

## ETHICS AND SPORT: WHOSE ETHICS, WHICH ETHOS – A PROLEGOMENON –

Milan Hosta

*Department of the Philosophy of Sport, Faculty of Sport, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia*

Preliminary communication

UDC 796.011.5

### Abstract:

The inability to make a distinction between the inner and the outer view, between the internal and the external values of a game leads to a misinterpretation of the ethos of a game as practice, and the ethos of the institution, which governs the practice. Unfortunately, that error has not only cognitive but far-reaching ideological consequences as well.

By justifying the ethical pluralism through our discussion, we wish to point out that moral pluralism is not an apology for moral relativism. The moral autonomy of sport is trapped in the structure of the game, and is inadmissible per se, or has to be understood within the context of the distinction between the ethics of sport and sport ethics.

*Key words: philosophy, sport ethics, pluralism, ethos, sense for sport*

### Sport and ethics

When thinking about sport ethics we come up against the fundamental dimensions of sport and of the human being. Obviously, we need to ask ourselves which is the central concern here – sport or the human being. However, it is about both – because, clearly, there is no sport without a human being!

The aim of the paper is implicitly written in the above lines. It is about the reconsideration of some general metaethical and metaphysical questions of sport science and practice, with the implication to rethinking the scientific paradigm in sport humanities. However, we will not provide the readers with answers to concrete questions. On the contrary, our aim is to open the terrain for further research into metaphysical and metaethical levels of sport science; therefore even more questions will be raised due to our insight.

A review of the literature at our disposal reveals some previous attempts to understand sport ethics in the way we approach the problem. The ethos of sport tells us that there is an authoritative tradition in the specific sport culture that substantiates the acceptable and unacceptable. Some authors questioned the ethos of elite sport itself (Breivik, 1998; Loland, 1998, 2000; Volkwein, 1995), and some offered a new way of understanding the reality of

elite sport ethos, not trying to moralize on its moral defect (Gebauer, 1991; König, 1995).

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

How can one think sport might be the most important question before we enter the field of ethical contradictions of sport? If sport appears in many forms and has roots in different grounds, we argue that consequentially the conception of the forms manifested as sport should be 'colourful'<sup>1</sup>. Therefore – to point out the pluralism of sport practices and the pluralism of sport ethics - we can consider recreational sport from the *ethics of proper measure*, top-level sport from the *ethics of maximum*, and extreme sport from the *ethics of other* or maybe moving beyond ethical towards aesthetical. These are all possible and plausible, though not single, points of departure into the ethical reasoning of sport. A very important issue arises also from the perspective of eco-ethics, which places sport within a larger context of global environmental concerns and suggests the concept of sustainable develop-

<sup>1</sup> For example, recreational sports are hard to deal with normative since they are non-normative by the very nature, top-level sport is to a certain extent governed by the law of winning, and in extreme sport we face intentional risk taking.

ment. We may witness even the substitution of subject: for in some representations and understandings of sport the focus shifts from the sportsperson to the spectator, which we can argue about when dealing with elite sport and economically contaminated utilitarian logic (Hosta, 2002).

Hypothetically, setting the game and competition as ontological categories of sport, it becomes clear that many ethical situations are already pre-figured and expected. Moral judgment concerning such situations is settled in accordance with the rules and the interpretations of the rules. If this is so, then two important questions arise. First, to whom is the sportsperson 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 the ethics of sport in the sense of the non-questioned autonomy of sport is far from philosophically satisfactory. Although a vast amount of literature has been written within the limits of the autonomy of sport, sport ethics is given the chance to uncover deeply rooted patterns that govern sport. We can ethically question the uniquely sporting activity in this manner.

Sport speaks about human primal, natural, cultural and technologically acquired needs and capabilities. Topical issues at this level can be formed in the questioning of technological progress and the interference of technology and pharmacology into the body-degeneration and self-construction, self-destruction, etc. We search for adaptational characteristics of the human organism and of social subsystems. That is: the ideology of technological progress governs also the sports world. Being interdisciplinary, the interesting phenomenon of sport offers many opportunities to exhibit the achievements of non-sporting institutions, which seek to use sport in the service of a society of consumption, spectacle and risk<sup>2</sup> (Hosta, 2007).

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

## Ethics

Modern man is strongly aware that overall ethical renaissance is unavoidable to survive. The post-modern thought that *anything goes* in times of ultra-liberal capitalistic democracy is driving us towards the opposite. Yet we strive for the basic and universal ethical principles to live by, to survive as a species. The all-embracing threat to life does not only regard humans but all living creatures. The irrepressible pollution of the environment, the increasing gap of social and economic differences, and easy access to weapons of mass destruction do not guarantee anything at all. If some things seem to us self-evident and inertial, this will no longer be the case given the speed of our progress in the near future. Satisfaction of basic natural needs is becoming an increasingly important question nowadays. Potable water, a clean environment, faultless/healthy food and social peace are the luxuries of life that only a few can access or afford. If at the beginning of the history of humankind the question of survival was a personal matter, it is now becoming a collective one. As Ošljaj (2000) says, the problematic horizon of the extremely complex problem of the development of society is becoming a global theoretical and practical challenge of the first degree.

In order to create the conditions for the long-term survival of its own kind, the human being has to reconsider, re-evaluate and adapt its agency in relation to nature. The ecological crisis, as recognized by the present state of nature, is proof of human alienation from it. The restoration of nature as an object (being at our disposal to use as much as possible; the total instrumentalization of all given resources, etc.) leads us to the point where our usage must become questionable because there is nothing new or more to use. Speaking about use, we have to consider misuse also. About the evolution of ethical thought, and consequently on the responsible regulation of evaluated relations, Kirn (1997) says:

*"There are four important ethical relations for humans: the relation to oneself, to other people, to nature, and to God. Ecologically speaking, ethics is not only about setting the boundaries and commands when dealing with other people, but to all living creatures and nature in general. Till now the moral regulation has been concerned by inter-human relations and not the other levels also. The transition toward an ecological society and ecological culture points out the moral restrictions of ever growing luxury in the biosphere, where no concern is given to other beings. At this transition an important role will be played, that is, the transformation of current anthropocentric and teocentric ethics into the ecocentric one."*

<sup>2</sup> Referring to Debord and Beck.

Ethics is therefore not only a question of human-human relations, but more and more a question of human-nature relations. Although the sport ethics literature devotes much of the following to the relation to oneself and others, we can expect a growing interest in the ethics of sport that is also sensitive to nature. Eco-ethics or, put differently, the ethics of nature, is not only the trend of some new-age school of thought or caprice of some philosophers trying to go beyond the aforementioned postmodern motto. The ethics (Ošljaj, 2000, p. 13) that ascribes an autonomous value to nature and sets it as a subject sees nature as: *“absolute other, which remains hidden and unattainable to our principal anthropomorphic value [...]”*

Toth (2002, p. 99), following Tillich, writes that a man without morality is not a man at all. Morality is the function of a man as a human being. The moral act to Tillich does not mean:

*“[...] some act with which we would follow God’s or human commands, but the act in which life is integrated within the dimension of spirit. And this means that in the community of persons it constitutes as a person?”*

A human as a person is never constituted to his/her fullness. Focusing on the dimension of spirit is essential in this constant openness and never-ending moral tryout. Such centralized positioning set a human being against the world and, at the same time, as a sole body, into the world as an integral part. This can be gained only through inner strength when the values of self-understanding are recognised and formed – the establishment of one’s inner nature in becoming a person. That is why ethics works as a concrete philosophy and is accepted as such. To choose and to decide presupposes evaluation, therefore abolishing the borders between mind and agency. Alongside this one has to take into account the responsibilities taken when choosing, deciding and evaluating. So, the human attitude, an ethical position, is not only theoretical but above all practical. Personality, of course, is judged through actions alone. Because of this the author supports the ethics that follows life - eternal and a lively life. Similarly, Kovačič - Peršin (1997) says that since a human being is undetachable from other human beings one’s *humanitas* is defined exactly by one’s ethical posture towards his/her fellow-(wo)man. All the content of this posture is found within responsibility. Responsibility is first and above all the acceptance of mutual being. Such a posture is not something in general. It can only exist as a personal attitude of a human being. The ethics of responsibility to fellow-(wo)man can be understood also as an ethics to nature. The body as our natural maxim is closest to us. The more we think we have mastered

the natural, the more power we have, and the more responsibility is laid upon us.

In our quest to develop sport ethics, obviously, meta-ethical origins have to be addressed. If we dare to listen to our intuitive voice, the establishment of ethics solely on the basis of relations among humans cannot match the concerns of today’s philosophical and environmental challenges. We believe, and there is no reason to oppose it, that the ethical turn, which demands the re-evaluation of our relation to nature, also embraces sport. Moreover, many sport activities engage directly or indirectly with the natural environment, not questioning their effects and consequences<sup>3</sup>. Such an approach – on behalf of sustainable development and an acceptable world ethos – cannot be afforded any more.

Ethics, we said, can be understood as the philosophy of morality (Bond, 1996). Consequentially, when we talk about norms of behaviour, codes of conduct, regulative game rules, bans and attached sanctions, we might say we are dealing with sport morality. The relations of trust between the coach and an athlete, the justice of the referee, respect for the opponents are moral questions when viewed and exercised in practice. The same dilemmas may count as ethical when being reflected philosophically. Sport morality is a notion that can be understood at least from two perspectives. The first one is the perspective of motivational focus, competitive tension and anxiety, and expressed will to win, which falls more in the field of sport psychology. Secondly, we are talking about the atmosphere created by the relations of specific or all parties involved (athletes, coaches, referees, fans, etc.). In the philosophy of sport such phenomenon is known as the ethos of sport, which will be closely revealed later on.

### Searching for the method

Sport is a practice where the body plays an 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 a present and solid category. We wish, in the spirit of interpretative options, that also *game* and *competition* can be regarded as ontological categories of sport. But we do not dare yet to jump to such conclusions without a substantial argument.

We will not spend 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 a definition that is able to make a clear cut distinction between sport and a non-sport activity was abandoned a long time ago. Strong support to our intuitive reasoning has been

<sup>3</sup> A suggestion: our first consideration to nature is the relation to the sporting bodies we are.

recently given by McFee (2004). A detailed explanation, with contextually and temporarily agreed understanding, makes much better sense when questioning sport philosophically.

What about sport as practice? To be consistent with the epistemological process, we should leave our contemplation here and dip into the world of sport practice. But would we then be able to talk more meaningful about the experience? Would we feel like talking about its importance 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 obvious. Time and again we witness dull answers to the questions of journalists following horrible defeats and amazing victories of obviously highly skilled sportspersons. 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 had this in mind when he replied to a journalist: "I ran, you write." He was running - period. That's it. He did not reflect on running and ask himself why he was running. In the moment, he was the run itself, the embodied run. The gap shown between practice and theory<sup>4</sup> is the crossing line in modes of being. It is impossible to be on both sides simultaneously and consciously. 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, then there is neither both nor one. In this manner Coe invites the other to his story; some people run, some write, some watch, etc. Everyone on his/her own, but then again, all together. Nobody asks questions, since it is clear to everyone, following Coe. But still, the task of the journalists is to question, to translate the feelings of the experience into words. When Coe stopped running he did not stop being Coe. The run was not over, when the watch stopped. Metaphorically, we will not trust to sport its autonomous position. It is about human activity that always carries a narrative, whether we like it or not, of an individual and society.

Sports science is interdisciplinary by nature, and in this manner, it tries to interpret sport. The more points of view and variety of sciences there are (physics, biomechanics, biochemistry, physiology, psychology, anthropology, sociology, etc.), the more the image gets 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 captured

in such an approach is a state – a matter of methodological technology and professional skill – and only by interpretation of the paint created can we move 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. We can never be too cautious in the scientization of practice. We should try to keep in mind this principle, for we know that many times empirical results from the laboratory combined with statistics are one thing, and the actual practice is another. If nothing else, we are left with the chance to show the limits of our cognition, and the methodology used. In order to keep in touch with practice, it is good occasionally to support our thoughts by concrete examples, and where appropriate use the findings of empirical research in sport.

Paraphrasing Hocart<sup>5</sup> we can say that the time has passed, when sport ceased to be just practice. The cognitive capabilities of the human are limited in time and space, subjectively and objectively. We are in the world consciously only to a certain extent; as needed in a given moment or as engaged we are, and as it 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 everyday life is primarily 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 (2002, p. 139) *practical sense* might show us the 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 de-temporalize 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)."*

It is believed that with the aid of scientific-logical reasoning, based on the principles of formal logic, man will – ever 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 generalisation, ordering, systematization and rational explanation. This, however, is already a transition from concrete life to the abstract, from practice to theory, from lived to reflected or to dis-

<sup>4</sup> Theory, for this opportunity, is understood as the explanation of practice, as a reflection and interpretation of pre-reflective, pre-rational, corporal, intuitive and emotional.

<sup>5</sup> Hocart in Bourdieu (2002, p. 62): "It has been a long time since man stopped just to live, and began to think life."

cursive 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 the lived and the 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 inability to embrace the whole at once, we will try to grasp it where we are able to, and where we find it appropriate. We spoke in favour of ethical pluralism in the first part, which sounds postmodernist, 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 the finishing 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 acknowledge life to every sport activity, but each and every one of them must be reconsidered from the firm ground of ecoethics, and only then the true value and subsistence in the mosaic of the sports-world will be given.

We are aware of some possible objections regarding this way of getting to the heart of the problem. One of those might be that we have never been seriously involved in the practice of top-level sport and therefore there is not much that we can know and say about it. Even if top-level or extreme sport were never our domain, it does not justify the argument that nothing very essential can be said about it. It is like reproaching the doctor who heals a disease that he never had and might never have in the future. But as the physician is aware of the relation to the patient when treating the disease, also we have to seriously consider our relation to sportspersons and sport practice when trying to get accustomed to its logic (or 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 devote to experience. To be one

is neither necessary nor sufficient for knowing one. Indeed, as Fay (1996, p. 28) 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."*

Regarding this, we are aware of the importance of the sense of ethos of the game and sense for an emotional attachment to it. Since our interests are ethical, we presuppose that the actors in sport are rational, although understanding that in some cases being rational contradicts the sole activity. This is one more reason to be aware of the slippery moralizing ground that too often accompanies moral judgements in sport. We 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 a scientific utopia. We have to stand somewhere; we have to have some footing not to be sucked into a cultural vacuum. Consciously leaving some space for unconsciousness is the core issue that we believe makes any text lively and juicy. It gives the opportunity for different interpretations. It allows us to develop a *sense* for sport. And it allows us, being conscious of societal reproductive forces, to express our world outlook.

Various elements of the ethos are not themselves parts of the formal structure of the game but they receive their sense and orientation from that structure. The one who sees, and feels the game in this manner is able to understand, experience and describe its inner values, traditions and formal laws. The one who is not capable of gaining such perspective will interpret the game within the frame of its institutionalized nature – economic influence, political repercussions and general social norms. The inability to make a distinction between the inner and outer view, between the internal and external values of a game leads to a misinterpretation of the ethos of a game as practice, and the ethos of the institution, which governs the practice. Unfortunately, as emphasised by Morgan (1995), that error has not only cognitive but far-reaching ideological consequences as well.

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Submitted: October 4, 2007

Accepted: May 19, 2008

Correspondence to:

Assist. Milan Hosta, PhD

Faculty of Sport, University of Ljubljana

Department of the Philosophy of Sport

E-mail: milan.hosta@fsp.uni-lj.si

## ETIKA I SPORT: ČIJA ETIKA, KOJI OBIČAJI – PROLEGOMENA –

### Sažetak

#### Uvod

Već je na prvi pogled jasno da je sport vrlo kompleksan fenomen koji izaziva etičke proturječnosti. S jedne strane usađen je između moralno-edukacijskih i esencijalno-bioloških potreba, a s druge strane, zarobljen je između ekstremne eksploatacije i strastvenih predodžaba našeg vremena te zaigrane nevinosti tijela i uma.

Opravađanjem etičkog pluralizma našom diskusijom željeli bismo istaknuti da moralni pluralizam nije isprika za moralni relativizam, koji bi se isto tako mogao označiti kao etički bezdan. Moralna autonomija sporta, koja se temelji na ideji "slobodnog okupljanja" – dobrovoljnih priloga članova civilnog društva – ali je u isto vrijeme zarobljena u strukturu igre koja je neprihvatljiva sama po sebi ili mora biti shvaćena u kontekstu razlikovanja između etike sporta i sportske etike.

Budući da se bavimo etičkim pluralizmom, ne možemo unaprijed obećati očekivanu snagu uvjeravanja etičkog rasuđivanja. Sport nije jednoličan, uniforman fenomen i zbog toga bi takav zahtjev bio pretenciozan. Ipak, kao profesori fizičke kulture (kineziologije) i sportski treneri moramo čvrsto stajati na etičkim načelima ili barem moramo biti svjesni skliskog tla na kojemu stojimo. S obzirom na naše zaključivanje, moramo uzeti u obzir da je ovaj kratak uvod tek pokušaj da se otkrije složenost etičke misli u sportu i da se neprekidna rasprava osvježi nekim drukčijim pogledima.

U našem mukotrpnom pohodu da razvijemo sportsku etiku, očigledno se moramo osvrnuti na meta-etičke izvore. Ako se usudimo poslušati naš intuitivni glas, utemeljenje etike isključivo na temeljima odnosa među ljudima ne može nikako odgo-

varati zabrinutosti današnjim filozofskim i okolin-  
skim izazovima. Mi vjerujemo, a ne postoji razlog protiv toga, da je etički preokret, koji zahtijeva preispitivanje, ponovno vrednovanje našeg odnosa s prirodom, isto tako isključio i sport. Štoviše, mnoge sportske aktivnosti vezane su izravno ili neizravno s prirodnim okruženjem, a da se pritom nitko ne pita o njihovu utjecaju i posljedicama. Takav pristup – u ime održivog razvoja i prihvaćenog svjetskog etosa, obrasca ponašanja – ne možemo si više priuštiti.

Sportski etos je vrlo složen i osjetljiv fenomen koji do određene granice može biti reguliran i uravnotežen u smislu praćenja ideje dobre igre ili dobrog natjecanja. Mi shvaćamo etos kao sinergijski izlaz mnogih faktora koji sudjeluju u procesu, nekih koje dobro poznajemo i vrlo smo ih dobro svjesni, kao i nekih manje poznatih kojih smo manje svjesni. On prezentira ukupnu kvalitetu igre ili sporta i isto tako uključuje i osjećaje i emocije.

Filozofija sporta kao disciplina i kao metoda ima sposobnost istražiti svoje područje interesa na najopćenitijoj razini. Ona ne samo da postavlja pitanja o osnovnoj epistemološkoj i ontološkoj prirodi sporta i sportske znanosti, već preispituje i samu sebe. U tom smislu, čitatelj je pozvan da čita i shvaća tekst kao svojevrsan uvod u područje sportske etike. Budući da je filozofija sporta tek nedavno (re)institucionalizirana u Sloveniji i Hrvatskoj, odlučili smo započeti raspravu na najopćenitijoj razini. Zbog toga članak nije bogat suvremenim etičkim dilemama kao što su doping, *fair play* i tehnološki napredak, pa čak u njemu nije predstavljena ni istinska kritička teorija koju bi čitatelj mogao očekivati. Fokus je na najosnovnijim i vrlo važnim pitanjima na koja nailazite pri ulazu na područje sportske etike. Vjerujemo da neka meta-etička pitanja treba postaviti prije nekih praktičnih etičkih tema u sportu.