

SPORT AS A WAY OF EXISTENCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to establish a connection between the totality of the world and a certain manifest forms of practice (in this case – sport). It starts with the question of the meaning of human existence with a emphasis on its theological understanding, where sport is not seen in insolation from other spheres of earthly existence, in which by remaining God, the axiological foundation of total life is lost. Because contemporary sport is not just an idyllic image of harmonizing positive relationships between individuals, families und society. Therefore, its study should be approached as an ambivalent category, where the primary goal is seen in terms of improving human health and nurturing his optimistic philosophy, but at the same time, other goals must be taken into account, such as: social prestige, reputation and fame. Goals such as money, as well as various other forms of negative influence should be placed at the end or even nowhere on this list.

So, the presented premises lead us in continuity from the theological understanding of existence to the true meaning of earthly life, where engaging in physical exercise, sports and recreation is linked to a healthy und quality life (meaning moderate engagement in these activities) but all the negatives offered by contemporary professional sport (as a form of its own kind of stress) end its connection to international politics and business must be taken into account.

Key words: sport, existence, health, goals of sports engagement

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Every analysis of the being and nature of sport must, inevitably, begin with the spheres of metaphysical and epistemological understandings of reality, within whose context we should seek the connections between the totality of the world and certain manifest forms of life practice. For, we must not transform the experiential world merely into diverse “slices of reality,” nor should our research be primarily reduced to a simple fragmentation of life, where the totality of all that exists is lost from view. In other words, the connection of individual phenomena with the comprehensiveness of existence cannot be ignored. We must remember that “truth is the whole” (Hegel). In this sense, our St. Bishop Nikolaj also stated that every issue should be thought of “holistically, not in fragments.” Otherwise, we stray from the essence of any subject of study. From the aforementioned words, it is clear that the term “sport” cannot be viewed as a phenomenon “in and of itself,” nor can it be isolated from the most general concepts of the world, such as the existence of the universe and the existence of man. Consequently, for example, if God is removed from reality, man loses his point of reference. This renders his entire existence meaningless, including all his struggles and efforts towards self-actualization and full realization. Therefore, the phrase “sport and existence” must have a consistent conditionality and connection. Above all, one must start from the divine person as the giver of meaning to human existence. Human existence, given its finitude in this world (but not in eternity), has endowed man’s physical principle with a powerful will to live and a concern for maintaining health, which, among other things, is achieved through sports activities, provided they are conducted with consistent value. This is especially important because there is a prevalent belief that engaging in physical activity, in itself, leads to a happier and more harmonious life for individuals, families, and society.

Just as perspectives on human existence can differ and conflict, sport can also have another face and take on distinctly ambivalent properties. In order to properly discuss the sports valued characteristics and its forms of expression, it must first be truly grounded in what transcends its boundaries and connects it with the totality and purposefulness of the world. For, one must open the door and step inside. When looking through a window, some images are only glimpsed in their outlines. Therefore, the essence of things must be revealed.

The Question of the Meaning of Human Existence

On this question, philosophy and religion intersect. While religion provides a consistent and striking answer, philosophy, on the other hand, offers a plethora of different understandings on the matter.

Essentially, all views on the meaning of existence are related to the concept of death. For the awareness of life’s transience and the realization that life is “an ongoing loss of existence” (L. Kolakowski) lead to the conclusion that in our world, there is only one event that is given significant attention – our death (M. Maeterlinck). On the other hand, Spinoza in his Ethics presents the view that human wisdom is not contemplation of death but of life. There are also attempts to rationalize death and provide a certain psychological comfort, as Seneca states at one point: “There is nothing after death and death itself is nothing.” Epicurus, however, presents it in this

way: "Death should not be feared, because as long as we exist, death is not here, and when it comes, we are no longer here." In other words, it is necessary to establish a tacit acceptance of the fact that we must die.

From various understandings of the value of human existence, certain philosophical concepts have formed: nihilism, pessimism, the philosophy of the absurd, etc.

Nihilism (Latin: nihil = nothing) is a philosophical stance that denies the meaning of human life and the world. For example, Nietzsche's teaching on the "death of God" dismantles the entire traditional system of values. With this understanding, the world becomes completely worthless (nothing is sacred or true anymore) because, if absolute value does not exist, then all other existing values are also abolished.

(in an ontological sense, both Buddhist religion and philosophy are nihilistic)

Pessimism (Latin: pessimus = worst) is a philosophical stance that considers this world to be "the worst of all possible worlds" and that there is more evil than good in the world. A pessimist views things and events from a negative perspective. Thus, Arthur Schopenhauer said: "If you look at the world morally, it is a den of thieves; intellectually, it is a madhouse; aesthetically, it is a collection of abnormalities."

The philosophy of the absurd (Latin: absurdus = impossible, meaningless) emphasizes that human life is a kind of absurdity. This view was developed by A. Camus and is succinctly summarized by the idea: "We will die, and therefore nothing has meaning." This philosophy is built, among other things, on the foundations of the myth of Sisyphus and represents a reflection on the fate of human life, from which arises the question: Is it worth living?

There are also contemporary attempts to philosophically overcome the previously mentioned viewpoints. The meaning of life is found in "participation in the reality of the rhythm of history," free human creativity (artistic, political, scientific), and, more recently, it is sought in the space between the "balance of fear" and rationalist programs of "universal happiness" and the establishment of some kind of "paradise on earth."

Therefore, since philosophy does not have an adequate solution to the eternal question of the meaning of human existence, the only possible solution is found in faith. All desperate efforts to save man from decay and death have their only solution in Christian faith, the faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and humanity's path to Eternal Life. All our hopes are based on this faith because "if Christ has not been raised... your faith is futile" (Apostle Paul).

Thus, only through a true understanding of the meaning of human existence, and the fact that sport should not be viewed in isolation from other spheres of earthly existence, is it possible to discuss the values of sport and physical exercise as a whole.

The Subject Matter of Sports

In today's mechanized era, sports, in the broadest sense, are synonymous with health and a healthy lifestyle. Health is "the first and most important thing for our happiness" (A. Schopenhauer). There is a professional-scientific nuance and precise differentiation of what falls under the concept of Physical Culture (physical education, sports, recreation, corrective gymnastics), so that in a populist understanding, all of this gets a unified meaning of something that is simply expressed by the word - sport.

Thus, sport is understood as any human activity manifested in the form of movement and serves to satisfy the urge for play, maintain health, or increase physical abilities. Another, more explicit (scientific) viewpoint emphasizes that the essential feature of sports consists of voluntary physical activity regulated by its own rules, which often takes the form of competition with others, with the possibility of becoming a professional activity. According to the European Sports Charter, "sport" includes all forms of physical activity that, through organized or unorganized participation, aim to express or improve physical fitness and mental well-being, create social relationships, or achieve results in competitions at all levels.

Certainly, sports positively impact modern man, relieving him of various life burdens and stress, which we are exposed to in all areas of today's dehumanized and programmed living. Accompanying it are all the most significant elements of a healthy life, such as light, air, food, etc. This should be added to the regulation of all biophysical properties, i.e., bodily functions, as well as gaining general fitness, strengthening self-discipline, and building character as a whole. Similarly, general actions like "Sports Against Drugs" are also conducted.

In short, today, the cult of the body is increasingly emphasized, leading to apparent excesses aimed at emphasizing physical-hedonistic and physical-aesthetic motives. There are pieces of advice on "diets" and body nourishment, advertisements for hydromassage tubs, saunas, and tepidariums, then bodybuilding and fitness clubs, special gyms, wellness content, and so on. Recipes for healthy living and longevity are sought and offered. There is a multiplication of phenomena of bodily narcissism in sports and personal lifestyle, and there is an absolutization of vitalist methods in securing "eternal" youth.

However, human existence (regardless of the individual) sooner or later leads to confronting one's own personality and death. The culmination of human bodily changes, which occur in space and time, is death.

The forgetfulness of the finality of human nature is often suppressed during professional dedication and perseverance in achieving sports successes, victories, and medals. The fervor of sports and the usual formulas of professional activity often overlook that the results achieved are, in fact, a kind of deception and are under the camouflaged control of international politics and business.

Therefore, it is essential to always keep in mind the intersection of the anthropological constants of "secular science" and theology.

New Testament Anthropology and Sports

In its true dimensions, sport is not alien to the Christian understanding of the world, as is commonly thought. Christianity has never neglected bodily disciplines and the competitive spirit. According to the Bible, man should play because he is bodily, and through play, he should develop his physical abilities. He should compete with others to understand his place. Metaphorically, St. John Climacus says: "A horse that runs alone often thinks it runs fast enough. But when yoked with another horse, it realizes its slowness."

Christian trichotomy directs us to understand that man is simultaneously body, soul, and spirit.

There is often a misconception that Christianity completely rejects the body and physicality. While it does not preach the cult of the body, it also does not advocate its mortification. For the weak body is not only the body of death but also the holy temple of God and part of the body of Christ. The physical composition is called to participate in earthly life as well as in the afterlife. The Christian formula for life is not the service of the body, but the service with the body. The body is earthly dust, but from it, the path leads through the soul to the spirit. As St. Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović says, body hygiene is only a picture of soul hygiene. Therefore, as long as a person is alive, he must preserve the body entrusted to him by God until death. There must be cooperation, balance, and harmony among the spirit, soul, and body. The necessity of maintaining the body for life was pointed out by Apostle Paul: "After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church" (Ephesians 5:29). Food for nourishment, clothing, and shelter for warmth are essential conditions for bodily life, its biological minimum for survival. However, any excess, any maximalism in satisfying these needs, represents a bodily temptation that diverts man from the right path. And that path is the struggle against sinfulness and evil, which leads to death. If a man primarily becomes "body" and completely surrenders to bodily pleasures, he chooses what is earthly, which ultimately leads to death.

When a person trains adequately through bodily and spiritual effort and self-denial (a philosophy of a sort of asceticism), it is then possible for his overall struggle to be easier.

The Life-Giving Nature of Christological Teachings in Contemporary Sports

Sports can benefit everyone if they are imbued with respect for fundamental Christian values. For example, if an athlete becomes famous, they should not be consumed by pride, self-love, and narcissism. Similarly, wealth gained through professional sports should not lead to hedonistic pursuits, extravagance, excessive luxury, and arrogant behavior. Helping the Church, the needy, the elderly, the disabled, etc., are concrete ways of manifesting and nurturing genuine Christian virtues.

Sports competitions should not be arenas where the worst forms of primitivism, hatred, violence, and conflicts between teams and their supporters are displayed, including mass fights with the police.

When the Olympic Games were held in Athens some years ago, we were reminded of the necessity of establishing closer ties between church organizations and athletes. The highest dignitaries of the Greek Orthodox Church blessed the athletes and wished them success from God. Special prayers were also read, calling on athletes to oppose all laziness and strive to achieve excellence (as Greek athletes are almost all members of the Church of Christ).

Therefore, for many athletes, it is not difficult to be both good athletes and good believers simultaneously, that is, to remain people who will not sell their soul to the devil (doping, genetic engineering, etc.) to win a medal at any cost, that is, the "perishable crown."

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