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**Between Sport and Bioethics:  
Grounding the Philosophy of Mountaineering**

**Abstract**

*Mountaineering encompasses a vast number of practices and it is becoming an umbrella term for a set of human outdoor practices. Although categorised as a sport, mountaineering resists to the standard definition of sport and especially to mainstream understanding of sport as a competitive activity. On the other hand, usual ethical questions concerning sports do not cover the vast majority of mountaineering practices, thus calling for a wider normative perspective – a bioethical analysis. It is argued that such an approach could ground the possibility of understanding mountaineering as a peculiar sort of sport, and differentiate its special features by using bioethical analysis. Thus, it is showed that mountaineering is a unique sport, but also that mountaineer shares and promotes a genuine life philosophy exemplifying a truly bioethical worldview. Mountaineer is guided by a unique set of core values encapsulated under something we can and should call the philosophy of mountaineering.*

**Keywords**

mountaineering, sport, bioethics, philosophical analysis, philosophy of mountaineering

**Introduction**

At first sight, there is a subtle sense of triviality in the talk about the philosophy of mountaineering. Philosophy is something we have a more or less determined sense about, and mountaineering is something we take for granted as one of the most spread leisure activity.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, many would say that there is no need for any philosophy of mountaineering because it is all about different mountaineering philosophies, strictly linked to particular mountaineers. Thus, if not related to the banality and triviality of topic, some could argue in a different direction, that this is a classical philosophical hair-splitting intended to make some mind-exercise concerning a new topic – mountaineering – which actually does not need any such kind of analysis because it is purely practically oriented and completely subjective.<sup>2</sup>

1

Similarly, as “most contemporary philosophers simply ignored sport, presupposing or assuming that it was too trivial a human affair to merit serious philosophical attention and analysis” (McNamee & Morgan, 2015: 3), the same is happening with mountaineering.

2

Such view is probably most evident in mountaineering literature, where most writers are trying to build and elaborate some kind of “personal philosophy”, without tendency to reflect on the general features of mountaineering sports or finding universal patterns shared by all mountaineers. Cf. Messner (1974), Mihelič (2005).

However, such an impression could easily be dissipated with just several first-hand questions concerning the topic. If there is a sort of philosophy of sports (and there is),<sup>3</sup> does mountaineering fit in such a theoretical frame, especially if mountaineering is truly peculiar as a sport, as it seems it is? If there is a sort of ethics of sport,<sup>4</sup> how it encompasses the realm of such diverse mountaineering practices? To be more specific, if there are some particular ethics related to mountaineering, then is it enough to use classical ethical theories or does the multitude of needed perspectives force us to engage in a broader – bioethical – analysis?

To answer these questions, on the one hand, we have to analyse the relation between sport and mountaineering, and between mountaineering and (bio)ethics, on the other. Thus, the first two parts of the paper deal with both relations. In the third part, we connect conclusions from both analyses arguing that the philosophy of mountaineering is a specific kind of philosophical enterprise.

### **Mountaineering as a Sport**

Mountaineering resists to any classical definition and categorisation. It is a mix of sport, leisure, outdoor hobby and personal adventure. If we take the dual usage of the general term, using “sport” as “the social processes and institutions that make up what we think of as the sporting world” (Levinson & Christensen, 1999: xv), and using “sports” as “actual games and practices, such as football, gymnastics, and stock car racing” (Levinson & Christensen, 1999: xv), mountaineering better fits the first than the second understanding. The possible reason is that mountaineering is more connected with the specific culture of visiting the mountains, wilderness and natural environment in general. However, mountaineering encompasses some activities which could be seen as a particular sport in the second sense. The reason for that is that until recently some reference work about sport took only those “more sportive” elements from mountaineering and focused just on “mountain climbing” and “rock climbing”. Mountain climbing has a competitive element in the historical race of “first ascents” primarily towards Alpine and Himalayan highest peaks (cf. Donnelly, 1999a: 262–264), and rock-climbing evolved from it much later, as a sport with specific rules, tools and standards (cf. Donnelly, 1999b: 326). However, for mountaineering, the race in first ascents was not enough to constitute it as a sport, and in the 1860s mountaineering, some would argue, split into two forms, “one based on exploration, the other on sport” (Donnelly, 1999a: 264).<sup>5</sup> Thus, similarly to rock climbers, alpinists also looked for competition in climbing the mountains but in different ways:

“... some began climbing without guides and developing their mountaineering skills (the norm today). They began to ascend minor peaks (...) which were often technically more difficult and dangerous than the major summits, they sought new routes.” (Donnelly, 1999a: 264)

As Donnelly correctly observes, “rock climbing is a sport elusive of definition; different from mountain climbing, ‘scrambling’, and hiking, rock climbing is generally distinguished by its structure, with climbs of recognised gradation and difficulty and danger” (Donnelly, 1999b: 325). This gradation and structure served as a base for different ways and sorts of competition, and it could be said that rock climbing truly became a sport in the traditional sense of that word. Moreover, “the notion of competition and its commercial possibilities, combined with the new French style of climbing (in which climbers begin to find commercial sponsors), resulted in the development of ‘sport’ climbing

competitions” (Donnelly, 1999b: 326). Thus, even on the level of terminology, the emphasis on the sporting element is present.<sup>6</sup> Be that as it may, rock climbing still resists the strict classification and institutionalisation:

“Although rock climbing has no institutionalized competitive structure, the sport functions much like others. The two specific types of competition are direct and indirect. Direct competition involves achieving the first ascent of mountains or of specific routes on mountains, cliffs, and frozen waterfalls. Direct competition also considers the first recorded ascent and such variations as first solo, first female, first all-female, or first winter ascent. Indirect competition is based on the style or quality of an ascent. It may refer to speed, but is usually considered in terms of how closely the ascent follows climbing’s informal rule structure.” (Donnelly, 1999b: 326)

This likeness to sport is probably the reason why the UIAA<sup>7</sup> (International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation) is seen primarily as a sports association, what was confirmed when it became a member of GAISF – Global Association of International Sports Federations (formerly known as Sport Accord) in 1991 (cf. GAISF, 2018). Additionally, some mountaineering activities were differentiated as separate sports and even included into the group of Olympic sports: cross country skiing since 1924 (cf. Olympic Games, 2018), and sport climbing since 2016, recently added to the list of sports included in the 2020 Olympic games (cf. Wood, 2018). It is worth mentioning that International Olympic Board also recognised the third major set of mountaineering sports – alpinism (mountain climbing) – by awarding three Olympic Alpinism Prizes (“gold medals for mountaineering”), and two Silver Medals for accomplishments in mountaineering (cf. Wood, 2010).<sup>8</sup>

3

There is a vast literature concerning the philosophy of sport. For our purposes, it is enough to mention two anthologies – McNamee & Morgan (eds., 2015), and Torres (ed., 2014), but also the two specialised journals – *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* and *Sport Ethics and Philosophy*.

4

There obviously is such ethics: the majority of philosophical analysis concerned with sport is related to ethics (see the previous footnote for a brief list of primary references on the philosophy of sport – all including ethics of sport). We can say that the ethics of sport is especially stressed in the philosophy of sport discussion. Almost all of the most influential philosophers of sport dealt with ethics of sport in a book-length discussions or/and edited the entire anthologies about the topic – cf. McNamee (2014), McNamee, ed. (2010), McNamee & Parry, eds. (1998), Morgan, ed. (2010), etc.

5

It is important to note that this “split” is present in the discussion about core values in mountaineering and generally in sport. It can be said that there are two basic standpoints, a real clash between values: UK amateur gentlemen vision of sport (doing sport for a mere enjoyment) and US professional (highly competitive: sport as a career opportunity and space for realising talents) vision of sport. This “split” is useful for discussing norms in

mountaineering. For now, we can pose it in the form of a question: could (or even should) mountaineer be at all professional? Or the true nature of it is in amateurism?! I thank William Morgan for these observations.

6

I stress “at first”, because an indoor sport climbing competition seems inadequate to be characterised as mountaineering in any sense of that word. In best case, it is an interesting mode of training or exercise for real mountain climbing which fits more under the umbrella term *mountaineering*.

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Acronym is from French: Union Internationale des Associations d’Alpinisme.

8

There are several others interesting competitive phenomena in the mountaineering world, as for example the Piolet d’Or (French for ‘golden ice axe’), an annual mountaineering award given by the French magazine *Montagnes* and The Groupe de Haute Montagne since 1991. This competition is raising a continuous discussion and debate about such (and all similar) contests and their relation to the true nature of mountain climbing and its promotion. For critical notes about such competitions and views promoted by them see e.g. House (2005), Parnell (2006) and Scott (2010).

Thus, mountaineering is perceived and classified as a kind of sport. However, many authors, especially those coming from the mountaineering community, locate and discuss some features of mountaineering activities which resist the official definition and perception of the sport. GAISF (formerly Sport Accord) uses the following definition of sport:

“The sport proposed should include an element of competition.

The sport should not rely on any element of “luck” specifically integrated into the sport.

The sport should not be judged to pose an undue risk to the health and safety of its athletes or participants.

The sport proposed should in no way be harmful to any living creature.

The sport should not rely on equipment that is provided by a single supplier.” (SportAccord, 2012)

Whether mountaineering fits the given definition is a big question. Donnelly observes that “mountain climbing is a unique sport”, primarily because “it is one of only a few completely new sports” and “it has no substantial governing bodies, no written rules, and no means of enforcing the socially constructed and socially accepted rules that do exist” (Donnelly, 1996a: 262). Even more picturesquely, Donnelly made a similar point concerning rock climbing:

“The clash of sport climbing and ‘adventure’ climbing, its more traditional and less technology-dependent predecessor, has produced rock climbing’s most difficult ethical crisis. Sport climbing involves rapid institutionalization, commercialization, and many new climbers unaware of the traditions. It has also altered the risk-versus-difficulty equation that has characterized the sport for most of its history. Increasing technical difficulty in rock climbing was always tempered by climbers’ willingness to increase their risks. The new styles eliminate much of the risk in the equation.

An uneasy truce now exists. Many climbers cross over between the sport and adventure styles. Certain locations have been mutually accepted as being for sport climbing only or adventure climbing only (others are in dispute); and many lifelong adventure climbers recognize the attraction of competitions. Blends of the two styles have produced an enormous variety of ethics, minutely debated by local climbers. This suggests that climbing is still in the hands of climbers and has not yet been taken over by bureaucrats or commercial interests.” (Donnelly, 1999b: 326–327)

Stressing that norms are still in the hands of mountaineers and rock climbers and that they are continuously under self-evaluation as practitioners of such activities,<sup>9</sup> allows us to ground and justify some peculiar feature(s) of mountaineering as a sport. It seems that these evolving norms in mountaineering go far beyond classical ethical issues in sport and the whole story is much more sophisticated and complicated than relying on fair-play strategies and issues linked with the biomedical ethics.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the ethical component opens a broader philosophical discussion about the nature of mountaineering. On the one hand, by relying on the official definition of sport, on the other hand, by seriously taking the perception of mountaineering as a sport, we are deeply stuck with the problem of determining what mountaineering is. To give a simple overview of the most important questions, consider: (1) do mountaineering includes necessary competition?; (2) can mountaineering exist without a dose of luck?; (3) is mountaineering activity possible if every sense of risk is eliminated or diminished?; (4) in what manner is mountaineering devoted to non-hurting of living creatures? We now turn to consider each of these questions more elaborately.

### *Competition*

According to mainstream understanding, the sport is taken primarily as competitive activity (for a critical review of relationship between sport and com-

petition cf. Pedersen, 2005; Boxill, 2014; Gaffney, 2015), but it seems that mountaineering completely resists definitions that include competition, trying to find some other features as more adequate for defining its essence. Some authors question the necessity of competition in mountaineering, arguing that mountaineering is a superb example of “non-competitive sport”, which cannot be distinguished from its distinctive cultural, health and social features (cf. Čaplar, 2017: 116–117). We can define non-competitive sport could as

“... a way of entertainment that is aimed at fun, enjoyment and joy. That is why it is more private than public, although the fitness of the population can be significant for society (economy, military, etc.). It usually does not have an audience, and if it does, it does not pay for tickets, but it passively observes and does not part in different support groups (fan clubs). This sport can be used by everyone, regardless of gender, age, social status, etc. There is no standardisation, organisation and institutionalisation because fun and pleasure is the goal.” (Bjelajac, 2006: 52–53).

This definition is probably too broad and imprecise, but one possible way to approach the nature of mountaineering is to use the concept of cooperative games/sports as opposed to the competitive ones. Cooperative games movement started as an anti-competition movement (cf. Bowman, 2005: 377), and we can define them as games that try to give an alternative to traditional (competitive) sports:

“Cooperative games (sometimes referred to as ‘new games’) offer this alternative by stressing cooperating, participating, being spontaneous, and playing for fun, as opposed to competing, spectating, observing, predetermined rules, and playing to win. Most importantly, cooperative games are subject to evolution – players are free to change the rules of the game and to improvise as they play.” (Bowman, 2005: 377)

The given definition is far too close to the understanding of mountaineering sports. Moreover, it seems that cooperativeness is an essential feature of mountaineering activities:

“Cooperation is required not just for success but also for survival in the sport of mountain climbing.” (Bowman, 2005: 377)

This quote is given along the picture of several mountain climbers passing some (probably ice-covered) tricky leg, roped up in four-person rope formation, capturing the essential idea of a mountain climbing: it is usually in a team, it relies on cooperation, it is spontaneous in handling the enormous number of variables with improvisation skills. There are few regulative rules (roping, rescue steps and protocols, etc.; cf. Cox & Fulsaas, 2003: 360–389), but the mere climb is completely unpredictable – and that is exactly the point: that makes the whole fun and enjoyment in climbing! However, this brings us to another feature, unfavourable when we talk about sports: the far too much reliance on luck.

Before considering the case further, we would like to highlight something. Introducing non-competitiveness and cooperativeness into the game, and es-

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While discussing two types of competition, mentioned above in this paper, Donnelly observes that “the system of rules and conventions that govern both direct and indirect competition is known to climbers as ‘ethics’ and is socially constructed and sanctioned. Ethics are created and changed by consensus among climbers through face-to-face interaction and specialist magazines, transmitted by the same

means, and enforced by both self-discipline and social pressure” (Donnelly, 1999b: 326).

10

The classical debates in the ethics of sport are primarily related to fair play issues (cf. Loland, 2002; Simon, Torres & Hager, 2015; etc.) or biomedical issues (cf. McNamee, 2014; Camporesi, 2015; etc.).

pecially considering the given points nicely fitting the concept of mountaineering, it should be noted that we changed the discourse and somehow slipped from a discussion about sports to a discussion about games. The famous discussion of Bernard Suits' regarding the definition of games (cf. Suits, 1978), which he brought in a "more portable version" – "playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles" (Suits, 1978: 41) – can be very instructive and useful at this point. Moreover, Suits uses exactly the mountain climbing as a prime example of a non-competitive game trying to stress more clearly the essential features necessary for the constitution of something to be defined as a game (cf. Suits, 1978: 84–87).<sup>11</sup>

### ***Luck***

To show problems with reliance on luck, we can ask: how is it possible to conceive mountaineering without the element of luck? We can mention the weather as an extremely unpredictable factor, especially in some mountain areas, despite improvements in the weather forecast. Sometimes a success relies on at least a little dose of luck, not just concerning weather, but also concerning other unpredictable elements, for example the high-altitude sickness which comes unexpectedly and depends on the individual's body features and optimal pace of ascent (for instructive review of problems associated with high altitude see: Wilkerson, 1992: 266–294). The more complex a mountaineering project is, the more possible problems may emerge, so without a bit of luck, despite the perfection of preparation, some projects are doomed to failure, especially if we include some huge risks in some of those projects.<sup>12</sup> The idea of "neutralising the environment" (cf. Bale, 2005: 519–520) emerged from the need to minimise uncontrollable variables in sports and eliminate luck as much as possible (it is enough to imagine how different circumstances for soccer players affect the game, for example, the difference between playing a match during a sunny day with breeze or heavy rain with strong wind). For mountaineering, such environmental changes are essential and completely inevitable. A mountain climber is not interested in diminishing environmental variables, aware that it is part of the adventure. They are not interested in taking the best circumstances for better conditions for beating the opponent, but to face the whole range of unpredictable environmental conditions by the training, skills, and ability to improvise – that is the whole point:

"Rock and mountain climbing are two sports where the goal is not to win but rather to test one's limits against nature." (Bale, 2005: 520)

The only thing that mountain climber is trying to do is to minimise the risk, what brings us to the next issue.

We can revert to Suits' definition, stressing the importance in "voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles" (Suits, 1978: 41), because it seems that mountaineering preparation is exactly a voluntary attempt to engage into completely unnecessary situations with highly specific obstacles. Mountaineering provides an extraordinary example of Suits' account.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Risk***

The third question is related to the second. Mountaineering projects are always considered risky – even minor climbs or hikes have plenty of risks: contagious ticks (borreliosis, meningoenzephalitis),<sup>14</sup> poison plants (itches and blisters from poison ivy),<sup>15</sup> wild animals (angry sow protecting her little

piglets),<sup>16</sup> etc. Some projects are so dangerous that they rely on a great dose of luck, e. g. the climb on the second-highest mountain in the world (Chogori/K2). Some authors outright stress the element of danger present in many mountaineering projects:

“Mountaineering as it has evolved since the late eighteenth century, consists of two elements: (1) a search for adventure – savory surprise – by scaling on foot (or skis) a mountain, cliff, glacier, or snowfeld by a route that offers (2) difficulty and potentially, danger.” (Boucher, 2005: 1037)

Boucher stresses that exactly mountaineering has a special, constitutive relation to objective danger:

“... no other sport requires a person to pay such unremitting, moment-after-moment attention to avoid becoming a casualty.” (Boucher, 2005: 1038)

Far too much elimination of danger forces people to reject any connection of “sport” with the mountain games. A very good example is Stan Boucher who added a small section to his encyclopaedic article about mountaineering concerned with “sport climbing”, deliberately putting it under quotation marks and implying that this is not a “true mountaineering” because

“... in true mountaineering people confront large mountains, cliffs, or slopes of snow and ice. An element of danger (hopefully minimized by skill, proper tools, and reasonable luck) and a chance for adventure should exist—not from facing the terrors that kept medieval Europeans out of their mountains but rather from mastering enjoyable novelty: savory surprise.” (Boucher, 2005: 1046)

Along with the reliance on luck, a considerable amount of risk and its calculation in many mountaineering projects is something that makes mountaineering a quite peculiar game and/or sport.

### *Protection and preservation of life*

The fourth question will be answered in the chapter on the bioethical analysis of mountaineering, and thus I will announce the core issues: 1) is there any analogous example or counterpart in the world of sports committed and

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Due to limitations, in this paper much more cannot be said about the importance and significance of Suits’ work for developing the philosophy of mountaineering, but we stress that his work is unavoidable in any such project.

12  
The best example is probably the climb on one of the deadliest mountain in the world – K2 (Chogori) in the Karakoram: to climb the top, the only possible route goes under the overhanging seracs, through so-called “Bottleneck”, a narrow couloir. Statistically, every fourth person dies during this highly dangerous climb. For a short overview of the essential facts about the K2 and the useful links concerning further reading about the mountain and surrounded area see Wikipedia Contributors, 2018.

13  
For a very useful review of Suits’ account see: Hurka (2005), Carlson (2014).

14  
Borreliosis is a bacterial disease and meningococcal meningitis a viral disease transferred by diseased ticks.

15  
Poison ivy or some similar plant could be not just a nuisance, but real health or life danger in specific circumstances: e.g. seemingly innocent relaxation of legs (by walking around with boots taken off) can become, after getting blisters from poison ivy in the area, a real challenge for a further walk (or climb!), especially if there is much more walking or climbing to be done.

16  
Every environment has some especially dangerous animals we should be aware of if we are travelling in these kinds of areas: from Californian grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) to Croatian poskok (*Vipera ammodytes*).

devoted to the protection and preservation of living and non-living nature as mountaineering is?; 2) are there any cases in which the great risk for mountaineer's life can be justified?

To conclude, we can say that the relation between mountaineering and sports is in some way antithetic. Mountaineering resists to standard, sport-specific ways of standardisation, determination and even classification, stressing its non-competitive nature, reliance on luck, very high dose of risk, and specific attitude concerning non-harming the living beings, but it shows enough features to be legitimately added to the huge corpus of sports activities, especially considering that some of the mountaineering activities gained the status of Olympic sport.

### **(Bio)ethics in Mountaineering**

Although we can legitimately speak about the bioethics of mountaineering or bioethics and mountaineering, I purposely pointed out the talk about bioethics *in* mountaineering, stressing the fact that a mountaineer has a special worldview which is – in a way – bioethical by its characteristics. Further discussion should illuminate this point.

Discussion about bioethics is large and sophisticated, but generally, most of the relevant authors in bioethics could agree upon several things concerning methodology and content, which makes bioethics a distinctive enterprise:

- 1) Concerning the content, bioethics deals with life (*bios*), as one author famously stated, with “life as a whole and each of its parts, life in all its forms, shapes, degrees, stages and manifestations” (Jurić, 2017 [2007]: 132).<sup>17</sup>
- 2) Concerning methodology, bioethics necessarily includes as much as different disciplines and perspectives it can in the understanding, debating and solving bioethical issues, in the process creating a platform for normative discussion wider than traditional ethics.<sup>18</sup>
- 3) From the beginnings of bioethics, it was clear that bioethics is not about academic discussions, at least not only and exclusively, because it was born in the waves of social movements, and in comparison to other academic disciplines, its distinctive feature is the full-blooded inclusiveness in everyday real-life situations.<sup>19</sup>
- 4) Leaning on the first three features, some authors talk about special bioethical sensibility which forms a unique bioethical worldview, marked by the underlined respect for life.<sup>20</sup>

All four aspects of bioethics can be easily linked with mountaineering. In fact, mountaineering shares some of those in quite impressive way and range.

### ***Content, especially concerning the living world***

Mountaineering is unique both in the world of sports and outside of it, in emphasising the need for the protection of life. This emphasise is general – it encompasses the entire living world and non-living environment. The stated could be easily traced through several declarations and recommendations of UIAA, as the basic official regulative documents for mountaineering. It includes human beings through the demand of responsible dealing with risk and the estimation of danger (cf. UIAA, 2001: *passim*; UIAA, 2002: Preamble, UIAA, 2009: Articles 1 and 6; etc.), but it gives a special focus



to the mountain medicine too (UIAA 2018a). It also includes non-human living beings through the promotion of preserving flora and fauna, but also especially stressing the need for preservation of intact oasis of the natural environment (cf. UIAA, 1997: *passim*; UIAA, 2001: *passim*; UIAA, 2002: Article 7; UIAA, 2009: Article 9). Moreover, it seems that mountaineering codes and declarations go even a step further: they advocate for the protection of nature in general, independently if it is or is not a habitat for living creatures – e.g. it considers cliffs and bare rocks referring to the values they have as something which has to be left to further generations to enjoy in the same way as we do (cf. UIAA, 2014: *passim*). Outside the noted declarations, it should be stressed that deep mountaineering ethics was encapsulated in 1991 under the *Leave No Trace* principles (cf. Cox & Fulsaas, 2003: 122–129).

Thus, by pointing out all the mentioned forms of protection, mountaineering radicalises bioethical postulates concerning the protection of living and non-living world.

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For this occasion, it is enough to mention that bioethics is defined by their founding fathers as exclusively related to life (*bios*). Potter coined the name of the discipline merging the ‘life’ (*bios*) and ‘ethics’, and in his article “Bioethics: The Science of Survival” he already in the title defined this new discipline as being dedicated to the survival of all life on Earth: he speaks about this new science which should primarily teach how to use knowledge, first of all, the biological one, for survival. He elaborates further that his primary target is the knowledge of ecology, genetics and physiology, which should be connected with fundamental human values if we want to find a right way of correct actions (Potter, 1970). On the other side, Jahr mentions for the first time in history the term ‘Bioethics’ (Bio-Ethik) defining it as “the assumption of ethical responsibilities not only towards humans but towards all living beings” (Jahr, 2017 [1926]: 16) the idea of which is best summarized in his famous formulation of Bioethical Imperative: “Respect every living being in general as an end in itself and treat it, if possible, as such!” (ibid: 18). For further elaboration of Potter’s and Jahr’s views see their seminal works: Potter (1971) and Jahr (2012 [1927]). In the “official” definition by Encyclopedia of Bioethics, this orientation towards life is clearly stated through defining a content (the subject of investigation) of bioethics as “moral dimensions [...] of the life sciences and health care” (Reich, 1995: xxi). The next editions of Encyclopedia kept such definition (cf. Post, 2004: xi; Jennings, 2014: xv).

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Some “classical” bioethical issues, such as abortion, is unimaginable even in comprehension, and more less in seeking answers and solution without encompassing so much different disciplines (in the mentioned case: e.g.

medicine, philosophy, theology, law, philosophy/ethics, etc.) and perspectives (in the mentioned case: e.g. religious, subjective/personal, public opinion, etc.). This is also stressed in the “official”, Encyclopedia definition of bioethics, claiming that the content of bioethics is investigated by “employing a variety of ethical methodologies in an interdisciplinary setting” (Reich, 1995: xxi; cf. Post, 2004: xi; Jennings, 2014: xv).

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It is enough to mention the known huge scandals (e.g. research of hepatitis in Willowbrook State School, research of cancer in Jewish Chronic Disease Hospital, Tuskegee Syphilis Study) and new medical possibilities first used (e.g. technological advancement in haemodialysis – “God Committee” in Seattle, first transplantation of heart – opened issues of victim’s consent, possibilities opened by usage of life-supporting machines as respirators – case of Anne Karen Quinlan), brought in public arena, which light the masses and finally pushed the policymakers to give some satisfying solutions by making laws (e.g. Belmont Report), declarations (Helsinki declaration) and codes of conduct (Nuremberg code) which are firmly laid in the fundamentals of bioethics. For an overview of the birth and historical development of bioethics, see Jonsen (1998), and for the useful selection of most important documents related to bioethics, see Appendix I in Post (2004).

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Ivana Zagorac argues for such a bioethical worldview and gives several examples of proponents of such a world view: Fritz Jahr, Albert Schweitzer and St. Francis of Assisi (Zagorac, 2017). For more elaborate discussion about sensibility as one of the bioethical key features see Zagorac (2012, 2018).

### *Methodological aspect*

Mountaineering projects could be seen as dealing with concrete bioethical issues because they include the questions of life safeguarding, the security of the whole group and the protection of the environment (see talk about the content above). Interdisciplinarity is *conditio sine qua non* for successfulness in such projects (from simple trips and hikes to the complex climbs and expeditions) because it includes broad and different types of knowledge needed for a full success. We will list some of the needed disciplines and areas of knowledge, ranging from hard sciences to humanities:<sup>21</sup>

- a) *Technical sciences and physics of materials*: knowledge about clothing and features of different fabrics is needed even for the first steps outdoor. Knowledge about endurance and characteristic of some basic (e.g. boots) and advanced (e. g. ice axe) equipment is crucial: the adequate knowledge about your gear and equipment can save you from some minor annoying problems as blisters, but in many cases your life depends on it since you need to use your crampons, ice axe or rope.
- b) *Nutritionism*: knowledge about nutrients and their optimal usage in different circumstances (of organism or/and environment) and knowledge about optimal hydration is highly important. In hard or extreme exertions such as mountain climbs, it is rational to wear light enough but nutritionally satisfying kind and amount of food. The same holds for water and isotonic liquids.
- c) *Geography*: knowledge about natural features of Earth surface (geology) as the capability of the recognition and differentiation of different kinds of terrain and plants could be crucial. For example, the timely recognition and bypassing of vast areas of mountain pine – as an extremely difficult obstacle for advancing – could save not just time but life in areas where we should not be caught by night or in moments when we are over exhausted and out of supplies.
- d) *Biology*: knowing and recognising the animals living in places we plan to visit (from the smallest one as ticks to the larger as grizzlies), or plants growing there (from those usable for eating as blueberries to the poison ones as poison ivy) could be a lifesaving knowledge.
- e) *Meteorology*: this knowledge is necessary to plan correctly and respond adequately to the weather changes: knowing the general things about moisture accumulation in clouds, patterns of wind currents, but also the information about microclimate of some area is crucial. To give an example, it is a complete foolishness to climb up Biokovo mountain (Croatia) if we slowly advance and in middle of the day, if clouds are increasingly growing at the mountain top, to ignore the fact that summer storm is coming (despite the clear day and no precipitation announced). Similarly, it is foolish to try to make a winter climb on Velebit mountain (Croatia) during the culmination of a wind bora which can achieve the strength of a hurricane. Likewise, it is suicidal to decide to go in gorges like Narrows in Zion National Park (Utah) without knowing about possible flash floods even in much greater perimeter, because the gathered water comes from a vast area and we are doomed if a flash flood reaches us.
- f) *Chemistry and physics*: knowledge about physical features of the terrain is important for preparation (physical, psychological and technical). For example, going to Velebit with sandals is crazy considering the sharpness of limestone formations there. This is especially important if we would

like to climb mountains in different seasons or we need to use combined climbing in higher mountains because basic physics of snow movement concerning the steepness of slopes or chemistry of ice transformation concerning the stability of surface could be sufficient reason to quit the project and go back (e.g. relating to the possibility of avalanches). Another example is the knowledge about boiling conditions (of water) at high altitudes.

- g) *History and ethnology*: to know some, at least basic, information about the country we are planning to visit and people living there could also be lifesaving. E.g. to climb some holly mountain could enrage the locals and possibly provoke a death threat.
- h) *Ethics*: to know general mountaineering codes, and local highland communities' customs could also be crucial. For example, it could be quite shocking for someone usually climbing mountains in Triglav National Park (Slovenia) with so much *via ferratas* (trails with installed iron ropes, wedges and ladders) to encounter "leave no trace" ethics in US national parks with no (or extremely minimal intervention) in nature even in a most visited trails such as the ridge trail on Old Rag Mountain in Shenandoah National Park (Virginia).

From this (quite shortened and necessarily selective) list it is obvious that preparing a mountaineering project is necessarily involved not just in collecting knowledge from different disciplines and sciences, but in immediate, constant and continuing combination and update of all those knowledge – interdisciplinary thinking in mountaineering is simply unavoidable. It is standard.

Additionally, such interdisciplinarity is not enough. Preparation involves many other different perspectives which can be crucial for success. We will list some of them:

- a) *Personal perspective*: psychological preparation is probably the most important, after which follows physical conditioning and technical training. Mountaineers are personally involved in their project, and the success relies on personal preparation and other psychological skills/virtues, such as self-knowledge, self-control, courage, and so on. Overestimating one's skills could be fatal, and underestimating them could be imprisoning.
- b) *Teamwork*: the projects most serious rely on the possibility of teamwork. In expeditions, for example, leadership skills are crucial for success: selecting the right and collaborative team (at least from initially known dispositions of members), team building, managing the cohesion of the group during the trip etc.
- c) *Skills*: besides knowledge and personal preparation, mountaineering projects, especially those technically more difficult, depend heavily on the technical capability of climber(s). Technical skill is an aspect which is not reachable without hard and dedicated training of particular skills (climbing techniques, belaying techniques, stopping the fall or slip with ice axe etc.).

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For the best general detailed overview of theoretical, physical, psychological and technical preparation see the so-called "Bible for mountaineers and climbers", *Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills*, republished and updated in 9 editions (last edition in

2017). I used the 7th edition (Cox & Fulsaas, 2003). I will provide a more practical and less technical selection, primarily trying to clearly show the dependence of mountaineering project on extremely many variables and relating knowledge/skills.

- d) *Experience*: despite theoretical knowledge and skills gained in controlled conditions (e.g. climb training on the boulder in the gym), direct outdoor experience and the slow gradation of those experiences is the most important ingredient to mountaineer's success. All the knowledge, skills, personal endurance and teamwork should be tested in the real situation outdoor.

Listing only several essential perspectives, it becomes obvious that mountaineering is more than interdisciplinary activity, it is a complex and sophisticated enterprise which unavoidably includes many additional perspectives. Moreover, mountaineering includes other different activities, and in that sense, the combination of various perspectives is constant. Some essential documents underline the fact of existing “pluralism of climbing games”:

“Modern climbing encompasses a broad spectrum of activities ranging from hiking and bouldering to crag climbing and mountaineering. Mountaineering comprises extreme forms of high altitude alpinism and expedition climbing in high ranges like the Andes or Himalayas. Although the dividing lines between the various forms of climbing are by no means rigid, the following categorization makes it possible to present the vast diversity of modern mountain sports comprehensibly. Hiking and trekking<sup>22</sup> (...); Climbing via ferratas<sup>23</sup> (...), Classic mountaineering<sup>24</sup> (...), Ski mountaineering,<sup>25</sup> ‘Climbing games’.”<sup>26</sup> (UIAA, 2002: Annex 2)

The need for preserving such pluralism is stated clearly:

“It should be our goal to preserve the pluralism of climbing styles leaving them their special arenas.” (UIAA, 2002: Annex 2)

Thus, the pluralism and pluriperspectivism is another demand of, and the requirement for the existence of mountaineering (as a peculiar group of sports activities). Mountaineering presupposes pluralism of approaches to the same content – visiting mountains and wilderness! The mode of approach and movement in the natural environment is what often marks the dominant type of mountaineering activity, but many activities usually presuppose the combination of several modes. Thus mountaineering constantly exists in such pluralism of approaches to the unique general content.

### *Activism*

Mountaineering is rarely a subject of academic discussion,<sup>27</sup> and moreover, as we have sketched earlier, it resists even the basic categorisation related to the world of sport. Mountaineering is alive activity determined exclusively from day to day by their proponents – mountaineers. Guidelines and regulations are vividly debated, and in recent years many important documents concerning the safety of people and protection of the natural environment were written.<sup>28</sup> However, the real strength of mountaineering is in its continuous, everyday inclusion in exercising practices which promote chosen values directly in the real environment, outdoor, on the field.

Mountaineering possesses an exceptional self-regulatory power of self-criticism and the tools of social pressure, by which mountaineering community very clearly and uncompromisingly condemn some practices of members, resulting in their automatic exclusion from the community. It is all about the fact that usually, these practices involve the questions of life and death, and there is no room for forgiveness and giving a second chance. Putting your teammate at risk (e.g. by inadequate belaying in climbing game or by not giving help and support in medical emergencies or danger), destruction or degradation of some habitat, especially of some endemic plants or animals (e.g. by taking edelweiss as a souvenir), damaging the climbing routes by

inadequate sort or style of climbing (e.g. “dry tooling” in sandstone rocks) are some phenomena which echo like a bomb in mountaineering community, and the subjects are very soon put on the pillory with reflection about them as the individuals who are the shame for the entire community. Those individuals are automatically discredited as mountaineers.

### *Sensibility and shared worldview*

What was previously stated testifies about some generally shared worldview in the mountaineering community, despite the mentioned pluralism.<sup>29</sup> A classical mountaineer understands very well a sport climber who laments about a destroyed climbing route because it is analogous with the destroyed path or trail they are sometimes faced with. A climber understands the hikers raging on irresponsible excursionist who pollutes some source of water by some practices because they often depend on water found in nature, and so on. There is a specific sensibility shared among mountaineers, routed in specific

22

“Hiking to mountain huts, cols and summits is the most widespread form of mountaineering. A multiday hike in the mountains and other wilderness areas, especially off the beaten track, is often referred to as a trek. Hiking turns into a technically more demanding form of mountaineering as soon as hands have to be used for progress.” (UIAA, 2002: Annex 2)

23

“Routes on steep rocky terrain equipped with steel cables and iron rungs are becoming more and more popular. An arena hitherto reserved for technical rock climbing is made accessible through an elaborate infrastructure and special protection systems.” (UIAA, 2002: Annex 2)

24

“A mountaineer in this category will rock climb up to a standard of UIAA grade 3 and ascend up to 50-degree snow and ice. The typical goals in this category of climbing are the regular routes of peaks in the alpine zone.” (UIAA, 2002: Annex 2)

25

“The adherents of this classic form of alpinism use alpine or telemark skis to hike up mountains or traverse entire ranges. Due to the complexity of the skills required, this discipline ranks among the most demanding – and dangerous – forms of mountaineering.” (UIAA, 2002: Annex 2)

26

“A system for categorizing the different kinds of climbing introduced by Lito Tejada-Flores, has proved helpful in describing the many facets that modern technical climbing has acquired. Every specialised type of climbing ‘game’ is defined by an informal but a precise set of rules, formulated so as to keep the task at hand difficult – and thereby interesting.

The greater the danger in a particular climbing game due to the natural environment, the more lenient the restrictions for the use of technical equipment. The lower the objective dangers, the stricter its ‘rules’ get.” (UIAA, 2002: Annex 2) “Climbing games” are further differentiated by sort (bouldering, climbing on artificial objects, crag climbing, continuous climbing, big wall, aid climbing, alpine climbing) and style (adventure climbing and sport climbing, super-alpine climbing, expedition climbing) (cf. UIAA, 2002: Annex 2).

27

There are several interesting academic approaches to mountaineering: from historical point of view (cf. Hansen, 2013), from the perspective of cultural history of fascination with mountains (cf. Macfarlane, 2003), and even a highly professional practical approach from the position of training theory (cf. House – Johnston, 2014), but there are very few philosophically oriented approaches, coming up just recently (cf. Krein, 2019). See all UIAA documents we are mentioning above.

28

Ibid.

29

Even in some more extreme mountaineering practices, the need for finding a generally shared worldview is evident. Thus, Kevin Krein is trying in the book length, and from the perspective of more extreme “nature sports” to answer the central question of the mentioned worldview, narrowly connected with other two questions – about our relationship with nature and the way of living a good life: “How might we understand our relationship to the natural world? How do the activities in which we participate influence our worldview? And, the most important philosophical question of all: what is the best way to live one’s life?” (Krein, 2019: 1–2)

ethics or, more precisely, bioethics of mountaineering. It should be noted that this kind of sensibility is present in all the mentioned UIAA declarations, but it is probably captured the best by the *Leave No Trace* principles (cf. Cox & Fulsaa, 2003: 122–129). This opens a room for grounding a particular philosophy – philosophy of mountaineering.

### **Grounding the Philosophy of Mountaineering as a Unique Enterprise**

We can affirm the thesis that a peculiar philosophy connects (or should connect) the members of the mountaineering community. Bioethical elements are obvious, and it comes out that mountaineering is a prime example of bioethical worldview, moreover a kind of its radical variant. Mountaineering demands the self-preparation, teaching the others and technical skills. It requires vast theoretical knowledge, but also constant exercise, training and being outdoor “on the spot”. It promotes respect and love towards nature in all seasons, and it cherishes the special relationship towards nature and the local inhabitants of particular mountaineering areas. It stresses the need for particular care towards mountaineering companions, local inhabitants, nature, culture and tradition of hosts in the areas mountaineers are visiting.

It is an extremely demanding enterprise; it requires full devotion but provides an enormous range of experiences, impressions and diversity of cohabitation modes with nature. A mountaineer who shares such a mountaineering philosophy accepts such philosophy as their (fundamental) life philosophy. Mountaineering is something to be lived and not just performed or practised. It is inwrought in mountaineer’s everyday life by the promotion of basic ethical, social, cultural, health and many other values, becoming a unique enterprise worthy of philosophical and bioethical reflection.

Mountaineering shows itself as a life philosophy caught between sports and bioethics. Conclusively, we can say that philosophy of mountaineering grounds itself into a truly specific balance between bioethics and sport, whereby it seems that when it becomes too close to sport it threatens some bioethically relevant features it has, or, vice versa, when it radically promotes some bioethical standpoints, it distances a lot from sport, losing a part of its nature along the way. This peculiarity of mountaineering enables a unique philosophy of mountaineering which cannot easily fit the classical categories of the philosophy of sport, but it is also partly elusive for bioethical analysis in its radicalism and broadness. Nevertheless, aspects of sport and bioethics enable the thinking of mountaineering inside the framework of the philosophy of sport and bioethical discourse, thus making it a unique intellectual enterprise which equally depends on both the philosophy of sport and bioethics.

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### Igor Eterović

## **Između sporta i bioetike: zasnivanje filozofije planinarstva**

#### **Sažetak**

*Planinarstvo obuhvaća velik broj aktivnosti, postajući krovni pojam za skup aktivnosti na otvorenom. Iako kategorizirano kao sport, planinarstvo se uvriježenoj definiciji sporta opire, a pogotovo glavnoj struji shvaćanja sporta kao natjecateljske aktivnosti. S druge strane, etička pitanja o sportu ne pokrivaju većinu planinarskih praksi, što za sobom povlači potrebu za širim normativnom perspektivom – bioetičkom analizom. Argumentira se da takav pristup može zasnovati mogućnost razumijevanja planinarstva kao posebne vrste sporta i različiti njegova posebna svojstva korištenjem bioetičke analize. Pokazuje se da je planinarstvo jedinstven sport, ali i da planinarstvo udjeljuje i promiče autentičnu filozofiju sporta, opimjerujući odista bioetički pogled na svijet. Planinar je vođen jedinstvenim skupom sržnih vrijednosti sabranih pod nešto što bismo mogli i trebali zvati filozofijom planinarstva.*

#### **Ključne riječi**

planinarstvo, sport, bioetika, filozofska analiza, filozofija planinarstva

**Igor Eterović**

**Zwischen Sport und Bioethik:  
Grundwissen zur Philosophie des Bergsteigens**

**Zusammenfassung**

*Bergsteigen umfasst eine Vielzahl von Praktiken und wird zum Oberbegriff für eine Reihe menschlicher Aktivitäten im Freien. Obwohl Bergsteigen als Sport eingestuft wird, widersetzt es sich der Standarddefinition des Sports und insbesondere der vorherrschenden Richtung im Verständnis des Sports als Wettkampftätigkeit. Auf der anderen Seite decken die geläufigen ethischen Fragen in Bezug auf Sport nicht die überwiegende Mehrheit der Bergsteigerpraktiken ab, weshalb eine breitere normative Perspektive erforderlich ist – eine bioethische Analyse. Es wird argumentiert, dass ein solcher Ansatz die Möglichkeit begründen könnte, das Bergsteigen als eine besondere Sportart aufzufassen und seine besonderen Merkmale durch die Verwendung bioethischer Analyse zu differenzieren. Auf diese Weise wird gezeigt, dass Bergsteigen ein einzigartiger Sport ist, aber auch, dass Bergsteiger eine authentische Lebensphilosophie teilen und fördern, die eine fürwahr bioethische Weltanschauung exemplifiziert. Der Bergsteiger lässt sich von einer einzigartigen Reihe von Grundwerten leiten, die unter dem Begriff zusammengefasst sind, den wir Philosophie des Bergsteigens nennen können und sollen.*

**Schlüsselwörter**

Bergsteigen, Sport, Bioethik, philosophische Analyse, Philosophie des Bergsteigens

**Igor Eterović**

**Entre sport et bioéthique :  
fonder une philosophie de l'alpinisme**

**Résumé**

*L'alpinisme comprend un grand nombre de pratiques et est ainsi devenu un terme générique pour un ensemble d'activités en plein air. Bien que l'alpinisme soit catégorisé comme un sport, il résiste à la définition classique de sport en tant que qu'activité de compétition. De plus, les questions habituelles d'éthique concernant le sport ne couvrent pas la grande majorité des pratiques de l'alpinisme, ce qui nous contraint à réfléchir à une perspective normative plus large – une analyse bioéthique. Nous affirmons qu'une telle approche peut permettre de comprendre l'alpinisme comme un genre de sport particulier et de différencier ses caractéristiques particulières en se servant d'une analyse bioéthique. Ainsi, en illustrant un regard sur le monde véritablement bioéthique, nous montrons que l'alpinisme est un sport unique, et que l'alpinisme partage et promeut une authentique vie philosophique. L'alpiniste est guidé par un ensemble unique de valeurs fondamentales rassemblées dans ce que l'on pourrait et ce que l'on devrait appeler une philosophie de l'alpinisme.*

**Mots-clés**

alpinisme, sport, bioéthique, analyse philosophique, philosophie de l'alpinisme