

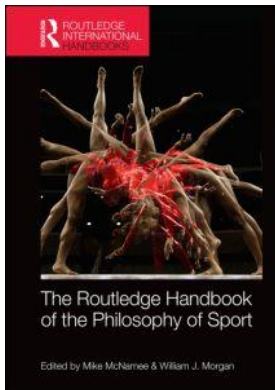
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.98.93

On: 14 Dec 2018

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Sport

Mike McNamee, William J. Morgan

Existential Philosophy and Sport

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203466261.ch10>

Kenneth Aggerholm

Published online on: 27 Mar 2015

How to cite :- Kenneth Aggerholm. 27 Mar 2015, *Existential Philosophy and Sport from*: Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Sport Routledge

Accessed on: 14 Dec 2018

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203466261.ch10>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

10

EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY AND SPORT

Kenneth Aggerholm

Introduction

Existential philosophy is commonly associated with ‘existentialism’ and understood as a both cultural and philosophical movement in Europe in the 1930s to 1950s. Sartre (2007) was the first to label his philosophy with the term ‘existentialism’ but he is far from the only philosopher who has been occupied with matters of existence or, more precisely, what it means to exist as a human being. This has been the concern of many philosophers at least since the Ancient Greek philosophers. Furthermore, some philosophers who are commonly associated with ‘existentialism’, such as Heidegger, Marcel and Camus, explicitly repudiated the label. In this essay, I therefore attempt to clarify an understanding of existential philosophy that is not restricted to the particular understanding outlined and labelled by Sartre. To describe existential philosophy as an ‘-ism’ can easily denote a certain view and particular (i.e. Sartrean) construal of human existence (Schacht 2012). But existential philosophy is not a school of thought with an agreed project and programme (like, for example, the logical positivism of the Vienna circle or the critical theory of the Frankfurt school). Moreover, it could be argued that existential philosophy is not a philosophical branch of its own but rather a subcategory to especially existential phenomenology, theology and existential psychology. This would be hard to deny since most, perhaps all, existential philosophers either declared themselves to belong to one of these traditions or have informed subsequent studies within these fields. In that sense, it would be more appropriate to consider existential philosophers as a family or perhaps a philosophical movement (Cooper 2012). Existential philosophy thus understood describes a number of philosophers with a shared interest in human existence.

I first give a very brief overview of existential philosophy, including the most central aspects and key ideas found in this tradition. I then outline central positions and topics in existential philosophy, through which I describe sources and ways in which existential philosophy has been, and prospectively could be, taken up in the philosophy of sport.

What is existential philosophy?

In her essay *What Is Existential Philosophy?* Arendt (1994, 173) described that: ‘Modern existential philosophy begins with Kierkegaard. There is not a single existential philosopher

who does not show evidence of his influence'. A very brief historical account of existential philosophy would therefore properly depart from the writings of Søren A. Kierkegaard (2012a–d) in the 1840s. From this, another central precursor of existential philosophy is the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche (1967, 1997a,b, 1999, 2001, 2006, 2007) in the 1870–80s. Even though Georg Brandes, a Danish literary critic, tried to introduce the writings of Kierkegaard to Nietzsche there is no evidence that any literary contact was made between them (Collins 1952: 17). There is, however, an intellectual affinity between them, and their passionate attempts to restore or save human existence from analytical, systematic and academic philosophy have in many and various ways been taken up by other existential philosophers. Among the most prominent of these were, on the German side, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers and Martin Buber. In France, the existential ideas were especially taken up in the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir and Paul Ricoeur. Others commonly identified as existential philosophers include the Spaniard José Ortega y Gasset and Russian Lev Shestov. Many other philosophers could be added to the list, depending on how broad existential philosophy is understood to be. For example, the later writings of both Husserl and Foucault, with their attention drawn towards the 'life-world' and 'techniques of the self' respectively, could arguably deserve a place in the history of existential philosophy. The same could be said about philosophers such as Henri Bergson and Hannah Arendt. These authors wrote in very different cultural, historical and political contexts, and their conclusions were indeed very different and often directly opposed to each other. What unites them and makes them existential philosophers is rather their point of departure and the particular subject matter of their writings: human existence.

What is human existence?

From Kierkegaard onwards, existential philosophy has reserved the term 'existence' to describe what it means to exist as an individual human being; if one is a human being, then one is an existing individual. This has in various ways been presented as an alternative to other positions that neglect and objectify human subjectivity. Kierkegaard himself was in keen opposition to abstract philosophical systems, especially that of Hegel. He continuously insisted and humorously illuminated how speculation, abstraction, objective thought and systematic and formal answers cannot provide answers to what it is like to exist as an individual human being. Nietzsche's understanding of existence was in various ways in opposition to dogmatic value regimes, especially religion, as he argued for the elementary human power to transcend these. Heidegger's account of existence described, among others, an alternative to the instrumentalism and objectifying tendencies of modernism. Merleau-Ponty laid out his understanding of existence as a third term between the Cartesian dualistic understanding of human beings as mind (*cogitatio*) and physical matter (*res extensa*). Sartre and Camus were, apart from sharing these concerns, also occupied with arguing for the importance of human existence in opposition to totalitarian political systems at their time.

These examples can illustrate how existential philosophy has in various historical and cultural contexts been occupied with providing an alternative to objectifying tendencies. This general focus was most precisely coined in Sartre's (2007: 20) famous clarification of the metaphysical basis of existentialism: *existence precedes essence*. Even if this claim may be of a metaphysical kind, the understanding of human existence in existential philosophy is, however, anything but metaphysical. The ambition is not to clarify existence as an eternal, unchangeable and universal essence. Human beings are not considered as substances with fixed and essential properties. Existential philosophy is first and foremost concerned with *experience* in relation to

the way or manner in which we exist. This does not mean, however, that nothing general can be said about existential matters. There is a universal *human condition* that is shared by any existing subject (ibid: 42–3). Two central aspects of this condition can be highlighted.

First, it is a basic condition for human beings to be *situated* in the world. This understanding of subjectivity as belonging to the world is most clearly expressed through the notion of *being-in-the-world*, which Heidegger (1996: 135) further described as a characteristic of *thrownness*. This renders the primary way of being a matter of ‘being there’, which is the literal meaning of his term for existence: *Dasein*. Acknowledging this, existential philosophy implies a refusal of intellectualism and rationalism. There is not an eternal world of ideas where we can find a secure stance at safe distance to the contingency of the world. Human beings are not considered as (transcendental or rational) subjects that stand before a world of objects. From this basic condition, it follows that we necessarily experience and live in relation to the presence of other people, to things and objects to cope with, to tasks and work to be done, to our physical body of flesh and blood, to our past and eventually to death. This is, in Sartre’s (2003) terminology, the *facticity* of existence.

Secondly, in existential philosophy, the meaning of this world that we live in is not considered as given with the objective presence of these situational elements. Human existence is not determined by the situation; man is not an object in the world. A particular social or cultural situation, or a particular kind of (for example, sporting) activity may invite for and make possible certain kinds of values and meaning. But the situation is not a being in itself that determines the subjective experience; it is a being for the subject. This makes existential philosophy opposed to the philosophical positions of, for example, behaviourism, physicalism and materialism. Instead, existential philosophers consider it a basic condition to find our own way of being in the world and give meaning to our life. We are, as Sartre (2007: 29; 2003: 462) famously put it, *condemned to be free*. As I return to in the next section, there are, however, various accounts and descriptions of this condition within existential philosophy. For now, the important thing is that this understanding of human existence implies that it is a task for human beings to balance the existential relation between transcendence and facticity or, as Kierkegaard (2012d: 145) described it, between the existential modalities of possibility and necessity: ‘The self is freedom. But freedom is the dialectical in the modalities of possibility and necessity’. This reveals the basic understanding of *human freedom* in existential philosophy: it is not a matter of being able to do anything; it is a synthesis of possibility and necessity where both are of equal importance; it is a matter of being free to commit and choose our own terms of engagement in our situation.

This human condition implies that human beings are not predefined as essence but defined by their actions. On this basis, Sartre (2007: 38–40, 54) defended his understanding of ‘existentialism’ as optimistic. However, this view does not necessarily make things easier. In existential philosophy *becoming* is primary to *being* and from this follow that it is a task for every person to ‘become oneself’ or, as Nietzsche (2007) put it, to ‘become who you are’. This was also a primary concern for Kierkegaard, who insisted that the movement of existence forces us to give primacy to becoming and consider existence as a matter of *continuous striving*: ‘Existence itself, to be existing, is striving’ (Kierkegaard 2012a: 90). In addition to this, existentialism does not build on the ancient idea of a well ordered cosmos; we cannot expect the world to be meaningful from the outset. Rather, the world is full of ambiguity and contradictions, which can make existence arbitrary. Therefore, from time to time we are bound to experience an uncanny feeling of estrangement, alienation or disintegration. From an existential stance, however, the task of philosophy is not to eliminate or explain this incongruity through systems, reasons or causal laws (for example, metaphysical, psychological or physical). Existential philosophy is,

rather, an attempt to embrace this ambiguity and look deeper into what it is like to live under this elementary condition.

Existential philosophy of sport

Against the background of this very brief clarification of the most fundamental structures of human existence, the following section introduces and describes some central positions and topics, together with brief descriptions of how existential philosophy has contributed, and potentially could contribute, to the philosophy of sport. Within this field, Slusher's classic 1967 publication, *Man, Sport and Existence*, is commonly acknowledged as the first to engage in existential considerations on sport. Gerber and Morgan's rich but often overlooked 1979 anthology, *Sport and the Body*, was among the first to include existential philosophers (such as Sartre, Jaspers and Marcel) and present more rigorous philosophical accounts of human existence in relation to sport. Since then, existential aspects have mostly appeared in articles within the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* (JPS) and *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* (SEP), with the exception of Müller's (2008) German monograph, *Risikosport: Suizid oder Lebenskunst*, which presents existential views on death in high-risk sports, and my own book, *Talent Development, Existential Philosophy and Sport: On Becoming an Elite Athlete* (2014), where I present an existential phenomenological analysis of performance and development in elite sport as a contrast to instrumental approaches in this domain.

A common thread in this literature that I seek to preserve below is the recognition of inherent tensions and sometimes contrasting understandings within existential philosophy. The strength of existential philosophy in relation to sport is its ability to reveal a range of ways in which human beings can find meaning and value in sport, rather than providing a systematic, analytical or absolute account of sport. In this sense, existential approaches to sport is a contrast to analyses of value in sport through formal criteria (formalism), abstract principles or imperatives (broad internalism) or sociocultural context (conventionalism). Also, approaching sport through existential philosophy is not a matter of claiming any particular kind of activity to be more or less existential.¹ This is not to say that certain kinds of activity cannot invite or make possible certain kinds of meaning and value. But since athletes are always, in an existential understanding, free to relate to a particular kind of activity in a variety of ways, the experience and meaning of a sporting practice ultimately depends on the existential attitude of the athlete.

The bodily existence: condemned to meaning

The first position I want to highlight is the existential philosophy of Merleau-Ponty. The existential weight of his works should not be neglected, even if it has often been subordinated to his phenomenological investigations. A central idea that runs through the writings of Merleau-Ponty is that human existence can only be properly understood against the background of our primordial and pre-reflective relation to ourselves and to the world. This may not be something of which we are aware in everyday life, where it provides the background upon which figures can come to our attention. But this background, Merleau-Ponty argued, is not merely an instrumental relation. Instead, he attempted to describe how this primordial relation has its own mode of existence and how this should, in fact, be understood as existence as such. It was for this he reserved his particular notion of existence, the *body*:

The natural world is the horizon of all horizons, the style of all possible styles, which guarantees for my experiences a given, not a willed, unity underlying all the

disruptions of my personal and historical life. Its counterpart within me is the given, general and pre-personal existence of my sensory functions in which we have discovered the definition of the body.

(Merleau-Ponty 1962: 385)

This pre-objective and bodily existence that adheres to 'the natural world' (*Umwelt*) represents Merleau-Ponty's suggestion for a third term between the psychic and the physiological, between being-for-itself and being-in-itself (ibid: 140, note 55). Far from denying the human ability to transcend our immediate, habitual and embodied relation to the world, Merleau-Ponty stressed that this is always secondary to our bodily 'being-in-the-world'. Rather than passively received stimuli (realism) or actively projected intentions (intellectualism), *meaning* is first and foremost co-constituted in lived and bodily experience. It is due to this corporeal existence that we are, as he (ibid: xxii) put it, *condemned to meaning* before we know it.

The phenomenological dimension of this bodily existence is extensively covered in the philosophy of sport (see Chapter 12) but it also has existential implications and, in that respect, it is important to notice that Merleau-Ponty's understanding of bodily existence in the natural world does not put us at safe distance from the 'ambiguous life' with all its 'fundamental contradictions' (ibid: 425). The pre-objective or phenomenal field is an 'ambiguous domain' (ibid: 73) and, since this primordial mode of being is lived rather than known, it can never become fully transparent to us. Mostly, our bodily relation to the world only becomes apparent to us in cases when our habitual comportment breaks down or when objectifying reflection interferes with our conduct. For the same reason, Merleau-Ponty drew on many pathological cases to describe our bodily existence. He analysed, for example, phenomena such as phantom limbs, aphasia, apraxia, agnosia and schizophrenia and, most famously, analysed the motor disorders of a German soldier (Schneider) who suffered a brain injury during the First World War. He also pointed to the reality of various ambiguous phenomena such as illusion and hallucination. In such cases, the normal functioning of the lived body and the ordinary lived relation to the world is obstructed. Merleau-Ponty argued that neither empirical or intellectual analyses can grasp the disorders experienced in such cases. Instead, he pursues what he terms 'an existential analysis' to interrogate the *meaning* of such cases: 'The study of a pathological case, then, has enabled us to glimpse a new mode of analysis – existential analysis – which goes beyond the traditional alternatives of empiricism and rationalism, of explanation and introspection' (ibid., 157). One thing, for example, that objective science cannot grasp is how difficulties and ambiguity related to movement and/or perception can sometimes be resolved by having *faith* in the immediate and bodily relation to the world. He describes this phenomenon as a primary, immediate, primordial and perceptual faith (ibid: 280, 305, 344, 375, 475).

Within the philosophy of sport, Connolly (2008) has built on this to show how a movement education-based embedded curriculum, consisting of various existential movement themes, can provide a relief from the experience of stressed embodiment in cases of autism spectrum disorder and can improve the bodily and social existence. Another fine example of perceptual faith can be found in the study of Jordbru *et al.* (2008). This study describes the paradoxical case of people who from one day to the next lose their ability to walk (conversion gait disorder). Such persons fit into neither somatic or psychiatric hospitals because the disorder can be located neither as an organic nor a psychic illness. Then what? As their article reveals, adapted physical activity can in such cases provide an alternative, which they describe as an existential approach. Treatment consists in the apparent paradox that using the body can help the patients to forget the body and, further, that forgetting the body improves the movement of the patients. Hence, this reconsideration of the relation between body and mind allows for

an existential behavioural therapy in which the patients regain control of their body by actively becoming unaware of it. This, I think, could also have general relevance for athletes in sport (as a contrast to strategies of cognitive sport psychology) and such generalisation would be in line with the ambitions of Merleau-Ponty, who tried to reveal common structures of human existence through the pathological cases.

This was, for example, a central point he made from the case of the German soldier (Schneider) mentioned above, who could not point to a part of his body when asked to do so, but quickly moved his hand to the point where a mosquito was stinging him. Merleau-Ponty asked: 'But how is this possible? If I know where my nose is when it is a question of holding it, how can I not know where it is when it is a matter of pointing to it?' (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 119) His answer to this question was that there is an existential difference between grasping and pointing. The first phenomenon, concrete movement, adheres to the existential modality of the actual, whereas the latter, abstract movement, is a way of standing in an embodied relation to the possible. This distinction describes two ways of expressing 'motor meaning' that can only be comprehended by existential analysis. I have, in various ways, made use of this distinction to describe how athletes in sport are capable of performing highly ambiguous expressions and movements such as feinting, deceiving, seducing, pretence and others (Aggerholm *et al.* 2011; Aggerholm and Ronglan 2012; Aggerholm 2013, 2014). Merleau-Ponty (1962: 128) describes this kind of abstract movements as a way of being bodily related to a 'virtual or human space' and this kind of expressive phenomena points to the next position I want to highlight here.

Choice and anxiety: condemned to freedom

This understanding of existence as adhering to the 'natural world' (*Umwelt*) was presented by Merleau-Ponty in 1945 as a critical stance towards, among others, Sartre's account of existence outlined in *Being and Nothingness* published two years earlier and defended in his 1945 lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism* (Sartre 2007). As these titles indicate, Sartre was mostly interested in 'the human world' (*Welt*), where the human beings have the power of bringing nothingness into the actual appearance of the world, for example by questioning, negations, denying or taking distance. This is based on his fundamental understanding of human existence as characterised by absence and lack rather than an essence predefined by human nature or God. From the outset, the human being is haunted by what it is not, Sartre claimed, and from this he argued that it is a human condition to pass beyond ourselves to become ourselves by bringing possibilities, meaning and value into the world. This is why existentialism in his understanding should be considered a *humanism*, and this is the first principle of his 'atheistic existentialism': 'man is nothing other than what he makes of himself' (Sartre 2007: 22).

To Sartre, the primary way in which this occurs is by *choosing projects*, in accordance with which the world appears in a particular and meaningful way. This choice and project is not necessarily known to oneself. When I leave home to go to work in the morning, or when an athlete goes to training every day, it is not a matter of explicitly choosing to do so every time. But that does not mean that the athlete and I are not responsible for it. We cannot explain or excuse our choices or actions with reference to an essence, be it physical or psychological. The actions rest on an original and fundamental choice that colours and shapes the actions and gives meaning to the existential situation.

This is, however, not just something human beings can choose to do now and then when we feel like it. It is not just a possibility among others, it is our original and primary way of being in the world. We are, as mentioned previously, condemned to be free; not because we

can step away from our situation and turning our back on the necessities and facticity of the world, but because a human *situation* consists, in Sartre's vocabulary, in both *facticity* and *transcendence*. Freedom is the possibility of finding ones own meaning and choosing ones own values in one's actual circumstances by involving, engaging and committing oneself to ones situation. There are, for example, a range of external conditions that athletes cannot choose, such as the condition of the field, the rules, the weather, and so on. What they can, however, freely choose is their attitude to these conditions as they reveal their situation as, for example, worth handling, funny, tough, tragic, annoying, dramatic or amazing. This also goes for one's own physical condition. Sartre (2003: 476–92) paid considerable attention to how the experience of fatigue is not given with the physiological state of the body. Of course, it has a physiological component but it can be suffered in many ways, for example as unbearable, bearable or maybe as a means of getting in (better) shape. Thus, in Sartre's view existential freedom is to acknowledge this and choose one's own way of engaging in one's situation to find one's own existential meaning and value. I (2014) have used this understanding of human freedom to describe how young athletes can take up different existential attitudes to their practice and thereby reveal various kinds of meaning in sport.

The consciousness of this freedom, of this human possibility and the responsibility that comes with it, is accompanied by *anxiety*. Unlike fear, anxiety is not related to an intentional object, to 'something' of which one is afraid. It is a mood rather than an emotion: the uncanny inchoate feeling of facing the possibilities of existence that arise from non-being and realising that it is *my* possibilities. The important existential point that both Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre make is that this is not simply something to get rid of, for example through psychological techniques of mental training. It is a more fundamental condition and, what is more, it is to be considered a positive source of existential growth. Existential philosophy can therefore inform an understanding where neglecting this elementary possibility of freedom would be to overlook a central and potentially constructive part of being human, not least in sport. Nesti (2011) has described how anxiety is an important theme for elite sport performers, as it involves taking responsibility and being oneself by choosing ones own terms of engagement rather than being guided by extrinsic values such as great rewards. He also argues that anxiety accompanies *authenticity*. Chapter 9 has already described Heidegger's notion of authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) and how the derived understandings of authentic engagement in sport has been taken up within philosophy of sport. The opposite of this would be inauthenticity (*Uneigentlichkeit*), where 'they' (*das Man*) condition subjective being through what Heidegger (1996: 114–30) classifies as distantiality (*Abständigkeit*), averageness (*Durchschnittlichkeit*) and levelling down (*Einebnung*). Hyland (1979) has suggested that his own experience from playing basketball can point to another position, because the uncanniness (*Unheimlichkeit*) of anxiety was not part of his orientation 'toward the possibility of the end of the game ... I *was* at home in a way that I rarely feel at other times' (Hyland 1979: 99; his emphasis). He also argues, that basketball can teach us that authenticity is not an individual but situated phenomenon, part of which is 'being-with' others: 'The basketball game situation suggests that meaning of the sort that leads to authentic awareness of one's human being can occur in a context of encounter, an encounter which can even be a kind of opposition' (ibid: 99).

Sartre was also critical to the notion of authenticity and in general avoided using the term.² Instead, he paid attention to the existential danger of *bad faith* (Sartre 2003: 70–94). This is a complex phenomenon but, for the present purpose, it can be narrowed down to a pre-reflective comprehension of fleeing one's existential freedom; that is, of not balancing the existential synthesis of facticity and transcendence.³ Thus, it can occur in two forms: when a person either sees his or her situation as: a) pure possibility (transcendence); or as b) pure necessity (facticity).

Culbertson (2005) has analysed the first form of bad faith in elite sports with ‘parallel competition’ (swimming, athletics and weightlifting). He argues that this can be seen as an arena that promotes bad faith, as athletes tacitly accept the constituent factors of improvement, enhancement, quantification and endless pursuit of records. This can make athletes neglect the physical limits to the capacities of human beings (facticity) as they strive for limitless progress (transcendence).

I (Aggerholm 2014) have reflected on the existential danger of the second form of bad faith in relation to the case of Andre Agassi. He won (almost) all there is to win in tennis but, in his biography, he (Agassi 2009) reveals how he hated playing tennis his entire career and only did it because his ambitious father pushed him into it. Hence, his engagement was determined by necessity; he never chose to play and he neglected finding his own meaning in his practice. Without judging if this is right or wrong it can point to the existential importance of choosing one’s own engagement in sport if the sportive endeavours are to be meaningful for the athlete.

In relation to team sports, Ryall (2008) has analysed how ‘being on the bench’ can put athletes in a contradictory situation that they have only partly chosen for themselves. Hence, it can make athletes liable to find themselves in the second form of bad faith, where they neglect their own possibilities (transcendence) and see instead their situation as determined and fixed (facticity).

This points to how the human ability to flee from freedom can also be experienced in relation to *social roles*. Simply living up to what one expects or the duties and established imperatives without choosing to do so, without choosing the duties and functions as your own, would be a case of inauthenticity in Heidegger’s terms and bad faith in Sartre’s terms. Sartre’s (2003: 82) famous example is the waiter in a café who has adopted a peculiar kind of conduct, namely the characteristic quick, rapid and eager movements of a waiter. This social role need not imply that he is insincere or in bad faith. That is only the case if he believes that he *is* this social role; that is, he takes it as a necessity. If he, on the other hand comprehends it as a freely chosen possibility and merely *plays* at being a waiter, hence plays his part in this social world, he would not be in bad faith. This cannot be determined from the outside; it all depends on his attitude to the social situation. Both Ryall (2008) and I (Aggerholm 2013, 2014) have argued that this kind of role-playing can be an important and constructive part of being in a team for athletes in team sports.⁴ Howe (2007, 2008b) has used the same distinction between being and playing a social role to reveal how athletes (and others) can play with their identity. In these texts, she has a special focus on gender and argues that play situations in sport, even if bad faith lurks close by in professional sports, ‘offers an arena within which one can play out situational responses and find out who one “is” – that is, gather one’s character by venturing oneself in the possibilities’ (Howe 2008b: 570). Involvement in sport can, thus understood, present a valuable opportunity for free self-expression that can contribute to redefining the gendered self.

Conflict and resistance: the value of obstacles

Within the philosophy of sport Martin (2010; 2012) has interpreted Sartre’s understanding of skiing and Camus’ understanding of swimming as two contrasting modes of existential consciousness in sport. Apart from being a keen boxer, Sartre enjoyed skiing in the Alps. Apart from being a goalkeeper in football and famously describing how he learned most about morality from playing football, Camus liked to swim in the Mediterranean. These sportive interests, Martin argues, infiltrated their writings on human existence. I focus here on their writings,

which also share a common view of the human condition, namely that it involves conflict and resistance.

Sartre's main concern in his descriptions of the relation to the world and other people can be summed up with his description of the original meaning of 'being for others' as *conflict* (Sartre 2003: 386). This element is present from his first descriptions of how the look of the other can cause a feeling of shame or guilt, to the various ways in which human relations to each other are essentially variants of a master–slave relation, which can be described in a continuum between sadism and masochism. In his later writings, he used the case of boxing as an example of this, where two persons are united in a binary praxis of antagonistic reciprocity (Sartre 1991: 5–6, 17–50). This antagonistic understanding of intersubjective relations has been criticised by many but, in sport, where relations to opponents are essentially constituted as an antagonistic relation, I (Aggerholm *et al.* 2011; Aggerholm 2013, 2014) have argued that his account can offer insight into the many ambiguous and deceptive ways in which the struggles with other humans occur, for example in the enactment of feints.

This understanding of relations to others can also be found in Sartre's descriptions of human relations to the world in general. He (2003: 604–7) offers the experience of being on an alpine slope as an example of how the human relation to the field changes as soon as one engages with it, for example as the sportsman establishes an appropriative contact with the field of snow. He highlights three ways in which this relation to the slope can occur: sliding, overcoming difficulty and gaining ownership. *Sliding* is action at a distance. It is the opposite of taking root and the ideal for sliding is to leave no trace and to avoid compromising oneself. The action of sliding only develops potentialities in a continuous process of creation where the sportsman appropriates the slope. Another aspect of appropriation is *overcoming difficulty* caused by the resistance of the snow. It is, as he argues, identical with the other (human being) and the master–slave relation appears again: the sportsman must overcome, conquer and master the elements with which he or she is confronted. Finally, the aim of appropriating the slope is to possess it and *gain ownership* in the relation to it. This is not an objective aspect of the relation or a matter of possessing the slope in itself. It is a desire to be related to a certain object in a certain relation of being, which involves creating a qualitative or symbolic relation of value to the slope as 'being in itself for itself', which can occur both through creation and destruction. These three aspects can describe central existential features experienced by athletes in sport.

Camus (1956, 2005) paid most attention to the second of these in his accounts of the existential experience of *resistance* and *struggle* in both *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*. In the former, he argued that the contradictions of existence, which Camus described as an incommensurable relation between man and the world resulting in the experience of absurdity, can be overcome in two steps: firstly, by embracing and becoming aware of the absurdity of the human condition; and, secondly, by choosing one's way of overcoming it or at least coping with it. In Camus' view, this kind of engagement is in contrast with various kinds of escapes, such as by killing yourself (suicide), by religious leaps towards eternal and transcendent values (Kierkegaard, Chestov and Jaspers) or by rationalising the contradictory human–world relation (Husserl). Instead, Camus considered three models that can inform ways of overcoming absurdity: by the passionate seducer (Don Juan), the theatrical and dramatic actor and, finally, by the striving and struggling conqueror. He also described the myth of Sisyphus as an image of the human condition.⁵ To Camus, he is an 'absurd hero' because he is aware of his condition and embraces his fate and destiny: 'The absurd man says yes and henceforth his effort and struggle will be unceasing' (Camus 1967: 116, my translation). Sisyphus's attitude and way of engaging with his stone and his mountain can, in Camus' view, describe the apparent paradox that obstacles, difficulties and the eternal struggles that are part of human existence can, depending on

the human attitude to it, be the source of meaning and value: 'Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that denies the Gods and raises rocks ... The struggle toward the summits is enough to fill a human heart. One must conceive of Sisyphus as a happy man' (ibid: 117, my translation).

This account of struggle and resistance in relation to necessary obstacles can throw light on how the unnecessary obstacles experienced in sport can be a source of existential value and meaning. Often Suits' (2005) account of *game playing* in *The Grasshopper* is taken to be a formal account. But indeed, as Hurka's clarifying introduction in the book highlights, it has an existential tenor (see also Hurka 2007). Suits argues that game playing is a supreme human (intrinsic) good, by which he understands: the activity most worth choosing for itself. It represents, as he argues, 'the whole of the ideal of existence' (Suits 2005: 154). People in Utopia, where all instrumental activities of human beings have been eliminated, would still choose to engage in 'the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles', which was Suits' (ibid: 55) short definition of game playing. Why? Suits' own reason is this:

For in games we must have obstacles which we can strive to overcome just so that we can possess the activity as a whole, namely, playing the game. Game playing makes it possible to retain enough effort in Utopia to make life worth living.

(Suits 2005: 154)

An existential interpretation of this could be that game playing is a kind of activity that balances the existential synthesis between necessity and possibility, between facticity and transcendence. In Utopia, where necessity and facticity is eliminated and everything is easy and possible, game playing can in an existential understanding provide meaning and value as it introduces facticity to existence, owing to its quality of difficulties, challenges and obstacles. What is more is that Suits goes on to argue that everything depends on the interest in and *attitude* to the activity. The lusory attitude is thus not only what makes game playing possible in a formal sense but also in an existential sense. What can appear as work or play when observed from the outside can just as well be a case of game playing if the person engaged with the activity has chosen to make the activity interesting by attempting to overcome unnecessary obstacles rather than seeking easy solutions.

Introducing the work of Ortega y Gasset to the philosophy of sport, Inglis (2004) has described how this contains very similar ideas. Ortega, in general, conceived of sports as profoundly expressive of the human condition as it is understood in existential philosophy because, as Inglis describes it, he 'sees sports as occupying a middle ground between the grinding seriousness of necessary labor and the wholly capricious nature of play' (ibid: 84). Hence, in his view, existence consists of both difficulties and facilities, and in a time when technological innovations tend to free us from labour and ease our paths (c.f. Suits' account of Utopia), sportive activities and athletic striving can in Ortega's view fill the existential void and allow us to spend time and effort in overcoming artificial problems, adversaries and difficulties (Ortega y Gasset 2002; Inglis 2004). This, on the other hand, is not an obligatory effort, as in necessary labour, but a freely chosen effort through practical engagement (Ortega y Gasset 1995: 42; Inglis 2004: 90). This makes the enterprise of sportspersons a way of fulfilling the 'poetic task' of life, where the 'difficult business' of athletic striving can be a way of making of oneself what one can, which can at the same time contribute to overcome the existential dangers of anguish, despair and alienation (Ortega y Gasset 1984: 96–7; Inglis 2004: 83–4).

These constructive accounts of effort and struggle hold important existential implications, the most central being that difficulties and challenges can be meaningful and valuable. This argument has more recently been taken up by Kretchmar (2006) in relation to physical

education. In his view, it marks a contrast to ‘easy street strategies’ that involve introduction, information and entertainment. These neglect the value of commitment, time, effort and persistence as students engage with ‘just right problems’. Playgrounds are, as Kretchmar argues, not something we suddenly find or discover; they grow as we are attracted by challenges and movement-related problem solving.

Stages on life’s way: towards transcendent aspects of existence

What has been said about the ‘human world’ (*Welt*) here was in many ways anticipated by Kierkegaard. Even if he was essentially a religious thinker he had much to say about existence in general, which has informed many, if not all, subsequent secular existential philosophers. He drew a distinction between three existential spheres or stages of life: the aesthetic, ethical, and religious. The first two are most directly covered in *Either – Or* (2012b, 2012c). In the aesthetic realm, we find persons who seek pleasure, poetry, immediate interest and new possibilities. In the ethical realm, we find the responsible and committed person, who has chosen his or her project and way of living and is courageous enough to continuously live up to the duties and obligations that follow from this choice. Within these spheres of human existence, Kierkegaard poetically and humorously described many ways of finding meaning in one’s situation and leading one’s life. I (Aggerholm 2014) have drawn heavily on this and attempted a secular reading of Kierkegaard to describe various ways of revealing meaning that can be of relevance in elite sport. I do this through five key existential phenomena: wonder, question, expression, humour, and repetition. Each of these include various sub-phenomena (dwelling, admiration, interrogation, seduction, irony, contradiction, passion, striving and many others) and can clarify ways of approaching and relate to one’s practice within one’s particular sporting discipline. I argue that such phenomena can inform important ways in which athletes can find meaning and sustain a passionate engagement in sport.

It should not be neglected, however, that Kierkegaard’s answers to coping with and overcoming, for example, existential struggles, anxiety and despair were indeed different from the authors above. He continuously drew attention to how the human world does not exhaust human existence. There is more to life (and sport) and Kierkegaard’s answer to this transcendent aspect was of course religious. In general, the religious aspect of sport can be traced back to the Olympic gods in Ancient Greece and has been revived in Coubertin’s Olympic ideas with reference to *religio athletae* and *religio atletica* (Parry 2007). This idea of making a non-theistic or civic religion of sport is still prevalent and the link to the transcendent is in particular reinforced in the symbols, narratives and rituals that feature an Olympic anthem, oath, flag, doves and flame (Robinson 2014: 245). But there can be various ways of understanding this transcendent aspect of human being and the description of this ‘world above’ (*Überwelt*) has come in many variants in existential philosophy. Kierkegaard’s ultimate aim was to reveal how it is only through the relation to God that human beings can find relief from despair, or the ‘sickness unto death’, as he termed it. The movement in which this relation can be established is highly ambiguous and completely transcendent. It involves a movement between the infinite and finite and consists in coming away from oneself in relation to the infinite (God) and returning to oneself as a concrete and finite self (Kierkegaard 2012d: 146). This is not a matter of directing or raising oneself towards something transcendent in the world. On the contrary, it is a matter of internalising the infinite. You cannot tell from the outside whether a person has faith or not. In fact, Kierkegaard scorned the people in his time who claimed to be religious by showing the world how strong their faith was. He saw it as infinitely comic when people followed the religious writings in external expressions (Kierkegaard 2012a: 89–90). The

religious is rather an internal matter and something the single one can only arrive at through *passionate interest*, or as he puts it, by being 'infinitely personally in passion interested' (ibid: 30). I (Aggerholm 2014) have argued that variants of this passionate interest can be found in sport as well, for example in the many personal, hidden and yet highly advanced rituals performed by many (possibly even most) athletes in relation to competition. Some of these can be religious and can include prayers but that is far from always the case. In general, they can be seen as instances of the highest passion, the enactment of which contributes in various and transcendent ways of enhancing their performance.

Another aspect of Kierkegaard's description of the religious sphere of existence is that truly becoming religious takes a *leap of faith*. To believe is not to grasp something objectively (which Kierkegaard took Hegel's speculative and systematic approach to imply). Rather, you must momentarily lose sight of yourself to stand in uncertainty on the 70,000 fathoms of water (Kierkegaard 2012a: 187). This involves a 'teleological suspension of the ethical' (ibid: 239–44) and in her paper 'Kierkegaard and Sport: Willing One Thing in Competitive Sports', Cindy White (2004) has asked the thought-provoking question, 'could sports be one of those powers that have such a grip in our corporate consciousness that we are forgetting what is good?' (White 2004, quoted in Watson and White 2007: 61) This is an excellent question that, in my opinion, could deserve more attention in philosophy of sport. It can throw light on the many cases where athletes violate the rules and fair play codes in sport and, at the same time, avoid ending with the conclusion that sport cannot be a venue for moral conduct. Kierkegaard can in this way inform ways in which sportive engagements can allow human beings to relate to a transcendent dimension of existence, for better or worse.

Heightening of human existence: the value of *agon* and *askēsis*

On the basis of these descriptions it may appear paradoxical to claim an intellectual affinity between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, who famously declared that 'God is dead!' but, even if they had radically different understandings of the 'world above', both were eager to reveal how the human (all too human) cannot be the ultimate source of value. As an alternative, Nietzsche argued that the source of meaning and value should be related to *enhancement* or *heightening* (*Erhöhung*). He saw this as a constructive alternative to religion and nihilism, the latter of which he described as a passage, a danger and temporary condition (Schacht 2012: 118–21). Still, where should this heightening of human existence be rooted when the transcendent God is dead and humans are all too human?

A clue can be found just after his first announcement of God's death in *The Gay Science*: 'When may we begin to *naturalize* humanity with a pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature?' (Nietzsche 2001: 110, section 109). As this points to and, as Schacht (2012: 124) has argued, Nietzsche was concerned with reinterpreting human reality naturalistically to free human existence from the chains of morality and religion; values should be found by through a naturalistic reorientation. This, to some extent, takes us back to the 'natural world' but, for Nietzsche, the natural world is not a realm of equilibrium and co-existence (as in Merleau-Ponty's account). He was more interested in the activity of a tightrope walker performed high above the heads of the crowd. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he (Nietzsche 2006: 5) used the image of a tightrope walker performing high above the heads of the crowd to illustrate how human being is something that must be overcome, and how: 'Mankind is a rope fastened between animal and overman – a rope over an abyss' (ibid: 7). This quote can describe how the 'natural world' and the 'world above' are tightly linked in the philosophy of Nietzsche. The abyss under the rope between them is, of course, the human, all too human, endeavours that claim morality

and religion as truth. It was to avoid this levelling down of the crowd (and priests in his time) that he stressed the human capacity to engage in higher endeavours related to the 'enhancement of life' and the becoming of the 'overman' (*Übermensch*).

This image of a tightrope walker who ventures to walk on this rope between animal and 'overman' is no coincidence. Grounded in and extending his 'value-naturalism' Nietzsche applies *aesthetic* and *artistic* concepts (such as style) to describe the rise of the higher and nobler human, the 'free spirits' and the 'overman' (Schacht 2012). He acknowledges only an 'artist-god', one that knows how to dance (Nietzsche 2006: 29) and, in general, 'only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally *justified*' (Nietzsche 1999: 33, section 5, his emphasis). Furthermore, to guide the heightening of human existence the magnificent figures of the *Olympian gods* played a central role for Nietzsche. These represent an 'over-brimming, indeed triumphant existence, where everything that exists has been deified, regardless of whether it is good or evil' (ibid: 22, section 3). They incarnate a 'fantastic superabundance of life' who allow for spectators to catch a glimpse of their perfection as an 'ideal image of their own existence' (ibid.). Nietzsche thus uses the Olympian gods to describe an aesthetic or artistic theodicy, where athletes carve out a realm of 'complete and perfect existence' (ibid: 24, section 3) that makes the experience of pain and suffering endurable: 'Under the bright sunshine of such gods existence is felt to be worth attaining' (ibid.).

This aesthetic theodicy can also throw light on his understanding of heightening as the ultimate task for human beings. This concerns human experiential significance, a feeling of fullness and increasing strength, rather than advancement in, for example, order of rank (Schacht 2012: 126). To describe this movement upwards, Nietzsche pays special attention to two artistic powers or drives of nature: the Apollonian and Dionysian. The first embodies the power of moderation, self-control, individuality and respect for boundaries. The latter is the drive for excess, transgressing limits, destroying individuality and dissolving boundaries. Sportive engagement can on this basis be described as a synthesis of recognising your limits and transcending them. These opposite powers unite in human creation, for example in sport, and contribute to defying despair and rise instead towards the heights of existence. Two aspects of this, which are of special relevance for the philosophy of sport, can be highlighted: *agon* and *askēsis*. I (Aggerholm 2014) have argued for the relevance of considering these as sportive virtues within talent development.

Agon is the ancient notion for contest and competition, and the role of this in Nietzsche's philosophy has in recent years received increased attention (see, for example, Acampora 2013; Tuncel 2013). His most explicit account of *agon* can be found in the short essay, 'Homer's Contest'. In her analysis of this essay, Acampora (2013: 43–8) describes how Nietzsche celebrated Homer's account of contests as a model for human struggle. She argues that this was in particular due to the way that Homer's understanding of *agon* can: a) inform an exemplary revaluation of human existence; b) give a life-affirming, positive and tangible value to human existence; and c) contribute to an understanding of values as renewable because contests and agonistic arenas supply a medium and forum in and through which further revaluations can occur. Could the contests we find in sport be a venue for such life-affirming, continuous and renewable revaluation of human existence? Nietzsche would obviously affirm this and of special relevance to the philosophy of sport would, in this respect, be his interpretations of the original meaning of *ostrakismos*. This is related to the third aspect of *agon* above and it describes the core of Hellenic understanding of contest, which was not about finding a winner once and for all. That would exhaust the contest and leave matters settled; hence, it would not stimulate and motivate others to strive for excellence and would therefore not be a common good, which Nietzsche considered *agon* to be. Instead, he argued that the ancient and primary meaning of contests is its ability to provide a continuous source of meaning and value because:

one does away with an outstanding individual, so that once again the competing game of strengths may awaken: a concept that is hostile to the 'exclusivity' of genius in the modern sense, but presupposes that in the natural order of things there are always several geniuses, who mutually incite each other to act, as they also mutually hold themselves within the bounds of moderations.

(Nietzsche 1997a: 40)

A first thing that this quote reveals is how ostracism implies a dynamic game of strengths. Here again, we see that becoming outstanding has primacy over being outstanding and Rosenberg (2008) has argued for the value and relevance of this understanding of contest and competition in sport. She describes how ostracism can teach us that a good contest consist of a genuine battle between worthy opponents and how it, as a motivating force, can teach athletes to remain competitive rather than rest on their laurels because: 'Their laps of victory will last only until the next competition' (ibid: 280). More existential points have been raised regarding this view of contest (although not with reference to Nietzsche) by Fry (2011), who argues for the existential value of comebacks in sport and by Kretchmar (2012), who argues that true competition involves a 'willingness to play again tomorrow'.

A second aspect that Nietzsche highlights in the quote above is that ostracism involves both mutual incitement and moderation between competitors (cf. the Dionysian and Apollonian powers). This is important, because the understanding and meaning of sportive agon can easily change. Hoberman (1997) has, for example, described how Nietzsche's ideal of *agon* and 'great health' has been distorted by the scientizing and pharmacologizing of elite sport into biological experiments and instrumental measurement that neglect the limits of the human body. Holowchak and Reid (2011) have voiced other concerns about variations of agonism in modern sport, where it can turn into a restless 'panagonism' (several contests within each contests and potentially limitless progress) or 'commercial agonism' (promotion for external goods). Instead of abandoning agonism in sport on this basis (which would of course be absurd), Nietzsche's reflections on the ancient meaning of *agon* can reveal and highlight the positive value that contests can give to human existence. In relation to the existential dangers described here, it can remind us, as Acampora (2013: 202) argues, that transcending our limits (desire to win and achieve mastery) need not exclude or be opposed to holding oneself within the bonds of moderation (respect for the instituted standards of excellence). A good contest involves both. It is a process of agonistic exchange where a lack of desire to win or a neglect of the boundaries and limits of the agonistic arena that make the achievement of victory possible would both disrupt the good contest.

Another central aim for Nietzsche was to remove the ideal of *asceticism* from the moral and religious aim of denial or obligation (Nietzsche 1997b). As a contrast to this, he described how 'I also want to make asceticism natural again: in place of the aim of denial, the aim of strengthening; a gymnastics of the will ... an experiment with adventures and arbitrary dangers' (Nietzsche 1967: 483). This ambition points back to the original meaning of *askēsis*, which was exercise, practice and training, and the sportive tone of this quote points to how sport can be a suitable venue for this kind of ascetic endeavour. Sloterdijk (2013) has taken up this idea to argue for a 'de-spiritualisation' of religion, placing *askēsis* at the heart of his anthropology of *the practising life (das übende Leben)*.

In this, Sloterdijk draws heavily on Nietzsche's understanding of heightening and he argues that 'humans are inescapably subject to *vertical tensions*, in all periods and all cultural areas' (ibid: 12, emphasis added). Sport is, of course, no exception and, in this cultural area, he clarifies the vertical tension to consist of the two poles of excellence versus mediocrity. These are the

decisive vectors of the human condition for athletes, the first of which attracts and the latter repulses. From this he clarifies the implications for our understanding of human existence:

Only from the angle of the attractive forces acting ‘from above’ can one explain why and in what forms *Homo sapiens* ... was able to develop into the upward-tending animal ... Wherever one encounters members of the human race, they always show the traits of being that is condemned to surrealist effort. Whoever goes in search of humans will find acrobats.

(Sloterdijk 2013: 13, his emphasis)

This understanding of human existence thus condemns us, not just to meaning (Merleau-Ponty) and freedom (Sartre), but also to *effort*. This ascetic understanding of the value of sportive efforts to achieve excellence was also a central part of Coubertin’s Olympism (see, for example, Parry 2007) and it rests on the Stoic ideals of resilience, endurance, perseverance, overcoming and self-discipline. From the earlier descriptions of Nietzsche’s aesthetic and artistic account of enhancement and heightening it should be no surprise that Sloterdijk describes this kind of human endeavours through the figure of the acrobat. The term ‘acrobatics’ originates from the Greek *akros* (high) and *baínein* (to walk) and literally meant walking on tiptoe or walking in the heights (for example, on a tightrope). It is in this sense that Sloterdijk clarifies the acrobat to incarnate both the artistic and naturalistic aims of Nietzsche. It is the artistic ‘overlord’ and Sloterdijk describes how the generalised ‘acrobaticism’ involves “a doctrine of the processual incorporation of the nearly impossible” (Sloterdijk 2013: 123). Human beings, in this view, can transcend and overcome themselves by practising; that is, through continuous striving and repeated attempts at reaching out for the nearly impossible. Monahan (2007) has argued that martial arts can be seen as a manifestation of this kind of Nietzschean self-overcoming. He draws, however, a distinction between this field of practice and the competition and aim for victory in other athletic pursuits, which, in his view, implies that training in competitive sport is conducted less for the sake of self-overcoming. From an existential stance and keeping the account of *agon* above in mind, I argue that this need not be the case. In fact, I think that a proper understanding of ascetic self-overcoming can prospectively contribute to a better understanding of the immense struggles of athletes in all kinds of sport.

Even if *askēsis* involves work on oneself with the aim of strengthening and self-overcoming it can, like *agon*, be considered a common good. It implies, as Sloterdijk (2013: 125) puts it, a ‘superversion’ of the existing and the ones who walk or have walked in the heights attract and urge others (for example, talented athletes) in the field to look up: ‘The human of the “over” is the artiste who draws our gaze to wherever he is active. For him, being there [cf. Heidegger’s *Dasein*] means being up there’ (ibid: 116). I (Aggerholm 2014) have used this perspective to analyse the indispensable meaning and value provided by role models in sport. However, being up there or, rather, the repeated attempts at getting up there in the process of practising, is not without danger. Nietzsche’s tightrope walker actually fell down and died and, in general, *risk* and death can, as Müller (2008) has pointed out, be seen as an inherent element of sportive existence. Within the philosophy of sport, Russell (2005) has explored how dangerous sports can contribute to self-affirmation by ‘meeting and extending the boundaries of our existence’ (ibid: 14). Ilundáin-Agurruza (2008) has analysed how the apparently (at least for non-Spaniards) absurd bull run through the streets of Pamplona, where thousands risk their lives, can through the lens of Nietzsche’s and Ortega y Gasset’s life-affirming views be seen to hold a significantly joyous existential value. He argues that such tangible risk and danger can, with

them, be understood as a prerequisite and means for an enhanced and joyful experience related to the sportive and festive sense of life. Howe (2008a) has explored risk in 'remote sports' (that is, non-urban sports) from an 'ecosophical' viewpoint to argue that such activity can advance one's self-realization and can contribute to understanding of both self, nature and 'self-in-nature'. Finally, Breivik (2010, 2011) has studied the risk involved in skydiving, kayaking and climbing, and argues that facing danger and possible death in such extreme situations can make deeper existential structures visible to us in a salient way.

None of these authors discusses *askēsis* in relation to risk and even if Breivik touches upon the vertical element of such sportive endeavour, it is in a significantly different understanding of the vertical than the one found in Nietzsche and Sloterdijk, who, as mentioned earlier, saw verticality as an existential movement of heightening and enhancement. This vertical dimension of existence, so elementary present in sport, has in many ways been overlooked within the field of philosophy of sport. Many concerns have, however, rightfully been voiced regarding instrumental variants of this, as seen in the continuous striving for records and results (Loland 2000, 2001) and the technological and medical assistance provided for example by performance-enhancing drugs (Hoberman 1988, 1992; Culbertson 2007, 2011; Loland 2009). But the deeper existential value of striving towards the heights of sport and the enhancing 'work on oneself' involved with the efforts of practising in direction of this, has yet to be thoroughly studied. I (Aggerholm 2014) have argued that such considerations can inform a virtuous and existentially sustainable account of enhancement and striving for improvements in sport.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has attempted to present existential philosophy as a broad range of ideas, topics and perspectives, rather than a school of thought with an agreed project or unified account of human existence. From a common understanding of fundamental aspects of the human condition, it is a branch of philosophy with inherent tensions and contrasting understandings. I have given examples of how some of these have been used, and prospectively could be of use, within the philosophy of sport. Through this I have tried to illustrate how existential philosophy can contribute to nurture an eye for both existential dangers and values in sport.

It can contribute to reveal objectification of human subjectivity in sport and provides an alternative to approaches governed by, for example, instrumental or dogmatic values. It can also help to understand and avoid other existential dangers, for example when athletes neglect their situated freedom to focus exclusively on transcendence or facticity.

On the more positive side, existential philosophy can be a constructive lens through which many engaging aspects of meaning and value can come to notice. Sport is a domain filled with attracting existential phenomena and people engage in sport for many more or less explicated reasons. I have presented ideas from key existential philosophers to describe aspects of existential meaning experienced in sport that can both be embodied, chosen and transcendent. This has guided the description of various and sometimes ambiguous existential phenomena present in the world of sport.

Much more could, and should, be said about this layer of meaning that provides a source for excitement and sustains the involvement of sportspeople around the world. This chapter has suggested some points of departure for the future study of this topic, which might inspire scholars within the philosophy of sport to grant existential philosophy the attention of which it is worthy.

Notes

- 1 In contrast to this view, Atkinson (2010, 2013) has, for example, proposed ‘post-sport’ (fell-running and parkour) as an existential alternative to modern sport.
- 2 Sartre (2003: 552) found Heidegger’s expressions of ‘authentic’ or ‘unauthentic’ dubious and insincere because of their implicit moral content.
- 3 It should be noticed here how bad faith resembles Kierkegaard’s descriptions of despair, as a result of lacking either the finite or necessity, on the one hand, and infinity or possibility on the other (Kierkegaard 2012d: 146–57).
- 4 I further analyse this in relation to Sartre’s (2004) later analyses in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, where he introduced ‘the pledge’ as a collective counterpart to the existential choice in his discussion of a football team.
- 5 Sisyphus is punished by the gods to roll a huge stone up a steep hill but, before he reaches the top, the stone always rolls back down, forcing him to start over again and making his struggles an eternal (and in Camus’ description an absurd) quest.

References

- Acampora, Christa Davis. 2013. *Contesting Nietzsche*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Agassi, Andre. 2009. *Open: An autobiography*. New York: A. A. Knopf.
- Aggerholm, Kenneth. 2013. “Express Yourself: The value of theatricality in soccer.” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 40(2): 205–24.
- Aggerholm, Kenneth. 2014. *Talent Development, Existential Philosophy and Sport: On becoming an elite athlete*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Aggerholm, Kenneth, and Lars Tore Ronglan. 2012. “Having The Last Laugh: The Value of Humour in Invasion Games.” *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 6(3): 336–52.
- Aggerholm, Kenneth, Ejgil Jespersen and Lars Tore Ronglan. 2011. “Falling for the Feint – an Existential Investigation of a Creative Performance in High-Level Football.” *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 5(3): 343–58.
- Arendt, Hannah. 1994. “What Is Existential Philosophy?” In *Arendt: Essays in Understanding: 1930–1954*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 163–87. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Atkinson, Michael. 2010. “Fell Running in Post-sport Territories.” *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise* 2(2): 109–32.
- Atkinson, Michael. 2013. “Heidegger, Parkour, Post-sport, and the Essence of Being.” In *A Companion to Sport*, edited by David L. Andrews and Ben Carrington, 359–74. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Breivik, Gunnar. 2010. “Being-in-the-Void: A Heideggerian analysis of skydiving.” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 37: 29–46.
- Breivik, Gunnar. 2011. “Dangerous Play With the Elements: Towards a phenomenology of risk sports.” *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 5(3): 314–30.
- Camus, Albert. 1956. *The Rebel: An essay on man in revolt*, trans. Anthony. Bower, NY: Vintage. (Originally published in 1951.)
- Camus, Albert. 2005. *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O’Brien. London: Penguin. (Originally published in 1942.)
- Collins, James. 1952. *The Existentialists*. Chicago: Henry Regnery.
- Connolly, Maureen. 2008. “The Remarkable Logic of Autism: Developing and Describing an Embedded Curriculum Based in Semiotic Phenomenology.” *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 2(2): 234–56.
- Cooper, David E. 2012. “Existentialism as a philosophical movement.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, edited by Steven Crowell, 27–49. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Culbertson, L. 2005. “The paradox of bad faith and elite competitive sport.” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 32(1): 65–86.
- Culbertson, Leon. 2007. “‘Human-ness’, ‘Dehumanisation’ and Performance Enhancement.” *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 1(2): 195–217.
- Culbertson, Leon. 2011. “Sartre on Human Nature: Humanness, transhumanism and performance-enhancement.” *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 5(3): 231–44.
- Fry, Jeffrey P. 2011. “Making A Comeback.” *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 5(1): 4–20.
- Gerber, Ellen W. and William J. Morgan, eds. 1979. *Sport and the Body. A philosophical symposium*. London: Henry Kimpton (Originally published in 1972.)

- Heidegger, Martin. 1996. *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. (Originally published in 1927.)
- Hoberman, J. 1988. "Sport and the Technological Image of Man." In *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*, edited by William J. Morgan and Klaus Meier, 319–27. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Hoberman, J. 1992. *Mortal Engines: The science of performance and the dehumanization of sport*. New York: Free Press.
- Hoberman, John. 1997. "The Sportive Agon in Ancient and Modern Times." In *Agonistics: Arenas of creative contest*, edited by Janet Lungstrum and Elizabeth Sauer, 293–304. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Holowchak, Mark, and Heather L. Reid. 2011. *Aretism, An Ancient Sports Philosophy for the Modern Sports World*. Lanham, MD: Lexington.
- Howe, Leslie A. 2007. "Being and Playing: Sport and the Valorization of Gender." In *Ethics in Sport*, 2nd ed., edited by William J. Morgan, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Howe, L.A. 2008a. "Remote Sport: Risk and Self-Knowledge in Wilder Spaces." *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 35(1): 1–16.
- Howe, Leslie A. 2008b. "Self and Pretence: Playing with Identity." *Journal of Social Philosophy* 39(4): 564–82.
- Hurka, Thomas. 2007. "Games and the Good." In *Ethics in Sport*, 2nd ed., edited by William J. Morgan, 21–34. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Hyland, Drew A. 1979. "Athletics and Angst: Reflections on the Philosophical Relevance of Play." In *Sport and the Body. A Philosophical Symposium*, edited by Ellen W. Gerber, and William J. Morgan. London: Henry Kimpton. (Originally published in 1972.)
- Ilundáin-Agurruza, Jesus. 2008. "Between the Horns: A dilemma in the interpretation of the running of the bulls – Part 2: The evasion." *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 2(1): 18–38.
- Inglis, David. 2004. "Meditations on Sport: On the Trail of Ortega y Gasset's Philosophy of Sportive Existence." *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 31(1): 78–96.
- Jordbru, Anika A., Ejgil Jespersen, and Egil Martinsen. 2008. "Conversion Gait Disorder – Meeting Patients in Behaviour, Reuniting Body and Mind." *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 2(2): 185–99.
- Kierkegaard, Søren A. 2012a. *Afsluttende videnskabelig Efterskrift [Concluding Unscientific Postscript]*. SKS-E 1.7 ed. Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter 7. København: Søren Kierkegaard Forskningscentret. (Originally published in 1846.)
- Kierkegaard, Søren A. 2012b. *Enten – Eller. Første del. [Either – Or. Part one]*. SKS-E 1.6 ed. Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter 2. København: Søren Kierkegaard Forskningscentret. (Originally published in 1843.)
- Kierkegaard, Søren A. 2012c. *Enten – Eller. Anden del. [Either – Or. Part two]*. SKS-E 1.6 ed. Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter 3. København: Søren Kierkegaard Forskningscentret. (Originally published in 1843.)
- Kierkegaard, Søren A. 2012d. *Sygdommen til Døden. [Sickness Unto Death]*. SKS-E 1.7 ed. Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter 11. København: Søren Kierkegaard Forskningscentret. (Originally published in 1849)
- Kretchmar, R. Scott. 2006. "Life on Easy Street: The Persistent Need for Embodied Hopes and Down-to-Earth Games." *Quest* 58(3): 344–54.
- Kretchmar, R. Scott. 2012. "Competition, Redemption, and Hope." *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 39(1): 101–16.
- Loland, Sigmund. 2000. "The Logic of Progress and the Art of Moderation in Competitive Sports." In *Values in Sport*, edited by Torbjörn Tannsjo, and Claudio Tamburrini. London: Routledge.
- Loland, Sigmund. 2001. "Record Sports: An ecological critique and a reconstruction." *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 28(2): 127–39.
- Loland, Sigmund. 2009. "The Ethics of Performance-Enhancing Technology in Sport." *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 36(2): 152–61.
- Martin, Andy. 2010. "Swimming and Skiing: Two Modes of Existential Consciousness." *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 4(1): 42–51.
- Martin, Andy. 2012. *The Boxer and the Goalkeeper: Sartre vs Camus*. London: Simon and Schuster.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1962. *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith. London: Routledge. (Originally published in 1945.)
- Monahan, Michael. 2007. "The Practice of Self-overcoming: Nietzschean reflections on the martial arts." *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 34(1): 39–51.
- Müller, Arno. 2008. *Risikosport: Suizid oder Lebenskunst?* Hamburg: Merus-Verlag.

- Nesti, Mark. 2011. "Phenomenology and Sports Psychology: Back To The Things Themselves!" *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 5(3): 285–96.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1967. *The Will To Power*, edited by Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage.
- Nietzsche, F. W. 1997a. "Homer's Contest." In *Agonistics. Arenas of Creative Contest*, edited by Janet Lungstrum, and Elizabeth Sauer, 35–45. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1997b. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1999. *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, edited by Raymond Geuss, and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 2001. *The Gay Science*, edited by Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 2006. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, edited by Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin), trans. Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 2007. *Ecce Homo. How To Become What You Are*, trans. Duncan Large. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ortega y Gasset, J. 1984. *Historical Reason*. New York: W. W. Norton. (Originally published in 1940.)
- Ortega y Gasset, J. 1995. *Meditations on Hunting*. Belgrade, MT: Wilderness. (Originally published in 1942.)
- Ortega y Gasset, J. 2002. "Man the Technician." In *Toward a Philosophy of History*, edited by José Ortega y Gasset, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press. (Originally published in 1941.)
- Parry, Jim. 2007. "The *religio athletae*, Olympism and peace." In *Sport and Spirituality. An introduction*, edited by Jim Parry, Simon Robinson, Nick J. Watson, and Mark Nesti, 201–14. London: Routledge.
- Robinson, Simon. 2014. "Sport, Spirituality and Religion." In *The Bloomsbury Companion to the Philosophy of Sport*, edited by Cesar R. Torres, 245–61. London: Bloomsbury.
- Rosenberg, Melinda. 2008. "Nietzsche, Competition and Athletic Ability." *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 2(3): 274–84.
- Russell, JS. 2005. "The Value of Dangerous Sport." *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 32(1): 1–19.
- Ryall, Emily. 2008. "Being-on-the-Bench: An Existential Analysis of the Substitute in Sport." *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 2(1): 56–70.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1991. *Critique of Dialectical Reason. Volume Two. The Intelligibility of History*, edited by Arlette Elkäim-Sartre, trans. Hoare, Quintin. London: Verso. (Originally published in 1985.)
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 2003. *Being and Nothingness. An essay on phenomenological ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes. London: Routledge. (Originally published in 1943.)
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 2004. *Critique of Dialectical Reason. Volume One. Theory of Practical Ensembles*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith. London: Verso. (Originally published in 1960.)
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 2007. *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. Carol MaComber. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. (Originally published in 1946.)
- Schacht, Richard. 2012. "Nietzsche: after the Death of God." In *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, edited by Steven Crowell, 111–36. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sloterdijk, Peter. 2013. *You Must Change Your Life*, trans. Wieland Hoban. Cambridge: Polity.
- Slusher, Howard S. 1967. *Man, Sport and Existence: A critical analysis*. London: Henry Kimpton.
- Suits, Bernard. 2005. *The Grasshopper: Games, life and Utopia*. Toronto: Broadview.
- Tuncel, Yunus. 2013. *Agon in Nietzsche*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press.
- Watson, Nick J. and John White. 2007. "'Winning at all costs' in modern sport. Reflections on pride and humility in the writings of C.S. Lewis." In *Sport and Spirituality. An introduction*, edited by Jim Parry, Simon Robinson, Nick J. Watson, and Mark Nesti, 61–79. London: Routledge.
- White, Cindy. 2004. "Kierkegaard and Sport: Willing One thing in Competitive Sports." Paper presented at the First International Conference, Sport and Religion: An Inquiry into Cultural Values. June 24–26, 2004, St. Olaf College, Minnesota, USA.