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The Virtue of Aggression in Sport

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Abstract: This paper argues that aggression, while often conflated with violence and harm, is a virtue in sports. We distinguish aggression from violence and assertiveness, exploring its positive moral value within rule-governed contexts. We examine the permissibility of violence in sports, considering consent and the public good while acknowledging the potential for harm and the importance of restraint. The paper uses anecdotal evidence and philosophical analysis to support the claim that controlled aggression, a form of self-restraint, is a valuable skill both in and outside of sport. Finally, we explore the relationship between aggression and other virtues like sportsmanship, highlighting the importance of context in evaluating aggressive behaviours.

Keywords: aggression-as-harm; aggression-as-bodily-harm; rule-governed-aggression; aggressive maxims; unsanctioned violence; rule-governed-violence; ethos-based-violence; consent-based-violence; controlled physicality; aggression-as-a-virtue; restraint-as-a-virtue; lusory assertiveness; lusory aggression; lusory restraint; natural justice

1. Introduction

Aggression is an important topic in sports sciences and the philosophy of sport, and we argue for its positive value. However, our goal is not to reconcile different views on aggression. Rather, we believe that aggression is a virtue in sports but is conflated with other terms like "violence" and "harm". Importantly, we tease "aggression" apart from nearby terms, discuss its morality as well as the permissibility of violence in sports, and draw the strong conclusion that aggression is a virtue. Our goal is to make acceptable aggression more distinct from unacceptable violence by introducing the notion of *controlled physicality*—the positive virtue of aggression in sports. Still, everyone will care about aggression at some point, and our modest aim below is to articulate some conditions and features for better identifying it and to orient the philosophical imagination to think otherwise. We begin by making our approach distinct from biological views and discuss the meaning of aggression. Using a phenomenology of aggression to describe our experiences and to posit it as more than a biological drive, we articulate the experience of playing sports, clarify the meaning of aggression and translate this into Suitsian terms. After making it more distinct, we argue for the permissibility of violence in sports and the value of aggression.

2. Towards a Phenomenology of Aggression in Sport

Because our reasoning relies on personal experience that is generalized to sport, it is prudent to first examine our methodological proposal. Our phenomenology of aggression involves identifying similar experiences, or formally, eidetic structures. The justification for this approach is straightforward: An eidetic structure is a reference to the invariant makeup or durable features of the object of study—in this case, observations about sport.

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This philosophic approach involves an eidetic reduction, or the imaginary exercise used to identify the assumed invariance. For example, regardless of the variations we may conjecture about the shape of a triangle, the constant elements are the three sides and three internal angles equally 180°. A phenomenology of triangles might take the second investigative step to discover why that is the case, and if there is an additional eidetic structure, that does not necessarily mean the first reduces to the second. So, for instance, if we run a thought experiment to change one of the internal angles of the triangle, it will then change the angle of the other two angles; this should not be confused with a mathematical proof. But it shows that the three angles are related somehow. Increasing one angle then reduces the other two. So, by deforming the shape and discovering its possible variations, we would see that the internal angles always add to the same number. This should be a common experience of triangles. Regardless of what colour or other themes one uses, the eidetic structure should be the same for all of us. This works fine for triangles, but what about complex social phenomena like sports? Can we take the same approach?

Not unlike triangles, certain rules typically apply to sports. Players are also working towards the goal of the sport and normally (most often) play by the rules. Not only do rules limit the possibilities for action within the sporting context, but sport is also an outlet for certain behaviours. It is, after all, a contest and one where contestants compete for recognition and status and rewards such as prizes and even money, and they do so energetically, whether that means physically, mentally, or emotionally. We should expect that those who are highly motivated to win will pursue their goals vigorously. This may be taken as a common psychology of contestants, and where there is a similar mindset, certain patterns will emerge, such as rule-breaking, cheating, and so on. Likewise, certain common attributes desirable or useful for the activity will prevail. Aggression is arguably a general human characteristic, but with the vetting of contestants, we should expect that the most appropriate, successful, and desirable traits will emerge in sports. If aggression is generally useful in sports, we should expect it to be pervasive. We should also not be surprised to find that certain expressions of aggression are better than others, given that sports are typically and largely rule-governed contests involving physical skills. In what follows, we will not only posit the assumption that aggression is common in sports but so is the accompanying moral development of its use within these rule-governed contexts.

3. Aggression: Nature or Nurture?

When thinking of aggression, one's first reaction may be more negative. It could involve more disparaging thoughts: My child is being *so* aggressive. I was being *too* aggressive. There is an intuition for having gone *too far*. This experience, we think, involves an eidetic structure or a common human experience. However, there is a precedent which suggests that vices can be ethically driven to the point of becoming virtues [1]. Disobedience, for instance, can be aimed at taking a stance toward revealing the truth. Likewise, a small vice, such as aggression, may be transformed into a virtue. On the other hand, sports commentary typically equates aggression with competitiveness and the term's cognates—She attacked that floor routine[1]—are expressed widely in sports. Aggression is also celebrated and valued, but it can be problematic.

Formally, social psychologists define aggression as the intention to cause harm.[2] Although this may also appear to be an appropriate construal of "aggression", certain issues can be raised. Generally, punching someone can be seen as aggressive because the intention is often to harm, which could also mean that boxing may be viewed as an inherently harmful and aggressive sport. Likewise, hockey involves checking, and punches thrown, whether they land or not, are an inherent threat within the game. Yet, we do not believe this is the correct construal of either sport or the many similar sports. Regardless,

one cannot generally make important distinctions between appropriate aggression and inappropriate aggression through the notion of *aggression-as-harm*. In contrast, other sports psychologists maintain that aggression can improve performance.[3] Athletes indeed take it upon themselves, at least in their professions, to test the boundaries of their activity. But where does appropriate aggression end and unacceptable violence begin?

In answering our research question, we seek to renew a conception of aggression through sport as having a positive moral value and virtue. We aim to clarify an aggression of goodness, care, and responsibility to respect the value of human life and not to cause needless harm or injury. To begin answering this question, we explore several concepts related to "aggression" and offer some clarification. While aggression is morally problematic in many contexts, this paper will also examine the positive moral value of aggression. We will argue that aggression can be a virtue.[4] We think of virtue as an excellent character trait that is a stable feature in the sense that it is well entrenched in its possessor and serves as a general reason for action [6]. Having the virtue of being trustworthy, for example, does not hang on to instances of being reliable so much as a general disposition to be trustworthy based on wholehearted acceptance of that value or goal. Someone might be correctly labelled "trustworthy" because they subscribe to certain principles and recognize untrustworthiness in their possible actions.

Part of what makes aggression morally problematic is the end to which it is used, and we agree that many of the ends to which aggression is put are ethically bad. Being an aggressive driver, for instance, is not appropriate, but maneuvering one's car aggressively to prevent an accident could be useful. Likewise, what is appropriate aggression varies by context in sport. Moreover, psychologists also distinguish between *hostile aggression*, when the primary aim is to cause harm or injury and *instrumental aggression*, when the aim is to achieve a goal through aggression [7,8]. Yet, the actions taken by hockey players, boxers, and other sports being discussed here could be viewed as both hostile and instrumental all at once. There is sometimes no obvious distinction to be made, and so it may be otherwise difficult to get clear about the attribution of certain actions as aggressive in one sense or another, especially when context determines so much. Nevertheless, positive views on aggression seem to be not just what one does but how one does it and with what intentions. This will be true of sport as well.

In boxing, once an opponent has been knocked out or has otherwise turned their back, there are moments when a fighter could throw a hard punch to the back of the head, but in doing so, would risk or cause serious injury. Their opponent is vulnerable. In these moments, and in many instances, fighters can, but also do so, hold back. Muhammad Ali, for example, refrained from hitting Jerry Quarry and instead waved to the referee to signal for a stoppage. It is the absence of certain actions that reveals the conceptual nature of aggression and its moral dimensions in our account to follow. However, if one considers Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) as a sport but also observes how often unrestrained fighters continue to strike unconscious opponents, one may begin to question such actions or intentions. But there are moments when fighters demonstrate restraint and genuine concern for their opponent, which are also the subject of sports highlights in MMA. There are some displays of sportsmanship in this sense, too. Restraint connects to aggression, and even though it is expressed in various ways, it is nonetheless invariant among sports.

The search for neutral ends to which aggression is best put to work has led to our thinking of aggression in the context of sport.[5] However, in sports, aggression is not just neutral. Indeed, it is often valued. Spectators applaud aggressive players; certain types of aggressive players are sought after by coaches, and more often than not, aggression is required to win or to do well in sports. This is true across a broad range of very different sports, and it is difficult to imagine any sport that does not require some form

of aggression. It is safe to assume that a common perception is that aggression somehow defines combat sports, such as boxing, wrestling, and MMA, and tackling sports, such as rugby and American football; it may be viewed as inherent to National Hockey League (NHL) hockey. But aggression, in a different sense, is just as important in racquet sports, such as tennis and badminton. While aggression is not a necessary characteristic of all sports, it is surely prevalent in Olympic Sports. Often, those activities whose status about which we are unsure or where opinions are divided—esports, chess, bridge, CrossFit, or perhaps cheerleading[6]—are those in which aggression seems to be missing or is somehow less obviously defining of the activity. Likewise, female-apposite sports, i.e., sports that advantage small bodies—synchronized swimming, rhythmic gymnastics, figure skating—may appear less aggressive.[7]

The key takeaways are that aggression is connected to competitiveness, sportsmanship and restraint, intentions and ends, but it is not always linked to harm. There are reasons to think that aggression is pervasive in sports and is not necessarily a vice. The suggestion that "aggression" comes apart from "violence" will be explored further below.

We will begin by narrowing the scope of this paper by setting out some issues that are mostly going to be set aside. There are three constraints to our proposal here. First, we are not arguing for the claim that sport itself is morally neutral. Largely, we are going to assume this claim. Throughout the paper, we are going to talk about the love of sport and the praise heaped upon athletes, but we are not going to defend sports, in any general way, against those who argue, like Orwell, that they are more or less war minus the shooting.[8] We hope this defence of aggression, in the contexts discussed here, demonstrates some of the meaning which supports thinking that aggression can be valued, but if we are wrong about the value of sports, then we might be mistaken in our valuing of aggression in sports.

Second, we are not arguing for the very robust claim, and indeed implausibly strong view, that aggression is, all things considered, valuable. We would not argue this view, even if it was limited to the context of athletic competition. Instead, the goal here is a much more modest one. The aim is to identify features of aggression that give it positive value and ones that make aggression a virtue. It might be that there are very few cases in which the positive value of aggression is not outweighed by other morally relevant factors. We accept the latter, but we are more narrowly arguing that aggression has positive value and that it can be a virtue in sport.

Third, we will not be exploring the gendered nature of the virtue of aggression, though that is an important topic that also requires attention. For insofar as aggression is a virtue, it is one denied to most women. Feminine gender socialization rarely allows that kind of embodied agency required by aggression, even in the context of sports.

4. Why Care About Aggression?

We are going to set the stage here with some critical anecdotal evidence and a methodological proposal, which we think is a more relatable and natural way to begin this discussion around aggression in sports. Generally, we think philosophy would be improved, in some ways, if philosophers were more open about why it is that we pursue the topics that we do. Surely, intellectual curiosity is one of our central motivations, but it is often much more personal than that, which means that we think from experience while working more bottom-up at times.

Let us begin with an anecdote from Samantha's time as a sports parent. One of her teenage sons plays a wide variety of sports—He loves anything with teams and throwing or ball kicking—but the ones he ultimately prefers are rather rough and physically demanding. So, the issue of aggression naturally comes about. His favourite sport is rugby, which is a passion that he picked up during their family's academic sabbaticals in Australia and

New Zealand. He spent some time playing with the Ontario provincial under-16 team in Canada, and as a result, Samantha has invested many hours watching his games from the stands, and she has come to love the game and appreciate its physicality.

Over the years that her son has been playing rugby, she has been coming to terms with the displays of aggression while also coming to see her child, whom she loves, act in ways to which she had a hard time attaching value. One specific match comes to mind. Her son's team was playing a team from England, who were smaller, faster, and more skilled at passing. The Canadian team's strengths were in tackling, but they also used brute force and aggression, which is part of the game. The players on the Canadian side were bigger, more muscular, and not afraid of pushing. Despite their differences and strengths, the game was rather evenly matched. At one point, near the end of the game, when the players were tired and their patience was running low, there was a dispute over the ball. Samantha recalls looking on in horror as she observed her son jumping to his feet, winding back his fist, and then striking a young man on the opposing team. Her son was 6′ 3″ and 220 lbs. then, at the age of 15. He was almost always, among the kids his age, the biggest one out there. Thankfully, his punch missed its mark. When the referee gave a penalty to both players and made them run around different but nearby rugby fields, she knew then it had not been unprovoked. It turned out that the other boy had kicked her son in the face while he was down on the ground. So, her son's response, while clearly warranting a penalty, was not hard to understand. Moreover, what she found interesting was the response by a number of the rugby fathers, who saw her horrified reaction and then rushed over to speak to her. She got versions of "It happens to everyone sometimes" and "Don't worry, he'll learn to control his anger". This prompted her to think about aggressive sports, sports violence, and the virtue of control. What stood out to her was, in the context of rough sports, how differently the uncontrolled outbursts of anger are treated versus the aggression that is part of the normal ongoing play. With this example in mind, let us also consider a broader view.

Both Samantha and Evan have spent time in combative sports, both as competitors and teachers. These are naturally rough sports, too, but they serve a purpose by focusing aggression as a skill and ability while mastering natural tendencies—the fight-or-flight response—to speak only briefly about their value.[9] Sports can, but martial arts do so more directly, teach people to be appropriately aggressive with an increasing ability for self-control and moral development. We believe this is a common experience in sports, too, i.e., there is an eidetic structure at work here. There can be a time and place for aggression.

Boxing, for instance, might be viewed as needless aggression. The injuries sustained can be off-putting and serve to reinforce attitudes that it is a harmful activity.[10] That said, hardly anyone, we suspect, would seriously argue this same claim about taekwondo. However, the injuries are often just as serious, and there are many other sports where serious injury is normal. One distinction lies in how one perceives certain actions, especially striking another person. Throwing a punch in rugby crosses a certain line, but boxing is essentially about punching. Crossing the line in boxing or MMA can involve certain types of rule breaches, such as deliberate low blows or head buts, but they may also involve escalations that do not break with formalisms. Showboating, for instance, would seem to be a display aimed at causing admiration, intimidation, or distraction, and although it may not break a rule, it can go too far by making one vulnerable in the fight or open to social criticism. A boxer may be labelled as "cocky", such as the British boxer Naseem Hamed, who was both criticized and celebrated for his brash behaviour. Non-physical escalations, such as trash-talk, although more common in boxing's pre-match events, are more normalized within MMA. However, the escalations can be entirely irrelevant to the fight. For instance, during a pre-bout interview [15], Conor McGregor offered Irish whisky to his opponent, who is a practicing Muslim and does not consume alcohol, but when

Khabib rejected it, he called him "mad backwards. . ." and proceeded to threaten "violence", literally, in their forthcoming fight.

This attempt at emotional abuse may seem aggressive or even violent, but it is also part of McGregor's psychological antics, showmanship, and need for rivalry. McGregor's behaviour, however, crossed a certain line in more than one way. Yet, Khabib was seemingly unfazed by McGregor's attempts to perturb him during the interview, and he went on to dominate and beat McGregor in the fight. It is important to note that Khabib is also known for his talking-down strategies inside the octagon, although it may be that his choice of words is directed narrowly at his opponent and not their community or worldview, which also means his actions and intentions would be more appropriate to the fight-at-hand. Generally, one might argue that the tactics used by McGregor more clearly crossed the line, while Khabib tended not to do so. A parallel, one might suggest, is that psychological warfare is also aimed at reducing the opponent's morale—the intent to cause harm—but the choice of words used by some participants in the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) would be unsportsmanlike in other contexts. Getting under the skin of one's opponent may be seen as part of UFC or boxing, where bullying and intimidation are valid tactics. While words may be the preferred weapon of choice, so too can simple gestures be employed. An American Hockey League hockey player, for instance, was suspended for making a racist gesture during a game towards Jalen Smereck. The player was suspended for three games, but the International Ice Hockey Federation Disciplinary Board later suspended him for one year from all international competitions.

Surely, rugby will seem generally aggressive to some onlookers, too. Combative sports may seem like exhibitions of aggression, anger, and violence, especially MMA, but what counts as an instance of each in one context may not be the case in another, and so, too, crossing the line will differ from sport to sport and, plausibly, even contest to contest within the same sport. Although throwing an unprovoked punch may be enough in some contexts, such as basketball, to warrant being labelled "aggressive", it is not simply the act itself that is sufficient for crossing the line in sports more generally. It should be clear that throwing a punch, throwing words around, or signalling with certain types of gestures, and whether they are properly labelled as "aggressive", also depends upon the sporting context. Note, too, that inappropriate forms of aggression are not just a matter of breaking the rules because although fighting breaks the rules of hockey, it is otherwise accepted as part of the game. Yet we think there is an eidetic structure common to these experiences as they all involve crossing certain lines or the perception of having done so. Some focal points for analyses can now be extrapolated.

In the course of this essay, we want to explore not just the permissibility of violence and aggression in sports but also the differences between *aggression* and *anger*, *aggression* and *violence*, as well as *aggression* and *assertiveness*. These distinctions matter, not only for getting our labels right but also because we live by certain concepts in sports. When we say a player or their actions are aggressive, we would like to know that we know this is true. Likewise, we would like to know whether a sport should be properly characterized as aggressive, too, and in what sense. It matters to the participation in sports so that athletes can better identify the right sports for them, and it matters to the development of our Theory of Sport that aims to serve as a philosophic explanation for all things sports-related. On that note, we want to propose an account of aggression that is flexible enough to capture a range of possibilities and instances that may be construed as aggression.

We also want to say why society values aggression in sports because it seems to us that sport is a space in which aggression is not just allowed or tolerated.[11] However, those of us who are fans of aggression in sports positively appreciate it as a virtue. Also, sport is not the only venue where aggression is valued. We also need and value aggression in

wartime and some business and legal situations, but the use of certain forms of aggression in some of these other contexts would be far more controversial than in many sports and sports in general. Finally, we hope that an analysis of aggression in sports is serviceable to these other contexts in which aggression is valued and to understand why it is.

Finally, it has been suggested that self-control, such as self-restraint, is part of the culture and structure of sport, including the moral development of its participants. This further suggests that competitiveness is honed and conditioned in sports. These are plausible assumptions connected to the development of sportsmanship. Also, there is a kind of justice at work in sports whereby certain actions, although against the rules, seem understandable. We'd like to account for this. In Part 4, a formalization of this implied justice is given. As well, aggression involves different modes, such as nonverbal, verbal, or physical expressions, but it is not necessarily the case that these expressions are given equal weight in different sporting contexts.

5. The Distinction Between Assertion, Aggression, and Violence

We are going to begin this paper again, now in the rather more traditional way that philosophers begin papers, with the importance of making distinctions. In the field of philosophy of sport, there are several journal articles about aggression and violence, and many of them run the terms "aggression" and "violence" together.[12] Although, in the course of this paper, we do want to state some important philosophical insights about violence and sport, and we also think it is generally important to distinguish between aggression and violence. It may not seem entirely clear that the terms can be distinguished because aggression in sports is frequently associated with displays of violence, but they are conceptually distinct, or so we will argue. Just as one can be an aggressive lawyer or an aggressive real estate negotiator without ever throwing a punch, so too can one play a sport aggressively without ever resorting to violence. Consider, too, that even noncontact sports can be played aggressively. As well, one can train or practice in their sport aggressively but without violence.

There is typically some threat behind aggression, often a line that the aggressor is showing a willingness to cross, but what is on the other side of the line need not be physical violence. Importantly, it is the willingness to cross a line that marks behaviour as aggressive in our view. This is part of what some of us find frightening or disturbing about swearing, for example. Even though swearing is non-violent, it has violent associations because it involves crossing a line, and once someone has crossed that line, we are not sure at what point they will stop.[13] Moreover, it is sometimes said that the reason certain battles are won in wartime is that one party is willing to escalate the level of violence. There are parallels in sports as well.

For instance, over time, the NHL has been going through a development whereby players are becoming larger and heavier because the game is becoming more physical. Hockey teams sometimes employ what is referred to as enforcers who serve as both a reminder and constant threat on the ice. Enforcers are responsive to any incursion past the line that we are pointing out in our account here, such as when the opposing team is threatening or actualizing their aggression through excessive physical play. It is the ongoing counter-threat that helps keep other possible forms of aggression or violence in check. In this case, being proactive is better than being passive, which is the strategic offensive principle of war. But enforcers also help balance and focus the gameplay, which may reduce possible injuries or wear and tear on the players by curtailing or mitigating certain types of physical play and their associated risks. Generally, when two opponents, either teams or individuals, are more closely matched in terms of their skills and abilities, there is the possibility for escalation of the physical aspect of the contest to either wear

down one's opponent or to intimidate or frustrate,[14] or better yet, to make progress towards the goal of winning by creating an advantage.

Surely, what defines the symbolic line in a narrow sporting context will depend on many factors. The implications matter: The term "sport", more generally, may be partially demarcated from nearby activities such as "war" or "martial arts" based on where the line is drawn for acceptable behaviour in each sport. Sport may be an outlet for aggression, but not just anything goes in terms of the possibility for aggression and especially violence. Yet, natural escalations will ensue when competition is at its most fierce and when both parties are willing to do what it takes to win, even if winning involves testing or even breaching rules or crossing other lines. When certain players lack a certain restraint, or the sport is escalating physically, enforcers may seem like a necessary feature given the lack of realistic alternatives.

Jim Parry [18] investigates the relationship between violence and aggression in sports and the limits of legitimate expression of aggression. Similar to the account being given here, Parry begins his exposition by expressing his grievances and concerns about the confusion between the two terms, especially in the writings of sports psychologists. Parry is also interested in the difference between and within sports, both concerning their tolerance of violent behaviour and in the educative potential of engagement with sporting competition, which requires, as he puts it, "both aggressive behaviour for excellence and success and also restraint within the rules and ethos of competition" (p. xiv). Here, the value of aggression may be connected to the virtue of restraint.

Parry also states, "The 'problem of violence' in sport is paradoxical because, some claim, aggression is a quality required in sport (especially at the highest levels); and so it cannot be surprising, if sport attracts aggressive people, or if sport actually produces aggression. The results of violence, however, are widely condemned. How can this circle be squared?"; Parry further suggests that sports psychologists run together two very different ideas, which are aggression and bodily harm. Indeed, they often define "aggression" as "direct physical contact accompanied by the intent to do bodily harm" (p. 206). But there is something wrong with the working definition of *aggression*-as-*bodily-harm*. As previously noted, however, one can play aggressively even in noncontact sports. Basketball and soccer, for example, can both be played aggressively, even though most forms of direct contact are prohibited by the rules of the game and their respective ethos. An aggressive strategy may involve pushing the pace of the game to pressurize the other team, such as aggressively defending, which involves collectively pressurizing the opposing team in order to win back possession of the ball. It follows, then, that direct physical contact is not necessarily part of our definition of "aggression" in sports, although certain types of aggressive displays necessitate a certain physicality. Also, this definition misses a key aspect of aggression, which is the pursuit of one's interests or one's team's interests. Importantly, to be aggressive is to have a set of interests in mind and to pursue those interests ruthlessly. In Suitsian terms, athletes adopt a *lusory attitude*, which is a key psychological trait among participants in sports [19].

The ruthless strategies one uses need not involve violence at all. To return to the business context, one can pursue a contract ruthlessly, which might mean underbidding one's competitors and being prepared to take a loss in order to get the deal. Even when losing a contract, a bidder may engage with a win-it or ruin-it strategy where the goal is to either win the job or facilitate a bitter victory for one's competitor by actively forcing the profits to be low or at a notable loss to one's market adversary. The winner is perhaps left with an unpleasant memory. In other cases, companies may take a nothing-left-on-the-table approach, which may involve strategically partnering with customers to gain crucial insight to maximize the sale of products or services. Car vendors, for instance,

purposefully prolong their customer's experiences at the dealerships because they know that the longer a customer is dwelling at the dealership, the more committed they become to buying—they begin to feel invested. Generally, what makes a course of action aggressive, in our view, is the willingness to step past accepted norms. Preferably, companies would compete with one another more fairly, but they sometimes do not. Ideally, suppliers would treat their customer's and clients' resources with more regard and respect, but they often take advantage of their epistemic disadvantages in pushing to meet aggressive sales quotas. Likewise, one can argue aggressively, which might mean not letting up or giving a single concession to one's interlocutor. On the other hand, in law, the adversarial approach may be used to get to the truth. Surely, these should all be viewed as aggressive actions in some sense, but they are not violent in any way.[15] Aggression may be necessary in certain contexts. Furthermore, to see the connection between aggression and the pursuit of one's interests or agenda, it helps to think about the connection between assertion and aggression.

One can be merely assertive without being aggressive. An assertive person stands up for herself. While it can be a vice in some contexts, there are times when being assertive is morally required.[16] For example, the most common character flaw associated with rights is that of the overly assertive individual. This person never misses an opportunity to make a rights claim and seemingly delights in each opportunity to alert others to an infringement of her rights. She is sharply aware of the boundaries that separate what is her's from what is not her's, and the language of rights is her usual language of interaction with others. Michael Meyer [20] distinguishes two different kinds of overly assertive rights bearers: *the bumptious man* and *the hopeless dependent*. According to Meyer's view, the bumptious man is offensive and pushy about his rights because of his worry that others do not respect him, whereas the hopeless dependent presses his claims too strongly out of fear that others will renege on their obligations. But, so, too, one can fail morally by not being assertive enough. Consider the counterpart to the overly assertive person, which is the person who fails to take her rights seriously enough. Where the selfish right bearer never waives a claim, the selfless right bearer waives her claims whenever asked. Thomas Hill [21] sketches just such a person in the character of the deferential wife.[17] Assertiveness and deference can both be vices when one either fails to stand up for oneself or fails to respect boundaries in the pursuit of one's rights or interests. It is a virtue to know when but also how to be assertive.

Generally, assertiveness is intrinsic to what Suits [19] refers to as the *lusory attitude*: The mindset adopted by participants of sports to accept the game's rules; if we go one step further, there is an implied *lusory agreement*: An understanding among players that gameplay occurs on the backdrop of the rules of the game. An expression of assertiveness—and this is but one way of articulating our view as consistent with Suits' account—may involve players sticking up for their rights considering the rules, especially when there are subsequent infractions. This is true of many sports, but it is especially important in elite sports. Tennis and soccer are renowned for their protests when players feel that officials have judged poorly, while rugby players less often question officials. It is an aspect of rugby that players respect officials, and still, assertiveness shows up here as confidence and leadership. In Tennis, Andrei Agassi protested to officials aggressively, and in Soccer, Pierluigi Collina, who was named the World's Best Referee, defended his official decisions forcefully. In its moderate form, we could refer to this as *lusory assertiveness*—the role of advocate that players are prepared to adopt in promoting their rights when they enter a game and when accepting the game's rules. Any of the sports we have in mind will be played assertively in this sense and other senses. Again, there is an implied structure of sport. There can also be a time and place for aggression in sports, which also means appropriate and inappropriate forms need to be contextualized.[18]

While aggression without violence may be clear enough, it is also possible that one can enact violence without aggression, which is perhaps less obvious. This possibility seems not to be acknowledged by those who lump violence and aggression together. Here are three further ways in which violence without aggression might happen.

First, some events that we label as "violent" lack agency altogether. Violent thunderstorms, violent waves, and violent outbreaks of disease can only be violent but not aggressive because they have no plan or agenda. Again, the Suitsian account of sport is useful here. For Suits [19], participants play games by accepting the *lusory attitude* to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs—the *prelusory goal*. Agents have goals, agendas, and so on.[19] The prelusory goal of soccer is to get the ball into the net while preventing the other team from scoring in the other net. But also, sports mostly involve physical contests, which include pursuing goals assertively and aggressively to win. Animal behaviour, on the other hand, is more complicated. Insofar as we describe animals as behaving aggressively, it is because they are in situations to which we can attribute motives, such as a magpie swooping aggressively to protect their young in the nest. Or a hungry bear stalking hikers aggressively, driven to hunt humans by the scarcity of food.

Second, consider that even random human violence need not be aggressive in any way. The berserkers were Old Norse characters who were said to act in a trance-like, uncontrollable fury. But they made no demands and staked no claims. Berserkers fought naked, which is thought to be psychologically effective because it shows utter disregard for one's safety. The berserkers were the human equivalent of lightning strikes or lava flows. They killed whoever was in their path. This is better described as violence or something closer to pure violence—violence without purpose. We sometimes, in certain contexts, use the term "hooligan" to describe violent behaviour among young men when they start fights at sporting events. Likewise, there is a distinction between Brazilian jiu-jitsu practitioners who are prepared for combat and self-defence versus the offensive sporting mode where such athletes test their skills in contests, both of which differ from a brawler who uses power and aggression to overwhelm other combatants.[20] Typically, part of the persona of a brawler is their willingness to be aggressive, signalled by an aggressive appearance and their indifference to being injured and violent towards others.

Third, those who kill at some distance from their opponents need not behave aggressively. In the context of war, pilots can gleefully or sadly drop bombs. There is no place for aggression. Arguably, in these cases, the aggression is elsewhere. Those who let lose the berserkers or the bombing pilots are the people who acted aggressively. The berserkers and pilots are mere tools or weapons and not actors themselves. Violence without aggression is connected to the claim made in the fifth section of this paper, which is that we sometimes value violence when it is part of an aggressive strategy, but mere random violence is of little or no moral interest.

The critical points are that assertiveness can be given a broader construal—lusory assertiveness—and the terms "aggression" and "violence" are distinct because the underlying concepts are not always the same. In Part 5, a Suitsian interpretation is given to the term "aggression". Also, sport involves aggressive strategies, and the value of both aggression and violence are connected to the prelusory goal through specific tactics or general strategies. The virtue of restraint is interconnected with aggression. In Part 5, a Kantian interpretation is given for this connection.

6. The Moral Permissibility of Violence in Sport

Sports are one of the few areas where aggression is not just permitted; it is also valued. In many, if not most, sports, the good player is also the aggressive player.[21] Mike Tyson was a vicious combatant, Tiger Woods had an aggressive style of golf, and Michael

Jordan was known by those around him for demanding excellence. Both Serena and Venus Williams, along with Saina Nehwal in Badminton, all have reputations for their dominant and aggressive styles of play. But what about the permissibility of violence in sports?

In what follows, we will make several distinctions supporting our view that violence is morally permissible in sports. We will take the criticism of violence in sports seriously. Here, it is useful to distinguish violence that is part of *normal play*—that is, permitted by the rules of the sport or part of the game itself—and *violence that is outside the rules*. We can again consider the contrasts between the contact sports discussed above. Also, the issue of consent has immediate relevance, so we will explore the connected law, which helps with our goal of drawing out a justification for violence in sports.

6.1. Critics of Violence

Within the category of "violence" that is outside the rules of the sport, there are different types and a wide range of responses to how it is treated. For violence within the rules, at least, the differences often seem contextual and historically connected to the norms and traditions of a given sport. Let us examine this thought further.

Checking, for instance, although a display of physical dominance in hockey, is also useful for disrupting one's opponent or gaining an advantage, whereas tackling would be much less optimal in this context. Also, whether violent or something less, checking can advance the team's play or distract the competition. In addition to enforcers, teams also use pests whose role is to, among other things, tempt the other team into fighting, for which they might be penalized. Beyond the players, the referees, fans, and hockey officials all seem to have considerable tolerance for violence that does not directly advance play that would not be tolerated in other sports, even ones that permit contact and tackling, such as rugby and football. Within the rules, there are indeed very hard tackles in the National Football League (NFL), and they are frequently excessive, but they are also impermissible in some cases.[22] The same is true of rugby, but the hits are probably less hard than those of NFL football. These activities appear more directly connected to advancing play versus hockey violence. Yet one interesting argument in favour of hockey violence is that it plays the role of bringing about *natural justice*. The referees cannot be everywhere, and without an enforcer, a team's top player may be subject to attacks from the other team. The enforcer's job is to enact revenge if a player meets with an unfair attack. Enforcers—especially large and physically aggressive players, some more talented at fighting than at hockey—serve to level the playing field, using the threat of violence to protect the rest of the players on their team. They serve as a dedicated source of coercion, and retaliatory behaviours are also commonplace in rugby and football, more broadly. Still, not everyone agrees that sports should be like this, and the critics of violence in sports take on a few different forms.

Some critics argue that violence is bad for certain sports.[23] This is the case in hockey, where the claim of superiority for women's games or the European style of hockey might be made because the latter involves more skill, technique, and strategy and less physicality in certain senses. A game like this is defined by greater displays of finesse and smoother game flow. Arguably, there is room for different styles of hockey, and the sports community could experiment, letting fans decide which they prefer. Some criticisms, however, could go broader, claiming that violence in sports is not morally permissible.[24] Importantly, critics of violence in sports need to make a distinction between *rule-governed-violence*, as in boxing, versus *violence that occurs outside the rules*, i.e., *unsanctioned violence*, as in hockey fights. Sports that allow tackling—rugby and American football, for example—fall in the middle. Let us examine the importance of this distinction and its implications for the general critics' view.

Conceivably, broad objections to the morality of violence in sports naturally take the form of concern about harm to the players. Previously, we argued that aggression and violence can be teased apart and that the *aggression-as-harm* and *aggression-as-bodily-harm* views run into certain categorization issues. We also discussed how harm, as a central concern, can be taken more broadly to include other gestures. Consider also recent debates about whether it is ethical to even watch football [26,27]. Note, however, that injuries in American football, about which we are the most concerned, are not intentional. Many football injuries come from years of sustaining micro-concussions after many years of play, and it is possible to sustain such injuries even if one did not ever receive a violent hit. In the case of football, it seems, sadly, to be the case that the high rate of injuries is attached to normal play and not to singular bad hits or tackles. Although sports aim to curtail certain forms of violence within gameplay, in light of the more immediate harms, this will not be enough to mitigate harm in the bigger picture. Generally, many sports, if not all, come with certain long-term risks, so broader sorts of criticism are better narrowed.[25]

Critics could instead focus on *rule-governed-violence*, however, without notable reform, perhaps all contact sports and combat sports would not meet their requirements for harm reduction or its absence altogether. Perhaps, then, critics are better off focusing on *unsanctioned violence* as a better target for improvement and progress. Certainly, arguing that fighting in the NHL is needless is a tenable position, in principle, but there are also the practical and business interests of fan appeal. Likewise, certain forms of striking should be banned in MMA, and many have been in the UFC as it moves closer to boxing. Indeed, there are manageable types of harm, and there are inevitable ones, too, and yet the risks in sports are sometimes no worse than the risks of other activities or inactivity. Jobs that require sitting all day raise the risk for our future selves, and careers in construction and mining, for instance, cost lives. Driving is dangerous. Risk is pervasive. It is more practical to focus on reinforcing practices that help mitigate certain known risks. For instance, padded headgear was eliminated in Olympic boxing because it increased the possibility of concussion. We think that general critiques of violence are better paired with relevant insight by considering harm more comprehensively but also locally to the sport in question.

6.2. Consenting to Violence

A discussion about violence causing physical harm will naturally involve the issue of consent. There is another distinction that needs to be made clear, which concerns the types of consent that apply to sports. For instance, all of the players in the NHL and the NFL are adults, and they will know the risks of playing hockey and football. Consent to injury seems even clearer in combat sports. So, is consent not enough to ensure that violence in sports is morally justified? Consent seems to us to be necessary but possibly not sufficient in the case of moral permissibility. Certainly, in Canada, consent is not sufficient to secure legal permissibility.[26]

The main case in Canadian law which establishes this is called *R. v. Jobidon 2 S.C.R. 714*. It confirmed existing common law that you cannot consent to assault causing bodily harm. The decision made the *exception for sports clear*, but since then, the law against assault has been used in some cases of hockey fights, which led to severe physical trauma and injury. R. v. Jobidon concerned a barroom brawl. Lisa Silver [30] states, "Jules Jobidon was charged with unlawful act manslaughter as a result of a consensual barroom brawl, which Jobidon and the deceased took outside to settle. Jobidon quickly took the upper hand, and within seconds, the recipient of the punches lay unconscious and subsequently died. Did the deceased consent to a fistfight? Yes, but is consent a defence or phrased differently, does the Crown need to prove lack of consent as part of the *actus reus* of assault? On the face, s. 265(3) of the *Code* does not preclude consent being given under the *Jobidon* circumstances,

but underneath the *Code*, "illuminating" the *Code*, as Justice McIntyre sees it in *Jobidon*, is the common law. It is a common law, through English authorities, most notably the 1980 House of Lords decision in *Attorney General Reference (No. 6 of 1980)* [1981] 2 All ER 105, which stands for the proposition, enunciated in *Jobidon*, that intentional application of force, which causes bodily harm vitiates consent on public policy grounds. This "judge-made" policy is based upon, in part, the social uselessness of brawls. Society has changed from a macho flexing of muscles and no longer views physicality as a virtue, although, as Justice McIntyre points out, we still enjoy a "socially valuable cultural product" like stunts and daredevil activities".

Returning to the context of sport, there are two separate lines of argument at work. The first is whether, when playing hockey or any other sport, you have consented to all the violent acts that might occur in playing the game. Canadian legal doctrine has extended the use of criminal law, in particular, laws against assault, to cases involving violence in sports. Over the years, a series of criteria have been developed to determine whether a particular act of violence falls under normal play or assault [31,32]. This argument asks what players might have been assumed to reasonably consent to, but much of the violent checking that goes on in the NHL is part of the normal play. Previously, we suggested that violence is sometimes valued, not for its own sake, but because it is part of an aggressive strategy. One could argue that there is an implied *aggressive maxim* where one should always check opponents hard into the boards when they break fast to the outside. These hits may, in turn, be violent, although they are permitted by the rules. However, unsanctioned checking, such as charging, boarding, and checking from behind, although dangerous, harmful, and violent, are known threats in the game too. Moreover, the second line of argument looks to considerations of the public good. Here, considerations of the public good are said to override individual consent, making a morally neutral act one that is legally impermissible. So, there is a broader concern that can be raised. Is this consistent with the values of liberalism?

Irving Kristol [33] argues not: He poses the willingness to limit consent to violence as a problem for a consistently liberal view. The example he uses is an extreme one—voluntary gladiatorial death matches—which Kristol thinks almost all liberals would ban, even though such a restriction allows considerations of the public good to trump individual liberties. One of the closer activities to Roman gladiator combat in modern times is MMA, but they were not unequivocally accepted. In Ontario, MMA was banned until 2010 because it was not seen as a priority for Ontario families, or that was the political explanation provided by the Premier at the time. In 2013, Bill S-209 was passed, decriminalizing MMA in Canada, which gave the provinces power to create athletic commissions to regulate it. But MMA is still banned in Norway because knockouts are used to win.[27] Maybe, perhaps, we are not always so liberal after all, suggests Kristol. Marc Ramsay [34] assesses two main lines of response to Kristol, which are Feinberg's *harm-based response* and Arthur Ripstein's Kantian *consent response* and finds neither satisfactory. We will not rehearse all of Feinberg's and Ripstein's arguments and Ramsay's responses, but there is one point that is most relevant to our larger thesis. Let us suppose that consent is sufficient to render the harm to the participants morally neutral—in his discussion of this point, Ramsay cites the familiar "to the truly willing no harm can be done"—than those who want to ban the violent sport, such as gladiatorial combat, and who are committed to harm as the only ground which justifies restrictions on human liberty, must look to other sorts of harms, beyond harms to participants. Let us call this the *harm-to-others-view*. Two examples of non-participant harm are often considered.

First, many people are attracted to the thought that athletes are violent off the playing field and outside the boxing ring. The reasoning is easy and familiar. Let us think again

about boxing and football. Such sports attract violent people, those willing to hurt others, and then nurture those traits. Indeed, recent media attention paid to spousal abuse and sexual assault committed by football players would seem to confirm the Violent Man thesis. The problem is that even though the reasoning that leads to this conclusion sounds good and matches our gender and race associations, it is at odds with the facts. While it is true that compared with the population at large, football players commit more violent crimes, that might not be the best or fairest comparison group. When we compare football players to men of the same age—mid to late twenties—they turn out not to look so bad: Indeed, they are not saints, but they are considerably less violent (in terms of arrest records, at least) than men of the same age; the violence rate varied considerably among football players, and it turns out there are interesting correlations between position played and violence off the field.[28]

So, perhaps, then, it is not the players on or off the field committing violent acts that are relevant to the social harm of violent sports, but it is the fans. Again, this kind of reasoning is easy to understand. The assumption or perception is that violent men watch football and boxing and are themselves more emotionally prone to such behaviour. Football-associated fan violence—particularly directed at women—is the subject of the popular book *The Stronger Women Get the More Men Love Football*. Domestic violence reports and arrests soar around the time of football events such as the Super Bowl, it is true. However, there is another correlation here that is relevant. These events are also often held on holiday weekends, which bring families together, which involves alcohol and stress; also, less violent sports—European football—which have much less violence on the field, have a far greater record of fan violence, including sexual assault and domestic abuse [36]. So, the *harm-to-others-view* line of argument appears to be on shaky ground. But also, for our purposes, it is beside the point.

We are interested in the moral value of aggression, and that is a separate question from the legality of violence in support. Although the argument can be made that violence is permitted in some sports without the law getting involved, we only need the much weaker thesis that violence is morally permissible when consent has been given. So, *consent-based violence* is a plausible feature of some sports, but surely there are cases where consent cannot be given. However, just because consent cannot be given does not mean that aggressive or violent acts are not otherwise understandable through the notion of natural justice especially in the case of retaliation. In some sports, there is also *rule-governed-violence* and *unsanctioned violence* more generally. As well, there are obvious cases of *rule-governed-aggression* which are being discussed here more generally.

There are still questions about what one has consented to, but at least in the case of boxing or MMA, it is clear that one has consented to aggression, violence, or even worse, disability or death. Prichard Colón Meléndez, for instance, a former boxer who received an illegal blow to the head, is now only able to speak through the use of a computer and suffers from life-altering difficulties. Morrison [37] notes that the fatality rate in boxing is 0.13 deaths per 1000 participants each year, which is lower than or similar to death rates in other high-risk sports. Fewer die in MMA, but the injury rate is relatively high. Although the deaths, paralysis, and mental health issues among jockeys, combined with horse deaths, make horse racing a strong contender among dangerous sports. Insofar as hockey and tackling sports are concerned, there is an element of combat inherent to all. While wrestling is categorically a combat sport, wrestling takedowns are practiced in both rugby and football and therefore border with the combative.

7. The Value of Aggression in Sport and Elsewhere

We are going to return, in this final section of this paper, to the rugby field and Samantha's anecdote. She was impressed spending time with some of her son's coaching team with the gentle giant nature of many of the older rugby players. They were physically fast and super aggressive in play but slow, gentle, and kind off the field. This thought involves a certain romanticizing, but she was struck by the contrast. Many held part-time jobs as bouncers to finance their university education. She could see why.

First, their size and strength would put most people off fighting. Second, and more importantly, they seemed very slow to anger. Samantha got the sense that, off the field, one would need to do a lot to get them mad at you. They told stories about drunks going for them and saying awful things but then quietly and calmly lifting them out the door of the nightclub. She does not claim that this ability to turn it on and turn it off is true of all athletes in aggressive and violent sports, but it is a feature she thinks that we value. Rugby players exhibit a capacity for moderating their aggression, which is a paradigm case for the account of aggression that we are developing here.

Consider Kant's discussion of the honest shopkeeper. There is a range of reasons why a shopkeeper might be honest. For example, the shopkeeper might be acting out of self-interest by wanting to keep his customers happy so that they return. Kant argues, "It is not sufficient to do that which should be morally good that it conform to the law; it must be done for the sake of the law" [38]. It is only when inclination pushes in the other direction, and we still manage to do the right thing because it is right, that our action has moral worth. For this reason, a misanthropic person who manages to overcome her dislike of others and acts kindly because it is her duty performs an action that has moral worth, while the naturally sweet, dispositioned soul can never know that his action has moral worth because we can never now if he would have performed the same act in the absence of inclination. But what does Kant have to do with aggression in sports? Consider James, a typical philosophy Ph.D. student. As James carries on his day and lives up to the perfect duty of not hitting others, it is not clear that this refraining from hitting has any moral worth. It is pretty clear that, in Kant's view, it does not. Because, for the most part, James is not inclined to do so. But like the naturally sweet soul with an easygoing disposition, it is not at all clear what James would do if his temperament changed or if he was presented with a set of circumstances far out of his ordinary life experience. James is at the mercy of his disposition. Arguably, he has very little practice with self-control. But note that this is not true for a person who regularly plays a physically aggressive sport. We want to suggest that the positive virtue of aggression in sports is *controlled physicality* which connects to the value of restraint previously explored.

Let us return to Kristol's point about gladiatorial combat. When both parties have consented, we confess that we find nothing morally impermissible in their actions that would justify an intervention. This assumes, leaving aside the law and policy question as to whether such contests should legally be allowed. While we find no reason to step in and put a stop to this sort of combat, we cannot say that it clearly appeals in any way as a sport. Indeed, there are questions about whether gladiatorial combat counts as a sport.[29] This means it may be life or death, and so it is not simply about winning the game, but it is also about surviving it. Here, there is something more akin to a set of implied natural laws.[30] From the view of a gladiator, either my opponent dies, or I die, but I intend for it not to be me that dies. The latter exceeds what, in contemporary times, people view as a sport, and gladiator challenges exceed the normal situations we now expect of fair sport and sports entertainment. Normally, most people prefer their violence fake these days (e.g., films), or their tastes are for something involving less than killing, death, or extreme violence. There are exceptions. UFC fans love violent knockouts, and NASCAR followers love a violent

crash. But in a modern light, it is not morally right to lose one's life or to have to take a life, just for sport. Athletes may risk injury or death, but death, one way or another, is never a guaranteed outcome of their sport and taking life is not part of a modern-day sport either.[31]

Gladiator challenges are more clearly akin to warfare or perhaps certain forms of martial arts in our contemporary times, like armoured combat sports, especially when compared to benchmark Olympic sports or professional sports. The narrative element overlaying gladiator combat—the reenactments of battles—bears a resemblance to the athletic theatre of World Wrestling Entertainment or the political theatre of Ancient Greece. Yet, even if gladiatorial combat counted as a sport, in some sense, it may fail to be an interesting one in the absence of specific types of rules, even if those rules are no more than the principles of hand-to-hand combat or the goal of combat through the use of weapons. Without rules that would offer no possibility of exercising the virtue of control and self-restraint in aggressive play, gladiatorial combat would lose its value as a sport. If, for instance, one opponent was tied down, there would be but one thing for their opponent to do. One can think of many scenarios that fall short of entertainment here. If combatants had no preparation, the same outcome ensues—It lacks certain qualities. These scenarios might be argued to meet a minimal account of sport, but they fail to be very interesting ones, presumably even for Ancient Romans. As well, gladiators were not uninitiated brawlers. Rather, they were trained combatants who would have understood the principles and culture of battle. They would have needed a certain discipline and fortitude to fight as gladiators, which implies other virtues such as control. Gladiators did not invariably fight to the death, and they could submit to their opponent who could show mercy. Control—emotional, mental, and physical—is what gives aggression in sports, and possibly elsewhere, its value. The wild berserker is not aggressive but merely violent. Aggressive play in sports is valuable because it is an exercise in Kantian self-restraint. We, as a society, appreciate the physicality, the pursuit of the goal of winning, and the holding back when doing so is required.

In our view here, seeing the value of aggression in the arguably neutral context of sports helps one see, in general, what is worth valuing about aggression more generally. Aggression involves threatening to go past certain agreed-upon rules or conventions, but with no rules and without self-control, aggression is not possible. Despite the physicality of sports, in the end, it is rational self-control that we most value. However, the moral development of athletes takes time, and to use a metaphor, practice is needed to hone the moral compass and make it properly tuned to the sport. With too much aggression, one may reach the tipping point of violence or excessiveness, but with too little, one can be a target for bullying or harassment, like in the case of NHL players. As an athlete, especially in combat sports and contact sports, one must be able to hold one's own but also know the limits. Sportsmanship, both in sport and outside, requires fair and generous behaviour or treatment of others—it is a virtue—as is self-control. If sport can, though it does not always, help us to be more appropriately aggressive, that is, to tap our aggression more deeply and yet subject to an increasingly developed self-control, then moral development has broader implications for society. Learning to be appropriately aggressive is a generally useful skill and ability.

If our proposal is practicable, then *aggression-as-a-virtue* and *restraint-as-a-virtue* go hand-in-hand in sports. So, *inappropriate aggression* in sports is not necessarily the harm caused, actual or potential, but instead, the restraint that should have been used. Yet actions taken outside the rules or the ethos of a sport may be motivated by natural justice and, therefore, may still be viewed as appropriate by the ethical frameworks operating outside the formalizations of the sport.

Practically, Rugby Union uses the notion of materiality when analyzing referee decision-making and its impact on the game, which implies causation.[32] For example, the hooker is supposed to throw the ball in straight from the sidelines to a player who lifts it to catch the ball. But if the defence elects not to compete for the ball, then a non-straight throw has had no impact on the game. So the referee can allow it. The same thought applies to aggression. A dangerous tackle can have a material difference in the game, but regardless of its causal impact, our proposal emphasizes the restraint that is expected in the first place. This, we think, is a useful insight because it may help with making sharper distinctions between types of actions and their underlying motivations. The relative restraint that is expected is itself a factor in how causes are evaluated during gameplay. Accompanying inappropriate aggression is appropriate aggression, which is rule-governed aggression or aggression sanctioned by the ethos of the game. In some sports, namely combat sports and tackling sports, most clearly, there is also *ethos-based violence*. There are also norms: Rugby has a rather high baseline of aggressive play, but not just anything goes in terms of the additional aggression. An inappropriate tackle may be met with an equally hard tackle in return, motivated by natural justice. In the scrum, punches get thrown, and they are returned in kind. Although, arguably, this violence exceeds both the rules and ethos of rugby, there is a rational morality at work in these tit-for-tat strategies, so these retaliations are reactions to an absence of controlled physicality. Where the referee may not have a line of sight to the breach of rules, players may retaliate.

There is a moment in the history of rugby that we think illustrates what we have in mind when referring to aggression and restraint as co-virtues. The newcomer and 17-year-old Chris Murphy, who weighed 70 kg, recalls a time when he tackled Jonah Lomu as a 120 kg veteran playing for Cardiff in Rugby Union [41]. Lomu had just broken through the Leeds' defence line and could have gone in any direction, but he looked at Murphy, smiled, and ran in his direction. Instead of levelling the younger and smaller newcomer, he ran as softly as possible into Murphy, who slid down to Lomu's feet and was able to tackle him just by his shoelaces as he offloaded the ball. Lomu then stood up, rubbed the young man on the head and said, "Well done mate". Lomu was both large and powerful but quick and skillful, and in a sport that still depended on physicality and confrontation, he offered a massive advantage, but he could match that physicality with a certain controlled physicality if he wanted to.

Powerful people are impressive, and they are even more admirable when they show control, restraint, or selective use of their advantages. Lomu demonstrated *lusory aggression*—the controlled physicality that players adopt when they enter a game and when they accept the game's rules to achieve the lusory goal. Accompanying the latter is the *lusory restraint*—the absence of aggression that exceeds *lusory aggression*. Aggression is modulated. Suits [19] offered a shorthand definition for the act of playing a game "as the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles". In our proposal, controlled physicality is an unnecessary obstacle. Players accept the limits placed on their aggression and the various expressions thereof to make the game possible, but sports can allow more or less aggression and different types, which can also vary from event to event. There are *aggressive maxims* in sports, but our account is intended to describe what they may have in common by articulating the Suitsian account.

Sportsmanship—the fair treatment of others—is connected to the understanding of appropriate and inappropriate aggression through the notions of lusory aggression and restraint, where controlled physicality is the virtue obtained by developing one's morality and the ability to modulate aggression within the sport. Participating in sports requires entering a space with a certain baseline of aggression beyond the norms of society while threatening to go further, includes dialling up aggressive play to achieve certain goals, such

as restoring normal play, responding to incursions past the norms, or ruthlessly pursuing the goal of the game. Although violence may be part of an aggressive strategy, and Lumo could have levelled Murphy with a hard hit, even in a high-stakes game, that action would involve unacceptable violence and a lack of controlled physicality and virtue. Likewise, excessiveness in combat or contact sports may be viewed as an absence of virtue.

8. Conclusions

While acknowledging the biological aspects of aggression, the proposed account explores some of the public elements that shape what is viewed as aggressive, while also exploring existing standards or definitions of aggression and their limitations. The importance of aggression is discussed while setting out a proposal for some of its general features. Questions are raised in response to a reflection on the permissibility of aggression and violence and their differences, along with their distinctions from anger and assertiveness, while considering consent and the public good and acknowledging the potential harm and the importance of restraint. The central proposal is that aggression, at least in the context of sport, is based notably on an ethical framework. The notion of "controlled physicality" is introduced and connected to a Suitsian view of aggression in sports. The overarching goal involves clarifying the differences between appropriate and inappropriate aggression and between appropriate aggression and unacceptable violence. Although acknowledging its possible value, this paper does not argue that violence is a virtue in sport. Also, no genuine attempt is made to reconcile the proposed view with the latest empirical evidence on aggression, nor are alternatives to the Kantian account considered.

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Notes

1 Sports commentary is much less likely to point to women's aggression. A study by Grieves [2] at Cambridge University analyzed 160 million words in sport and found that the term "men" was associated with more aggressive terms such as "dominate" or "battle", whereas "woman" was associated with verbs such as "compete", "participate" and "strive".

2 Baron and Richardson [3] define aggression as "any form of behaviour directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another live being who is motivated to avoid such treatment" (p. 7).

3 Please see Widmeyer and Birch [4] who explore the *aggression-performance-relationship* in hockey.

4 The view presented in this paper is not necessarily inconsistent with the proposals in biology. For instance, Lorenz [5] proposes a Biology of Aggression that posits aggression as a drive. In this view, aggression can be channelled in either positive or negative ways, but it is not a feature of action. Rather, it is instinctive and non-rational in both humans and animals. We are not arguing for the correct account of aggression or the appropriate level of analysis—biological, social, psychological, and so on—for why athletes are aggressive.

5 Although there are too many possible sports to offer an extensional definition of "sport", and an intensional definition typically involves using terms like "physical activity " and "game", what we have in mind for the context of this paper are the Olympic Sports, where displays of aggression have institutional implications for sport policy. We are thinking of Suits' [9] definition of "sport" as *games of physical skill* with or without the *wide-stable-following* requirement, which is later referred to as the *institutional* element. Meier [10] successfully argued against the latter because something can be a sport without being institutional.

6 There are obvious gendered elements to the questioning of the status of certain sports. And not all of the arguments for wanting them to count are conceptual arguments about the nature of sport and its boundaries. Practical considerations play a role, too, such as access to team doctors in the university context in the US. Political considerations matter as well. With universities trying to meet their Title IX requirements, the more women's activities that count as sports, the better.

7 The term "female-apposite sports" comes from Martínková and Parry [11].

8 Orwell [12] states, "Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard for all rules, and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence. In other words, it is war minus the shooting. . . Most of the games we now play are of ancient origin, but sport does not seem to have been taken very seriously between Roman times and the nineteenth century. . . Then, chiefly in England and the United States, games were built up into a heavily-financed activity, capable of attracting vast crowds and rousing savage passions, and the infection spread from country to country. It is the most violently combative sports, football and boxing, that have spread the widest".

9 Thomas [13] argues that combat sports can help survivors address feelings associated with the freeze response, regain a sense of agency, and feel safe in their bodies again by addressing how trauma is stored in the body.

10 Dixon [14] discusses arguments in favour of banning boxing.

11 This may seem counterintuitive to some readers when viewed from how spectators consume sports or how it is presented in sports commentary, especially for those unfamiliar with sports in general or a specific sport. For instance, the early days of the UFC would be better described as "martial", which implies something closer to the term "combat". In contrast, the UFC events today better resemble a sport like boxing. George St-Pierre, one of the most influential UFC fighters, suggested that he would prefer that rounds be eliminated to create a continuous fight. However, a structural change like this would remove substantial opportunities for strategy development and thereby place the emphasis back on the combatants to fight while testing strategies on the fly and all at once, thereby making it more of a real fight. It could shift the UFC further away from being like the Olympic Sports. However, St-Pierre has a point: If a fighter can be saved by the bell, UFC is perhaps less combative than it could be, but it may also be more spectator-friendly as such moments help build drama and suspense.

12 Please see Jewell, Moti, and Coates [16] in which aggression and violence are always mentioned as a pair and no attention is paid to aggression except as it is connected to violence. We cite this one source, and others here, but this book seems to be representative of the treatment of aggression in the scholarly literature on sport.

13 This shows a connection between manners and ethics. The person who crosses the usual norms for interpersonal communication is often both rude and threatening. The threat comes from the person's willingness to ignore or overstep norms. Samantha has had an opportunity to mull this distinction over when she is wakened by teenagers (not her's) drinking in the playground across the street from my house. Sitting awake, she wonders at what point she should call the police. At first, she waited until they smashed glass, threw beer bottles onto the street from the jungle gym climber or started fighting with one another. Later, she backed up her limits and called once she heard loud and aggressive swearing that almost always preceded the bottle smashing and fighting. The sequence of events was fairly predictable.

14 Please see Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears [17] for a discussion of the *aggression-frustration-relationship*.

15 Samantha's thesis supervisor had a reputation among the graduate students for arguing aggressively. She did not mind as it was the style with which she had grown up as a philosopher, but other students did mind. One graduate student said that it helped him to realize that, if he needed to, he could always take our supervisor in a fight. This puzzled her at the time, but again, I think it shows how people mistakenly run aggression of all sorts together with physical contact and violence.

16 Please see Meyer [20] for a discussion of assertive rights claiming as a vice.

17 Please see Brennan [22] for a discussion of the virtues and vices associated with the practice of claiming rights discussed in the context of feminist ethics.

18 Surely, there is a lot more to be said about the connection between gender, race, and the norms about assertive and aggressive behaviours, especially in terms of how they play a role in both philosophy and sports. Philosophy has been criticized for masculine aggression, which can make it difficult for those socialized as feminine to find a place. In sports and philosophy, one often feels the need to make a choice between *gender norm compliance*—which may be deeply internalized as part of one's sense of self—and *acceptance* as an athlete or as a philosopher.

19 Please see Steward [23] on the important idea of animal agency.

20 Above, we discussed the value of enforcers in the NHL, who, in some cases, might be more akin to brawlers, while MMA, boxing, and many other combat sports involve far more sophisticated skills and abilities. Arguably, hockey fighting might be best construed as a form of dirty boxing on ice, where the rules are more implied conventions. Renowned examples of brawlers include Tie Domi in the NHL and Tank Abbott in the UFC, but these athletes should be distinguished from those using the formal methods associated with brawling as a style of boxing or MMA.

21 To reiterate, we have something like Olympic Sport, under a Suitsian account of "sport", in mind. There are perhaps some activities where aggression is not so easily expressed or tracked by spectators during competition. For instance, some Winter Games, such as

bobsleighing or ski jumping, are examples where aggression may be less obviously expressed during competition. Athletes may understand in what ways they have crossed a line, or they may display certain signs of social or relational aggression.

[22] The nature of NFL football is hard hits, although quarterbacks are protected by a roughing the passer penalty, which is for late or violent contact. These players are more vulnerable, and they wear less equipment.

[23] Please see Sailors [24] for a discussion about why American football is unethical. Similar arguments could be made for combat sports or those with a combative element (e.g., NHL hockey, tackling sports).

[24] Russell [25] discusses the value of dangerous sports while considering plausible objections.

[25] There will be exceptions. For instance, cycling has life-long benefits.

[26] Consent is not sufficient; the Canadian Supreme Court has ruled in the case of bodily harm that occurs as the result of sadomasochistic sex. A person cannot consent, in the sense that carries legal force, to an assault that causes bodily harm. Please see Cossman [28] and Olson [29].

[27] In 2014, the Norwegian parliament voted to lift the 33-year ban on professional boxing. The ban was in place because the parliament believed professional boxing was too dangerous.

[28] The players in the offensive line are less violent, for example. Please see Livingston [35].

[29] Reid [39] discusses whether gladiators were athletes in connection to Roman and modern views of sport.

[30] In a genuine life-or-death battle, it seems to us that social niceties would be largely set aside. Here, gladiators could fall back on basic survival instincts when their lives are truly threatened.

[31] There may be exceptions, such as bullfighting, which is increasingly unpopular and already widely banned.

[32] For a discussion on causation in sports, please see Knott [40].

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