

Phil 294: Philosophy of Sport (Spring 12)



Sports and games deserve close philosophical examination since they have always played an important part in human life. We first ask what exactly sports, games and play are, and how they relate to other modes of life. Next, we consider the aesthetic elements of sport and whether sport is a kind of performance. We then consider the widely lauded, but not easily explained, virtue of sportsmanship, and what it implies for the vices of cheating and winning at all costs. We next consider two issues of considerable recent interest in sport: artificial methods of performance enhancement and violence. After the break, we consider some issues about the epistemology of sports and games, especially chance and statistics and then enjoy a 'literary interlude'. We next consider issues of gender and sex difference and equality in sport, the role of sport in a democratic (or otherwise) society, and education (such as liberal arts education at Macalester). It is often said that sports and games contribute to a 'well-rounded' life. So we conclude by examining what sport tells us about the meaning and value of human life. Is it plausible and useful to view life itself as a game? Throughout the class we will ask whether sports can help us gain insight into more general philosophical concepts, such as virtue, justice, health, embodiment, friendship, consciousness, absurdity, death, and beauty.

Required Texts:

1. *Philosophy of Sport: Critical Readings, Crucial Issues*. Edited by A. Holowchak (Prentice-Hall)
2. A few readings will be made available by email (E), online (O) or moodle (M).

Class meetings: MWF 9:40-10:40, OM 001 **Office Hours:** MW Noon-1PM and by appointment.

Instructor: Dr. Geoffrey Gorham; **Email:** ggorham; **Office:** Old Main 100; **Phone:** 6048

Course Requirements

1. **Examinations.** One final take-home examination. The exam will be distributed on the final day of class and due by email at the end of the official final exam time-period.
2. **Papers.** Each student will write two short (3-5page) and one long (8-10 page) paper. The long paper will be due on the last day of class. The short papers will be due as stated on the class schedule below. A choice of topics for the two short papers will be provided at least 1 week before due-dates. Topics for the final paper will be chosen by the student. The short papers require discussion of assigned readings. The long paper requires detailed discussion of at least one significant secondary source based on the student's independent research.
3. **Presentations.** Every student will make a 5-10 minute presentation on their long paper research during the final week of classes. Details about expected format will be explained
4. **Conversation Starters.** Students will submit a total of 10 (and only 10) 'convos' for 10 separate readings and classes (your choice). Responses are due by 9:30 AM on the day the reading will be taken up and attendance on that day is required for credit. Responses must be emailed to me with the subject line 'Convo 1', etc. A successful convo demonstrates that you have read closely and thought about the reading and raises an interesting objection or question about the reading. A good convo will typically be about 100-200 words in length and make specific reference to the text (with page reference in brackets). Grades will be assigned as 2 (excellent), 1 (satisfactory) or 0 (unsatisfactory), including half-grades. Here are some illustrations:
Example of grade 0: Suits seems to think that some sports have referees and some have judges. I don't get this. Isn't a referee just a kind of judge?

Example of grade of 1: In the reading for today, Bernard Suits draws a distinction between games that are “essentially refereed” and games that are “essentially judged”. (33) For example, football is refereed and gymnastics is judged. This seems to me an invalid distinction. Even football referees have to ‘judge’ whether a block was an illegal hold or not. And some sports don’t have judges or referees.

Example of grade of 2: In the reading for today, Bernard Suits draws a distinction between sports that are “essentially refereed” and games that are “essentially judged”. (33) For example, football is refereed and diving is judged. This corresponds to his more fundamental distinction between games and performances, which he thinks have different aims. But it seems to me the refereed/judged distinction is itself problematic. For one thing, refereeing involves judgment, for example whether had control of the ball when she went out of bounds. Suits tries to answer this objection by insisting that referees make ‘judgment calls’ about specific ‘events’ whereas judges are concerned with ‘overall performance’. (34) But this is a dubious and vague response. The score given by a diver is also based on the ‘events’ that make up the dive: whether the diver completed the turn, entered the water at a perpendicular, caused a splash, etc. And a referee sometimes has to judge whether a player’s overall performance was ‘unnecessary roughness’. So I don’t see how refereed/judged distinction can do the work Suits wants it to do in distinguishing two kinds of sports.

4. Attendance, etc.: This will class will be discussion-based. Students are expected to complete all assigned readings prior to the meeting in which they will be discussed, attend all class meetings, and participate occasionally in class discussion. I will keep informal track of these factors and assign a grade of 1-10 at the end of the year. If you nearly always attend class, come prepared, and occasionally contribute thoughtfully to discussion, you should expect to receive 10; otherwise, you should expect to receive less than 10. Experience indicates that there is a strong positive correlation between attendance and final grade.

Grading: Assignments will be graded using points (e.g. 15/20) and the total of all points will be converted to a final letter grade using the following formula:

Short Papers:	30 points (each)	A =	187 - 200 pts	C =	147 - 153 pts
Long Paper:	50 points	A- =	180 - 186 pts	C- =	140 - 146 pts
Presentation:	10 points	B+ =	174 - 179 pts	D+ =	134 - 139 pts
Convos:	20 points	B =	167 - 173 pts	D =	120 - 133 pts
Take-Home Final	50 points	B- =	160 - 166 pts	F =	0 - 119 pts
Attendance, etc:	10 points	C+ =	154 - 159 pts		

Total: **200 points**

Disabilities. I am happy to make appropriate accommodations for documented disabilities, as provided by College policy. Please make contact with Associate Dean of Students, Lisa Landreman, and then let me know how I can help. **Religious Holidays.** I am happy to make accommodations for observance of religious holidays and practices, as provided by College policy. I appreciate being given advance notice of absences. **Academic Misconduct** such as cheating and plagiarism will be dealt with in accordance with College policy and procedures. Please talk to me if you have any uncertainty about what constitutes plagiarism.

Course Schedule (subject to revision)

Monday, January 23: **Introduction**

I: The Nature of Sports, Games and Play

Wednesday, January 23: Huizinga: “Selections from *Homo Ludens*” (PS)

Friday, January 25: Suits: “Tricky Triad: Games, Play and Sport” (PS); From Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (E).

Monday, January 30: Segrave: “A Matter of Life and Death: Some Thoughts on the Language of Sport”. (PS)

Wednesday, February 1: Brown: “Practices and Prudence”. (PS)

Friday, February 3: Holowchak: “Moral Liberalism and the Atrophy of Sport” (PS); From Plato’s *Republic* (E).

II. The Aesthetics of Sport

Monday, February 6: Best: “The Aesthetic in Sport” (PS)

Wednesday, February 8: Boxill: “Beauty, Sport and Gender” (PS)

Friday, February 10: Excerpts from film (TBA)

III. Sportsmanship

Monday, February 13; Arnold: “Three Approaches toward an Understanding of Sportsmanship” (PS)

Wednesday, February 15: Simon: "Sportsmanship and Fairness in the Pursuit of Victory". (PS)

Friday, February 17: McAleer: "The Ethics of Pitcher Retaliation in Baseball" (E)

IV. Cheating and Winning

Monday, February 20: 15. "Can Cheaters Play the Game?" (PS)

Wednesday, February 22: Hundley: "The Overemphasis on Winning: A Philosophical Look" (PS)

Friday, February 24: Dixon: "On Winning and Athletic Superiority" (PS)

V. Performance-Enhancers

Monday, February 27: Gardner: "On Performance Enhancing Substances and the Unfair Advantage Argument" (PS) **First Short Paper Due**

Wednesday, February 29: Holowchak: "'Aretism' and Pharmacological Ergogenic Aids in Sport" (PS)

Friday, March 2: Tannsjo: "Medical Enhancement and the Ethos of Elite Sports" (M)

VI. Violence

Monday, March 5: Parry: "Violence and Aggression in Contemporary Sports" (PS)

Wednesday, March 7: Wade: "Sports and Speciesism" (PS)

Friday, March 9: Excerpts from New York Times series on hockey 'enforcers' (E); Film excerpt (TBA)

Monday, March 12: **Spring Break!**

Wednesday, March 14: **Spring Break!**

Friday, March 16: **Spring Break!**

VI. Epistemology of Sport

Monday, March 19: Visit from Prof. Vittorio Addona: Sports and Statistics

Wednesday, March 21: Hales: "An Epistemologist Looks at the 'Hot Hand' in Sports" (PS)

Literary Interlude:

Friday, March 23: Readings from John Updike on basketball and golf (M)

VII Heroism and Fanaticism

Monday, March 26: Tannsjo: "Is our admiration for sports heroes fascistoid?" (PS) **Second Short Paper Due**

Wednesday, March 28: Izod: "Television Sport and the Sacrificial Hero" (PS)

Friday, March 30: Excerpts from Buford, *Among the Thugs*; Film Excerpt (TBA)

VIII. Gender and Race

Monday, April 2: Postow: "Women and Masculine Sports" (PS)

Wednesday, April 4: Boxill: "Title IX and Gender Equity" (PS); Francis: "Title IX: Equity for Women's Sport?" (PS)

Friday, April 6: Burfoot: "White Men Can't Run" (PS)

Monday, April 9: Mosley: "Racial Difference in Sports: What's Ethics Got to Do with It?" (PS)

IX. Sport, Education and Society

Wednesday, April 11: "Virtue Lost: Courage in Sport" (PS) Visit/Reading by Gordon Marino?

Friday, April 13: Arnold: "Democracy, Education and Sport" (PS)

Monday, April 16: Morgan: Sports and the Making of National Identities" (PS); Hurka: "American Sports" (M)

X. Sport and the Meaning of Life

Wednesday, April 18: Suits, *The Grasshopper, Games, Life and Utopia* (M); Hurka: "Games and the Good" (M)

Friday, April 20: Selections from Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus* (M); Selections from *Zen and the Art of Archery*;

Monday, April 23: **Research Presentations**

Wednesday, April 25: **Research Presentations**

Friday, April 27: **Research Presentations**

Monday, April 30: **Research Presentations; Final Long Papers Due; Final Take-home distributed.**

Saturday, May 5: **Final Take-Home Exam due 10 AM by email,**