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TO GROW UP OR TO GET TO BE MORE MATURE?

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Those who try to articulate a total view rather than an academic philosophy must tolerate close inspection of their lives: To what extent do their lives conform with what they claim are their values? I am among the fortunate to be under friendly surveyance. Twice there have been comments in very valuable publications about what has been termed my boxing: How does that combine with my enthusiasm for Gandhian non-violence? It has been suggested that I am a less integrated person than certain philosophers with whom I have been in debate (Sir Alfred Ayer, Sir Karl Popper,...), or that I have an unusually complex nature. Is not Gandhian non-violence, even applied in ordinary daily communication, a high ideal to me? These friendly reflections make it natural to dwell upon an important aspect of my life philosophy.

There are philosophers like Moritz Schlick who have elaborated the theme *homo ludens*. Human beings may or may not deserve the designation *homo sapiens*. These philosophers stress the ability, or even ethical justifiability, to live playfully. I lack the motivation to go into this in all seriousness, but there is more room for child-like play all through life than seems to be generally recognized.

Well padded boxing gloves make it possible to hit each other without injury. For a million years hitting each other with aggressive purpose, to injure, even to kill, has been part of adult human behavior. We may safely infer that children have been imitating this in their play also for a million years. Their joy in playing has been in part due to the seriousness of the adult fight. The joy of playing with boxing gloves imitating brutal, bloody fights is here today. But if people try this without previous instructions they sooner or later hurt themselves, of course unintentionally. Some people get angry when hit on their noses, others do not. I never get angry from such occurrences, and I play with friends who don't. Anyhow, if and when I still play with boxing gloves, I play only with a very good heavy weight boxer, Bjorn Barland, who is also a postgraduate student in the sociology of sport.

Sometimes we determine beforehand a succession of moves. Bjorn shoots a left, then a right, then a left to my stomach, then with lightning speed he goes for my head. In order to evade the last move I have to lift my glove not more than 10 inches to protect my jaw. Bjorn has to move at least three times as fast, but again and again he reaches my jaw before I have my glove in the right place for protection. Very impressive and very funny. Much laughter! It is also experienced as amusing when Bjorn hits my elbow which protects my stomach: It makes an impressive noise. More laughter, but with care, because our mouths should not open too much. The general situation is completely preposterous: Good friends staring into the eyes of each other in order to find out within a split second whether the other will hit you in the face or the stomach. We can play an hour, with small intervals to recover our, mostly my, breath. The intense movements and high concentration make the play a valuable training and relaxation from serious mental work. (Of course there are many other ways to get this result.)

Fencing has been made civilized by making it highly unlikely for participants to injure each other. The public sees the protective mask. The many exercises and ceremonies and sports with deadly weapons are dominated by rules eliminating serious risks. On the other hand, competitive boxing looks brutal and is brutal. In this way it remains a source of big money for all concerned. If boxing gloves could get a kind of lining that signals the weight of a hit, rules could be made to punish unnecessary heavy hits. But that variety of competitive boxing would hardly be noticed by the public at large.

I have sometimes recommended play-boxing for people engaged in environmental direct actions. Enraged people who would profit from a certain hydroelectric development threaten to beat demonstrators. They marched in big formations against their camp. Police had announced that they would be incapable of preventing serious injuries. The leaders of the direct action, Sigmund Kvaloy among them, decided that because of the lack of training in non-violence resistance, they had to give in, and they left the place they were defending. One major condition for successful resistance is the ability to look into the eyes of the attackers, completely unruffled, as in boxing.

Boxing reveals with extraordinary clearness the philosophically important difference between pain, fear and anxiety (including panic). It is considered quite painful and a little undignified to be hit on the nose, but fear and anxiety also play an important role, even when it does not seem so to the 'victim'. If by ill luck we are hit fairly hard during a concentrated intense play, there is little pain and no fear or anxiety. (One has to smile and so ensure one's dear partner that he need not feel unduly sorry.)

In short, participants attacked by police or angry 'civilians' may largely profit from getting rid of much of the normal fear and anxiety when hit in the face. One's behavior is then free to be of a kind most likely to pacify attackers.

Gandhi made a distinction between the non-violence of the strong and that of the weak. The former seeks, not avoids, 'the centre of the conflict'. Without courage militant Gandhism is not possible, and Gandhi therefore considered physical as well as mental courage a precondition for the non-violence he advocated. Repression by authorities, including the police, is in part based on intimidation and threats of physical punishment. Those who both believe firmly in their cause and are capable of relentlessly, like Socrates, expressing their minds, whatever the external circumstances, are bound to influence the opponent in the 'right' direction.

When I play with boxing gloves, I don't have anything that lofty in mind, but I think that that kind of play, *like many others*, helps us to understand more of the sinister role fear and anxiety play in situations requiring mental and physical concentration, and also to understand the curative power of intense mental and physical activeness.

Considering its one million years prehistory, play with boxing gloves will continue. What has once been for so long a time a play imitating deadly serious physical struggles of adults will continue to fascinate at least some children, and there-fore also some playful adults. I was a member of a gang of three very good friends. One of the great varieties of play we indulged in was throwing big solid bricks at each other. Of course we were aware of the necessity of having sufficient distance between us, and we would not throw at somebody who was looking away. This play made us laugh more than when we played with balls. It confirms the tendency to react with laughter when 'deadly' activities are imitated by people en-gaged in them with consistently and completely friendly in-tentions.

Conclusion: There is no incompatibility between the Gandhian norm of non-violence and play with boxing gloves, or with training in receiving hits without equimindedness, including absence of anger. But to enjoy such play fairly late in life indicates perhaps that one has not grown up properly. And how does it relate to human maturity? My answer is that in principle there is no incompatibility. Soren Kierkegaard, who certainly was serious in questions of human obligations, insisted that the state of being in 60000 fathoms depth in human choice should not make one's delight when visiting a circus less in-tense than that of the children present. From this I infer that maturity in his view need not hamper 'childish' joys. I am inclined to agree. And fortunately there are innumerable 'childish' joys.

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