

# Back to the basics

## On ethics, football, and youth

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This article aims to be a clear and straightforward proposition for rethinking the relationship between ethics and football in younger ages, acknowledging its important role in the players' education and human development. With a pedagogical objective, this article seeks to think and explore ethics in a way accessible to the common, non-philosophical reader, deconstructing and challenging the usual weight of the classical tradition and translating it to direct and fundamental questioning. This basic structure enables the presentation of the problem through seven statements, each open to singular or unified discussions regarding ethics in general or within specific pragmatic cases. The argument is not only pedagogical but also challenging due to its own assertiveness. It defies and invites the reader to immediately question himself on his agreement, and engaging with very dense sports ethical problems, by a departure questioning method. In a certain sense, it encourages an invisible dialogue that the reader, whether a coach, a player, father, or mother, can acquire from the attempt to establish a clear insight, bringing ethics back to its original

position: a living thought, a conversation with everyday life and the problems that emerge within that sphere.

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## §0. A Prelude to Ethical thought: the spectator lens as a mirror

Let's start at the beginning: *what is Ethics?*

Approaching or touching a field as dense as ethics always requires an attitude that is both daring and humble. Perhaps it can help us in this effort to probe into what ethics is not, or at least what it cannot be reduced to. In this sense, ethics is not, contrary to what common sense sometimes seems to suggest, the systematic response of anglophone analytical philosophy, in which problems are categorically ordered in relation to their descriptive, meta-ethical, normative, and applied character. This could paradoxically put us outside the problem. It would be like being outside of life. Just like saying that ethics is ultimately about choice, and erasing all the infinite possibilities, tensions, anguish, and conflicts that are involved in the whole process. Ethics is life in its purest state, a constant navigation, decision, involvement, and implication. Each one of us is hopelessly involved in our lives and wakes up every day looking at ourselves and others, having in death our final step or destination, and the most radical question is whether or not we can master that destination. If life is worth living, ethics is the answer to a fundamental question of human existence: *how should I act?* What should I do? Simple, in all its infinitely complex aspects. This question that haunts us all arises from life itself, from its natural problems, its complications, unexpected situations, challenging situations, in a word, ethics is a question and a problem that springs from life itself. Philosophy, as an effort to clarify, has tried to think about this problem over the millennia. However, thinking about a problem can't just mean analytically grouping or describing it, but, above all, self-immersing in it, perhaps even inhabiting it. And that's why even today we read the ancient Greeks and thinkers like Plato and Aristotle, who really delved into the density of this problem. But it was perhaps Kant who best explained philosophy's herculean tasks in the following terms:

*What can I know? What should I do? What can I expect?*<sup>1</sup> With this text, we will try to give a clear and synthetic answer to how we should act, or rather, we will try to delimit the field of ethics given the many misunderstandings in the present time, and especially in, and in relation to, the field of Sport.

Ethics is often referred to as a branch of philosophy dedicated to the study and foundation of the hierarchical set of values and practices that guide human action towards the good. Ricoeur defines this good as the search for a good life,

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1 Kant, I., (1994) *Critique of Pure Reason*. Lisbon: Gulbenkian Publishing House, p. 639

shared with others<sup>2</sup>. This ethical perspective aims to promote human coexistence geared towards individual and collective improvement, requiring a human experience lived in a free, responsible, fair, supportive, and meaningful way, in the Aristotelian sense of a life well lived<sup>3</sup>.

Ethics encompasses several domains, such as virtue ethics, which focuses on personal qualities and how they should be oriented towards the good<sup>4</sup>; deontological ethics (duty ethics), which concerns the set of criteria and rules that tend to be universal that individuals should follow; and practical, utilitarian or behavioral ethics, in which individuals, by exercising their virtues and obeying their duties, discern how to act appropriately on ethical problems in concrete, specific, contextual and situated situations. It has been from a specific approach to sport, from the perspective of these three main ethical theories (utilitarian or consequentialism, duty or deontological, and virtue ethics), that works produced by sports philosophers<sup>5</sup> have emerged debating issues such as justice, integrity, responsibility and respect between players, the rules and norms of healthy coexistence in sport, as well as the problem of fraud, doping and medical intervention to artificially enhance performance, violence, racism, exclusion and inequality.

In an effort to contemplate these various perspectives, and from an initial purpose of seeking easy and demystified access to an ethics of sport in the particular context of the participation of children and young people in youth soccer and its consequences on the pitch, but also off the pitch (especially with parents and the social environment), we propose a look at the realm of ethics from *seven essential postulates* revealed by it that seem essential in this framework:

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- 2 Paul Ricoeur (1995). *Si mismo como otro*. Madrid: Siglo XXI.
  - 3 Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by António de Castro Caeiro. Lisbon: Quetzal Editores (2009 edition).
  - 4 A. McIntyre (2007). *After virtue: a study in moral theory*. 3rd edition. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.
  - 5 See for example: J. Boxill (Ed) (2002). *Ethics and sport*, Oxford: Blackwell; P.J. Galasso (Ed.) (1988). *Philosophy of sport and Physical Activity issues and concepts*, Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press; S. Loland (2002) *Fair play in sport: a moral norm system*, London: Routledge; W. J. Morgan (2000) *Ethics in sport*, Illinois: Human Kinetics; R. L. Simon (1991). *Fair play: sports, values, and society*, Colorado: Westview Press; M. J. McNamee & S. J. Parry (Eds.) (1998) *Ethics and sport*, London.

## §1. Ethics as a defiance against the law of strength and its overcoming

### §1.1. *First overcoming: the survival of the fittest*

The law of the strongest is what we call in common parlance the law of the jungle. In philosophy, it is a question that has been thought about for a long time, but essentially it is the ordering of life or politics according to force. This state of nature, as thematized by Hobbes<sup>6</sup>, is the consecration of the principle of survival, not as Darwin drew it up in the adaptation and evolution of conceptual movement, but as a civilizational minimum. It is the dictatorships and totalitarian states of modernity that gave us a more present image of the savagery and destruction that the law of the strongest is capable of. Because in the law of the strongest there must always be a weaker one, a scapegoat, as René Girard<sup>7</sup> masterfully thought. That brute, blind force which then takes on more complex forms in action, necessarily brings out forces of resistance, of action–reaction. Ethics, as a possibility and source of ultimate resistance, cannot be erased, because it is a requirement for the struggle against submission, slavery, and servitude. Freedom is the first and last horizon of ethics.

It may seem contradictory in an essay on sport to point out the need of overcoming the law of the strongest, since one of the aims of sporting competition is precisely to discover the best performance, the best result, the best athlete, expressed very clearly in the motto “*Citius, Altius, Fortius*” adopted in 1894 by Pierre de Coubertin. Perhaps it was precisely a paradoxical feeling of incompleteness in the face of this Olympic ideal that, amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games (which took place in 2021), the motto was modified with the addition, after a hyphen, of the Latin word “*communis*”, which means “*in community, in solidarity*”. This subtle addition is absolutely transformative when it comes to looking at the other (competitor, opponent, teammate, referee, family member, spectator). It is in this sense that Robert L. Simon defines sporting competition as “*a mutually acceptable quest for excellence through challenge*”<sup>8</sup>. Because excellence is sought in community, in relationship, which leads us to the need to go beyond oneself.

6 Hobbes, T. (1651). *Leviatã*. 1995 Edition. Lisbon: INCM.

7 Girard, R. (1972). *De la violence à la divinité*. Éditions de 2007. Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle.

8 Simon, R. L. (2010). *Fair Play: The Ethics of Sport* (3rd ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press, p.27.

### §1.2 *Second overcoming: that of oneself*

Life is an evolutionary flow; movement is its essence. To live is to inhabit permanent movement. Even in hypothetical states of stagnation, such as depression or complete happiness, movement does not cease. The Portuguese popular expression, ‘Stopping is dying,’ encapsulates the idea that movement is intrinsic to life, and crystallization resembles death. Human beings are in constant growth and learning, so resisting movement is akin to resisting life.

As we find ourselves in the context of philosophical thought of sport, it is inevitable that we introduce the ancient Greek notion of *becoming*. Ethics and life are in permanent movement, in *becoming*, in change, because naturally every human being inhabits this ontological condition. Even when we stand still, we are in a movement, between the past, the present and the future. In this movement, every human being is constantly interiorly engaging in dialogue, metamorphosis and overcoming, even if not in an intentional way. If we imagine a young athlete trapped in the deep regret of having deliberately caused serious physical harm to his opponent, for example, that athlete is – beyond the total fixation of not being able to change what was done and trapped in that fact – in transformation and adjustment to what that experience itself can transfigure. There is a continuum of self-reflection and inner dialogue that is triggered by *becoming*, by the relationship with others and with the world, which pose to the person some questions, such as, “did I do the right thing in that situation?”, “could I have acted differently?”, or “how is what I’m going through transforming and building me up?”.

This reflexive self-awareness takes place in the clash with the world, and particularly when there is tension, suffering, pain and conflict, as Aristotle rightly saw it, in the eternal quest for excellence (*arête*). In this line of thought, *becoming* has an agonistic nature in search of transcendence, placing ethics at the heart of competitive sporting values, from antiquity to contemporary times<sup>9</sup>.

Ethics, like sport – and particularly sports ethics – is on the move, evolving and changing. It is therefore demanding. It requires everyone to always do their best. We are all nomads, heirs of desire, in a searching path, of overcoming, of transcendence, of *arête*. The need to be alive goes hand in hand with this responsibility to overcome oneself. The responsibility of the encounter.

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9 Hervas, RG; Albelda EF; and Delgado AP (2022). *Competiendo para los dioses: los rituales agonísticos en el mundo antiguo*. Seville: Editorial Universidad de Sevilla

## §2. *Ethics is rising to the present challenges and circumstances (or at least trying to)*

Ethics goes beyond the world of ideas, it doesn't exist in the air or in a vacuum but reveals itself in the most concrete aspects of human experience. In this sense, ethics is not just about thinking about how we act. It's about acting according to what we think and believe. This subtle verbal inversion makes all the difference. Because while we can hear and read a wide range of hackneyed phrases and commonplaces about ethics, at its root, in its radicalism, the problem lies not just in talking about it, but above all in acting in accordance with it, and actually acting. However, it's not a question of talking about the essential nature of choices, and how choice is our ultimate identity as humans, but of choosing in the form of an action, a position, a sharing, a friendship, a misunderstanding, and ultimately in the form of a mistake. Because it is inescapable in any human experience. As one of our most brilliant mathematicians used to say: *if I don't fear error, it's because I'm always willing to correct it*<sup>10</sup>. Ethics is made up of temporality, of rising to the occasion, of acting at the right time. In this sense, ethics also belongs in some way to courage. The courage to do something in the present, but also to be aware of the future, of how what we do now is a seed for the future. This is easily proven negatively, i.e., seeing ethics in the problem of inaction, or ignoring, whitewashing, not getting involved, disregarding or being indifferent to what needs action and attention, in brief, all the negative offshoots of inaction that lead to the maxim exposed on the allies armor in the Second World War: *the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing*. This eternal ethical dilemma, popularly interpreted as “*don't complain later*”, shows silence as spinelessness, in deep contradiction with the search for an ethic life. We are not referring, of course, to thoughtful, profound, reflective, or prudent silence, but to complicit and cowardly silence, the silence that erases, the funeral silence of servitude, the enemy of freedom. And freedom, as a form of life, remembering Wittgenstein, is being at the height of circumstances. Between *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos*, the equation of life is not a simple arithmetic of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. The complexity of life goes far beyond mathematics and logic, although capitalist societies tend to reduce everything to numbers and maths.

So, we have to ask ourselves what it means to be at the height of circumstances in the context of coaching children and young people. What does it

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10 A quote by Bento de Jesus Caraça inscribed on a wall of the then Instituto Superior de Ciências Económicas e Financeiras, where he taught as Full Professor.

mean for a parent in the stands to rise to the occasion when they witness a refereeing error, a foul on their child, or the failure of an attempted but unsuccessful move? What does the coach have to do when he has a player on the pitch who, despite scoring many goals, is constantly unsportsmanlike? And what about the parents of that player when, for that reason, the coach decides to put him on the bench for a game?

All of these questions give the subject (player, coach, parent, family member, spectator, referee) the opportunity to position themselves in accordance with the circumstances, in real time and in action, with reference to the best interests of the integral development of each sportsperson in training in their relationship with the other and with the world, in overcoming the law of the strongest and of themselves, in a movement of encounter and search for transcendence, which leads us to the next postulate, that of the relationship.

### §3. *Ethics is the relationship between me and the other*

If the other is the end of the action, and I am the beginning of the action, the action is somewhere between these two sides. But action is a relationship, a connection. The question lies in the form of the action, but also in the entire process: how do I connect with others? How do I treat others? How do I take care of others?

For Bento and Constantino<sup>11</sup>, sport is a perfect cultural artifact created by our civilization to satisfy the desire to make the body an instrument for socializing principles and values, which improve and qualify the person in their relationship with others.

This view of sport as an essentially socializing element doesn't just refer to the individual processes of creating social identities, or even among the polymorphic possibilities of self-consciousness. On the contrary, sport initiates human beings into an encounter with others through corporeality, into sociability, allowing them to experience freedom through a sense of a bodily personal agency<sup>12</sup>. This process should not be artificially thought up or added to sport through pedagogical motivations. It results precisely from understand-

11 Bento, JO and Constantino, JM (2007). *In Defense of Sport. Mutations and Values in Conflict*. Coimbra: Edições Almedina.

12 Lacerda, T.O. (2002). *Elements for the construction of an Aesthetics of Sport*. Doctoral dissertation presented to the Faculty of Sports Sciences and Physical Education of the University of Porto.

ing the essential meanings, functions, inherent principles, and objectives of each sport, which in itself promotes otherness by the search for a perfect realization of its requirements, be they technical, tactical, strategic, psychological or biological<sup>13</sup>.

Sport requires a special and intensive bodily occupation of places and spaces, where everyone lives and meets others, their places and their particular ways of living. In this sense, if it can be a welcoming place, it must not only be a place for the appropriation of space, but also one that provides a creative and fruitful experience for the subjective and intersubjective convergence of human potential, as well as a collaborative dialogue between those involved.

The real challenge lies in “how” this dialogue can take place to promote the strengthening of social ties, combating exclusion by finding mechanisms to promote integration, social reconstruction, and the configuration of new forms of solidarity for the common good.<sup>14</sup>

Experiencing space, spatializing, through a sport practice can convey the meaning of giving to the other, of opening up space to the other, of experiencing and promoting otherness. Learning contexts such as those provided by youth sports, based on the continuous need to exercise motor skills in relationships between people (which are not only physical, but also expressed by an integral corporeality), represent an important and valuable tool for creating social identities and new forms of coexistence that harmoniously consider the development of a self- and hetero-identity.

Because in sport, and we should always remember this fundamental lesson from the philosophy and ethics of sport, the central question is not just whether one win or lose, but how the defeats and the wins are lived.

This “*how*”, which belong not only to the end result but also to the process leading to it, is also connected with a certain beauty of things, the beauty of an action beyond its outcome or end, and ultimately, of the game and life as a work of art.

Don't we all wish to be remembered with admiration in the future? What legacy and memory do we aim to leave for the future, concerning the experience of sports for children and youth? We will return to this point of analysis between Ethics and Aesthetics, between Good and Beauty, which we will delve into more clearly later on.

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13 Bento, J.O. (1990). *Looking for references for an Ethics of Sport*. In: Bento, J.O. and Marques, A. (eds). *Sport, Ethics and Society*. Porto: University of Porto – Faculty of Sport Sciences and Physical Education.

14 Pereira, P.C. (2009). *Habitar e Acolher, Argumentos de Razón Técnica 2* (serie especial): 211-219. Seville: Faculty of Philosophy, University of Seville

### §3.1. *Ethics is the relationship between me and the other, the relationship with my neighbor*

Ethics, as a relationship to the other and having the other as the center of action, can be translated in a very simple, intuitive, and accessible approach: care and responsibility. It was perhaps Levinas<sup>15</sup> who showed this most beautifully through his writings on ethics concerning the countenance. The face of the other expresses an ethical openness, an openness to the infinite possibilities of relationship with the other. In short, this means affirming the notion of the person as a non-negotiable and non-transferable dignity and worth: each human being is a unique and unrepeatable being. Even though the world can be a very tough, ugly, and boring place, this is testament to the excess of beauty that exists in it. It is astonishing that things are shaped as they are. In this mystical sense, ethics becomes the fight against substantial loneliness and the ordering of the natural tribe in relation to chaos. Politically, it becomes a matter of intergenerational justice, but essentially intergenerational responsibility. Hans Jonas<sup>16</sup> showed this sense of ethics, also in relation to nature, and recalled the importance of an ancient sense of responsibility towards those to come. We must never forget that we are passing through this world. We came from dust, and to dust we shall return.

The responsibility of being alive demands humility towards the living and the dead, but also towards the unborn.

Sport can be an arena for this approach to ethics, as it shows the case of Braima Dabó<sup>17</sup>, well-known and most popular, and Dinis Paulo<sup>18</sup>, perhaps most

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15 Lévinas, E. (1982) *Ethics and infinity*. Translated by João Gama. Lisbon: Edições 70; Lévinas, E. (1980). *Totality and infinity*. Translated by José Pinto Ribeiro. Lisbon: Edições70

16 Jonas, H. (1994): *Ethics, medicine and technique*. Gradiva. Lisbon.

17 At the World Athletics Championships in Doha, Qatar, on September 27, 2019, during the 5,000 meter race, Braima Dabó, observing Jonathan Busby, the athlete from Aruba, struggling with the heat and weakness, decided to intervene about 250 meters before the finish line. Without hesitation, he held his opponent by the arms and waist, helping him to support his body weight. He slowed down to keep up with him and together they crossed the finish line. Unfortunately, this noble action resulted in Busby's disqualification and a yellow card for Braima, for breaking the rules by helping another competitor. However, the crowd in attendance recognized and gave a standing ovation to the beautiful display of fair play and solidarity that unfolded before their eyes.

18 On February 15, 2020, Dinis Paulo, just 10 years old, enchanted Portugal during a futsal match between the Sporting and Benfica youth teams. With the score tied at 0-0, the referee awarded Benfica a penalty kick after the ball touched the Benfica player's face during an attempted save, raising doubts about the move. The Sporting players approached the referee, and it was then that Dinis made a gesture indicating that the ball had hit his teammate's face and not his arm. Impressed by the youngster's honesty, the referee annulled the penalty and awarded Dinis the white card, the symbol of fair play. Sporting ended up winning 1-0, but the result was eclipsed by the beautiful lesson in sportsmanship provided by that game.

unknown and anonymous. Both episodes, which revealed an enormous ethical sensibility on the part of their protagonists, have a scope that far transcends the competition they were in, the immediate sporting results of the event they were competing in, and the ranking consequences they led to. The indelible mark of fair play and the humanity of the choices made, and the actions taken, remains on the record for memory and for the future.

### *§3.2. Ethics is the relation of me to myself, a relation of interiority, thought and reflection*

Action does not exist in a vacuum. It is the result of an invisible process that involves a complex relationship of many elements, determinations, circumstances, and context. The density of an action, truly and deeply considered, invokes reflection and pondering. Of course, someone who kills someone with a “lost head” has still carried out a homicide, but this type of action is not what could be described with the same degree of depth and globality as someone who has thought and planned for years about how to kill someone. In other words, in the same act, such as killing, for example, we can uncover different types of action depending on their nature, extent, severity, reflexivity, etc. Without going too deeply into the complexity of an action, there is something that, whether we like it or not, changes everything: the principle, and requirement, of truth and compassion. Of course, an action has several readings and perspectives. There are frequently at least two perspectives, several people involved, different lenses to realize its implications, and several points of view, so to speak. But there is a truth in the action that cannot be overcome or ignored and that gives access to compassion. Peace, or the processes of forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing from serious crimes, are achieved through acceptance of the truth and compassion. Forgiveness therefore requires recognition and acceptance of the truth, so that it becomes possible to break the link between the evil done to me and the feeling and the impact it leaves on me (i.e., for forgiveness)<sup>19</sup>.

Often, it is precisely the opacity or difficulty of ascertaining the truth of sporting events – which so often leads to referee decisions that are not at all consensual – that triggers a feeling of injustice in sports actors (be they players, coaches, spectators, etc.) and, in turn, hurt or resentment. If, on the one hand, the sporting investment in investigating sporting truth contributes to

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19 Enright, R. D., Gassin, E. A., & Wu, C. (1992). *Forgiveness: A developmental view*. *Journal of Moral Education*, (21), 99-114.

greater transparency and clarity in the truth of the actions on the pitch, on the other hand we know that it never fully achieves this (the use of larger refereeing teams, technologies such as the video referee, the goal line or the hawk's eye has not yet been able to completely eliminate the number of controversies that fuel weekly television programs dedicated to analyzing refereeing in many different sports). There is, however, an investment in moral training – perhaps given less attention – for recognition, acceptance, and compassion (in a word, forgiveness) that can be taken into account and be developed in the training of children and young athletes.

#### §4. Ethics lies between values and rules and is rooted in this tension

Ethics reveals its maximum power in tensions, dilemmas, and paradoxes. There is no ethics outside lived life. This means that there is a space from me to me, between me and the others, and between me, others and the world that surrounds us all and where ethics is assembled. In this relationship of action, in the flow of life, the other and me are established in an ordered context, already in progress and development. Life is already in motion when one finds oneself in it, like a flowing river that doesn't stop to be observed. This means that everyone who lives always does so together with those who are already living the flow of living at the same time. This encounter can take different forms. It can be smooth, abrupt, in tension and in shock, appropriate or inappropriate, in acceptance or revolution, etc. But whatever form it takes, subjectivity and collectivity will have to relate and dialog. Even the apparent exception of those who dedicate themselves to monastic or hermit isolation, apart from never having done so from birth, in an absolute sense, they too depend on some kind of relationship with the community and the natural world. In short, in human existence there is always a *space-in-between*. Ethics inhabits this *space-in-between*. One of its most hardly tangible dimensions is the realm of values, the first and physically invisible motor of action. Along with reason and emotion, values compose this foundational triad of action. In short, values are one of the elements that ignite action. For instance, if someone places their professional career at the top of their hierarchy of values, they tend to undervalue other dimensions of life, such as family or social life. Or if someone considers their children to be the most vital presence and companion of their existence, they

are less likely to expose themselves to solitary sailing... In other words, there is a deep and hierarchical relationship between axiology and ethics.

What is axiology? In philosophy it's what we call the study of values. However, it is not exclusively limited to ethical values. In relation to the sporting phenomenon, we can think of axiology in an immediate way as a link between what appears and what is not visible. The relationship of axiology to the problems of sports ethics can be framed in simple terms: *on and off the pitch*. As in cinematographic and television language, the shot is an ethical and aesthetic relationship between what remains included and what is excluded, what is seen or not seen, an ethical-phenomenological cut with the visible, perceptible, and formal. The form of what remains included, both on and off the pitch, is very important. This is clear, for example, in television broadcasts and pitch invasions, corruption scandals in sport, player transactions, human trafficking of players, etc. The recent and increasingly frequent cases of violence in children's and young people's games illustrate that *off-field* violence takes very worrying forms, and shapes the relationship between athletes and sport, parents and children, clubs and referees, etc. In soccer, in particular, there are successive cases of violence in the stands, on the pitch, with the police, between parents, a whole parade of strange forms of behavior and action that leave us all perplexed at the level that has been reached. The social figurations, resulting from some irrationalism and class prejudices, prevent a global and complex understanding of the problem. We must move away from a dialectic of the ethics of appearance, to an effective and concrete understanding. The space of tension between values and rules cannot be an empty space that is invaded by neutrality and barbarity; this tense space is the source of richness for a meaningful life and action in freedom. The sports bench, from soccer to field hockey to futsal, as a psychotherapeutic couch and psycho-social purge, cannot be an unpunished space open to tribes and cannibalism. This means that the relationship between ethics and legality is in crisis, whether due to inaction or the deliberate awareness avoiding. In this sense we need to remember the valuable and undeniable contribution of the philosophy of law in the field of sport. However, we cannot legalize ethics by reducing it to rules. Ethics is, or can be, a fermenting source of law. Morality is, or can be, among other things, a seed for law, but not the other way around. However, if a person crosses the line of the law, they can and should be punished, because, as Hobbes said, "*law without a sword is of no strength*"<sup>20</sup>. If in ethics, it is the anguish of conscience that marks the punishment, in law, it is the punishment that marks and announces the suffering, the law without a sword is worthless.

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20 Hobbes, T. (1651). *Leviatã*. Edição de 1995. Lisboa: INCM. Cap. 17.

If practical virtues can be perceived as not being that – virtues, that is – then this perception comes to light in society itself. The value of humility and modesty, or frugality and prudence, have all but disappeared from the public space monopolized by the paradigm of image and social appearance<sup>21</sup>. This paradigm opened ground for the idea of selfishness to be reinforced as a principle of action or central value, obscuring the care for the other, taking the other into consideration as part of ethical and moral reasoning and consideration. Putting oneself in the other's shoes is, or should be, a continuous ethical exercise. Right and wrong, from the point of view of ethical and moral action, can always and quickly be thought of in the light of the following popular formula: *would I like to be treated the way I am treating the other?* It always looks easier said than done. In fact, one of the great obstacles and objections made to the ethical problem is that it is outlined in the sphere of the ideal, as if it were something good to achieve but which, unfortunately, is impossible in the real world. This erroneous and deficient understanding of the ethical problem prevents its proper interpretation: firstly, that ethics inhabits the exercise of free will in the real world and therefore has consequences on multiple levels and that it ultimately sustains morals; and secondly, that ethics always flows into the water mirror of politics, and that, consequently and ultimately, it is a micro-political gesture.

## §5. Ethics is the realm of Freedom and Responsibility

We have reached the highest point of our reflection: the umbilical link between freedom and responsibility. This is the most important postulate but, perhaps because it is so obvious, it is often forgotten<sup>22</sup>. But if this meta-evidence is at the heart of our thinking, freedom and responsibility present a glaring issue in contemporary society: the problem of limits. In a society where the indi-

<sup>21</sup> Bauman, Z. (1999). *Liquid modernity* (ed. 2001). Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editora

<sup>22</sup> It would be important to consider two very important ramifications of the problem here, but for reasons of space saving they will only be listed systematically: 1) the sub-relationship of morality, legality and pedagogy, in terms of what is essential when it comes to training young people in Portugal and exercising citizenship, and 2) ethics, urbanity, civility and legality, in terms of what is important in terms of civic behavior in the public space, and in terms of the forgotten conceptual pair civility-urbanity and the importance of highlighting some basic rules for living together in society. The near disappearance of the concept of civilization, in relation to the concept of culture, has had the unfortunate consequence of the near disappearance of the idea of a minimum common basis for civilizational relationships.

vidual apparently has maximum freedom and where everything is allowed<sup>23</sup>, the grayest and most ambiguous areas always bring this eternal and recurring question into crisis. And also, the question of consequences, in the sense of responsibility on the one hand, but also of accountability, of being held responsible, concretely in the specific case we are addressing here, concerning violence in the stands and among younger age groups.

The concepts we use here to think about this issue cannot therefore be totally removed from a certain amount of realism, trying to avoid dangerous generalizations. Where does the danger of a generalization lie? It comes from its abusive and absolute hermeneutic side, which rejects complexity, trying to draw all attention to analytically isolated issues, in other words, we mustn't confuse the tree with the forest. This needs to the search for a point of balance, authenticity and pragmatism. Such a proposal does not mean to hide the violence or aggression that the sport itself embodies. Without it, sport would be comparable to birdwatching. In fact, violence consists in a global collective impulse, and sport is also somehow rooted in that representation of the Freudian *tanathos* (death drive)<sup>24</sup>. Pure violence, not to be confused with the death drive, is highly contagious and corrodes the sporting spirit. The examples are numerous and undeniable: the phenomenon of ultras fans, the need of policing and level of violence in youth and children's sports, parents' lack of control, disrespect and offenses against referees at youth level... Perhaps the most obvious case is inherently the most publicized in the media: the tension felt in the football arenas, as if violence could break out at any moment without warning. This is the reality of contemporary stadiums. The stadium seems to be, itself, a problem.

What is the definition of a stadium today? It's not just a place where people go to watch matches, but a much more complex place with different layers of interpretation, within a logic of collective catharsis. For many people the stadium is the place to vent their passions, where they can't digest defeat, and where insulting people (referees, players, fans of the opposing team, etc.) is a habit, almost a psychotherapeutic practice. This doesn't mean that if we remove the stadium from the equation of violence in sport<sup>25</sup>, as has been done and proven

23 Lipovetsky, G. (1983). *The age of emptiness. Essays on contemporary individualism* (2013 edition). Lisbon: Edições 70.

24 Freud, S. (1920). *Beyond the pleasure principle* (2009 edition). Lisbon: Relógio D'água

25 We refer to the problem of ultras' violence as a problem of violence "in" sports and not "of" sports, as it pertains to the violent behaviors of organized groups who engage in them – even under the pretext of sporting events – both inside and outside the sports arena. This demonstrates that it is a form of violence external to sports that is subsequently brought into the sporting context. On the other hand, violence "of" sports refers to manifestations of violent acts intrinsic to the sporting activity itself, such as an example being a technically

in England, violence won't then erupt on the pitch, in the street or in cafés, but the fact is that we first must solve the stadium as the sacred place of sport. And also, the derivative problem raised by the perception of the game as combination of various elements, as if it doesn't have a bit of bitterness, concealed violence, offenses and emotional derangement, it is dull and with no fun. This preconceived idea, this confusion, is simple to understand here: it's one thing for the stadium to be a place of emotion and passion for the game or club, but it's quite another for someone to be in the stadium as if there were no limits to their passion. Emotion cannot be limited to unbridled, uncontrolled passion. If we add to this alcohol and everyday life problems, we can already see the explosive recipe we have on our hands. In other words, to be clear and simple, we could use Aristotle's system of causes to break down and think better about the problem of the stadium as a place for the cult of violence: 1) *formal cause*: what gave it form, what is its essence or structure? 2) *material cause*: what is the problem made of? 3) *efficient cause*: how was it built, what was its source?; 4) what was its *final cause* – the intention? What was the final objective?

Whatever the interpretation, from an ethical point of view, causality can only have one conclusion: the *other* as an end, the *other as a horizon* to whom I can't stop looking at and caring.

## §6. Ethics is the realm of reason and emotion

The most famous phrase in modern ethics belongs to Sartre: *hell is other people*<sup>26</sup>. This statement perfectly reflects a tendency to drop oneself away, to position oneself into the sideline of the problem. It is rooted in an old dream and selfish delusion: that if everything were my way, everything would be perfect. This kind of delusion about reality is the basis, and foundation, of many of the dictatorships and totalitarianism we have seen in the 20th century. In this sense, others are just a hindrance, an obstacle between me and my happiness. When the sporting phenomenon is lived from the assumptions of passion, the question of emotion, of disposition, is annulled and goes to its maximum limit as deregulation. Dysregulation of reason and passion. But emotion can be accompanied by responsibility, and not everything that touches the emotional needs to be of the order of deregulation. Emotion, a central concept for understanding the 21st century, plays a very important role not only in the question

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executed violent act resulting in an expression of violence (e.g., a rugby tackle executed in a violent manner, causing excessive physical harm to the athlete at the receiving end).

26 Sartre, J.P. (1946) *Exit and three other plays* (1989 edition). New York. Vintage International

of responsibility, as Spinoza<sup>27</sup> and Damasio<sup>28</sup> saw, but also and because they are part of decision-making processes, part of practical reason. Since the role of emotions in moral development of the individual is a topic that we won't have space to go into in depth here, we'll focus on the strongest example to think of latent violence in sports venues as the effect of a more concrete cause: letting go of emotion and giving in to the transformation into anger, rage, and resentment. In this dichotomy between emotion and passion, emotion and unreason, we can try, beyond the neuroscience scientificity, to look for some causes through mere philosophical observation. In this way, we could point to some lenses to try to understand and think about the problem:

1) *anthropological-cultural*: irrationality frequently comes from the *fetish of the society of the spectacle*<sup>29</sup>, as if the role of the spectator had to be filled with unregulated passion, a place of prominence on television and news programs for the most bloody and brutal motives, for vulgarity, as if it were impossible to have any other kind of posture or positioning;

2) *psychological*: many of the behaviors that absolutely exceed the sporting spirit of the watched game, and the actions they trigger, can be analyzed in relation to imitation, *mimesis*, pointed out as a possible reading key by Bandura<sup>30</sup> in modeling, or even by Piaget<sup>31</sup> in deferred imitation, which in philosophy is rooted in the old philosophical value of example, as Kant so masterfully developed and applied;

3) *political-military*: the blindness of anger can lead to destructive actions. What is needed here is a distinction between enemy and adversary. We must not forget the destructive force of blind rage, an uncontrolled passion, and must remember the idea that a second in life can be vital, when everything can be lost and destroyed;

4) *categorical*: the Kantian categorical imperative continues to exhibit enormous robustness, even after so many centuries. A good way of thinking about the ethical problem can be between means and ends, because, of course, nobody likes to be used, abused, and manipulated. Nobody<sup>32</sup> likes to feel violated and empty;

27 Spinoza, B. (1677). *Ethics* (1992 edition). Lisbon: Relógio d'Água.

28 Damásio, A. (1999). *Descartes' error. Emotion, reason and the human brain*. Lisbon: Temas e Debates; Damásio, A. (2003). *Encountering Spinoza. Social emotions and the neurology of feeling* (2012 edition). Lisbon: Temas e Debates.

29 Debord, G. (1967). *The society of the spectacle* (2021 edition). Lisbon: Antígona Editores.

30 Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundations of Thought and Action*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall

31 Piaget, J. (1971). *The Formation of Symbols in Children. Imitation, play and dream, image and representation*. Trad. Alvaro Cabral. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1971

32 There are obvious exceptions from a psychoanalytical point of view, but they have no expression at the sporting level where we are discussing the problem. There may be a tiny

5) *the power of joy*: in his pondering and thinking about ethics, Spinoza showed action as a power between joy and sadness. Sadness is a decrease<sup>33</sup>, joy an increase. Sadness and joy are contradictory passages, from the lesser to the greater<sup>34</sup>. Joy (the joy of a good accomplishment, a beautiful gesture, etc.), which is often erased from the news and forgotten, seems today to be relegated to comedy, a profound and serious civilizational error.

## §7. Ethics is the realm of the Beauty and the Good

### §7.1. *Ethics and Aesthetics*

In the context of the experience of relating to sport, and specifically football, there is always a search for values that, to a greater or lesser degree, satisfy the individual and collective expectations of the subject. We get involved and commit ourselves with fervor to its practice, attentive observation, enthusiastic discussion, and scientific study, because we see in football some kind of nobility that attracts and can satisfy the highest human aspirations

According to Torres<sup>35</sup>, in soccer for instance, this appreciation can take on two distinct perspectives: an externalist and an internalist. The externalist approach refers to participation because of its external consequences, such as the organic health benefits or the moral and social values that can be promoted by its practice. In this approach, sport is seen as a mere means to achieve ends that transcend the sporting experience itself. On the other hand, the internalist perspective is based on the pursuit of the sport's own intrinsic assets, such as its nature and structure, expertise, and standards of excellence, regardless of the external benefits mentioned above.

The aesthetic appreciation of sport takes on tangible manifestations, such as the relentless pursuit of standards of excellence, the deep connection between audience and athlete, the intensity, spontaneity, and playfulness that animates it. It also encompasses the collaborative interaction between the players, the permanent adaptation to ever new and unpredictable scenarios, the harmonious combination of movements, the overcoming of difficulties imposed by

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fringe of possibilities, but they have no real expression in the global community and society as a whole.

33 Espinosa, B., *Ética*, Ed. Relógio D'Água, Lisbon, 1992, p.329

34 Espinosa, B., *Ética*, Ed. Relógio D'Água, Lisbon, 1992, p.332

35 Torres, C.R. (2011). *Gol de media cancha: Conversaciones para disfrutar del deporte plenamente*. Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila Editores

opponents and the strategies that involve partnerships and complicity within the team. Masterson<sup>36</sup> even attributes an artistic nature to some sports (in which soccer seems to fit); for example, when the athletes' actions reveal the sublimity of human competence, comprising aesthetic elements such as individual and collective movements, the dynamics between attacks and defenses, counterattacks, rhythm, color, composition, elegance, style, grace, strength, movements economy and efficiency.

The debate about the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in sport in general and in football in particular – between the beautiful and the good – is complex, since some characteristics, such as intensity, color, rhythm, grace, style, movements and strength, can be interpreted as eminently aesthetic attributes, while others, such as the struggle to overcome obstacles, partnership and complicity strategies, transcendence and overcoming limitations, the ability to make free decisions and competition, are more intuitively perceived as ethically relevant dimensions. However, this categorization is not exempt to questioning and heated discussion.

Football has aspects whose nature is not subject to a precise definition or an exclusively aesthetic or ethical categorization. The interaction between collaborators and opponents, technical skills, communication, victory and defeat, the incessant search for standards of excellence, the close connection between audience and athlete and the spontaneity that animates it, because they express and reveal both the beautiful and the good, can be equally relevant to both the aesthetic and the ethical dimensions of sport.

Although aesthetics and ethics are not totally dependent on each other in the context of sport, it is crucial to understand their apparent relationship in depth in order to understand sport as an activity that transcends mere recreation and embraces deeper and more sublime meanings.

Undoubtedly, soccer, and especially youth soccer, contains elements of relevance that are inaccessible to those who limit themselves to looking only at its superficial appearance. In this context, the game would be reduced to mere empty and innocuous sequences of movements devoid of meaning<sup>37</sup>. However, it is imperative to recognize that specific meanings reside in sporting behaviors, which manifest themselves not only in their form, but also and above all in the intentionality of the movements, in players' free agency. Within the scope of their performance, players always have a deliberate technical, tactical, psychological, strategic, and even spiritual intention in their actions, in

36 Masterson, D. (1983). *Sport, theater and art in performance*. In Hans Lenk (ed.), *Tropical problems of sport philosophy*, pp. 169-183. Schorndorf: Verlag Karl Hofmann.

37 Damo, A. (2001). *Soccer and Aesthetics*. S. Paulo em perspectiva, S. Paulo, v. 15, n. 3, p. 88-91. 2001.

their gestures. Only in this way is it possible to face and solve the challenges inherent in each moment of the game in which one voluntarily chooses to remain practicing. Therefore, the beauty of sport requires a semantic charge, a deeper substance, which transcends the mere theatricality of empty gestures or superficial appearances, since purposes and intentions invoke their materialization in the human body to be aesthetically perceived and apprehended.

In this context, it is no coincidence that we often hear spectators exclaim: “How beautiful!” when referring to a well-executed shot, a complex and perfect move that results in a goal. In the same way, ugliness seems to compromise the ethical value of sporting performances. Unlike art, where ugliness can be aesthetically valued, and the shapeless, the abject, the repulsive and the disgusting, for example, attract artists, critics, and the public, in sport this valuation is difficult to understand. This phenomenon is revealed when we hear in stadiums, “What an ugly play!” when a player acts in an unfair or unsportsmanlike manner, makes visibly wrong choices, or fails to take advantage of an obvious opportunity in his favor.

As an example, let’s imagine that a gymnast performs an unprecedented triple somersault with a new movement that has never been seen before. The immense aesthetic potential of this moment could certainly be compromised by the feeling of disappointment if it were discovered that he had achieved this feat by means of a spring illicitly hidden under the ground. Perhaps this wouldn’t be a problem in a circus environment, for example. However, sport requires a congruence between the appearance of performances and the significance that give them meaning, between aesthetic expression and its ethical significance.

Given this, the aesthetic experience of soccer seems to be intrinsically imbued with a strong ethical character, manifested in the unique interaction between the form and content of the sporting gesture. In this way, delighting in beauty in football requires not only the sensitive apprehension of a visible idea of beauty, but also an understanding of the meanings that this idea can represent. Similarly, the experience of ugliness reflects this intimate relationship between form and content, thus revealing itself as a dimension of experience that we call aesthetic-ethical.

The ugliness of football (which includes unsportsmanlike behavior, insults or disloyalty) is therefore not only perceived by the senses as such, but also needs to be understood through its underlying meanings.

Perhaps it is this fact that explains why we can consider Aaron Hunt’s unexpected performance in a crucial Bundesliga match between Werder Bremen and FC Nuremberg in 2014 – two teams stuck in the bottom half of the classi-

fication table where the threat of relegation loomed – to be remarkably beautiful. After it appeared that Hunt had been tripped by a Nuremberg player in the penalty area and had been awarded a penalty by the referee, Hunt, the beneficiary of this decision (as well as his entire team) challenged it. Hunt quickly got up and admitted to the referee that Javier Horacio Pinola had not brought him down, and the penalty was disallowed. The FC Nuremberg players lined up to shake Hunt’s hand after the tackle. Bremen were leading 2-0 at the time and managed to hold on to that advantage until the end of the game<sup>38</sup>.

It follows that the ethical experience of football calls for overcoming the rules, as well as the practical or utilitarian consequences that are drawn from it, invoking a freedom that moves through the transcendence of minimum values, in search not only of justice, but also of something that transcends the strict fulfillment of the good-doing, in a free personal agency in search of the internal beauty of the experience of the game.

The issue of survival is a highly intricate matter in ethical action, as illustrated by the aforementioned example. Frequently, we ponder how to act rightly, what the correct course of action is, and even when we identify it, it may entail painful consequences that are challenging to accept and embrace, as Saint Augustine so clearly recognized. It is a struggle<sup>39</sup>.

One way to engage with virtuous actions is through admiration. *If you wish to understand a person, do not inquire about their thoughts but rather inquire about what they love.* We admire an individual for the beauty of their actions. Wittgenstein asserted that ethics and aesthetics are one and the same. The pursuit of virtue, of excellence, is also a quest for the beautiful. Making an effort to perceive beauty in things is also a form of love for one’s neighbor.

## 7.2. *Ethics as an active form of knowledge, in other words, non-archaeological*

Ethics is not an isolated form. We can always think of it alongside politics, for example, in one of your most complex questions regarding poverty and corruption, i.e., can a poor country be ethical? Paradox: Is Portugal poor because it is corrupt, or is it corrupt because it is poor? In other words, corruption is not just about what exists, but also about what doesn’t exist, in relation to the

38 <https://ftw.usatoday.com/2014/03/bundesliga-bremen-nurnberg-penalty-kick>

39 “*Video meliora, proboque, deteriora sequor*” (*I see the better things and approve of them, but I follow the worse*). There are many fronts in the battle. “*But evils without pain are the worst. Indeed, it is worse to rejoice in iniquity than to suffer in corruption.*” Saint Augustine, (2023) *The Nature of Good*, , Coimbra: Institute of Philosophical Studies, p.77.

future for example, and in this sense corruption is also theft, or in the corruption of good action as the disappearance of the possibility of something good that could be born and develop, and which is replaced by something bad and harmful, which diverts.

### 7.3. *The nature of good is to fight against evil, and Vice-versa: Final and Pre-Conclusive Notes*

Some brief and systematic considerations on the question of evil:

1) *Universal evil vs. local or particular evil* (biconditionality). It seems relatively peaceful, and perhaps even consensual, that in life we can't lump everything together and level everything equally. So a small lie or omission in the face of genocide is not so bad. But there is something that can be measured negatively in terms of habit. A person who regularly cultivates evil is more prepared, and even inclined, to carry out even terrible actions. This could be called an *original membrane of truth and goodness*, i.e., a kind of natural repository and veil of good in every human being which, when exposed too much and too regularly to evil, promotes a desensitization to this ongoing evil. Those who are not too exposed to evil are, in a sense, still unprotected and unprepared, which is why they are often shocked by some of the more tragic things in life, and why moral feelings of disgust, etc. emerge. This also poses what we will call the problem of *moral and ethical naivety*: the lack of credibility and trust in moral reasoning and calculation. For example, nobody believes a 50km/h speed sign on a long straight stretch of road in Portugal. In short, if on the one hand there is *ethical virginity* as an individual reserve that is used up throughout life, there is on the other hand the possibility of *moral naivety* that makes it impossible for us as a community to consistently establish a solid horizon of mutual trust;

2. *Lesser evil and greater evil*. Following on from the above, and following the hypothesis of considering weighing up a decision as ethical and moral reasoning and calculation, it is also more or less clear that in the event of a radical choice, the lesser evil is chosen. If, for example, it were necessary to lie in order to save millions of Jews from extermination, few would hesitate in their decision and the speed of their moral calculation. On the other hand, Rousseau<sup>40</sup>, when thinking about the question of piety, even in relation to the state of nature, affirms the natural maxim: “*Achieve your good by causing the least possible harm to others*”;

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40 Rousseau, J.J., (1973) *Discurso sobre a origem e os fundamentos da desigualdade entre os homens*, Porto Alegre: Editora Globo, p.214

3. *Necessary evil*. As St. Augustine noted, and it's obvious to everyone, there is no perfection in the world, and so evil exists out of a need for contrast and the possibility of recognition. This question makes us think about the possibility of a useful evil, as we say in Portugal “*there are evils that come for good*”, and in this sense evil, by contrast, makes us see the good. If evil didn't exist, we wouldn't be able to recognize the good;

4. *Utilitarianism<sup>41</sup> and evil*. If everything is circumstantial and useful, riding the wind so to speak, there will be no port of departure and no port of arrival. And if this is the case, and utility is elevated to the maximum exponent of relativity, as opposed to multiplicity and impermanence, we will be thrown into the permanent convenience and maximum functionality of use and manipulation. But this possible world of the mechanical perfection of what is useful, which Machiavelli so well thematized in relation to power, conquest and maintenance, comes up against the temporality of the principle of perfection in the face of excellence. In other words, if the whole world were made up of people who only governed their actions by these principles, the logic of the absolute instant in the survival of the here and now would take us back to a constitutionally established state of nature. But it is precisely because the Heraclitean becoming of the world, as a struggle, is generally established that we cannot turn our backs on the problem, and the ultimate question is simple: should we fight against ignorance, evil and injustice, or should we just resign ourselves, in the conformation of what exists, acquiescing to the force of power? Ultimately, the ethical dilemma sets up a metaphysical dilemma in the struggle between the impossible and the possible. The ethical gesture is always in tension between these two poles. But it only emerges more strongly when faith or courage demand things of us that we didn't know we were capable of. In this sense, the ethical gesture is gymnastics and an exercise in building verticality and flexibility. Vertical because it demands a posture and attitude from us, seriousness and vitality, but also flexibility because it requires tolerance and reconciliation, community and friendship.

5. *Evil, utility and injustice*. An *ad hominem* world is a world without a way out, without salvation. In an *ad hominem* world, all that remains is the voracity of the banquet in the division of the spoils of power. Natural selfishness cannot be deaf. It can't be blind when so many around us are crying out in hunger and pain, cuddled up in the mud, cold or heat. The radical selfishness that is fashionable today, leading to solipsism, is a short-sighted view of life, although

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41 In the equation between principle, maxims and utility, let's remember that there is a conceptual difference between use, utility and function. Although they are not distant concepts, they can have very different interpretative weights.

very effective in the short term. But it sows little. The hypocritical pragmatist's mistake is to think that ethics belongs to an ideal world, which has nothing to do with the real world. But even the hypocrite has his own ethics, even if it's his own survival, selfishness and greed<sup>42</sup>. The hypocrite is, at heart, someone who wants to see everything burn, but while clinging to his fire escape.

Hypocritical question: if the world is such a horrible, pragmatic, unjust place, full of traps and infamies, shouldn't we cultivate our children, from an early age, in this culture of violence and devastation? Shouldn't we expose them to the greatest cruelties in order to ensure that they develop maximum resistance and preparation for the iniquities they will soon have to endure alone? The struggle between good and evil is infinite.

*Final Postulate:* If philosophy, in general, is the preparation for death, ethics is the preparation for life, the realization of philosophy at its highest vital level. This, too, is the essence and vitality of ethics for football and the development of its players, without which the game fades and self-destructs.

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<sup>42</sup> Between the fear of consequences and the cunning infinite and strategic calculation of them, Plato's hypothesis of the ring of Giges is an excellent philosophical exercise for thinking about ethical limits and trials. Giges' ring is proof that the hypocritical utilitarian lives and feeds on shadows.

