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## SHORT INTRODUCTION TO ETHICAL REASONING IN SPORT

### 1. SPORT AND ETHICS

Walking through the field of sport ethics we collide to fundamental dimensions of sport and of human being. Obviously we need to ask ourselves for what is it all about; for sport or for human being? It is about both! Although it is clear to us: there is no sport without human being! Well?!

It is clear at first sight that sport is very complex phenomenon, which generates ethical contradictions. It is pinned between moral-educational and essential biological movement drives on the one side. On the other side, it is trapped between extreme exploitation and passionate images of our time, and playful innocence of body and mind.

If sport appears in many forms and from different grounds, we argue that consequentially also the conception of the forms manifested as sport should be colorful (e.g. recreative sports are hard to deal normatively since they are non-normative by nature, elite sport is governed by the law of winning, and in extreme sport we face intentional risk taking). Therefore - from our perspective - we can enter recreative sport from the *ethics of proper measure*, elite sport from the *ethics of maximum*, and extreme sport from the *ethics of other* or maybe going beyond ethical towards aesthetical. A very important issue arises from the perspective of eco-ethics, which places sport within the larger context of global environmental concerns and follows the concept of sustainable development. We also face the ethical turn of substitution of subject; the focus shifts from sportsperson to spectator, which we can argue when dealing with elite sport and economically contaminated utilitarian logic.

Hypothetically, setting the game and contest (competition) as ontological categories of sport, it becomes clear that many ethical situations are already expected. The moral judgment concerning such situations is settled in accordance with rules and interpretations of the rules. If this is so, then two important questions arise. First, to whom is the sportsman ethically obliged? Second, are there any

situations in sport, when there are no known rules or benefits, which will provide us with ethical orientation? And above all, we know that ethics of sport in the sense of non-questioned autonomy of sport is far from philosophical satisfaction. Although vast amount of literature is written within the limits of autonomy of sport, sport ethics is given the chance to uncover deeply rooted patterns that governs sport. We can question the sole sport activity in this manner.

Sport speaks about human primal, natural, cultural and technologically acquired needs and capabilities. Topical issues on this level can be formed in questioning of technological progress and interference of technology and pharmacology into the body – degeneration and self-destruction. We search for adaptational characteristics of human organism and social subsystems. Namely, ideology of technological progress governs also the sports world. Being interdisciplinary interesting phenomenon sport offers many opportunities to show off the achievements of non-sporting institutions, successfully using the sport to serve the society of consumption, spectacle and of risk.

Since we are dealing with pluralism, we cannot assure in advance the expected convincing power of ethical reasoning in sport. It is not uniform phenomenon and therefore such a demand would be too pretentious. However, we are not able to be satisfied with the logic where we are forced by the constructed reality in the form of an institutionalized body giving us ethical laws as being independent of human (sportsperson) will. Following this intention, we can ethically question the sole sport activity or at least a part of it. Sport has to be set to please the human, and not vice versa, in order to show some fundamental contradictions within. Along such reasoning, we will try to justify the ethical liability outside the autonomy of sport, which is often misunderstood and misused by sport authorities.

## **2. SEARCHING FOR THE METHOD**

Sport is practice where body plays important – even decisive – role. Coming across more or less convenient classifications of sport and ineffective essentialism, which is lost in human incompleteness, only the body is always present and solid category. We wish, in the spirit of interpretative options, that also play and contest/competition can be regarded as ontological categories of sport. But we do not dare yet to jump to such conclusions without substantial argument.

We will not spent time searching for the one and only definition of sport. No definition guarantees us to understand and know sport more clearly. The hope

of creating definition that is able to make a clear cut between sport and non-sport activity has been given up a long time ago. Strong support to our intuitive reasoning has been recently given by McFee (McFee, 2004). Detailed explication, contextually and temporarily agreed understanding makes much better sense when questioning sport philosophically.

What about sport as practice? To be consistent with epistemological process, we should leave the contemplation here and dip into the world of sport practice. But would we then be able to talk more meaningful about the experience for sure? Would we feel like talking about it is important at all? Pushing even more: do we become better skilled in sport if we talk a lot about sport? Nothing of these is secured and self-evident. We witness dull answers to questions of journalists at horrible defeats and amazing winnings of obviously well sport skilled persons time and again. But can the answer be dull just in the sense of putting it into words. On the experiential level the impression or sensation is a huge thing to deal with, and hard to translate. Maybe Sebastian Coe has this in mind when he replied to journalist: “I ran, you write.” He was running and period. That’s it. He didn’t reflect on running and why running. At the moment, he was the run itself, incorporated run. The gap shown between practice and theory<sup>1</sup> is the crossing line in modes of being. It is impossible to be on both sides simultaneously. You are or you think how you are. Sometimes the alternation from mode to mode is so fast that it may seem as one. But when it really becomes one, then again, you are. If this happens, the there is nor both nor one. In this manner Coe invites other to his story; some people run, some write, some watch etc. Everyone on his own, but then again, all together. Nobody asks questions, since it is clear to everyone, following Coe. Still, the task of the journalists is to question, to translate the feelings of experience into words. When Coe stopped running he didn’t stop being Coe. The run was not over, when the watch stopped. Metaphorically, we will not trust sport its autonomous position. It is about human activity that is always a narrative part, whether we like it or not, of individual and society.

Sports science is interdisciplinary by its nature, and in this manner, it tries to interpret sport. The more the points of view and variety of sciences (physics, biomechanics, biochemistry, physiology, psychology, anthropology, sociology etc.), the more the image get clearer, though complex. In addition, the image is all we can reach. We are trying to translate and paint on the timeless canvas of science the logic of practice that is trapped within the necessity of time. The moment

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<sup>1</sup> Theory, for this opportunity, is understand as the explanation of practice, as reflection and interpretation of pre-reflective, pre-rational, corporal, intuitive and emotional.

captured in such approach is a state – a matter of methodological technology and professional skill – and only by interpretation of the paint created, we are moving towards true scientific challenge. Why? Because, at the very moment of interpretation the scientist is faced with the art of placing the results into the primal context of things – back into the world of sport, and back to the human being. Precaution in scientification of practice is never too much. We will try to keep in mind this principle during our philosophical discourse, for we know that many times empirics from laboratory combined with statistics is something and the practice is another. If nothing else, we are left with the chance to show the limits of our cognition, and methodology used. In order to keep the touch with practice, we will occasionally support our thoughts by concrete examples, and where appropriate use the findings of the empiric research in sport.

Paraphrasing Hocart<sup>1</sup> we can say that time has passed, when sport ceased to be just practice. Cognitive capabilities of human are limited in time and space, subjectively and objectively. We are in the world consciously only to certain extent; as needed in a given moment or as engaged we are, and is in our power (will). To know might mean to be able to identify or describe and explain something, or to have the same experience as the one we are trying to understand. Our every day life is primary experienced as the place for actual and possible actions, and only secondly as an object of our thoughts. We are now facing the challenge of bridging the gap mentioned, where Bourdieu's Practical Sense might show us a way:

*“There exists the time of science, which is not the time of practice. [...] The science is possible only in relation to time, which is contrary to practice. Science wants to overlook time in order to detemporalize practice. The one who is involved in the game, seized within, does not conform to what he sees, but to what he fore-sees (pre-voir, sees in advance in directly perceived presence.”<sup>2</sup>*

It is believed that with the aid of scientific-logical reasoning, based on the principle of formal logic, man will faster and more successfully change the stock of knowledge of everyday life, a life based primarily on the rules of ‘common sense’. Man tends towards the explanation of a practice, its generalization, ordering, systematization and rational explanation. This, however, is already a transition from concrete life to the abstract, from practice to theory, or to discursive

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<sup>1</sup> Hocart in Bourdieu (2002: 62): “It has been for a long time since man stopped just to live, and began to think life.”

<sup>2</sup> Bourdieu, P (2002) Praktični čut I [Practical sense I]: 139 (translated by Hosta)

consciousness. And this is exactly the point, we believe, where attention should be placed in order to develop a theory of sport. The gap between lived and reflective, and between practice and theory. Regarding this gap, an important paradigmatic change is occurring; scientific positivism is being transformed into, or perhaps more accurately, being replaced by, the science of perspective. (Jošt, Hosta 2004)

Since we acknowledge our disability to embrace the whole at once, we will try to grasp it where we are able to, and where we find it appropriate. We are speaking in favor of ethical pluralism in the first part, which sounds postmodern alike, and is about legitimizing the primacy of little stories and small truths. For that reason we will conclude with something more challenging when moving towards *finish line*. Little stories and their truths can be a source of stereotypes, prejudices and conflicts if they are not grounded properly, and this is what we do not to bear witness to. We are acknowledging life to every sport activity, but each and one of them must be considered from the firm ground of eco-ethics, and only than the true value and subsistence in mosaic of sports world will be given.

I am aware of some possible objections regarding the way of getting to the heart of the problem. One of those might be that I have never been seriously involved in the practice of elite sport and therefore not much can I know and say about it. It is true, elite or extreme sport where never my domain, but it doesn't justify the argument that nothing much essential can be said about it. It is like reproach to the doctor that he is healing the diseases that he never had and might never have in future. But as the physician is aware of the relation to the patient when treating the disease, also we will seriously consider the relation to sportsperson and sport practice when trying to get accustomed with its logic (its logics). Accepting solipsism would mean that you cannot know and understand anyone else but yourself. This would mean to give relativism an easy victory. Because to know is to grasp meaning rather than merely to experience. To be one is neither necessary nor sufficient for knowing one. Indeed, as Fay goes on:

*“[...] sometimes it is easier for those [who are] not ‘one’ to grasp meaning because they have the requisite distance from the experience to appreciate its significance.” (Fay, 1996: 28)*

Regarding this, we are aware of the importance of the sense for ethos of the game and sense for the emotional attachment to it. Since our discussion is ethical, we presuppose that actors in sport are rational, although knowing in some cases being rational contradicts the activity. This is one more reason to be aware of slippery moralizing ground that is too often accompanying the moral judgments in sport. I believe that no ethical position can be substantiated without intuitive and culturally

dependent reasoning. Therefore we regard the idea of pure objective knowledge and a view from nowhere as scientific utopia. We have to stand somewhere; we have to have some footing not to be sucked into cultural vacuum. Consciously leaving some space for unconsciousness is the core issue that I believe makes any text lively and juicy. It gives the opportunity for different interpretations.

## LITERATURE

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## ABSTRACT

*It is clear at first sight that sport is a very complex phenomenon, which generates ethical contradictions. It is pinned between moral-educational and essential biological movement drives on the one side. On the other side, it is trapped between extreme exploitation and passionate images of our time, and playful innocence of body and mind.*

*By justifying ethical pluralism through our discussion we wish to point out that moral pluralism is not an apology for moral relativism, which can also be labeled as an ethical void. Moral autonomy of sport that is based on the idea of free pooling of civil society, and is at the same time trapped in the structure of the game, is inadmissible per se or has to be understood within the context of distinction among ethics of sport and sport ethics.*

*Since we are dealing with pluralism, we cannot assure in advance the expected convincing power of ethical reasoning in sport. It is not uniform phenomenon and therefore such a demand would be too pretentious. However, as a PE teachers and trainers we need to stand firm on ethical grounds. We need to take into account that this short introduction is only a first stage of understanding sport in order to develop further educational strategies to promote and practice socially responsible sport in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*