

ONE-DIMENSIONAL SPORT SPIRITUAL CRISIS AS A CAUSE OF DEGRADING SPORT TO A ONE-DIMENSIONAL PHENOMENON

Ljubiša Despotović

Institute for Political Studies, Belgrade, Serbia

UDK 291.1:796

SUMMARY

The paper analyzes spiritual stumbling of modern man which in addition to other general aspects of life has also led to sport degradation to only one dimension - the dimension of the result covering particular material interests of having power and being popular to which all other sport components including playing as the most honourable ingredient, which in terms of anthropology defines man as a being whose essential characteristic is playing, are inferior. Spiritual stumbling of modern man is a result of ratiocentrism (that is, his abandoning the concept of theocentrism) with despair and loss of morality turning the complex body-spirit bond into an instrument and the sport competition itself into an alienating form of achieving results at all costs. As a result, athletes themselves as main participants in competitions (either against other competitors or against themselves) have become an instrument-tool for gaining profit. Spiritual stumbling have generated moral crisis and left sports and their participants without any human dimension of existence degrading them to a single physical dimension and its merciless and brutal exploitation.

Key words: sport, the body, spiritual crisis, ratiocentrism, game, alienation

Correspondence author

Ljubiša Despotović
despotlj@stcable.net

INTRODUCTION:

According to the opinion of our most prominent philosopher Milan Brdar man's new-age both philosophic and cognitive denial ("killing") of God marked not a triumph of man as it was ingenuously assumed by Humanism and Enlightenment but his complete fall into *an abyss of nothingness*, into *the darkness of the meaningless and nihilism* and out of *humanity*. This serious ontological dispute against God with an unfavourable end for man and still lasting today started with the ratiocentrism of Descartes and an attempt to generate and base the cognitive approach *I know* on the idea of *I think, therefore I am*. By introducing the method of radical suspicion and shifting the focus of thinking from God-centered system to a ratio-centered system Descartes made a philosophical and cognitive step which was unlikely without serious ontological consequences and fall into solipsism. Milan Brdar explains why man has lost his support, measure of everything and even his own sense and actions with the Cartesian removal of God as *a referent framework* from the theocentric approach of that time. "The unsolved problem of a method which could provide the transition from "I think" to "I know" and the issue of distinguishing the truth from the untruth within clear and particular ideas remains." (...) And to think you know and to know you know is not the same thing."¹ Numerous attempts to provide ontological and spiritual base of the future thinking-acting order in man himself turned out to be just a little bit better than a mere inventory of philosophic misconceptions, abstract humanism and radical self-deceptions. "Modern man becomes such an anthropoid. What prevents such a man after the fall of God and both Christian and any other sanction threats to imagine that he is a Nietzsche's *Übermensch* who despises morally limited, weak man as "a being to be overcome."²

The danger of the ontological approach is hidden in self-deception, in losing the support, a reference point for spiritual estimate, normative determinant of moral judgement and an a priori quality as a source and base of real values. "The main misconception of the Modernity and Modern Humanism is praising and glorifying the loss of the support as a result of emancipation from the Middle Ages theocentric order with the assumption that man will find himself a substitution. (...) The fantasy of freedom is based on the appalling ignorance about human nature despite constant prating about it."³ To leave all this to the so-called free will leads not only to unacceptably high risk of self-will but also to a certain road

¹ Brdar, Milan. *Between the Abyss and the Sky*. Institute for Political Studies, Beograd, 2015. p. 117.

² *Ibid.* p. 298.

³ *Ibid.* p. 336.

to moral depravity, social anarchy and political and legal anomalies. This is where the wake-up warning "cry" of Dostoevsky "if there is no God everything is permitted" comes from. There is no a priori good, says Brdar, "there is no normative determinism, everything is possible and everything is permitted." In such situation "God is silent and He knows, I think and I don't know, the World keeps talking and it doesn't know." Even that a rotter talks about morality, a rascal about justice, a ruffian about peace, an usurper about equity, an insane man about wisdom, an imperious man about calming, a scrooge about kindness, a fool about education, a dishonest man about honesty, a stutterer about oratory, a thief about property, aggressor about freedom, a loser about luck, a haughty man about humility, a perjurer about assertion, an unbeliever about belief, an ironhearted man about heart, a traitor about patriotism and a cheater about fair play. "Morality is now left to individual self-will of I will - I will not. One is formed by choosing one's "own morality".⁴ The man of modernity has not specified criteria for essential distinguishing the good from the evil, usefulness from fairness and has no clear awareness of the necessity to divide science itself into the area of *intellectually certain knowledge (episteme)* and the area of *opinion (opinio, doxa)* or *belief (pistis)*. "Modern man found himself in complete freedom when he was free from religion, church, tradition, state and in particular when God abandoned everything. This is not political freedom in terms of value but ontological freedom in terms of absence of any measure, limitation, norm, foundation or base. Therefore the curse is fate and misfortune. Therefore ideological Mermaids who take the soul and leave bones raid."⁵

ONE-DIMENSIONAL SPORT OR ON FURTHER MORAL STUMBLING OF THE MAN OF MODERNITY:

This brief but basic spiritual and philosophical introduction on existential and moral fall of the man of Modernity into *the abyss of the meaningless and spoilt* was necessary as a spiritual preamble serving as a significant base for our paper and indicating the direction in which to look for answers to numerous questions arising from the main topic. It is about planned degradation of sport to one-dimensional phenomenon, high profitable business and competition at all costs, cold-hearted professionalism lacking any human sense. The paper will at least indicate the causes of turning modern sports into gladiator arenas where athletes themselves are victims of their sports managers and club owners and turned into

⁴ Ibid. p. 300.

⁵ Ibid. p. 308.

instruments and degraded to a single physical dimension and its merciless and brutal exploitation.

The writer of the paper advocates *heteronomous* foundation of ethics as a branch of philosophy concerned with the meaning and the goal of moral behaviour and actions. This approach is of *theonomic* nature, thus it assumes *God-centred worldview* without which neither moral nor cognitive aspects of behaviour of man as an individual or a member of a group or a broader political community are likely to be founded. The given approach therefore has axiological and theocentric base. "Since the world is a work of God, "a clear and specific indication" of his almightiness and perfection the relation of an idea and the world is actually the same as the relation to God"⁶ and assumes a certain form of altruism without which no community is likely to survive, not even the community defining itself as a broad international community, as a sports association or federation. It also implies normative ethics which clearly establishes moral principles of behaviour and judges them through a system of criteria and sanctions in case of potential criteria violation because values can exist only in relation to "man as a being of practice". Our position questions common *moral relativism* which suggests "the rejection of a universal view or approach and doubts the principles claimed to be true or justified for all" both in sports and life in general.⁷ Such moral relativism leads to scepticism while scepticism in turn ends up in nihilism. *The ultimate consequence of moral relativism is found in free space left for different and incoherent interpretations adaptable to the attitude of justifying power and success based on money.* Sport has also been trapped in the commercialization and relativism and abused by unscrupulous owners of capital and greedy collectors of material things.

This has been enabled by general relativization of values and morals of the civilization because the system of criteria is required only to preserve certain particular values. For example, Christian moral norm *Thou shall not murder* serves to protect *life* as the highest *value* and is followed by *punishment* as a reasonable consequence for violation of the norm protecting the previous value (CONCEPTUAL TRINITY: THE VALUE - THE NORM - THE PUNISHMENT). Such ethical approach is opposed to the aforementioned moral relativism and based on *Christian deontology* that is, the glorious ethos of one's moral behaviour determined by the principles of harmonized relations with God, with the world - creation (living things and non living environment), with other people as well as with oneself. "The essential virtues characteristic of Christianity are therefore:

⁶ Ibid. p. 90

⁷ Simon, Robert. L., Fair Play: The Ethics of Sport. Official Gazette, Beograd, 2006, p. 25.

conciliation, faith and hope. The religious resource of Christian virtues and the Christian ideal of society include the following four principal virtues of the ancient ethics (wisdom, courage, perseverance and justice) and the three divine virtues (faith, hope and love)."⁸ The significance of God can be placed in the everlasting *Cosmos* which is the only thing capable of establishing a stable meaningful order and even providing a functional level of a human being *by saving him from absurdness*. "And there, in finding ways to provide the ultimate meaning and certainty lies the origin of God as the supreme being who arranges the world order and gives it meaning and purpose so that one can find his place in the universe. Thus, the concept of God is a result of man's weakness and undefensible existential uncertainty."⁹

Modern human sinking deep into a desparate existential situation and lacking meaning of life are largely the result of his serving to *capital-technical complex* which, forced by the so-called rationalism (the curse of collecting material things and capital) pushes him deeper into the abyss degrading his human being to a simple machine attachment. It, in return, makes profit for global masters both in traditional business and in those areas of human activities such as *sport, culture, education, science and even leisure* which should have stayed out of it turning them into entertainment and profit industry. "The fact is that technology and capital need man only in his functional form. And in the view of capital man becomes outdated."¹⁰ *Modern sport is thus turned into profit industry unscrupulously exploiting its best athletes degrading them to slaves of the profession, instruments-tools, wasting them quickly and replacing them with other athletes who are recruited rapidly*. They become more useful for making money by continuing the circulation of profit which is increased in each following circle. This is probably where the appalling compound noun "human resources" in the modern management vocabulary comes from. "Greed has become an essential characteristic of today's man (occupied with gaining quantities, collecting material things and important social positions). Man has taken the outlook of a "collector" (people are valued according to the size of their property, the number of referenced books, the number of scores in a match)."¹¹

This is why we have reached the point where sport as an early and primal need of man to play and enjoy the beauty turned into *a one-dimensional sport*, into a brutal competition against the predominance of success and results at all costs.

⁸ Radoš, Jovo, *Ethics in Sport*. Kairos, Sremski Karlovci, 2013, p. 16.

⁹ Brdar, Milan, see above, p. 420.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

¹¹ Radoš, Jovo, *The Philosophy of Sport*. Kairos, Sremski Karlovci, 2010, p. 40.

"Competition in sport in its widest context can be described as participation in the sports competition aimed at defeating the opponent. In clear circumstances, the competition seems to be a situation where winning on the one side has to be accompanied by losing on the other side (zero-sum game)."¹² *We therefore talk about alienated sport showing "respect" only to "winners" and praising them only as long as they can be used for making profit for their masters.* "Commercial drifts and winning at all costs have made us estranged from sport by shocking exaggerations."¹³ Mankind has become overwhelmed by "general madness" which seems to have no end and which no one is likely to oppose. It seems that this estranged and *unscrupulous leviathan of the sport abuse* has completely mastered our lives and sucks the last bits of our strength as a "vampire" leaving athletes without any feeling of sport and audience without money and any meaning. Without everything we had when we stepped into this once innocent area of human games, goodness, humanity, freedom, entertainment and culture. Money has become the measure of all things, thus it is no wonder one of Marx's prophecies revealing the entire absurdness of our civilization and culture has caught up with us: ... "I'm bad, dishonest, unscrupulous, stupid; but money is honoured and hence its possessor."

Has not the same happened to education? Here, we have reached a complete downfall in its quality, meaning and enlightening aspect. Almost three decades ago, an American philosopher known for his criticism of American higher education cried that education in America is "just little more than propaganda"¹⁴ targeting at gloomy results of various educational reforms which caused the break down of nowadays educational systems, particularly those assigned to ordinary people. To the contrary, the elite (whatever it means today) has assured for itself the privilege of quality education and science avoiding the traps of the "Bologna education" in its well protected areas of education.

The entire existential downfall of modern man is therefore the result of his spiritual decay, secularism of the system, deformed materialism and aggressive atheism. *Utilitarian morality* claiming that *what is useful is moral* can exist in such world only. The road from such perverted moral approach to bare robbery of everything including even all human activities is not long. *Thus, sport has turned into various forms of expressing secular religion.* When true spirituality is in crisis, some substitutes for authentic religious relations arise. "Our theologian R. Bigović notices: Regardless of how irreligious it may look at first sight,

¹² Simon L., Robert, see above, p. 39.

¹³ Koković, Dragan, *The Downside of Sports*. Prometej, Novi Sad, 2008, p. 117.

¹⁴ Bloom, Allan, *Closing of the American Mind*. Prosveta, Beograd, 1990, p. 64.

contemporary culture is essentially the culture of a new form of religion - secularized religion. The Orthodox Church is also challenged by the new religion. Regardless all the external circumstances: cultural, economic, social, political and historical human existential needs remain the same. Man is god-like (theocentric) being according to this ontological structure. Therefore, if deprived of true God, true relation and union with Him, then his tragic odyssey in search for new gods, sanctuaries and rituals starts."¹⁵ *Thus, it is no wonder if he finds them in sports, on fields and courts turning athletes into new gods and idols.*

Consequently, sport was first reduced to a *competition* and then *commercialized* to the ultimate endurance limits of modern gladiators we call competitors. And it seems that nobody cares any more about the lost meaning of all the things. Given that the situation is only comprehensible for money-making owners in sport it is not clear how all others: athletes, coaches, and particularly the audience who pay for it have become deprived. *The consumers of alienated sport deprived of the essence of the game, humanity and beauty have been anesthetized by media in general.* While another human aspect of the game is cut off in various competitions year after year, the media anesthetized audience paying much for it seem not to suffer at all while the last bits of sports soul are being murdered before them.

This way, rich usurpers kill its primal spirit as an *honourable skill and everlasting illusion about the good and hope* providing people with a harbour where they can dream about a world better than the one they live in while walking towards modern arenas. "A game is, as Aristotle says, diametrically opposed to reality. It should be therefore separated, confined and protected from the surrounding world at first place in order to enable its system to function and circulate within a broader system of life."¹⁶ **Sport should and must become a protection from nonsense and fraud that is, an area of one's freedom and faith in the game as an honourable substrate and requirement for one's happiness.** We are not ingenuous when requiring this from sport because it actually used to be like that but the civilization and technology of profit have taken its "innocence". Dull materialism, greedy collection of material things and raw wealth cannot be considered as culture. "If sport finds itself in manipulation whirl, then it distracts from the truth, physical and spiritual creativity and the true human existence. Serious dangers of violence and exaggeration distracting us from sport can occur under the circumstances of fundamental politicization."¹⁷

¹⁵ Koković, Dragan. *The Downside of Sports*. Prometej, Novi Sad, 2008, p. 124

¹⁶ Radoš, Jovo, *The Philosophy of Sport*, p. 42.

¹⁷ Koković, Dragan, *The Downside of Sports*. Prometej, Novi Sad, 2008, p. 32.

CONCLUSION:

Comprehensive reaffirmation is likely only with the return to certain basic values and ideals defined as early as Antiquity. One such ideal is a harmonic development of the body and mind. The ideal of *kalokagathia* which promotes reaching beauty through physical education and thus achieving the good as a harmonious ethos of an individual. "As long as they stay within the area of "pure game" sport and art are very close to each other. An artist and an athlete are real only when they play for the sake of the game itself."¹⁸ Also, the social ideal of *paideia* with a well organized community providing balanced relationship of the spirit, the good as a virtue strived to and the body, which can lead to comprehensive development of an individual and the political community based on the three forms of achieving perfection: physical, intellectual and ethical. "Focusing on brutal competition, selection and elitism ruins dignity and concepts of physical education. Physical education should dose efforts whereas sport should not hesitate to exhaust the body."¹⁹

The essence of possible shifts towards the good in sport can be concentrated at this very point. Sport, though it should be, is not *a separate area of sociability*, individual and independent from general civilizational and cultural values and predominant social patterns. Thus, the essential change must also become *a general civilizational change* in relation to itself, its framework of values, life and its attributes. Without this change it is impossible to change the relations in alienated and materialized sport which represents only our ugly mirror reflecting more obviously than other areas of life how much we have stumbled and how close to self-destruction we have come. "We can learn to overcome difficulties and appreciate excellence through sport. We can learn to respect activities for what they are free from any reward and the contribution of others even when we are opponents. We can develop and express our morality through sport as well as illustrate the full importance of dedication, integrity, justice and courage."²⁰

"An athlete, too, just like an artist is the more "real" the more he or she plays fair that is, the less he or she allows any external interests or moments interfere with his or her game."²¹ It is necessary in every aspect of sport values: biological and health, social and cultural and ethical and educational to *revitalise*

¹⁸ Radoš, Jovo, *The Philosophy of Sport*, p. 42.

¹⁹ Koković, Dragan, *ibid.*, p.162.

²⁰ Simon, L. Robert, see above, p. 281.

²¹ Radoš, Jovo, *The Philosophy of Sport*, p. 42.

and reaffirm the spiritual in the human being inclined to *games, beauty and physical education*. It is an authentic and meaningful role of sport as a form of culture and honourable game pursuing *healthy life* as a summary of many essential values in our life. *The lost spirituality based on real and everlasting values of the truth, the good, justice, love and morality can be restored in sport better and faster than in any other segments of our existence if approached in appropriate way*. The highest values of the divine order created for man's ascension to spirituality and moral improvement. The evangelistic message "Therefore you shall be perfect just as your Father in heaven is perfect" clearly and incisively provides an attest to this.

REFERENCES:

1. Brdar, Milan, *Between the Abyss and the Sky*. Institute for Political Studies, Beograd, 2015
2. Bloom, Allan, *Closing of the American Mind*. Prosveta, Beograd, 1990
3. Koković, Dragan, *The Downside of Sports*. Prometej, Novi Sad, 2008
4. Simon, Robert. L., *Fair Play: The Ethics of Sport*. Official Gazette, Beograd, 2006
5. Radoš, Jovo, *The Philosophy of Sport*. Kairos, Sremski Karlovci, 2010
6. Radoš, Jovo, *Ethics in Sport*. Kairos, Sremski Karlovci, 2013

СПОРТ ЈЕДНЕ ДИМЕНЗИЈЕ ДУХОВНА КРИЗА КАО МОГУЋИ УЗРОК РЕДУКЦИЈЕ СПОРТА НА ФЕНОМЕН ЈЕДНОДИМЕНЗИОНАЛНОСТИ

САЖЕТАК

У раду ћемо настојати да анализирамо духовно посртање модерног човека које је поред других аспеката укупног живота и у пољу спорта прозивело његово свођење на једну димензију - димензију резултата, иза кога стоје конкретни материјални интереси моћи и популарности, којима се подређује све па чак и она најплеменитија компонента спорта коју чини игра, а која у антрополошком смислу човека дефинише као биће чије је једно од суштинских својстава играње. Духовно посртање модерног човека, последица је рациоцентризма (његовог напуштања концепта теоцентризма) а безнађе и губитак етичности произвели су инструментализацију комплекса тело-дух, а само спортско такмичење свели на отуђујућу форму резултата по сваку цену. Последица свега тога, је да су и сами спортисти као централни актери такмичења (било са другим било са самим собом) постали профитабилни

инструмент-средство. Духовно посртање произвело је етичку кризу, и оставило спорт и његове актере без хумане димензије постојања, свдећи их на отуђену раван телесности и њену безоштедну и сурову експлоатацију.

Кључне речи: спорт, тело,духовна криза, ратиоцентризам, игра,отуђење

ОДНОМЕРНЫЙ СПОРТ ДУХОВНЫЙ КРИЗИС КАК ВОЗМОЖНАЯ ПРИЧИНА РЕДУКЦИИ СПОРТА К ФЕНОМЕНУ ОДНОМЕРНОСТИ

АННОТАЦИЯ

В данной статье мы попытались проанализировать духовный камень преткновения современного человека, который, в дополнение к другим аспектам его жизни, породил его сокращение до одного измерения в области спорта, а также - измерения результатов, с конкретными материальными интересами власти и популярности в фоновом режиме, в котором все, и даже самая благородная составляющая спорта заключена, в одной из игр, которые в антропологическом смысле определяют человека, как существо, для которого игры-это одно из важнейших действий. Духовный камень преткновения современного человека является следствием ратиоцентризма (отказа от концепции теоцентризма), а безнадежность и потеря этики произвели инструментализацию телесно-духовного комплекса, во что бы то ни стало свели спортивную конкуренцию к отчуждающей форме результата. В результате сами спортсмены как центральные актеры соревнований (будь то с другими или с собой) стали прибыльным инструментом. Духовное манипулирование породило этический кризис, оставив спорт и его участников без гуманного измерения существования, доведя их до отчужденного уровня телесности и безжалостной и жестокой эксплуатации.

Ключевые слова: спорт, тело, духовный кризис, ратиоцентризм, игры, отчуждение.

Received on 14.04.2018.

Accepted on 17.06.2018.