

Sport: Instrument of Nihilism or Praxis of Lightness?

Luc Viet Anh Ha

Overview on the problem of sport and the nihilistic civilization

In Nietzsche's works, the absence of meditation on the practice of sport, combined with his allegories of dancers, tightrope walkers and playful children creates a lack which prompts the question: is sport a Nietzschean practice? What are its qualities, in terms of life-enhancement or life-depreciation? One might be surprised by these questions because sport exists *de facto* in the contemporary alleged Christian societies, which are portrayed as degenerative by Nietzsche. In that sense, sport could be construed as a practice unrelated to morals. However, this assumption is often accepted without close observation. In fact, the coexistence of morals and sport is not necessarily a peaceful one, but it can also be either collaborative or agonistic.¹

¹ This essay is based on my unpublished master's thesis, *Sport and Christianity: a Nietzschean genealogy* (2019), supervised by Pr. Niels Henrik Gregersen of the University of Copenhagen.

Sport can be construed as two contradictory processes—one which enhances the internalization of instincts, another one which enhances their externalization. From a Nietzschean point of view, this double way to deal with instincts is correlated to morals or, its opposite, lightness.

In *The Genealogy of Morals*, the bad conscience is presented as a process of internalization of life. Self-control and moral values entail an elaboration of spiritual obstacles to replace the absence of obstacles which the body has to face (GM § 16, 99).² Subsequently, the generation of internal obstacles, i.e. bad conscience, creates the disgust of oneself and the will to negate life (GM III §14, 157-161). Nietzsche writes: "All instincts which do not find a vent without, turn inwards—this is what I mean by the growing 'internalisation' of man: consequently, we have the first growth in man, of what subsequently was called his soul." (GM II §16)

For Nietzsche, the valuation of soul is the effect of a being who faces a lack of external *agon* and becomes unable to deal with concrete life, therefore he must create a supra-sensitive world. Morals are determined by a corporal *modus essendi*, a poor psychophysical condition and a low degree of life. On the one hand, sport activities disengage from bad conscience, as the obstacles which are proposed to the athletes are not spiritual but external. From this perspective, sport is an activity which enables a relief from a world of spiritual valuation and from its weight.

Nevertheless, sports are also composed of strict rules, etiquettes and a sense of fair play, which can be seen as subtle ways to internalize moral rules through outward movements. The alliance of movements and rules might be a way to control and civilize bodies. Instead of capturing the passions of the spirits with concepts and narratives only, e.g. with ideas of guilt, sin and redemption, the elaboration of structures of movement could prevent peo-

² Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* in *The Complete Works*, ed. by T. N. Foulis, transl. by Horace B. Samuel, vol. 13, Edinburgh, 1913.

ple from having uncontrolled bursts of violence. Hence, men could either be used for political reasons, e.g. war, or pacified in favor of life-depreciative values. In both cases, the energetic expression of a person is constrained to serve a specific purpose, and, in that process, is detached from its spontaneous expression.

Moreover, Nietzsche's understanding of movement is paradoxical because "mechanical activity" is also presented as the tool of priests, i.e. the masters of the bad conscience, to reinforce "absolute regularity", obedience and self-control in the Christian congregation (GM III §18, 174). The priests, like the athletes, perform repetitive movements which makes them malleable. Both of them forget themselves in their own asceticism. Not only is sport paradoxical, but so is movement as such.

In order to untie this double knot, it is important to understand the criteria which define the qualities of a will to power. The two differential qualities of the will to power are active and reactive.³ Every being is a will to power which expresses itself in various forms, but the active forces proceed from an overabundance of vitality, whereas the reactive ones are those who belong to a minimum of vitality (HAH 4, 9).⁴ Nietzsche equates active forces with the "forces of spontaneity, aggression, and encroachment with their new interpretations and tendencies" (GM II, 12). The reactive ones are those which are useful for adaptation of a being, conservation, utility, and comfort (Deleuze, 64). The latter do not exist by themselves, but are correlated to the active ones—they exist as an impoverishment of active elements and are a process of division (Deleuze, 100). For Nietzsche, people who mainly possess active forces have a strong constitution and a healthy physiology, whereas the ones who possess reactive forces are those who are sick and impotent (GM I §7, 29-31).

³ Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2014, 99.

⁴ Nietzsche, *Human All-too-human, A book for Free Spirits*, trans. by Alexander Harvey, The Floating Press, 2013

Nietzsche explains that the human history is one which is governed by nihilism, that is to say the reactive forces triumphed, with the hegemony of Christianity and its later derivatives, and the normal state of humanity is to depreciate life.⁵ Yet, the active qualities exist and allow for a certain alleviation from our human-all-too-human condition. Creation is an escape door, but, it is not a pure form of deliverance from the reactive or nihilistic history. Instead, the creator, like the athlete, can only escape history by playing with his own chains. One must use one's context in order to transcend it. Therefore, I will argue that sport, *qua* a creative process, takes place in a reactive world and transmutes the reactive forces into active ones.

I will first study sport as an activity in tension between outward movements and inward regulation. Then, I will analyze the ascetic dimension of movement and the paradoxes of self-oblivion, as *ekstasis*. Finally, I will argue that sport is a process of creation, therefore it must be understood as an *ex materia* creation, where the matter is nothing but the nihilistic civilization, pushed to its limits.

Sport: Catharsis and Spiritualization

Contrary to the Christian, the athlete is constantly coming back to a world of external obstacles, which provides him with joy. He seeks the challenge of objects, lines and rules which force him to modify his body *in situ*, to employ his tissues, members and breath according to a new goal. The sport philosopher Bernard Suits defined sports as a creation of useless and artificial obstacles.⁶ In that precise sense, sport strives to recreate the external *agon*. The sportsman accepts to endure suffering, tiredness and efforts in his body, and, feels a pleasure linked to the overcoming of sporting obstacles. Moreover,

⁵ Jean-Pierre Faye and Michèle Cohen-Halimi, *L'histoire cachée du nihilisme: Jacobi, Dostoïevski, Heidegger, Nietzsche*, la Fabrique, Paris, 2008, 124.

⁶ Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Life, Games, and Utopia*, David R. Godine Publisher, Boston, 1990, 48-49.

an athlete is likely to find and generate harder challenges for himself, as a way to *accelerate* this cycle, once it has become stagnant. His acceptance of the external world is such that the acceptance of chance must be its corollary. In many sports, chance is an inherent part of the game. For instance, the rugby ball is designed in such a way that it rebounds unpredictably, and, in sport climbing, weather conditions are constantly out of the climber's control and determine his ascent. Moreover, the athlete's way to manage his forces is precisely one which embraces its cycle of generation, dispossession and regeneration of vitality: he gathers his forces, uses them and eventually strengthens his body. In that sense, the athletic existence is a Nietzschean one "The higher man is distinguished from the lower by his fearlessness and his readiness to challenge misfortune" (WP Book II, I, 3, §222, Nov. 1887-March 1888).

This way of life is precisely the opposite of the Christians', the major heralds of reactive instincts, characterized by the internalization of instincts. Nietzsche paradoxically defines the original Christianity, as opposed to the ecclesiastical one, "as way of life, not a system of beliefs. It tells us how to act; not what we ought to believe" (WP, Book II, I, 2, §212, Nov. 1887-March 1888). The Christian idiosyncrasy is defined by the fear of the problematic aspects of life, he thinks: "I will do nothing that may disturb the peace within me: and if I must suffer on that account, nothing will serve better to maintain my peace than suffering." (*Ibid.*) Fear of life produces inertia and, in return, it creates a contradictory form of *eudaimonia* despite the agony. The formation of obstacles is internal, as it is the contradiction itself which reinforces the pain and makes the sufferer unable to leave his state between *apatheia* and *pathos*. The external inability of the body to challenge misfortune is turned into a stable condition of degeneration of forces, originating from the body.

The second contradiction of the Christian faith is that suffering becomes a constitutive element of life (GM III §11, 151) but, it is also questioned and requires justifications (GM II §7, 77). "Why is life so painful?" sighs the Christian. In the world of sports, enduring the pain of the efforts, of the

injuries and of the losses are nothing more but the conditions *sine qua non* of the activity, it does not come from a spiritual meaning or the essence of one's being, e.g. from the original sin. This way to consider pain as something external to oneself is similar to Nietzsche's description of the master's way to deal with pain, as Deleuze explains: the pain is identified, isolated in order to avoid its propagation—the meaning of pain is one which is external as it is not generated from within (Deleuze, 202). Hardship is a constituent of sporting ways of life, and the pain which derives from it remains unquestioned. The nihilistic hardship is different as it proceeds from the search of spiritual answers to the pain, which amplifies its effects, hence, Nietzsche states: "[before the triumph of the civilized man] pain did not hurt as much as it does nowadays" (GM II §7, 76).

Nevertheless, sport has also been celebrated by Christian voices, it is therefore necessary to understand how it is compatible with this way of life, from a certain point of view. The period of the Duecento shows an important turn in the Christian theological evaluation of sport because of the Aristotelian influence on Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas analyses the legitimacy of games and "outward movements" in his *Summa Theologica*.⁷ After a first antithetic part where Aquinas presents the arguments against games, he answers that, according to Augustine's *De Musica* and Aristotle's *Ethics*, respectively, resting is sometimes necessary and games can have the virtue of *eutrapelia*, i.e. pleasantness or wittiness,⁸ which is useful to rest from the work of faith. Sport is approved and portrayed as a neutral activity similar to sleep.

⁷ Second part of second part, question 168.

⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. by Father of the English Dominican Province, Benziger Bros., New York, 1947, Second part of second part, question 168, article 2, p. 2509. Aquinas quotes *De Musica*, II, 15; *Ethics* II, 7; IV, 8.

During the Renaissance, humanists went further in the institutional apology of sports. The renewal of the Greco-Roman spirit led Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, who became Pope Pius II, to say that “Games and exercises which develop the muscular activities and the general carriage of the person should be encouraged by every teacher.”⁹ From this point of view, the lessons of discipline, courage, endurance, self-sacrifice, self-confidence and hard-work provided by sport contribute to build character. The sporting qualities were considered as the propaedeutic values of the Christian teaching, since they train the moral teachings *via* its physical expression. Nowadays, this mix of ethical values and moral values constitute the contemporary *doxa* defining the compatibility of sport and Christian life.¹⁰ I believe that the conditions of possibility of this amalgam and of the Christian apology of sports are the fact that modern sports keep the Greek elements of athleticism but, severely reduces its violent nature.

As the sociologists Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning claim, the emergence of modern sports in Protestant countries, especially in England, shows an increase of self-control, moral code and institutional regulation of violence in the late XVIIIth century and the early XIXth century.¹¹ The quality of self-control became prevalent with the English idea of fair-play,¹² therefore, humanity witnessed a reactive-becoming of sports as the dimension of conservation partially superseded the aggressive spontaneity.

9 Piccolomini, “The Treatise of Aenas Sylvius Piccolomini, Afterwards Pius II, De Liberorum Educatione”, In *Vittorino Da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators*, ed. by William Harrison Woodward, Teachers College Press, New York, 1963, 138.

10 Shirl James Hoffmann, *Good Games, Christianity and the Culture of Sports*, Waco, Baylor University Press, 2010, 113-114.

11 Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, “An Essay on Sport and Violence” In *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the civilising process*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986, 150.

12 Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, *op. cit.*, 151.

Even if self-control is reinforced, a certain discharge of instincts, i.e. a *catharsis*, is still possible, as well as an *ekstasis*, i.e. and escape of the self. The crowds engage in the emotions of the game, of the character of the sportsmen, while the athletes engage in the agonistic experience which is necessary to keep themselves away from self-created chimera. By doing so, the spectators and the athletes forget themselves in the joy of the game. Yet, the *catharsis* of the crowd and *ekstasis* of the athletes can be controlled and directed towards particular, political goals.

For instance, the ambiguity of the Church towards sports in the Middle Ages is significant. The sociologist Shirl James Hoffmann explains that the approval of sports by Pope John XXI in 1316 (four years after the ban of sports by Pope Clement V) is not issued after long theological debates but results from pragmatic opinions concerning the Crusades.¹³ For Pope John XXI, the tournaments were seen as a means of elevating the popular sentiment for the crusades, as a source of income, and as a military preparation to defeat the pagans.¹⁴ The pragmatic interests of conquest and the pressure of the popular sentiment counterbalanced the ascetic ideals.¹⁵

This socio-political function of sport is also analyzed by Marxists sociologists such as Jean-Marie Brohm who claims that sport is an apparatus of capitalism, bearing its value of oppression through the industry of spectacles which alienate people.¹⁶ According to him, the stadia are political spaces where the crowd becomes foolish and mimetic, leaving an open door for the tyrannical control of the minds. Hence, sports also create the illusion of entertainment through the cathartic-mimetic effect of spectacles. From this

13 Shirl James Hoffman, *op. cit.*, 52-53.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*, 50.

16 Jean-Marie Brohm, “Le spectacle sportif, une aliénation de masse” In *Mediapart*, 2 April 2013, URL: <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/denis-collin/blog/020413/un-article-de-jean-marie-brohm-le-spectacle-sportif-une-alienation-de-masse>.

perspective, sport is only a display of external instincts because it performs the exact opposite: after the people have consumed the *panem et circenses*, after they are hypnotized, their instincts become more placid, and both the spectators and the athletes are more likely to be obedient. In Nietzschean terms, *catharsis* can be the tool for spiritualization.

Movement: Askesis and Ekstasis

Mechanical activity and its corollaries, such as absolute regularity, punctilious unreasoning obedience, the chronic routine of life, the complete occupation of time, a certain liberty to be impersonal, nay, a training in 'impersonality,' self-forgetfulness, 'incuria sui'—with what thoroughness and expert subtlety have all these methods been exploited by the ascetic priest in his war with pain. (GM III §18)

This quote shows that sport possesses more than one taming feature. The sporting rules and moral framework are completed by the mere ability of movements to lead away from the individual development of forces. Nietzsche refers to the ritualistic aspect of the monastic life and maybe to movements of circumambulation, which bring about "self-forgetfulness", that is to say a specific *ekstasis*. The priest and the athletes have in common the fact that they have to repeat certain sets of movements during their physical and spiritual journey. Both are not governed by a specific point in time and space: wherever the athletes are, whatever are their emotions, they must repeat their rituals or their choreography. The desires of the moment are not heard. The term *askesis* itself shows its double belonging to the religious and the sporting worlds, as it means "exercise, training" in Ancient Greek.¹⁷ Asceticism fosters "an active refusal to get rid of [a once indented impression], a continuing and a wish to continue what has once

¹⁷ Michel Hulin, "Ascèse & Ascétisme", *Encyclopædia Universalis*, URL : <http://www.universalis-edu.com/encyclopedie/ascese-et-ascetisme>.

been willed, an actual memory of the will", which is an "opposition-power" to the robust health of forgetfulness (GM II §1, 62). Hence, *askesis* is the shadow of self-forgetfulness, *ekstasis*, and, one forgets daily life in order to embrace another routine. Sport, articulated in rules and mechanical repetition, bears similitudes with the structure of work, *negotium*. Training could strengthen auxiliary skills of work, and, far from being definitely relieved of the burden of social responsibilities, the individual would be conditioned to carry more duties.

Furthermore, since the obstacles of sport are artificial, i.e. they are fabricated, the microcosm which the athletes inhabit is somehow disconnected from the rest of the world and their daily life. Their behaviors in the *gymnasia* and the *stadia* do not coincide perfectly with their ability to show courage, strength, lightness in the other areas of life. Sport does not necessarily provide an everlasting solution to the negative affects which derive from the minimum of vitality; once the athletes leave the agonistic space, the normal nihilism resumes its path towards to enthronement. Precisely because sport benefits from a form of autonomy by defining sporting rules, space, time and ethical behavior, one can ask "even if a form of alleviation is possible in sport, does that make any difference?"

What is the meaning of the ascetic practice of sport?

The possibility that sport, as movements and structures of games, is an instrument of a nihilistic society is darkening the portrayal of the *stadia*; but, these doubts derive from an extra-individual, historical point of view. However, if we change the perspective from a macro-social to a micro-individual one, the issue reveals itself under another light.

About the genealogy of the bad conscience and of the “memory of the will”, Nietzsche asks: “How thoroughly, in order to be able to regulate the future in this way, must man have first learnt to distinguish between necessitated and accidental phenomena, to think causally, to see the distant as present and to anticipate it, to fix with certainty what is the end, and what is the means to that end?” (GM II §1)

We saw that sport increases the type of consciousness which controls, analyzes and predicts, yet, an important difference separates the athletic life with the sacerdotal: the finality of the repetition. The priest acts towards the end of times, the end of history or the after-life, which appears as the justification of an ascetic and moral existence. With the idea that the after-life is eternal, it follows logically that the otherworldly future appears as the only important thing of existence—in mathematical terms, the future is attributed an infinite value, thus the value of the present decreases toward zero.

On the opposite end, even though the athlete trains in order to improve some skills, he knows that there is no true finality to his training except the pleasure of the sporting act itself. I claim that there is no teleology of training, unless this teleology is synthetically inserted through a reactive reinterpretation. On the scale of one’s existence, the athletic life is doomed to fail, since the gains are ephemeral and that muscle tissues disappear with time and old age is inevitable. Even the professional athlete senses that his activity is not rational and bring about danger—there are easier, more secure and well-paid professions. Therefore, sport is active as it requires no existential justification—running, jumping, dancing, climbing, playing with object are childish actions which are primarily justified by the *hic et nunc*.

A reactive interpretation of sport is one which asks “should sport exist?” as it has been the case in Christian theology, for centuries.¹⁸ The answer to this question is necessarily one which answers with functionalist, utilitarian theories, if it defends sport as something truly good, for example, with the idea that sport is good for health.¹⁹ Nevertheless, health is secondary to the joy of sport, because the child does not think that he needs to play for his health, it is a spontaneous action. And this is the critical source of a misinterpretation of sport which prevails: the interpretations of sport in sport science and sport philosophy are still reactive interpretations as long as it seeks justifications for sport in the ideas that sport is good *for* character building, health, *eutrapelia*, to mention few arguments. Indeed, these justifications are merely *raison d’être* to prove that sport is needed for conservation; yet, life in its whole requires not only conservation but over-being: a surplus of strength and not a minimal vitality.²⁰ Thus, I argue that the *sui generis* asceticism of sport is one which has the structure of an eternal return which selects and destroys the reactive forces through the repetition of movements and moments of hardship.

Sports are not simple childish movements, but they increase the selectivity and hardship of movements by adding a surplus of rules. The sporting rules imitate the social, moral and political ones, even those of the war, i.e. *jus in bello*. Their subordination to the dogmas of our civilization is ambiguous *qua* sports emerges between the moral and the amoral realm, the Greek and

18 Shirl James Hoffman, *op. cit.*, “Proscribing, Controlling and Justifying Sport”, 47-71.

19 Similarly to Herbert Spencer’s theory where the good coincides with the useful, described in GM I §3, 22.

20 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* In *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. by Aaron Ridley, trans. by Judith Norman, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, 3.

the Protestant worlds and the Apollonian (controlling, shaping instincts) and the Dionysian instincts (*ekstasis* and *mimesis*). However, Nietzsche writes: “The ascetic ideal has at times, even in the most intellectual sphere, only one real kind of enemies and damagers: these are the comedians of this ideal—for they awake mistrust.” (GM III §27)

Sportsmen, *qua* comedians and joyful satirists of the ascetic ideal, are at the best place to deconstruct the values of our history, from the inside. The sporting realm is a *topos* of active-becoming of our instincts as it leads the process of spiritualization towards bodily games. To put it differently, the rules of sport increases our self-consciousness, but, by doing so, they reveal that the mastery of our being is not necessarily subordinated to a moral quest.

In order to play with the reactive forces, one must embrace the nihilistic world and lead it to its extreme in order to accelerate the self-destruction of the reactive forces, which is their inherent becoming (Deleuze, 109). The sporting *agon* casts a light on the weaknesses and the differences between each man, for their inequalities have direct consequences on the game. Hence, the athletes are granted a space where the “*pathos* of distance” (WP, II, 3, §221, Nov. 1887-March 1888), i.e. the pride of one’s individual difference, is possible, contrarily to the nihilistic values where the differences are levelled and impoverished (Deleuze, 70). The winner gains from his victory, while the athlete who loses accepts that he lacks a certain power and he accepts the pain of the defeat in order to *act* on his forces to come closer to victory. In the athletic life, the forces are questioned, valued and re-acted. Namely, the reactive forces manifest their lack of vitality in front of the victorious ones. The courage of the sportsmen is not to participate, but to have the courage to transmute the reactive elements into active ones. The active-becoming proceeds by the active negation of the reactive elements, their destruction (Deleuze, 281). The mere idea of training is selective: if someone who is alien to sport is being questioned to accept an existence of hard training, injuries and good health, ephemeral glories and disappoint-

ment, the inadequacy of the efforts and the results, would he be able to say “yes”? This question is similar to the Nietzschean question of the acceptance of the eternal return of all things, as it is the question itself which enhances the gap between those who affirm life in its whole and those who negate it (Deleuze, 106). Yet, the two questions differ *qua* the former concerns a microcosm of life, i.e. sporting life, whereas the second one is general.

Sport uses the context of nihilism in order to transcend it because the rules which are usually taming the individuals are now creating the conditions to play and to be creative. The Nietzschean model of creation and liberation is not one which is reactionary nor radical. Nietzsche does not have the nostalgia of the spontaneity of the first, naive men. The escape from history is not radical as there is no *deus ex machina* which will grant us an ahistorical solution. His conception of creation is antichristian because only an *ex materia* creation is possible, as opposed to the *ex nihilo* creation of matter in Christian theology:²¹ the creative individual can only transcend his time, but he cannot abstractly fabricate a place which would be radically outside of nihilism. Therefore, one cannot be *purely* active, but can constantly act on the reactive forces, transform them. As such, sport is a significant example of this process where the material—the context of spiritualization and its codes—are exaggerated and amplified in order to create something playful out of it. Sport is thus the comedy of nihilism, but most comedians ignore themselves as such. The rules are arbitrary, as they are not determined by a higher power or a superior value. They require an overplus of vitality, as sport is not primarily a means of conservation, like a mere profession. However, as Nietzsche explains, the simple fact of having to respect a law, a rule, or even a moral code is necessary to “discipline and cultivate

21 Fabien Revol, « Théologie de la création continuée », *Revue des sciences religieuses* [En ligne], 91/2 | 2017, mis en ligne le 01 janvier 2019, consulté le 26 juin 2020. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/rsr/3953> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/rsr.3953>.

a spirit²² (BM, 188): “Whichever moral code we inspect in that light, its ‘nature’ teaches us to hate the excessive freedom of *laissez-aller* and instils a need for limited horizons, for immediate tasks—it teaches us to narrow our perspective, and thus in a certain sense, to be stupid, as a precondition for life and growth.” (*Ibid*)

In opposition to the severity and seriousness of the world-denying asceticism within Christianity, sport preserved the disciplining dimension of morals by reinforcing its “stupid,” arbitrary, insignificant aspects and added the stimulation of the game. The children who do not love sports are right when they ask why football players all run after a ball. There is no reason to follow the sporting rules, except the thrill. It is hard to believe that any sport can be as serious as the perseverance for the Christian crown of immortality. However, the mere fact of having rules is a generator of growth, as it restricts our possibilities. From this perspective, “excessive freedom” leads to dissolution whereas the “limited horizons” bring about games. One can only transcend the moral rules by creating new laws, and, our civilization with another form of culture. *In fine*, spontaneity can only be regained by means of playful discipline and mastery of lightness.

Conclusion

The investigation on the quality of sport, in regard to the Nietzschean hierarchy of forces, led to several perspectives and interpretations of the phenomenon. The comparison of an athletic economy of vitality with the Christian one shows a seminal difference. The athletes find joy in the apprehension

22 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. and ed. by Marion Faber, New York, Oxford University Press, 2008.

and the pursuit of solutions of external, bodily difficulties, whereas the Christians, as nihilists *par excellence*, are founded on a fear and an inability to apprehend these obstacles. The need of *agones* is then turned into an internal labyrinth. In other words, sport accelerates the cycle of energy, whereas the nihilistic *modus* reduces it in favor of a pure escape in the spiritual realm.

Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of its functions, sport coexists peacefully with reactive powers. It played a role in the preparation for the Crusades and, later, it adapted to the Protestant decorum by reduction of violence and increase of self-control. The analysis of the use of repetitive movements strengthens suspicion over its ability to create a world of lightness devoid of spiritual content. Does the ascetic face of sports hide behind the appearance of joy, as *ekstasis* for the athletes, and, *catharsis-mimesis* for the spectators? If the sportsmen, like the priests, shape their existence by the repetition of movements, are they united in a tamed form of nihilism? Or, worse, is this activity so independent from life, *qua* artefact, that its effects on life is negligible?

I answer that these questions are reactive as such. Following Nietzsche’s discovery of the active forces, as primary and spontaneous ones, I believe that reactive perspectives only bring about reactive answers: it is their nature to ask for justifications. Instead, it is necessary to understand that, on the scale of one’s life, sport is as absurd as Sisyphus’ damnation. Moreover, it is precisely in this absurdity that the world of sports mocks the moral one. In reality, the movements of sportsmen have different qualities than the priests’ because they are only superficially repetitive—they refine in time. Improvement *in the joy of games* is the only content of the otherwise empty laws of the stadium. In sport, the law precedes the content of the law, likewise, movements precede the reasons of movements. Sport can always be reinterpreted and reused by external actors: it is its weakness and strength to be of a somatic nature—the intellectual representations are secondary. Like children, sportsmen have a spontaneity which can be “perverted” by masked philosophers and priests. However, sport is independent from morals, as it

provides a rare place for games and valued differences, i.e for a development of vitality devoid of inverted values. Sport games enable an active-becoming of forces, i.e the transformation of the reactive ones and the action on them, as opposed to the levelling propagation of reactive forces. In virtue of this power, sport is a continuous creation of vitality through bodily gestures, which reveal that being non-spontaneous with all the instincts is the only way to conserve the strong, spontaneous ones. The sporting microcosm allows an earthly world alleviated from the content of our civilization, yet, it preserves the necessary discipline to remain on the brink between mortifying ideals and dissolution in extreme freedom. Perhaps, sport, as a disciplining power, can nowadays peacefully coexist with the Church precisely because the latter has abandoned its scepter and has left it for the satires of the jester.

Works Cited

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. by Father of the English Dominican Province, Benziger Bros., New York, 1947.

Brohm, Jean-Marie, “Le spectacle sportif, une aliénation de masse” In *Mediapart*, 2 April 2013, URL: <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/denis-collin/blog/020413/un-article-de-jean-marie-brohm-le-spectacle-sportif-une-alienation-de-masse>.

Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2014.

Elias, Norbert and Dunning, Eric, “An Essay on Sport and Violence” In *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986.

Faye, Jean-Pierre and Cohen-Halimi Michèle, *L'histoire cachée du nihilisme: Jacobi, Dostoïevski, Heidegger, Nietzsche*, la Fabrique, Paris, 2008.

Hoffmann, Shirl James, *Good Games, Christianity and the Culture of Sports*, Waco, Baylor University Press, 2010.

Hulin, Michel, “Ascèse & Ascétisme”, *Encyclopædia Universalis*, URL : <http://www.universalis-edu.com/encyclopedie/ascese-et-ascetisme/>

Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. and ed. by Marion Faber, New York, Oxford University Press, 2008.

Nietzsche, *Human All-too-human, A book for Free Spirits*, trans. by Alexander Harvey, The Floating Press, 2013.

Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals in The Complete Works*, ed. by T. N. Foulis, transl. by Horace B. Samuel, vol. 13, Edinburgh, 1913.

Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufman, Random House, Inc., New York, 1967.

Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols In The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. by Aaron Ridley, trans. by Judith Norman, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Piccolomini, “The Treatise of Aenas Sylvius Piccolomini, Afterwards Pius II, De Liberatorum Educatione”, In *Vittorino Da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators*, ed. by William Harrison Woodward, Teachers College Press, New York, 1963.

Fabien Revol, « Théologie de la création continuée », *Revue des sciences religieuses*, 91/2, 2017, URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/rsr/3953>.

Suits, Bernard, *The Grasshopper: Life, Games, and Utopia*, David R. Godine
Publisher, Boston, 1990, 48-49.