

# Meron! Meron! Constructing the Nature of Man in Sabong (Cockfighting)

Dexter A. Adriatico, Rommel M. Dascil

Mariano Marcos State University, City of Batac, Philippines

Email: dexteradriatico329@gmail.com, rmdascil@mmsu.edu.ph

**How to cite this paper:** Adriatico, D. A., & Dascil, R. M. (2023). Meron! Meron! Constructing the Nature of Man in Sabong (Cockfighting). *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 11, 417-424.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2023.115027>

**Received:** March 21, 2023

**Accepted:** May 27, 2023

**Published:** May 30, 2023

Copyright © 2023 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

## Abstract

This paper examines the nature of man in the context of Sabong or cockfighting. It presents the biological and rational being of man as manifested in cockfighting. This qualitative study employed interviews among active members of the United Ilocandia Game Breeders Association (UNIGBA) in Northern Philippines. It reveals that the biological and rational being of man are evident (meron) in his pursuit for the highest good or happiness through sabong. The study found that sabongeros continue to engage in sabong at various stages for various reasons leading to the fulfillment of their goals of ultimate happiness and self-development, as well as that of other individuals.

## Keywords

Nature of Man, Rational Being of Man in Sabong, Biological Being of Man in Sabong, Sabongeros

## 1. Introduction

Man occupies the central position in philosophy since ancient time. As early as 427 to 347BC, Western philosophers have started believing that the ultimate goal of human life is the fullest development of man as moral being by living a life of reason for the attainment of moral good. Other philosophers who embraced the fundamental principle introduced by Aristotle such as Epicurus in the 342 to 270BC (as cited by Konstan, 2005) held that happiness is the *summum bonum* or the highest of human life. For him, happiness is capable of giving lasting and uninterrupted satisfaction to man, and as such, intrinsically valuable. Kant (1724-1804), however, argued that man is not only characterized as biological but a combination of both biological and a rational. He explained that as biological being, man innately possesses feelings and emotions, desires and instincts. Man, as rational, on the other hand, describes him as a being who has control over

these feelings, emotions, desires, and instincts.

As man lives his life, he is placed in situations where his biological being and rational being manifest themselves and come to full fruition. Sabong or cockfighting is deemed to be a good measure of this manifestation. In almost all corners of the Philippine archipelago, the activity of cockfighting has been normal a scenario since it was legalized under the “Cockfighting Law of 1974” by then President Ferdinand E. Marcos. Section 4b of the law provides local government units the power to authorized individuals, party, or the LGUs themselves to operate sabong within their jurisdiction for the purpose of revenue collection alongside with the Framework of New Society of maximum development and promotion of wholesome recreation and amusement. The law acknowledges the historical and cultural traditions that go with the sports which nowadays is considered an industry because of the commercial components accompanying its operation (Brosas, 2022).

While sabong continues to flourish and grows as an industry that provides livelihood to many Filipinos, there are no studies conducted in the Philippines that provide insights on the biological and rational being of man in this sport. Prompted by this, the researchers conducted this study to construct the nature of man in sabong. In particular, the study sought to determine 1) the biological being of man and 2) the rational being of man in sabong.

## 2. Literature Review

Historically, the sport of cockfighting spread east to the Philippine islands where it became a national obsession. According to Walker (1986), a World War II US veteran in the country, related the following experience:

While I was stationed in the islands I saw cockfighting going on all day. Everybody, old men to boys carried a cock around under his arm. They were fighting all over the place. Course the army boys would gather around and egg em on and bet on the fights. Some of that old papa-sans made a hell of a lot of money on those old roosters.

Cockfighting is one of the oldest male-dominated sports documented in existence which is believed to have started in the Classical period. Historians believe that the Greeks practiced it before battle in order to stimulate their warriors to brave and valorous deeds. This is however refuted by many experts for they believe that it originated in Asia. It is believed to have started in India between 1200 BC and 900 BC where the wild game fowl was domesticated and selectively bred to produce fighting game cock. From India cockfighting spread east and west. In the Philippines, many believe that it is a culture passed by the Spaniards. However, many locals believe that it has long been existing before Spain colonized the Philippines.

Culturally, sabong is a part or a way of life of every sabong aficionado. As a part of culture or a culture itself, it is practiced almost every day, more specially

during celebration of fiestas. In fact, in most barrios, they call the operation as Tupada. Tupada is construed similarly as Sabong and cockfighting, but it derives negative connotation because some operators operate without legal permit. However, in most cases tupada is a localized activity where small-time sabongeros bet minimally and field not so high quality roosters or gamebirds.

For a large scale operation and highly selected participation, cockfighting is elevated to what they call as derby. A derby is a scheduled cockfighting event, mostly at night, participated by big breeders and tahors or big time bettors and derby participants who have the capacity to compete with highly selected birds of high pedigree that are bred and prepared by well-trained farm hands. As a highly competitive form of Sabong, a derby attracts only those who have the money who can afford to field entries because every entry requires pot money from which the guaranteed prize of winning entry/entries is taken. Moreover, in derbies, there are also minimum bets. Thus, all of these requirements and considerations separate derby from other forms of cockfighting like Tupada.

In both historical and cultural sense, sabong is an exciting sport that does not only reflect the male ethos, but also inclusivity among the sexes and all walks of life. Today, in televised prestigious derby events, locally and internationally, the sport is joined by female aficionados, thus defying the convention established in the sport. There are now lady breeders, lady handlers, and lady gaffers. Indeed, the sport has become an avenue of inclusivity among people across all walks of life. Sabong is nobody's sports, but everyone's. While derbies can be afforded by the ones who have the money and logistics, the less capable can still join as attendees, cheerers, well-wishers, and bettors. Aside from this, the love for sabong is widely observed as many households in rural and urban areas of the Philippines keep at least one rooster corde. With these, Filipinos love for Sabong shows that it is a part of cultural heritage like style of dress, language, crafts, and arts.

The Filipinos love for Sabong leads to the growth of this sports into P50 billion industry before the Covid 19 pandemic. During the pandemic the industry claimed to be earning P1.5 billion a day (Limos, 2020). Today, the Philippine Gamefowl Industry covers not only cockfighting, but all sectors that are involved in its operation such as feed companies, gamefowl medicines like vitamins, antibiotics, vaccines, etc. breeding cages, gaffing accessories, and others (Jacinto, 2018). As the industry grows, it paves the creation of employment for millions of Filipinos starting from breeding of roosters for derbies and tupadas to the actual operation of cockfighting. Interestingly, even people who are indirectly involved in the operation also benefit because it creates additional jobs for canteen owners and staff, parking attendants, and drivers of public utility vehicles (PUVs) and public utility jeeps (PUJs).

Jacinto (2018) further adds that the Philippines is now the center of game fowl cockfighting in the world as evident in many international derbies being held in the Philippines annually, like the World Slasher Cup and Pitmaster Cups with two events a piece yearly. Similarly, the country is now the hub of the biggest and largest gamefowl or gamecock breeding in the world.

Other than just a part of national heritage, breeder-cockers are enticed more to breed and field entry in national organizations like Bakbakan, Digmaan, Salpukan and the like that offer lucrative prizes amounting to tens of millions of pesos. On top of the prize they receive is the prestige they get as they become stars in the industry. Once they establish their name by winning in prestigious derbies, they automatically become endorsers of game fowl products, like feeds, vitamins, vaccines, etc. (Sy, 2018).

Jacinto (2018) opines that the main drivers of the gamefowl industry growth are competition, the televised gamefowl programs, gamefowl magazines, internet, social media, and the prestige that goes with winning most prestigious gamefowl events. The growing competition among players in the industry results in higher quality products and services of gamefowl companies. It is expected that in five years, the industry will rise to a total of 50 billion or even higher. The international derbies like the World Slasher Cup, the National Cockers Association and Pit Master Cup may have more competitions as Mindanao and Visayas may have their own of these kinds in the future.

Recently, the Games and Amusement Board initiated a move to institutionalize and professionalize the conduct of activities in the industry. To do this, it conducted trainings, dubbed as Sabong Standardization Seminar, for upgrading the skills and licensing of gaffer, sentenciador, and post-battle care personnel in all areas of the Philippines in cooperation with cockpit owners and operators. As an output, the board issued 2-year license to participants that allows them to work and operate in their respective areas (Mitra, 2020).

### 3. Methodology

The study employed qualitative research design. This method is appropriate since the study is concerned with understanding human behavior from the informants' perspective (Paton, 2001). The data were collected through participant observation and interviews. The data collected were analyzed by themes through the descriptions of the informants. The informants included in the study were breeding and cocking members of the United Ilocandia Game Breeders Association (UNIGBA) in the Provinces of Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, and Abra.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The following themes emerged in the study.

*Biological Being of Man in Sabong.* Man by nature is desirous, that is why most of the time he would always seek for anything that makes him happy.

Cockfighting, like some other sports, can express man's biological nature as it reveals deep-seated human instincts and impulses. Part of the human experience, the intense emotions and reactions, joys and frustrations, derived from watching a cockfight reflect man's biological nature, particularly the evolutionary heritage of man's primeval urges and drives. Such nature of man is evident when one informant who always goes to the cockpit arena to bet and fight said:

Agpallot nak latta ta naragsak, aglalo nu mangabak nak (I go to cockfight because it brings me happiness, especially when I win).

This shows that sabongeros find happiness in sabong. Their participation in sabong brings them joy. Having said that, sabongeros habitual participation in sabong, whether in a hackfight or derbies, makes them happy and makes them active members of the sabong community. Aside from their participation, what provides pleasure to sabongeros, is their winning which comes from their bet or the prize they receive. Hence, when sabongeros keep on winning, it is expected that the more that they engage in cockfighting.

Other sabongeros however provide other (meron) reason why they keep on cockfighting:

Dakkel ababak min, ket nu agsardeng kami ton ano mi pay maabrot. Agpallot kami latta a bareng makabawi kami (We have lost much so we have to continue cockfighting to get even with our losses).

It is clear in this case that these sabongeros keep going to the cockpit, whether they fight their own rooster or bet on other rooster is for them to gain back their losses. It is their desire to win in order to get even that pummels them to go on. This is dangerous as this may lead them to more losses.

Such ideas however are different from the following other (meron) reasons why other sabongeros are engaged in cockfighting.

Saan nga mailadawan rikna na nu mangabak tay manok mo ken palakpakan dagitay agbuya diay manok nga insaganak (The feeling is unexplainable when the audience applauds you for preparing well the rooster which leads to its win).

The excerpt reveals that sabongeros find happiness when they win. More importantly in this case, what makes the sabongeros feel elated is when the chicken they prepare wins in the battle. Indeed, the sabongeros take pride of how they handle well the gamecock they prepare for battle. As the saying goes, the sport is no longer a game of chance. That is, the pit warrior needs careful preparation starting from selecting the best fowl to prepare and religiously following the mental and physical conditioning the chicken needs to win the fight (Berbano, 2017). It is interesting to note that the biological being of a sabongero is geared toward realizing his desire to be acknowledged as a part of the sabong circle, to win, to gain back his losses, and to gain prestige in winning.

The biological being of a sabongero as perspective in constructing the nature of man in sabong provides a context for exploring the relationship between man and his environment, including his relationship with and attitude towards animals such as fighting cocks. Through sabong as sport, such perspective reveals the way we understand and meaningfully relate with what we have in our immediate world. In the case of the sabongero, his behavior, choices, and actions are influenced by and referenced from his being part of sabong, hence, he thrives in the intersection of man's cultural and biological evolution.

*Rational Being of Man in Sabong.* While man is known to be biologically desirous, man is also a rational being. In this study, rational being pertains to man's intent towards development not only for himself but for other individuals too—this is the other (meron) reason why man does sabong.

Sabong, with all its complex social features, manifests man's rational nature as it reveals man's capacity for decision-making and strategic thinking. From careful breeding and selection of fighting birds to the complex tactics and strategies employed in the cockfighting arena, sabong displays clear expressions of human ingenuity and intelligence. Indeed, man being rational as a perspective provides insights into the nature of human ability to balance complex and competing interests. The sabongero's capacity to make informed decisions in a high-pressure environment reflects the human experience of broad cognition and emotion.

This perspective is exemplified in the following lines from the key informants.

Adda napintas nga pagsapulak iso nga saan ko masapol nga agpustapusta tapno laeng mangabakak. Bonus langen nu kas pagarigan mangabak nak. Agbreed ken agpallot nak ngem tapno laeng agserbi nga stress reliever ko. Ken kaimportantean, agbreed ken pallot nak tapno adda ubraen ken panggedan met ta kaanakak nga awan trabaho na. (I do not need to bet for the prize money for I have a stable job. The prize is just a bonus. I breed and cockfight because it is my stress reliever. Most importantly, I provide job for my relatives).

In this excerpt, the sabongero finds cockfighting as an avenue to help other people by providing livelihood for them. Pakners, a magazine show of ABS-CBN concluded that breeding and conditioning are decent jobs (Taberna & Carino, 2018). Also, in an episode of Tukaan, a TV Sabong Magazine Show aired every Sunday, Sy (2018), the host, educates the viewing public why most farm owners are well earning professionals and about OFWs who can afford to sustain the needs of their farms and employ personnel to do the farm works like breeding, feeding, conditioning, etc. This sport is not an easy enterprise because the farm owner needs to have all that it takes to maintain quality good gamefowls and enough manpower.

Another note worthy idea is stressed in the following excerpt.

...tallo a tawen kamin nga agpadpaderby kas wagas nga pinagdadanggaymi nga agpapagayam nga adda abroad. Ngem nu man pay nu kasta saan kami nga agpaderby laeng tapno ag-enjoy nga agbuya ti laban, nu diketdi wagasmi nga makatulong kadagiti ububbing. Daydiay kitaenmi ket mangialokar kami igatgatangmi school supplies para kadagiti ububbing nga agad-adal. (...we have been holding derby for three years as a gathering among us who are working abroad. We enjoy watching cockfights but we are also doing this to help others by setting aside an amount from our proceeds to buy school supplies for young pupils and students).

The lines reveal that despite what some people think, sabongeros also think of their social responsibility or obligation. Since most farm owners are OFWs and the like, they are not into the profit they get in holding derbies. Instead they take this as an avenue where participants become sponsors of their cause. This simply implies that while the sabongeros engage in cockfighting to enjoy, they also think of the welfare of the community.

Furthermore, inculcating discipline is also another moral obligation cockfighting farm owners would like to instill in the minds and heart of their farmhands. This is manifested in the following excerpt.

Kasla kadagiti daduma nga trabaho, kayat ko nga itultuloy ti agmanok ta kayat ko nga masursuroda ti pateg ti displina iti trabahoda. Ti pinagmanok ket masapol na disiplina gapo ta amin nga paset ti panagmanok ket sururot ti umno nga pinangsurot ti oras ken amin nga trabaho. (Like any other job, cocking requires discipline. This is what I want my farmhands to value because cockfighting and breeding require strict observance of time in performing all tasks).

This implies that the cock farm owners/sabongeros would like their farm assistants to observe discipline in performing their tasks. Discipline in performing each task in the farm would contribute to the success of the farm in breeding, in handling, and most importantly in actual cockfighting.

The above discussions, which show social relations and dynamics in cockfighting, reflect the rational nature of man. From breeding and selection of fighting fowls involving complex trial-and-error and genetic combination experiments to the complex strategies applied in conditioning, fight planning and actual cockfighting and betting, the sabongeros use rationality, in various forms and levels of specialized knowledge and experience, to achieve their goals.

Moreover, from breeding to cockfighting, the sport bring together people—farmhands, technicians, sponsors, among other enthusiasts—from diverse backgrounds and social classes. This social mixing can create opportunities for rational exchange and dialogue, as well as for the development of new relationships and alliances based on rational choices. Influenced by factors such as status and skill that create the sabongero's reputation, and which result from rational strategies, the network of the sabongero in the cockfighting community is an important determinant of success in the sport. The nature of the network, which can be hierarchical and competitive, and the benefit or advantage it provides, reflect broader and rational social and economic dynamics.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

First, the biological and rational nature of man in sabong are manifested in his search for the *highest good* or happiness in actual cockfighting and betting.

As a sport, cockfighting expresses man's biological nature as revealed in in-

tense emotions and reactions, joys and frustrations, derived from participating in the sport. As cockfighting offers an avenue for exploring the ways we understand and meaningfully relate with our immediate world, it also provides us a context to understand the intersection between man's cultural and biological nature.

Moreover, as sport, cockfighting manifests man's rational being, and this is marked by his intent and ability to pursue development for himself and other people. From breeding to actual cockfights, sabong reveals man's capacity for complex decision-making and strategic thinking and displays clear expressions of human ingenuity and intelligence towards success in the sport.

## 6. Recommendations

In light of the conclusions drawn, the following are recommended.

First, similar studies are conducted with a larger scope, locus, and context.

Second, future studies may look into the cultural drives and individual drives of sabongeros, and determine the level of acceptance of people on cockfighting.

Finally, studies are conducted on the politics and economics of cockfighting with consideration to the specialized roles of farm owners, handlers, pure bettors, financiers, breeders and other forms.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

## References

- Berbano, M. (2017). *All New Tukaan*.
- Brosas, A. (2022). *The Laws and Legalities of Cockfighting in the Philippines*. <https://agrario.com/news/the-laws-and-legalities-of-cockfighting-in-the-philippines/>
- Jacinto, A. (2018). *Cockfighting in the Philippines: The Billion Dollar Industry and National Obsession*. <https://www.phillife.co/cockfighting-philippines/amp/>
- Konstan, D. (2005). Epicurus. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu>
- Limos, M. (2020). *Sabong: A Billion-Dollar National Obsession in the Philippines*. esquiremag.ph
- Mitra, B. (2020). *GAB Naghigpit sa Sabong*. <http://www.sportsmanila.net>
- Paton, M. Q. (2001). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Sy, J. (2018). Tukaan Live. *TV 5 Network*.
- Taberna, A., & Carino, G. (2018). Pareng Pakners. *ABS-CBN Magazine Show*.
- Walker, J. (1986). *Feathers and Steel: A Folkloric Study of Cockfighting in Northern Utah*. Utah State University.