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„Fight / Battle, Violence, and Aggression in Sport und Culture of Human Motion“

Lecture at the Xth. International CESH-Congress 2. - 5. November 2005 in Sevilla
cf. the enlarged German version: <.../Gewalt-Beitrag-ESSH-Spring2009-2.pdf>

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abstract:

In sport-science, especially in sport-sociology, but also in sport-psychology, -pedagogy as well as -history it is very important to have good knowledge about the meaning of violence in sport. Nevertheless, an astounding obscurity rules about the central concepts of this problem area. For example in the German „Wordbook of Ethics in Sport“, the keyword „Gewalt“ (i.e. violence) is simply referred to the keyword „Aggression“. I would like to clarify the problem area „violence in sport and culture of human motion“ on the basis of three concepts appearing central to me: First „fight“ or „battle“ („Kampf“) as basic for my understanding of sport, then „violence“ itself, and finally „aggression“ as a concept, unfortunately used mostly ethically loaded negatively and mixed - up to the unrecognizableness - with the violence-concept. I will clarify these terms by giving my definitions and will discuss their meaning especially for sport-historic research and representation.

Text of the Lecture:

Dear colleagues!

My lecture will deal with terminological, conceptual questions both in English and German. In order to reach better the international audience gathered here in Sevilla, I will speak English, although I would like to clear the conceptual problems in the German scientific realm also or even primarily. In spite of my only modest knowledge of the English language and scientific literature, I have also discovered terminological problems in English, for whose clarification I hopefully can give some stimulations with this lecture, too.

I will therefore try the splits to discuss the problems of the German concepts also in English. You will hopefully understand and perhaps be able to enjoy this intellectual and language acrobatics a little, too. As a certain support for this risk I take the fact, that some important theorists in this field, like Hannah Arendt and Norbert Elias, may have conceived their thoughts in their mother tongue German and then transferred them to English. Mentioning these two authors, I would like to indicate at once, that my small examination is laid out philosophically and sociologically rather than sport-historically. As for the rest I ask you for correcting comments in the following discussion, if my English was insufficient.

My theses are:

The concept "violence", central idea of this congress, needs clarification.

The German concept "Gewalt" is substantially broader, further and thus even more needful for clarification.

There are only few authors who offer a definition of "Gewalt" and „violence“, too.

In connection with „culture of human motion“ and „sport“ around the term "violence" further concepts are used, out of which I pick "fight", "battle" and "aggression". In German, "Kampf" and "Aggression" are used around "Gewalt".

Since in this lecture I would like to clear the mentioned concepts concerning their significance for „sport“ and „culture of human motion“, I first want to clear the two concepts "sport" as well as "culture of human motion". These are my definitions, that I've already introduced and founded in Crotona the last year:

"Sport" is a cultural field of activity, in which human beings voluntarily go into a real or only imagined relation to other people with the conscious intention to develop their abilities and accomplishments particularly in the area of skilled motion and to compare themselves with these other people according to rules put self or adopted without intending to damage them or themselves.

"Culture of human motion" is a field of activity, in which people come to terms with their nature and environment and consciously develop, form and represent their particularly physical abilities and accomplishments for to experience a meaningful individual or also common benefit and pleasure.

The semantic field of the German term "**Gewalt**" is considerably bigger than that of "**violence**" in English. The Latin word "**vis**" has an approximately equally big meaning as "Gewalt"; it also means force, strength, power and even violence. Derived by "vis", the Latin verb "**violare**" means damaging and thus already presupposes always an act of violence. The Latin word "**violentia**", derived again from "violare", which largely corresponds to the English "violence", has also predominantly this meaning. Both Latin words, "vis" and "violentia", in the sum, have the "numinose" or ambivalent meaning, which is also characteristic of the German word "Gewalt".

"**Gewalt**" is at first a quite *general concept*, the English equivalent of which, force, I define as follows:

"Force" is a phenomenon where great, big strengths work.

In this broad meaning the word „Gewalt“ respectively "force" is used also and even predominantly at nature phenomena; the accompanying adjective in German is „gewaltig“, in English

"enormous". Other words than "violence" cover this area in English, approximately **"force"**, also **"energy"** or **"strength"** or **„power“**. This semantic field has only little to do with sport; the (sub-) type of force which is worth a consideration in connection with sport and culture of human motion is that between human beings, the inter-personal one. „Force and sport" would make no sense as a congress topic, but "violence and sport" does.

So the key word to deal with in the following is **"violence"**; in German, „zwischenmenschliche Gewalt" (i.e. "inter-personal force") corresponds to it; the adjective belonging to this semantic field of "Gewalt" is by the way „gewaltsam", in English, more simply, "violent". By this adjective in German one can already recognize, that it describes not the quality of a phenomenon (like enormous) but a way to act. This concept is to be clarified - in connection with sport (and culture of human motion). I haven't found any convincing definition of the concept violence in the literature; therefore I propose my own **definition**:

"Violence" is a possibility to act given to us human beings by nature and culturally malleable, at whose realisation we threaten or actually cause damage to ourselves or others.

I want to tell you briefly which is my defining method: I follow the regulations for determining the essence of concepts in Aristotle's tradition. At first one looks for it's higher level term (the *genus proximum*), and then one names what is special for it (the *differentia specifica*). The nearest higher level term (*genus proximum*) was in the case of the concept "force" (or the quite general "Gewalt" concept) still the very general concept "phenomenon", (in German: „Erscheinung"). In the case of the concept „inter-personal force (violence)" it is something more exact: „Violence" is a behavioral option ("violence is a possibility to act"), one of several, many options or possibilities.

All of us human beings have many acting possibilities from nature, among them also just violence. We do have in principle also the choice, to make use of it or not. And, if we make use of this acting possibility, we can do it this way or differently, we can mold, measure out, form our violent behaviour. There are "samples" handed down culturally, models, for example the Christian commandment of the complete violence renunciation, that we shall hold out the left cheek to somebody who beats us on the right.

With this, we come to that, what distinguishes the action possibility violence from other action possibilities, such as welfare (*differentia specifica*): If we make use of this acting possibility violence given to all of us, then we threaten to cause damage to somebody other or even actually do it; we even can damage ourselves (then threaten of course does not fit).

After almost all ethical-moral bases (religious or philosophical) violence is "*forbidden*" *in principle*, at least precarious and requiring justification. For the realisation of this acting possibility in each case means a heavy *injury to the personal integrity* of another human being, his/her dignity. This is primarily valid of course for the victims of violence; but violence perpetrators also hurt their own human dignity - spoken with the bible: they "take damage at their soul".

Following my definition, violence is only a possibility to act; people always have the freedom to decide not to realise this possibility, too. We are *responsible* for it, which of the acting possibilities we choose. This is the reason that we must think thoroughly about violence as well as come to an agreement with each other on the bounds considered to be necessary in each case of practising violence.

The *manifestations* of violence are various, the damage be mental, physical or social, the action be an active action or an omitting, the action be direct or mediated, the actions be directly visible or not, the effects occur directly or later. The *reasons* for the exercise of violence are just as various.

With this definition I try to take up the approach seeming more meaningful to me in philosophy, political science, psychology and sociology, which holds a *broad understanding of violence*, declines particularly the limitation to "physical" violence. My definition includes also "structural" violence following Johan Galtung and others. About this just at the moment is argued intensely, not only in the mentioned science areas, but also in the anthropology, pedagogy, biology, medicine etc.

The connection between "violence" on the one hand and on the other hand „culture of human motion“ and „sport“ isn't systematically examined thoroughly yet despite the early essay of Norbert Elias and different contributions of him and Eric Dunning as well as in Germany especially of Gunter A. Pilz; the clear philosophical-conceptual outline is particularly missing. To this I would like to give stimulations with this lecture.

Elias has offered hypotheses, that have often been taken up recently, particularly in sport-history. This is in principle admittedly welcome, though Elias' hypotheses sometimes are not justified well, so that further research is necessary. Elias himself has pointed out, that these hypotheses must be checked empirically and also could be refuted only so. This has done very thoroughly Hans Peter Dürr, a German ethnologist, for the general base. His research-results, that jar the whole building of Elias' theory, are still underestimated, and they are intentfully skipped by many of Elias' disciples. Hereupon, I will enter more extensively at a later opportunity.

Eric Dunning, who was most near to Norbert Elias as a student and colleague, in his contribution to the „international handbook of violence research“, titled "violence and sport", has added nothing essentially new to his earlier publications, so far as I see.

If one shares my understanding of "sport" and "violence", then the following maybe surprising understanding results from that: Since in my sport-concept damaging oneself or the other deliberately is excluded, in my concepts one cannot speak about "violence *in sport*". If many authors do speak or write about "violence in sport", what is then meant with that, however? Presumably always "violence *in the associated field of sport*".

I think that a source of this conceptual misunderstanding lies in it, that sport essentially means a *fight*, even if ritualised, symbolic. Elias and Dunning frequently use - besides the word „fight“ - the word "*battle*", mostly with the preceding label „mock“: Sport is a played, simulated fight, a „mock battle“. But sports is and remains fundamentally a fight, and in the fighting, the individuals or groups sometimes can exceed the border between symbolic and real or between played and serious. This problem recently has thoroughly examined and represented by Axel Binhack.

My understanding and use of this concept I want to clarify by a definition, too:

„Fight“ or „(mock) battle“ in sports is the way to find out the winner out of several (at least two) competing individuals or teams.

Since great, big strengths must always be put into the fight, if the competitors show approximately the same abilities, the proximity is clear to the quite general force- respectively violence-concept defined above. One should not forget, however, the essential differences compared with the concept of inter-personal violence, even if of course every (sporting) fight is held between people.

Another aspect, that also Eric Dunning has pointed out, arrives: In the sporting fight, the competing people are divided in winners and losers in the end. This can - particularly in the so-called combat-sports or martial arts - be even physically hurtful, at least however it is probably experienced emotionally by the losers as grievous. Losers having been beaten (!) in a sporting fight can therefore experience themselves as damaged; and an imaginary proximity may be given for having experienced violence. This is a point, where the precarious balance between symbolic and real can switch to pathogenic feeling and behaviour - individually as well as socially.

These two aspects may encourage to connect violence and sport and to speak or write of "violence in sport".

An even more important source of misunderstandings in the problem-field culture of human motion / sport and violence for me is the application and the understanding of the concept „aggression“. The term „aggression“ is used by many authors synonymously to the term „violence“, and there is hardly an author, who doesn't connect both words directly together, speaking and writing about „violence and aggression“. I consider it a big loss just for the sport-science, if between "violence" on the one hand and on the other hand "aggression" no clear distinction is made.

Also for the concept "**aggression**" I've worked out a **definition**:

"Aggression" is a disposition of behaviour to both animals and human beings founded phylogenetically as well as (in limits) formed culturally and malleable individually, by which they can steer their actions in situations experienced to be existentially meaningful.

The meanwhile old quarrel, whether aggression (or aggressiveness) is innate or acquired, is superfluous in my opinion: the question is put wrongly, there is not this alternative. Aggression is part of the animal and thus also human basic equipment, is a phylogenetic inheritance, an anthropological condition („*conditio humana*“). The way of using or handling it is - in limits - malleable, obtainable; this can be "learned" and "unlearned" (forgotten) again, too. It isn't fixed from the start whether from this potential either something constructive or something destructive follows. Animals and human beings too can make up their mind in a dangerous or threatening situation, choosing for example between fight or flight (or feigning to be dead); people can decide even much more differently: they can even hold out the right cheek to somebody who beats them on the left. We are responsible for it in every case as we deal with the disposition of behaviour called aggression.

With that, "aggression" is at first an ethically-morally neutral (or ambivalent) concept. Only insofar, as people can decide *how* they want *to handle* aggression, from an ethical moral judgement aggression is accessible. The (pristine) neutrality or ambivalence of the "aggression" concept, by the way, also arises from the history of this word (etymology).

The word "aggression" derives from the Latin verb "aggređi"; this means "to approach somebody or something". In this meaning aggression is, at worst, the possible beginning for direct physical violence, that can take place only in direct body proximity. But „aggression“ can also indicate an approach to somebody, that shall not become forcibly (for example at a sexual matching). The semantic field of "aggression" is substantially broader than that of "violence", and equating them or even substituting the "violence" concept by the "aggression" concept leads to significant misunderstandings particularly in sport science.

A general result of this misleading equation of "violence" and "aggression" is the exclusively negative ethical-moral charging of the concept "aggression". The actually neutral aggression concept has, particularly within the last decades, been loaded with the violence concept burdened ethically-morally negatively both in the everyday-language and in the prevalent psychology-language, and thus the semantic field of aggression has changed. This change limits the meaning of the aggression-concept and with that its analytic value. This is a loss not only in general, but exactly also for the sport science.

Aggression - in the sense of the proposed definition - in many sports is an essential, necessary component of the action strategies, particularly in the combat sports of course. One cannot compete physically without getting near, directly close to the competitor(s), not only in the combat sports, but also in many ball-sports. Therefore the real ambivalence of the concept is still recognisable in the usage of sport-language - in the language of the fans anyway, but also in the technical language of the coaches and scientists.

In many sports coaches and spectators often enough expect and demand a "more aggressive" behaviour of the athletes. Searching the direct body-proximity simply is first a necessary prerequisite for an militant confrontation in a sporting competition; it must not have the consequence, that the athletes behave violently, as long as they avoid everything suitable to damage the other(s) or themselves (according to my violence and my sport definition). To prevent this, rules have been invented in the sports and perhaps referees have been established. In successful cases of physical, militant competition, one speaks of a „clean duel or fight“ - with aggressiveness, but without violence.

In the abstract to this lecture I had announced to discuss the significance of such concept clarification for the sports history. Unfortunately, I can do this, due to the time schedule, only very briefly and summarising.

That the *gladiatura* in ancient Rome for example cannot - according to my concept - be understood as sport, arises already from my definition of sport, that I have introduced more detailed in Crotona last year.

From my violence concept emerges, that this preferred research-area of sport-historians, political scientists and sociologists should be marked more differently as until now: The manifestations of a violent behaviour *in connection with* sport events - main example: hooliganism - has to do only indirectly with sport; their violence does *not* take place *in* sport, is not a part of sporting behaviour. If really direct, *essential* connections between for example hooliganism and sport existed, then they could only be seen and named clearly, if sport scientists used clearly defined concepts instead of their too broad ones. Then also a polemic like the one recently delivered between Diethelm Blecking and Simon Geissbühler in the periodical "Sport-

Zeiten" could produce much more illumination. So both have got stuck in the fog of their unclear concepts, also Blecking, who by his point of view and temperament is more pleasant to me.

Unfortunately, I could only touch or indicate many aspects of my topic. I would be happy if sport-historians in the future directed their attention also as well as at first toward the meaning of the concepts, with which they handle in research and teaching.

I thank you for your attention.