

## SPORT, A WAY TO THE AUTHENTIC SELF?

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Julkaistu kongressijulkaisussa: Philosophical Issues in Sport and Physical Education.. Conference Proceedings. Mike McNamee (ed.) The Sports Council for Wales: Cardiff 1995, s.59-64.

### I

According to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, man exists in authentic (*eigentlich*) or inauthentic (*uneigentlich*) way. In his work *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time) he analysis the ontological structures of being a human. (1) In inauthenticity man does not define himself his Self. He is *das Man-selbst*, defined by *das Man*, the subject of the passive, by Anybody. He does not define in any authentic meaning himself his Self. He has, as Heidegger says, fallen to the world. (2) In order to become authentic Self he has to get rid of the way he is defined by others. In a way he has to return to himself. This is difficult because the attraction of Anybody is so great. Anybody removes the burden of the shoulders of man. He does not have to be responsible of his deeds, because he can always say that Anybody does the same. Being Anybody man is, what anybody is, but what nobody actually is.

There are many structures of inauthenticity, but the most important to us is what Heidegger calls distantiality (*Abständlichkeit*). (3) When being in inauthentic way with others man is always measuring the distance between himself and others. We are aware of this distance all the time. We think if we are in some respect behind, even or ahead of others and should something be done. It is one of our main concerns when we exist in an inauthentic way.

### II

People exercise for many reasons and goals. I take as a starting point four key projects of movement. The concept of project comes from Heideggers philosophy and his idea of man as an Project (*Entwurf*). (4) I put forward the idea that the four key projects of physical education are as follows: *Winning, Health, Expression* and *Self*. Winning refers to those forms of exercise such as competitive sports with victory as a goal. When exercise is the means to a stronger and healthier body, health is the project, as in fitness training. Movement arts as dance are considered as projects of expression. Exercise as a project of self includes all forms of motion that involve study of self, with the goal of discovering what can be termed actual or authentic existence. Projects of Self

include many of the Asian movement arts with a philosophical and religious background (yoga as an example).

### III

We may then take a look at the projects of human movement from the perspective of authentic being of man. It is not difficult to see the connection of the project of winning and inauthentic being. Victory gives meaning to a contest. A contest without a winner is a contradiction. A contest requires also others, whom to race with and in respect of which ones own result is defined. This definition is done by measuring distances. Victory exist only as a victory over others as well as losing means always losing to others. Only one can win, an individual or a team, others are losers. Winner-looser relationship is the most important relationship between self and other. In this relationship there is no intent to any balance so that everybody could be winners. On the contrary. I should be always the winner. All the training aims to this. In the project of winning other man as well as nature is an obstacle that has to be overstepped.

In a contest winning does not depend on me. An athlete can not be a winner when he wants to. To be a winner is always defined by others, by those who are won and loose. It is not defined by the athlete himself even if he as his word to say in the case. The others define what I am by losing to me. An athlete is best as long as others are worse than he.

For Heidegger this kind of being of the self which is defined by others is the self of Anybody. In this sense being a winner is being in an inauthentic way. In inauthentic being man is always measuring his distance from others. In sports this measuring has become most important and accurate.

The pre-understanding of the project of winning is constituted culturally, of course. The sport classes of the school, the sport pages, the sport highlights, they all create the pre-understanding that gives the meaning to the project of winning.

### IV

The next question is, I think, to investigate the possibility, how western competitive sport could work as a means to explore the Self - as a project of Self. This is of course if we want it to work that way. This is not obvious at all. In the western conception of sport winning is still the most important factor. Without winners there would be no publicity, no sponsors, no audiences. The western view of sport does not include an idea of exploring the Self in any profound way. The investigation of Self means only measuring its physical limits. But do we loose the winners if we get some insights to the Selves of athletes? Is the project of winning and project of Self contradictory? At the level of individual athlete, I think it is not. But at a more general level, I

don't know. It is easy for an individual athlete to adopt a philosophy of sport, or a philosophy of life perhaps, where this at least apparent contradiction is solved. At a more general level that would require radical changes at the schooling system where these values of winning are formed.

But if we want this change, even at the individual level, how could we proceed? Maybe we can try to learn by example.

## V

The fact is that there exist such systems of human movement, which are in a very pure way means to explore the Self the most profound way. They are what I have called "projects of Self". We'll find them especially in Asian cultures. The most famous of them to the westerners is Indian yoga, of course. But there are others: Japanese arts based on Zen, Chinese Taoist exercises, the whirling dance of the Sufis etc.

Now I am not talking about that version of these arts that have gone through westernization and lost their background philosophies. Most of these arts, as we see them practised now in West and in East, too, are degenerated versions of the originals. They have adopted the western conception of exercise and become projects of winning or project of health. This has happened as a result of the imperialism of western sport. We usually consider our understanding of physical exercise to be the right one, or the best one at least, and forcefully export it to other cultures. The idea that it is most valuable to a country to have gold medals in Olympic Games is almost universally accepted. Of course, there are more urgent targets to use the money everywhere.

Anyway analysing these projects of Self in their original form, we can at least see what it means, that a physical exercise is a way to some kind of authentic Self. We can try to find out if there are any common structures in them.

## VI

Now, the way how we experience a thing defines the meaning and value we give to that thing. This is my starting point now. I think it is rather obvious. We can talk about the horizon of experience of that thing. Taking a classical example, if I show a book to a savage he might call it a very strange boomerang because he has no horizon of experience of this thing what we call a book. Little by little this horizon of experience can open to him and reveal new meanings and values attached to the book we have shown to him.

## VII

This is why I want to emphasise that it is most important for us to try to understand the structure of experience that we find in the projects of Self. Only through this understanding we can realise, how these exercises can function this way. What we suppose here is, of course, that human experience is something universal. At least its structures are common, although the way we articulate linguistically these experiences are varied.

After this analysis is done, we can consider if it is possible to create the same kind of experiences in other ways of exercise, in sport fore example.

Now we have to do some phenomenology.

## VIII

I take as an example Japanese swordsmanship. There is an interesting book about this art written in 1729 by a samurai called Shozan Shissai (5). It is a good presentation about the way of the sword. Its text is mostly philosophical, but looking at it closely you can find the different levels of experience that the swordsman is supposed to go through in his training in the art of the sword. In this way his art will gain a deeper meaning. Physical exercise will change to spiritual training and open an ethical dimension, too.

Phenomenological analysis of the text brings to light four steps of the training, each of which indicates four different levels of experience:

The training begins by (i) practising the form or technique (*waza*), (ii) through the form life force or vital force (*ki*) is exercised, (iii) through the exercising of the vital force the mind/heart (6) is exercised. Mind contains the (iv) universal Principle that will finally be revealed. So we have a four level process where physical exercise finally reveals a universal Principle, which acts as a base for ethical conduct. It is a short description but it includes a profound way or path that penetrates all of the traditional forms of physical exercise of Asian culture.

I'll explain first all of these steps and concepts used in describing them and later offer a philosophical interpretation based on the concepts of western philosophy.

*Form.* The first level, the level of the form or technique is easy to understand. It simply means the different techniques of swordsmanship, the strikes, parries etc. That was hard physical training.

*Ki.* The concept of *ki*, which is usually translated as life force or vital force, is a more complicated concept. Shissai writes himself: "Technique is practised by means of the Life Force. The Life Force is that which defines the form by means of the Heart. (...) From mastery of technique follow the

harmony and balance of Life Force.(...) If the technique has not been mastered, then the Life Force will not be harmonious and balanced, the appropriate form will not ensue (...) (7)

And: "Technique must be proven, the Life Force disciplined, and the Heart exerted. (8) (...) Swordsmanship is basically the exercising of the Life Force and, therefore, at the beginning of study the Life Force is exercised by means of technique. (9) (...) When the discipline of the Life Force has attained maturity, then one can proceed to the Heart. (10)

Without going deeper to this concept we can say that in Shissai's thought it means our consciousness of that vital force that we feel to fill our body. It is our awareness of that vital force that floats through us and what we simply call - life.

*Mind.* According to Shissai heart/mind is the nonmaterial part of the life force and life force is the material part of mind. Mind contains the divine Principle and is higher than life force. Mind and life force resonate with each other so that exercising life force mind is also exercised. Shissai writes: "If one disciplines the Life Force, knowledge o the Heart will come of its own accord." (11)

Practising the Life Force calms the mind. This is important. Shissai writes: "If the Heart is free of irritations, then the Life Force is harmonious and peaceful, and when the Life Force is harmonious and peaceful, then it is lively and moves freely and is without rigid form. (...) The Heart is like a clear mirror or still water." (12)

Here we are coming to the goal of the practice. When the mind is calm and in harmony it reveals the divine Principle that has been there all the time but without our noticing it.

*Principle.* In Shissai's thought, which is near to neoconfucianism, the concept of the Principle means the changeless and eternal principle that is inherently present in all beings and phenomena. Without this essence or principle nothing would exist. Understanding of this Principle is the birthplace of the virtues.

To reconcile. Training in the swordsmanship means that through the technique of the sword you harmonise the Life Force and calm the mind so that the universal and divine Principle will get a possibility to come to light.

I like this book very much because I don't think that it can only be a theoretical or philosophical description of the way of the sword. I believe it to be an adequate description of the experience of a master swordsman who has attained the final goal of swordsmanship. I don't believe that the swordsmen of those days wrote theoretical philosophy. They wrote about their experience although they used the philosophical vocabulary of their time.

## IX

Looking at yoga or Taoist exercises will bring the same kind of result. My argument is that you can find a similar structure of experience in all of the projects of Self.

In interpreting this schema I have used several continental philosophers, most important of them being Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Max Scheler and Emmanuel Levinas.

To be short again we can rewrite this schema as follows:

(i) The training of the body sharpens or clears (ii) the body-consciousness, which has the influence of (iii) stilling the ego-consciousness. This process uncovers what we could call (iv) the contact surface to the Transcendent. The touch of the Transcendent is an ethical event.

This is again a short description which requires explanation. Max Scheler did the distinction between *der Leib* and *der Körper*, the lived body and the body as an object (13). Through Maurice Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologists of the body this distinction has become widely accepted. Scheler did also a distinction between body-consciousness and ego-consciousness. (14) According to Scheler this is a distinction that the traditional philosophical analysis has left unnoticed. However, the way how the lived body and the body-consciousness is given to us is fundamentally different of the way the ego-consciousness is given. They are both different fields of our experience that can not be reduced to each other.

## X

From these concepts we can proceed to formulate the concepts of bodily horizon of experience and mental horizon of experience. Even if I am talking about two basic horizons of experience, one mental and one bodily, my conception of man is still monistic. As other philosophers of existence I take the existence of man to be the one "substance" aspects of which these two horizons of experience try to describe. Thus when I talk about man, I talk about a whole, a unity. That is why we can say that these horizons of experience "resonate" with each other.

According to Shissai then the physical exercise influences the Life Force which has a stilling influence to the mind. We can interpret this now as follows. Physical exercise sharpens our body-consciousness in a natural way. After running a few miles, when we sit down, we can feel our body in a very distinct way. We feel the warm, pulsing sensation all over our bodies. In other words, our body-consciousness has come the main object of our attention. Or better, we have become more our body through the "call" of our body-consciousness.

If we still continue our introspection we may notice that our mind is very calm. The hot body in a way covers our mind. The body-consciousness stills the ego-consciousness- at least a bit - and that is experienced as a peaceful moment.

By the way - this is a very familiar experience for Finns after a hot sauna-bath. The heat of the body stills the mind, which is a meditative experience. Maybe that's why sauna has been considered a sacred place in Finland.

The idea of Shissai that the mind contains a deeper level, where man can unite to something divine, is a widely held position in the religious traditions. It can be said to be the uniting principle of all

mysticism. Mystical experience, though differently articulated, is the core experience of all the world religions. It is also as commonly accepted idea that the conscious mind has to be emptied, calmed down, the ego has to be thrown away for this experience to come forth.

Heidegger describes this process of letting go of the ego in his later philosophy, especially in his *Gelassenheit* -book (15). Man's unity with Being as a whole is his later counterpart to the authentic being in *Sein und Zeit*. Emmanuel Levinas talks about the Absolute Other trying to describe the same experience. (16) Anyway what man experiences in this meeting is something which is bound to remain transcendent.

The touch of the Transcendence, even if we cannot describe it in words, can still have a deep meaning to our life. Actually I consider it to be the basic experience where alone ethical thinking can be borne. But to defend this argument goes out of this paper.

## XI

Now I try to recapitulate and see if we can learn something about this analysis of one project of Self and its interpretation. We can ask, what does the description of Shissai presuppose. I would say that it presupposes a tradition, a framework through which all the phases of the way will get their meaning. Especially that is the case regarding the goal of the practise. In swordsmanship this framework or context is Zen-Buddhism, in yoga it is the philosophy of Samkhya. This kind of a philosophical or religious tradition has a well articulated conception of, what it means for a man to exist in an authentic way. This kind of tradition has also such a conception of man, which makes it possible, that exercising of the body can have a spiritual meaning. Usually it means a monistic view of man.

## XII

We live in a dualistic tradition. Our tradition separates mind and body. In our culture exercising the body has never been valued as a spiritual training. If there has been such training, it has been askesis, deadening of the body so that the spirit can flourish.

We also live in a materialised society where the conception of authenticity of man is hard to understand. Or if it is understood, it is understood in a superficial way. Authenticity is considered to be maybe the same as - consuming.

So our tradition in its dualistic form does not seem to give appropriate framework to the idea, that we could change the project of winning to the project of Self.

## XIII

That's why I see an urgent need of a new philosophy of sport and physical education in general. In that philosophy the authenticity and inauthenticity of man should be thematized. The mental training of the athlete could then get a totally new meaning. In creating this new philosophy of sport I can see two directions or possibilities. The type of existential philosophy I shortly outlined above is one possibility. (17) The other is *philosophia perennis*, perennial philosophy. (18) Its point of departure is the idea that the experimental elements of different religions are the same even if their cultural articulations may differ. This idea offers then a good starting point when comparing experiences in different cultures.

In our researches at the philosophy department of Tampere university we are exploring both ways.

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VIITTEET:

1Heidegger, Martin: *Sein und Zeit*.Tübingen: Niemayer 1986.

2ibid, p. 175.

3ibid, p. 126.

4ibid, p. 145.

5Kammer, Reinhard: *Zen and Confucius in the Art of Swordmanship. The Tengu-geijutsu-ron of Chozan Shissai*. Routledge: London 1978.

6The chinese character means both: mind and heart.

7Kammer, emt., s. 44.

8Kammer, emt., s. 50

9Kammer, emt., s. 53

10Kammer, emt., s. 53.

11Kammer, emt., s.57.

12Kammer, emt., s.46.

13Max Scheler: *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die Materiale Wertethik*. Bern: Francke 1980, p. 397.

14ibid, pp. 397 - 398.

15Martin Heidegger: *Gelassenheit*. Pfullingen: Neske 1988.

16Emmanuel Lévinas: *Totality and Infinity. An Essey on Exteriority*. Tr. by Alphonso Lingis. Hague: Nijhoff 1979, p.33.

17Timo Klemola: *Liikunta tienä kohti varsinaista itseä. Liikunnan projektien fenomenologinen tarkastelu. Filosofisia tutkimuksia Tampereen yliopistosta, vol. XII. Tampere 1991.*

18Tapio Koski: *Liikunta ja kehollisuus perenniaalisessa filosofiassa. Filosofisia tutkimuksia Tampereen yliopistosta, vol. XVII. Tampere 1991.*