



SPORT ETHICS AROUND THE GLOBE

ÉTICA DO ESPORTE AO REDOR DO MUNDO 

ÉTICA DEL DEPORTE ALREDEDOR DEL MUNDO 

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Abstract: This introductory article in the special section of the journal *Movimento* explores global perspectives on sports ethics, highlighting that philosophical thought focuses on “open” questions and values conceptual precision and critical inquiry. The text provides an overview of the section's articles, covering topics such as the career and reflections of Scott Kretchmar, a pioneer in sports ethics; the importance of cultural values in kendo; the ethical implications of artificial intelligence; the central role of rules in sports; issues of sextortion and doping; and the role of physical education and values in school sports as fundamental rights in South Africa. It concludes by emphasizing the need for ethical reflection to foster a more respectful, inclusive, and integrity-driven sports environment.

Keywords: Sport. Ethics. Physical Education. Philosophy.

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Around the world, there is a variety of approaches to philosophical issues, sometimes depending on geography and culture, and sometimes on authority and ideological imposition. But, everywhere, what distinguishes philosophical thinking is its concentration on the importance of language and its insistence on conceptual acuity, uncovering the complex issues of life for our understanding: “Philosophy unties the knots in our thinking; hence its results must be simple, but philosophising has to be as complicated as the knots it unties” (Wittgenstein, 1967, §452). It is also distinguished by its attention to ‘open’ questions – that is to say, questions that do not admit of a definite answer. Along with this, philosophy has no set of agreed principles of procedure with which to seek answers, but rather relies on many and various forms of logical reasoning and argument. Its successes, then, often take the form of ‘criticism’, showing some position or argument to have been false, or untenable.

Historically, philosophy emerged in ancient Greece at the same time as the emergence of democracy and sport, and it has been argued that this is no coincidence, since all three require the same open mind-set: the thought that you might be wrong, or just not good enough to match an opponent; the value of competition; accepting defeat in a contest; equality and meritocracy; an emphasis on human development; and living the Good Life (McCoy; Martínková, 2022).

Ethics is one branch of philosophical enquiry, and it is sometimes seen as the search for an adequate overall ‘theory’ of ethics, such as for example utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, situation ethics or an ‘ethics of care’. Applied ethics, however, eschews such high-level theorizing (or, rather, relegates it to secondary importance) in the pursuit of a careful and detailed understanding of the nature and justification of particular actions or events, bringing together considerations and arguments relevant to the particular case, and arguing for a position on the matter.

Applied sport ethics is a central area of sports philosophy, and its theoretical and practical importance cannot be overestimated. This special section, published in *Revista Movimento*, edited by the School of Physical Education, Physiotherapy and Dance at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (ESEFID-UFRGS), seeks to explore some of the ethical issues that permeate the world of sport, offering contributions from academics from various philosophical traditions. The aim is to offer an insight into the range of current debates within sport ethics, highlighting the relevance of ethical thinking for both academics and professionals involved in sports policy and decision-making.

Sport ethics deals with moral behavior and the norms that guide sports practices in their various forms. It is an area of theoretical and practical knowledge that examines issues such as fair play, cheating, integrity, justice, violence, doping and discrimination, among other important topics that focus our sporting intelligence on those moral principles that should guide the conduct of athletes, coaches, referees and sports officials. The aim of sport ethics is to maintain our critical attention upon issues that threaten the moral basis of sport, in order to ensure that sport remains an activity that not only challenges its participants physically and mentally, but also

promotes values that contribute to sports integrity (Gardiner; Parry; Robinson, 2017) and, more widely, to building a fair and respectful society.

Sport ethics is most often discussed within with sport in the narrower definition of ‘competitive sport’, the classic examples of which are Olympic sports, e.g. defined by Parry’s (2023) six criteria as “institutionalised rule-governed contests of human physical skill”. Competition requires exclusive goals within the context of rule-following. Because the victory of one athlete or team excludes the victory of others, various tensions and moral challenges are thus provoked, and the search for victory brings temptations such as cheating, doping, match-fixing, violence, etc. And because rules provide a quasi-legal framework for sports competition, the issues of justice and fairness are also a central part of sport ethics inquiry, bringing topics such as equality, discrimination, corruption, and various issues in sports governance (e.g. see Engelman; Reppold Filho, 2021; Costa *et al.*, 2019), such as the democratic management of sports federations.

In this special section, the articles selected reflect the diversity of thoughts and approaches to sport ethics, with contributions from academics from different parts of the world, enriching the debate by offering global perspectives on sport ethics. This plurality of voices is fundamental to broadening our understanding of the ethical challenges that arise in different cultural and social contexts, enabling a fruitful exchange of ideas between the various philosophical traditions and social contexts that cohere in a common aim: to illuminate the nature and value of sport.

Article 1, *The philosophical journey of Scott Kretchmar: exploring how sport and physical activity mean*, begins the section with an intellectual biography of Scott Kretchmar, one of the pioneers of sports philosophy since the 1970s. Tracing the development of Kretchmar’s thinking over a career spanning more than 50 years, Cesar R. Torres (USA) and Francisco Javier López Frías (Spain/USA) identify four research areas as his main concerns – “the metaphysics of play, games, sport, and competition; the role of physical education; the ethics of sport; and the meaning-making and spiritual aspects of sport” – and they investigate Kretchmar’s contributions to each in turn. To us, this reads rather like a history of the development of the sub-discipline as a whole, which is one indicator of Kretchmar’s prominence. Selecting just one of Kretchmar’s ‘lessons’ identified by the authors, we note his insistence that issues in the ethics of sport cannot be addressed adequately without attention to prior metaphysical and conceptual matters. We must understand the *nature* of sport before we can fruitfully enquire into its normative features.

Article 2, *A dilemma concerning the internationalization of kendo as budo – Japanese “zan-shin” and Korean “jon-shim”*, by Yoshiko Oda (Japan) and Kevin Krein (USA), plunges us into a controversy over cultural and sporting values in a Japanese martial art, kendo. Whilst judo has ‘successfully’ Westernised, and become an international and Olympic sport, some argue that this has resulted in significant changes in the core values and culture of the activity. The question is: should kendo go the same way? The authors explain the philosophical ideas behind martial activities (and other Japanese practices, such as the tea ceremony) and show that the question

cannot be answered without a deep exploration of those ideas. The authors are in favour of a more global practice and appreciation of kendo – but not at the expense of those valued practices that exemplify the most profound meanings of kendo.

Article 3, *Artificial Intelligence in sports: a revolutionary technology that must be handled with care*, by Alberto Carrio Sampedro (Spain), addresses one of the major issues of our time: ethical issues arising from the rapid growth of the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in sport. The positive face of AI applications in the sports industry include those that aim to improve the game, to engage fans, to generate revenues through talent identification and recruitment, etc. But the author also explores the ethical challenges that this technology poses for the governance of sport, which can undermine the values of sport as an essentially human activity.

The next two articles illustrate the centrality of rules to an understanding of sport and to an appreciation of wrongfulness in sport. Article 4, *Eligibility rules in sport*, by Irena Martínková (Czechia) and Jim Parry (UK/Czechia), questions the common assumption that the constitutive and regulative rules are the most important rules, and that eligibility rules are ‘auxiliary’, or secondary. They reconsider the role of eligibility rules in sport and conclude that, whilst constitutive rules do provide the necessary structure for a sporting event, the event is also necessarily structured by eligibility rules. In this way, the two sets of rules are equally important, and co-dependent. They accept that eligibility categorization of athletes can never be perfect, and is often inevitably to some extent arbitrary, but it enables inclusive competition, and it aims to diminish injustices and exclusions.

In Article 5, *Subverting the rules in sport*, Miroslav Imbrišević (UK) asks what is wrong with subverting the rules of play, for example by employing the ‘strategic foul’ in football, since these days it seems to be generally accepted as an inevitable ploy. To do so, he argues, is to make a conceptual mistake, because it makes transcendental elements of the game (which are the very *conditions* of play) into part of the game itself. Players who do this are playing in a self-contradiction that they fail to recognise: they are undermining (‘subverting’) the very elements of the game upon which we all rely, in order to have a game at all. As with most good philosophical arguments, this one is simple but effective. It conclusively demonstrates what is wrong. The problem, of course, is that some players, managers, owners, don’t care about the game. They care about winning, and any way will do – even at the expense of the game itself.

Article 6, *Sextortion in sport: an applied ethics approach to misconduct*, is ground-breaking. It is the first article to describe and assess the nature and wrongness of ‘sextortion’ in sport, defined as “the abuse of power to obtain a sexual benefit or advantage”. Incorporating original empirical evidence from 49 countries, Whitney Bragagnolo (Canada/Netherlands) and Yaneí Lezama (Mexico/Canada), draw our attention to the importance of identifying cases of sextortion, since it might escape legal definitions of ‘violence’ or of ‘corruption’. They emphasise the crucial role of the exercise of power in sporting relationships, in their analysis of the concept of sextortion; and this reveals the norms of consent and autonomy that are violated. So, even where explicit legal provisions are not violated, the wrongfulness of sextortion is

exposed. This is classic example of the capabilities of a philosophical approach. We can all see that sextortion is wrong – but saying exactly what it *is*, and exactly *why* it is wrong, requires philosophical thinking.

Article 7, *An interpretation of Brazilian literature on doping*, by Marcus Campos, Odilon José Roble, and Alberto Reinaldo Reppold Filho (all from Brazil), offers an analysis of Brazilian research on sports doping and anti-doping. The authors provide a theoretical overview of the country's published work to date, applying a well-established framework for interpreting arguments related to doping in sports. They further assess the strengths and limitations of Brazilian scholarship, aiming to position it within the broader, international body of sports-doping literature.

In Article 8, *Physical education, school sport and Olympic values as fundamentals rights in South Africa*, Marion Keim (South Africa) brings together several perspectives in considering sport and physical education (PE) provision for children and youth in South Africa. In the context of a mixed-methods empirical study, including qualitative research, survey data, interviews and group discussions, she marshalls arguments from the philosophy of Olympism and from human rights theory in the service of policy advocacy. She argues for reviving the place of PE in the school curriculum, for a values-based approach to moral education through sport, and for regulation of 'sport for development and peace' programmes run by non-governmental organisations. Finally, she presents a raft of practical proposals for legislative and organizational reform, for training and development, and for investment in infrastructure, resources and facility provision.

For those readers unfamiliar with the sports philosophy literature, we hope that you will find some issue or approach in this special section that will serve as a starting point for further research in this sub-discipline. Philosophy of sport may help you to clarify sports-related issues for yourself, but it can also lead to deeper dialogue with athletes or coaches (e.g. see Mareš, 2023). For those already engaged, we hope that these articles will inspire productive debates and further research on the ethical direction of sport in the contemporary world. Furthermore, as an 'applied philosophy' sub-discipline, we are (as always) focused on positive proposals and recommendations for policy. We need the best empirical research to inform our decision-making; but empirical research is not enough: all recommendations and proposals are *normative*. This means that it is *logically impossible* to move straight from facts to conclusions about policy; ethical thinking is a *necessary* component in decision-making.

Philosophy brings a certain slowness as an addition to sport, which usually aims to go 'faster, higher, stronger'. It is suitable for those times of recovery, when sport is not actually being practised, and when there is time for deliberation and reflection on what has been done, and what could be done otherwise (Geisz, 2022; Martínková; Andrieu; Parry, 2022). We hope that these articles will serve as a guide towards a more ethical and thoughtful sporting practice, capable of positively transforming those involved in sport.

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Resumo: Este artigo introdutório da seção especial da revista Movimento explora perspectivas globais sobre ética no esporte, destacando que o pensamento filosófico foca em questões “abertas” e valoriza a precisão conceitual e o enfoque crítico. O texto oferece uma visão geral dos artigos da seção, abordando temas como a trajetória e as reflexões de Scott Kretchmar, pioneiro na ética esportiva; a importância dos valores culturais no kendo; as implicações éticas da inteligência artificial; o papel central das regras no esporte; questões de sextorsão e doping; e o papel da educação física e dos valores no esporte escolar como direitos fundamentais na África do Sul. Conclui enfatizando a necessidade de reflexão ética para promover um ambiente esportivo mais íntegro, inclusivo e respeitoso.

Palavras-chave: Esporte. Educação Física. Ética. Filosofia.

Resumen: Este artículo introductorio de la sección especial de la revista Movimento explora perspectivas globales sobre la ética deportiva, destacando que el pensamiento filosófico se centra en cuestiones “abiertas” y valora la precisión conceptual y el enfoque crítico. El texto ofrece una visión general de los artículos de la sección, abordando temas como la trayectoria y las reflexiones de Scott Kretchmar, pionero en ética deportiva; la importancia de los valores culturales en el kendo; las implicaciones éticas de la inteligencia artificial; el papel central de las reglas en el deporte; cuestiones de sextorsión y dopaje; y el papel de la educación física y los valores en el deporte escolar como derechos fundamentales en Sudáfrica. Concluye enfatizando la necesidad de reflexión ética para promover un ambiente deportivo más íntegro, inclusivo y respetuoso.

Palabras clave: Deporte. Ética. Educación Física. Filosofía.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that this work involves no conflict of interest.

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