

by evolutionary biologists under rubrics like “intrinsic bias,” “sensory drive,” and “hidden preferences.” They remain a dilemma for any attempt we might make to interpret animal play behavior as evolved adaptation.

I also question Boyd’s adoption of the social brain (theory of mind) hypothesis of encephalization (brain to body-mass ratio) and his implied acceptance of the paralyzing social-ecological dichotomy. In coevolved relationships between distantly related species, what is social and what is ecological? Each individual’s ecology constitutes rhythms of integrated relationships in space and time. Play between human infants and adults, rightly spotlighted by Boyd as the cradle of human nature—whose unity transcends simple dichotomies of organism and environment, nature and culture, social and nonsocial—is the source of these lived rhythms of time and space beyond construction and beyond preexistence, a developmental scaffold that recycles as social, as locomotor, and as object play in later ontogeny, as communicative musicality, and as children’s geographies (and, ultimately, as art and much, much more).

*On the Origin of Stories* is a novel look at literature as reflected in the funhouse mirrors of biology, a refraction of human nature as seen by a credentialed humanist who dared exercise the free spirit of natural history as if fiction were simply one more research protocol of human ethology. Human souls are an endangered species. For Boyd, art’s richness, order, and purpose are life’s last safe refuge, the only immortality that souls may share.

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### Contemporary Athletics and Ancient Greek Ideals

*Daniel A. Dombrowski*

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. Bibliography, index. 167 pp. \$35.00 paper. ISBN: 9780226155463

Are the ideals of ancient Greece still pertinent to the lives of modern people? Philosopher Daniel Dombrowski argues that concepts from Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and others continue to be important tools for analyzing one of most prominent obsessions of contemporary societies—athletics. A sports fan himself, Dombrowski is aware of the potential benefits of sports to participants and spectators (aesthetic realization, moral tutelage, physical development, community identity, and the like). But he also recognizes the dangers of highly organized, commercially developed sports (excessive preoccupation with victory, cheating, boorish behavior, the idolization of the athlete, and so forth). In this context, his book attempts to reimagine some moral and aesthetic possibilities for modern sport and for sports people like players, coaches, and fans.

Dombrowski’s list of useful Greek concepts includes the following: *arete* (the pursuit of excellence), *sophrosyne* (the path of moderation), *dynamis* (the power to deal with both bodily limitation and bodily possibility), *askesis* (the practice of athletic discipline), *paidia* (joyful play), and *kalokagathia* (the integration of moral and physical being). Although he argues that many contemporary beliefs about sport (and especially the Olympic movement) derive from the Greeks, he does not pretend that one can simply lift ideas from a faraway context and apply them to contemporary life. Nor does he

claim that ancient Greece featured any uniform understanding of athletics and athletes or any simple connection of these to society at large. Instead, his position is that these ideas should be understood by modern philosophers and sports professionals (as they were by the Greeks themselves) as challenges to think about the character (and even the virtue) of sports participation.

The book contains five substantive chapters. The first of these explores the cultural background of Greek athleticism. In addition to demonstrating the many different ways in which the sporting impulse was expressed among the various city-states, Dombrowski introduces the reader to several other contemporary analysts of Greek sports. The second chapter focuses on the work of philosopher Paul Weiss, who argued that modern sports should maintain the Greek emphasis on *arete*, understood as the search for bodily excellence. The third chapter analyzes historian Johan Huizinga's classic *Homo Ludens*, in which the author comments on the importance of the play spirit as a driving force in the creation and sustenance of society. For Dombrowski, these two views—of sport as a search for excellence and success and of sport as playful realization—must be reconciled in any comprehensive theory of athletics. Chapter four focuses on the theories of contemporary philosopher Randolph Feezell. Feezell, who seeks a path of moderation between these extremes just mentioned, pays special attention to two of Huizinga's central concerns: the continuing possibilities for freedom in play and the complicated relationship of the player to seriousness and frivolity. The final chapter represents Dombrowski's attempt to integrate some of these theories

into a general approach to contemporary athletics. He argues that athletics must sustain both its success-driven and play-oriented qualities.

Against Feezell's view that athletics exemplifies the absurdity of the modern world (in which we give ourselves passionately to events and activities whose seriousness can hardly be justified), Dombrowski prefers Weiss's and Huizinga's emphasis on sport as a path of personal—and social—realization. Ultimately, he advocates a search for "reflexive equilibrium" (p. 144), an ongoing process of evaluating the character of sports behaviors and events, the opposing tensions and excesses found in those settings, and the possibilities for worthy participation. This participation should be understood in moral as well as aesthetic and technical terms. In his view, the ideals of equality of participation, and even sportsmanship, are crucial to the success of democratic societies, and sport is one of the principal settings where the implications of these themes can be explored.

Dombrowski's book is marked by the liveliness and clarity of his writing. His use of Greek concepts (a necessary practice because of the book's ambition) is always attended by English translations; and he avoids philosophical jargon. The book serves as an introduction to several philosophers of sport and engages readers from different academic disciplines. His interests in the possibilities for self-realization and virtue in the sporting world are worthy reminders of the importance of these matters in our commercialized, cynical age.

Of course, many other disciplines besides philosophy have contributed to the ongoing dialogue about the prospects and problems of modern sport; Dombrowski's

book is not informed by those writings. He could have said much more about the diverse ways in which modern sports are now organized and about the specific challenges that these forms of organizations raise for players, coaches, and fans. It is worth remembering that Huizinga's strong critique of contemporary sport (as a turning of the play spirit into a quest for sterile excellence) also focused on what he called "false play," the sponsorship and control of play events by large political and economic organizations. Such organizations provide the settings (and often the terms) within which people develop selfhood, discover community, and comprehend ideas of moral worthiness. To be sure, people gather together (on the fields of sport and elsewhere) to construct the moments of their lives; but studies of athletic idealism must also emphasize the character, conduct, and even "virtue" of those social formations.

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### **Foundations of Playwork**

*Fraser Brown and Chris Taylor, eds.*  
Maidenhead, U.K.: Open University  
Press, 2008. References, figures, appen-  
dices, index. xxiv, 316 pp. \$49.00 paper.  
ISBN: 9780335222919

For the reader not familiar with the practice of playwork, a concept with roots in the adventure playground movement in Europe, *Foundations of Playwork* serves as a comprehensive introduction to the topic. The book consists of fifty-six brief chapters (no chapter is more than six

pages long), organized into ten parts. Discussions focus on the theoretical foundations of playwork and the implementation of the theory into practice, the practice of playwork in various countries (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland), the roles and responsibilities of playworkers, the management of play settings, playwork and public policy, and issues related to conducting research on the topic of playwork. The essays also demonstrate how the practice of playwork can occur in a variety of contexts including playgrounds, hospitals, prisons, and even a Romanian orphanage for neglected, abused, and abandoned children.

I finished reading *Foundations of Playwork* and came to the appreciation that the book adds up to more than the sum of its parts. Each chapter addresses a fairly narrow topic, and the chapters are not necessarily sequentially linked. But, by the time a reader finishes all of the chapters (written by fifty different authors), he or she comes away with a comprehensive introduction to the theoretical principles underlying playwork, issues related to the playwork profession, and the ways in which playwork professionals affect the lives of children. It is as if the volume is a textbook on the subject of playwork without trying to be a textbook.

In terms of readability, the editors have done a good job at ensuring a fairly uniform style across the chapters. Some of the chapters are "drier" than others, but for the most part, they are reasonably well written. The editors have also included an annotated bibliography and a comprehensive list of references, each of which allows the interested reader to go beyond the content presented in the book.

The value of the book transcends