

STUDIES IN PHYSICAL CULTURE AND TOURISM
Vol. 18, No. 1, 2011

IRENA MARTÍNKOVÁ, JIM PARRY
Department of Kinanthropology, Humanities and Management of Sport,
Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic

THE DOUBLE INSTRUMENTALITY OF SPORT

Key words: sport, instrumentality, extrinsic goals, intrinsic goals, process.

ABSTRACT

In sport we can distinguish two kinds of goals – those extrinsic (external or instrumental) to the practice of sport itself, and those intrinsic (internal or ‘autotelic’) goals that are inherent in the practice of sport. Though the former goals are external to sport, it is important to take them into consideration, since they considerably influence its practice. This happens when sport is used instrumentally – that is, as a means to achieve goals external to it, such as fame, health, wealth, socialization, moral perfection, etc. The problem with external goals is that sport is understood as having value apart from itself, and that its practice is to be justified with relation to values outside of itself. This will be illustrated with examples from Physical Education and elite sport. On the other hand, the internal or autotelic goals of sport are often thought to be intrinsic and non-instrumental; but we shall argue that they also show a kind of instrumentality, since human movement in sport is supposed to lead to some kind of achievement. The aim of this paper is to describe this double instrumentality of sport and to identify some related problems, which are mainly to do with the quality of the process – that is, of the performance itself.

INTRODUCTION

We describe the benefits of sport in both intrinsic and extrinsic ways. We emphasise the internal satisfactions and intrinsic values of the activity as well as the physical, economic, social, psychological and other benefits that participation and success may bring.

As well as our own motivations, of course, there are many ways in which the athlete’s participation in sport may be used instrumentally in the interests of others. There is the well-known phenomenon of ‘achievement by proxy’, whereby parents, teachers, coaches or others gain benefits

from the achievements of those in their care. All these, and many other kinds of instrumental goals, may be legitimately pursued; whilst some of them may lead to a contradiction between the athlete’s participation and the supposed benefits for him or her. One theme of this paper is that, insofar as coaches and teachers owe duties to athletes or to non-elite participants (especially of young age) in respect of their development, sport practice should be guided first and foremost by intrinsic values: towards education, not just training; aiming at development, not exploitation; empowerment, rather than control.

Correspondence should be addressed to: Irena Martinkova, Department of Kinanthropology, Humanities and Management of Sport, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Charles University in Prague, José Martího 31, 162 52 Prague 6 – Veleslavín, Czech Republic, e-mail: martinkova.ftys@seznam.cz

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. In sport we can distinguish two kinds of goals – those extrinsic (external or instrumental¹) to the practice of sport itself, and those intrinsic (internal or ‘autotelic’) goals that are inherent in the practice of sport [13: 38]. Usually it is thought that it is only the first of these that is ‘instrumental’ in character, but we want to argue that these two kinds of goals are both, in a sense, instrumental – they point to two different levels of instrumentality. One of the two levels of instrumentality of sport is connected with the values pursued within a particular society, according to which sport is ascribed values, i.e. that make sport valuable to individuals within the given society. We might think that if it were possible to get rid of these extrinsic goals, we would remove instrumentality from sport. But that is not so easy. We shall argue that sport itself has ‘autotelic’ goals that, whilst they are intrinsic to it, nevertheless impose an instrumentality on the participating human being.

Both of these levels of instrumentality relate intractably to human life in general, with its tendency to understand things in an instrumental way. This view has been clearly expressed in the writings of Martin Heidegger on ontology, which starts with analyses of human existence [5: § 15 ff.; see also 1]. According to Heidegger, the very being of Dasein (the human being) is an issue for it, and on the basis of this self-concern Dasein primarily discloses things within the world in an instrumental way. In other words: we primarily and mostly understand things as tools/instruments and do something in order to achieve something else (understanding things as ‘in-order-to...’ – *etwas um-zu...*), which arises from the kind of concern of the self for its own being that he calls ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ – *Worum willen* [5: §18].

Even though this understanding is pervasive, it is mostly non-‘thematic’ (not in the foreground of our understanding), and as such easy to be overlooked. However, the instrumental approach is not adequate as an approach to everything. While it may be adequate for the use of tools (whose way of being is ‘readiness-to-hand’ – *Zuhandenheit*), it is problematic in the context of relations to beings that have different ways of being, such as ourselves

and other people (whose way of being is ‘existence’) or animals (whose way of being is ‘life’) [4: §12a].

The focus of this paper is mainly on the topic of human movement within the area of sport in relation to instrumentality. If we can identify and recognise different levels of instrumentality in sports, this might help us understand ourselves better, and it might even lead to our beginning to practice sport in a different way – one which is perhaps less instrumental and more friendly to one’s development.

So, firstly, we shall discuss the extrinsic goals of sports in relation to Physical Education and elite sport, discussing different goals that are connected with each area. Secondly, we shall explore the autotelic goals of sport. Finally, we shall identify some problems connected with instrumentality as so far discussed, and in particular, the problem of the quality of process within sport.

SPORT AND EXTRINSIC GOALS

Extrinsic goals point to something outside of sport itself and make the claim that sport can be used as an instrument that leads to achieving various values that people have elsewhere in life. These values differ in relation to the context in which sport is practised, so we can expect different extrinsic values to be pursued in the context of Physical Education and in the context of elite sport. Of course, these two discourses are interconnected, since they both have the common vehicle – sport. For each of them, we will present some examples of such extrinsic goals.

THE EXTRINSIC GOALS OF SPORT IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical Education is a part of education and falls under educational values and ideals. Extrinsic values attached to sports are often seen in the area of the justification of Physical Education. For sport to be a part of Physical Education, it is necessary to show that it coheres with the values of education. But what often happens with extrinsic valuation is that it is not sport itself that is considered valuable as an end, but rather some other value to which it is supposed to contribute, such as, for example,

¹ Since we use the word ‘instrumentality’ in both contexts (on the level of instrumental and autotelic goals), we shall use the term ‘extrinsic goals’ in this context.

health. Now, at this point, it becomes an important matter of contingent fact whether or not sport actually *does* contribute to the given end (e.g. health), with the corollary that, where it does not so contribute, it is not justified. The value of sport turns into a *different* kind of value (health, or whatever). Within the Physical Education curriculum this means that the value of sport itself is not considered, or is overlooked.

Thus different aims can be pursued *through* sport. The following aims are the ones most commonly held [11].

Health

It is often argued that sport makes a contribution to the health of individuals because it keeps them fit and well-exercised, this delaying the onset of 'diseases of affluence' and enhancing the quality of life. In a sedentary society, this sounds like a good reason to have Physical Education on the school curriculum.

However, although we cannot deny that sportspeople often look like paragons of health, it is not at all obvious that it is sport which makes them healthy. Maybe it is just the other way round. Indeed, teachers of Physical Education need to be assured that the children are healthy before they are allowed to take part. This also points us to the distinction between health and fitness. It may be true that Physical Education participation contributes to one's fitness, but being healthy is a prerequisite of participation. Being healthy is instrumental to the sport, rather than the other way around. And it is quite possible to be healthy without being fit.

These observations are reinforced by others: for example, it does not appear to be the case that people who have stopped playing games are in better health than those who have never played games. Possibly, even game playing induces a certain life-style which becomes destructive if maintained after retiring from activity. Also, the playing of games itself constitutes a health hazard, which is in some cases very severe indeed, as the incidence and severity of sports injuries show. Having said that, it must not be thought that a health hazard is necessary and therefore a bad thing. For some people, a certain risk or physical challenge element in sport is the reason to do it [9]. There are many of us whose functions are permanently impaired through sporting injury, but who would not have missed out for the world, and

would gladly opt for it again. Sport may assist a healthy life-style, but it may not – and this is not a secure foundation on which to build a justification: maybe, maybe not.

Character

Another suggestion, dating at least from the beginnings of public school athleticism in the United Kingdom, is that there is some connection between the playing of sport and the development of desirable traits of character. A more modern way of expressing this kind of thought is to say that sport makes a contribution to moral education.

Again, the answer is maybe and maybe not. We cannot be sure that this is true, and so it is an unreliable route to justification for Physical Education. Under certain circumstances, and given good educational leadership, it is true that sport *might* have the potential to affect children's moral development for the better. However, if we take a look at elite athletes, we shall see that not all of them are the moral giants of our age, regardless of their undoubted sporting prowess. The issue of sporting role models is widely discussed in the philosophy and psychology of sport literatures, but there are no easy answers, as the recent example of Tiger Woods has shown. The case here is at best not proven. Sportspeople do not seem to have a monopoly of virtue, and non-participants do not seem to be particularly pernicious or evil.

Socialisation

Another claim is that sport can contribute to the socialisation of children. Two examples of this refer to competition and rule-following. It is argued that, since society is competitive (or since we are all innately competitive), sport acts as a microcosm of society, wherein children may learn and practice those qualities which will make them socially successful. Or it is argued that the strict enforcement of clear and agreed rules by an impartial authority on pain of sanction provides children with an unambiguous model of correct social conduct, and encourages their willing obedience to legitimate order.

The problem with this kind of argument is that it fails to address the question of the value of sport itself. It presupposes that the above outcomes, if they occur, are desirable. But it is necessary for us to ask further questions, such as: Is competition a social virtue? Do we want our children to be

‘successful’ in those terms? If we do, can everyone be successful, or will we have to deal with the ‘failures’ produced as well? Is there a clear right and wrong (even in games)? Do we want our children just to follow rules obediently? Is sport an agent of conservatism and anti-intellectualism? These are some of the questions which an educational argument would have to address, and they cannot be swept under the carpet by representing them as claims about socialisation.

Art and the Aesthetic

In the United Kingdom in the 1970s and 1980s, the Physical Education world was heavily influenced by a powerful educational movement that claimed a special relationship between movement and art. Supposing art to be deemed respectable without argument, they have either claimed that sport is a form of art, or that sport can contribute to an aesthetic education.

However, for one thing, it is quite clear to us that sport is not art [10], despite the fact that they may share certain similarities or origins or functions, and that there may be some tricky borderline cases (such as ice-dance). Secondly, although we may well appraise sport in aesthetic terms, this will not help our case, since it is open to us to appraise *anything at all* aesthetically. Why should it then be thought to be a particularly powerful function of sport? In either form this claim seems to us to be quite empty, but our main objection is that it supposes art to be of value, and sport only to be of value if it is a kind of art, or if it is instrumental to artistic or aesthetic values.

THE EXTRINSIC GOALS OF SPORT IN ELITE SPORT

Unlike Physical Education, in which sport is connected with values that the society wishes to promote through its educational system, sport as elite sport is connected in a rather different way with the values that actually reign in the particular society. Though some values may overlap in both areas, we can find in elite sport some specific values related to elite sport itself. However dominant in the society those values may be, they may nevertheless be problematic; and their pursuit through sport turns sport into a vehicle that mediates those values, whilst overlooking its own.

Fame and success

Fame and success are secular aims and sport is an arena in which people can achieve them, since sport competition produces winners and losers. However, success is intractably connected to failure, and fame to obscurity. Competing in sport may be understood as a way of striving to improve one’s position in society – as a route to upward mobility. However, the pursuit of fame and success, when that is one’s overriding goal, can lead to the taking of any measures necessary for success, whether or not they contravene the rules or ethos of the sport.

Money

Related to the above, money has increasingly become an important part of elite sport, from the point of view of the athlete (salaries, sponsorship, endorsements, prize money, etc.) of management (ticket sales, TV rights, advertising income, etc.) and of the spectator (admission costs, TV sports channel costs, gambling, etc.).

Participating in sport because of the money to be made, especially if it brings a livelihood for the athlete, the media and the manager, shifts the value of sport to the areas of work and entertainment. Presumably this notion was at the bottom of the old idea of amateurism – that, as soon as sport becomes a kind of work, it loses its core of intrinsic valuation, and becomes instrumentalised in submission to the values of work [2]. It tends towards ‘venality’ [15: 32].

Self-affirmation

Self-affirmation is interconnected with fame, success and financial status. Within Western society, in which there is a high valuation of the individual, self-affirmation may be sought through sport. Self-affirmation is identified as a value by Russell [12: 2, 15], who connects it mainly to dangerous sport. An athlete is looking for his or her worth through the medium of sport, and potential success within it.

However, there is a problem with self-affirmation, since it is often understood, like fame, success and money, as an exclusive good. Exclusive goods are those the possession of which denies others. (If I win a tournament and its prize, you – logically – cannot). If self-affirmation is achieved *at the expense of* others, in affirming oneself, one is dis-affirming the opponent, and if

self-affirmation became a dominant value in sport, we could understand why it might be off-putting for those who do not expect to win most of the time. (We can't *all* win most of the time; and winners need losers – so it would be self-defeating to put them off from playing at all). If sport is practised for the value of self-affirmation, it might be seen as an egoistic exercise, which instead of nurturing friendship raises animosity and disrespect towards opponents. Such a failure to respect opponents misunderstands the basis of sport, for it is the opponent who enables us to participate, and a challenging opponent who enables us to excel. Without him or her or it, there is no competition [Cp. 14].

Since all of the above values permeate our society, there is a real possibility that the focus of engagement with sport will be on the extrinsic values, to the detriment of the internal goals of sport, with the danger that this might lead to an overlooking of the central values of sport, and to a tendency towards negative practices such as cheating, doping, and other vices.

THE PROBLEM WITH EXTRINSIC GOALS

Now, it is important to notice that all of the above examples present extrinsic or instrumental arguments. They point to something outside of sport itself, and make the claim that sport can be used as an instrument to promote the values of that other 'something', be it health, character development, socialisation, money, fame, or whatever. An instrumental argument, though, is a weak form of argument, because it is both hypothetical and contingent.

Being hypothetical, it asserts: if (and only if) you value X will you value Y. This is tantamount to saying, for example, that sport is of value *only if* it contributes to health. And it now becomes a matter of contingent fact whether or not sport actually *does* contribute to health, with the corollary that, where it does not so contribute, it is not justified.

Apart from the fact that this turns a moral argument into a factual matter, the main objection is that it turns an argument about sport into an argument about something else (health, or whatever). This is precisely the way in which, for example, projects that are supposed to be researching into the Physical Education curriculum can get hi-jacked by health agencies into not really

looking at Physical Education at all, but at the general problem of health maintenance. And if it turned out that sport was *not* (contingently) the best way to achieve health (or any other good), then the argument would compel us to reject sport as an option.

What is required here instead is some attempt to provide an account of sport itself apart from (even if in addition to) an account of its contribution to other goods. Such an account might then be brought to a conception of schooling and education in order to attempt to provide a justification of sport in schools. The production of such an account is even more urgent when Physical Education at schools is of a low status and tends to be diminished in order to give timetable time for other subjects [3].

SPORT AND ITS INTRINSIC GOALS

Sports are rule-governed competitions wherein physical abilities are contested. They are more formal, serious, competitive, organised, and institutionalised than the games from which they often sprang. The goal of sport is to achieve something, to fulfill a task which is given by agreed rules. And it is this joyful striving and improving with respect to the given task, together and at the same time against an opponent(s) (human or non-human), that forms the basis of sport.

Now, it may seem that when we get rid of extrinsic goals, we have gotten rid of instrumentality in sport. However, when we consider 'something to be achieved', we must acknowledge instrumentality again. The 'autotelic' goals of sport refer to the goals that are followed in sport itself. These internal goals of sport are the necessary conditions of a particular sport (scoring a goal, running a distance as fast as possible, collecting as many points as possible, etc.), and it is in terms of these internal goals that athletes compete against each other and are compared to each other. The internal goals of sport can lead to different kinds of results. Results can mean not only the outcomes of a particular performance (number of goals scored, or measured time or length), but also the outcomes that arise due to rankings (a finishing place in the race). And ranking itself can also have different facets – it can point towards actual placement in a particular race or, seen as one of a series of performances, to placement within a wider

competition (e.g. a league), or even to placement in all previous races (e.g. a world record).

However, not all sports are the same in this respect. We can distinguish two kinds of sports in relation to their aims – purposive sports and aesthetic sports [10]. Purposive sports are those whose purpose or function can be specified independently of the manner of achieving them. For example, in football, what the athlete does can be explained without reference to *how* he does it – a goal is scored when the whole of the ball crosses the whole of the line between the posts and under the bar; and we can explain this without reference to whether he must kick it, or head it, or *how* he must kick it or head it. *How* he does it is irrelevant (providing that it is within the rules, of course), so long as he *does* it. Aesthetic sports, on the other hand, are those whose purpose cannot be specified independently of the manner of achieving it. In order to explain *what* a Tsukahara is, or a barani, or a piked somersault, we would need to explain *how* to do it. In football we can distinguish the means of scoring a goal from the end, but in gymnastics the means are *part of* the end.

So in purposive sports the quality of the process is not evaluated for the outcome, and is only seen as important insofar as the actual achieving of the outcome is concerned. For example, the style of running in the sprint, or the manner of scoring a goal in football, are not judged – rather it is just one's speed or the number of goals that is important for the outcome. However, in aesthetic sports, the quality of the process of the performance is just what is evaluated for the purposes of ranking (for example, in figure skating and gymnastics). Thus, in aesthetic sports, instrumentality is diminished. However, since aesthetic sports are competitive activities, ranking is still important for the athletes practising them, even if this may just mean nothing else than the excellence of the athlete in comparison to the other athletes.

From the above we can see that, even if we avoid goals that are extrinsic to sport, participation in sport for its internal goods does not avoid instrumentality, whatever the nature of the sport. Even though athletes can merge with what they are doing during their performance and more or less remove instrumentality, which can be the result of their rhythmical movements etc. (cp. 'flow' or 'an optimal experience' of Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi [7]), the instrumentality cannot be completely

avoided during their performance, since as long as an athlete is participating in a particular sport, there is always a goal to fulfill. This internal instrumentality of sport (especially when also connected to extrinsic goals) has various consequences for athletes.

THE PROBLEM OF THE DOUBLE INSTRUMENTALITY OF SPORT

So, now we can see the double instrumentality of sport: the instrumentality of extrinsic goals and the instrumentality of intrinsic goals. Instrumentality means that something is used in order to achieve something else. And especially if we tend to value the result of an activity rather than the process itself [6], instrumental thinking in sport affects the quality of the movement of the athlete, whether the focus of attention is on the goal of the particular sport (as well as with rankings), or just with the rankings. In a society that is obsessed with results and wants to achieve them quickly, these two kinds of instrumentality often override the importance of the actual *process* of performance.

Sport is a competitive activity, and results are a necessary part of it, but because of this necessary attention to results, no more care need be given to the quality of movement than is necessary for outperforming the opponents in particular circumstances. In fact, to pay more attention than is necessary for success may even seem to be wasteful and inefficient. This is because the performance required for victory on a particular occasion is always comparative to the performance of an opponent. The performance of an athlete has to be 'good enough to win' and not necessarily excellent. An athlete (or a team) can even perform quite poorly, but still win. This does not support any aim such as perfecting, polishing and balancing one's movement (becoming excellent), unless and until that is required by competition. That is to say: when movement is just a means towards an achievement (ranking), the actual quality of the human movement depends on the various levels of competition. This might be a complicated mixture of elements such as the following: the ranking of the league or tournament; the abilities of the competitors involved; the particular 'external' circumstances of the contest (weather, quality of conditions or equipment, etc.); the particular

‘internal’ circumstances of the contest (near the beginning or near the end; when one is winning or losing; when one has a particular opportunity, when a particular victory is of special or overwhelming importance), etc. In this way, since tied to instrumental goals and particular circumstances of comparison, the movement of the human being in sport can hardly ever become entirely balanced, fluent and perfect [8].

Also, because of its inner instrumental and comparative nature, sport cannot be considered as enabling us to achieve or regain balance. Sport leads to excess, and athletes strive to become ever faster, higher, and stronger. Thus, rather than helping with balance, sport requires and employs our already-existing levels of balance. To be able to perform well, we have to be well-balanced *in advance*. Putting it another way: those who are not *already* well-balanced tend not to self-select for sports – and at the elite level, the ‘talent identification’ process will just screen these people out. Without already-existing balance, sport generally magnifies and multiplies our bad habits, rather than curing them. Within Physical Education this approach puts unbalanced and unskillful children off sport practice, which may affect their future participation in recreational sport and other movement forms as well.

Finally, an over-emphasis on results in sports (just as in daily life) puts an enormous tension on the athlete in terms of the outcomes of the performance. This may trigger for the performance disturbing emotions and thoughts, which disable the athlete from performing in the best possible way, and overshadow the joy that is usually associated with the human being moving and playing.

CONCLUSION

After having identified the high level of instrumentality that is interconnected with our lives, and having shown the double instrumentality of sport, we are now at least in a position to identify it, and to seek to free ourselves from it to the extent that we might wish. First, we can try to free sport from (some of) its external goals, and re-emphasise its internal instrumental goals. Now it is only the intrinsic goals that remain but, as we have already said, we cannot dispose of instrumentality in sport completely, since it is an internal part of it. In sport, there is always some achievement to be reached.

Here, the problem with instrumentality is that it has a tendency to overshadow an orientation toward process, which may prove damaging for overall performance, and for the quality of human movement more generally. When the end is more highly valued than the means, process becomes just a means to a goal. When the end overrides the means, the athlete fails to pay adequate attention to the means of his or her performance. This may be problematic because in this way we make ourselves, as well as other human beings, into an instrument for our aims; and thus we may fail to treat ourselves in a respectful way, perhaps even exploiting or harming ourselves or others.

For orientation toward process, we should look elsewhere. One way to do this is to recognize activities with a non-instrumental character and to include them side by side with sport in any programme that has a primary brief for the quality of human movement, or the movement development of humans, especially children. This will both improve one’s sport performance, and enrich one’s life with a new approach and new experiences.

Acknowledgment

The article was written with support from a Research Grant from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports MSM 0021620864, Czech Republic.

REFERENCES

- [1] Breivik G., Skillful coping in everyday life and in sports: A critical examination of the views of Heidegger and Dreyfus, *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 2007, 34, 2: 116-134.
- [2] Coubertin P. de, Why I Revived the Olympic Games, (in:) N. Müller, ed., Pierre de Coubertin. Olympism: Selected Writings, IOC, Lausanne 2000, pp. 542-546.
- [3] Hardman K., Marshall J., The state and status of physical education in schools in international context, *European Physical Education Review*, 2000, 6, 3: 203-229.
- [4] Heidegger M., *Einleitung in die Philosophie* (2nd ed.), Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 2001.
- [5] Heidegger M., *Sein und Zeit* (18th ed.), Max Niemeyer, Tübingen 2001.

- [6] Hogenová A., Phenomenology and Sport, *Acta Universitatis Carolinae. Kinanthropologica*, 1997, 33, 2: 47-53.
- [7] Jackson S.A., Csikszentmihalyi M., Flow in Sports, Human Kinetics, Champaign, IL; Leeds 1999.
- [8] Martínková I., The Fluency of Human Movement in Sport, *Acta Universitatis Carolinae. Kinanthropologica*, 2009, 45, 2: 55-65.
- [9] Martínková I. & Hsu L-H., Justification of Dangerous Sports and the Question of Values, *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 2009, 5, 2: 93-99.
- [10] Parry J., Sport, Art and the Aesthetic, *Sport Science Review*, 1989, 12: 15-20.
- [11] Parry J., The Justification of Physical Education, (in:) K. Green & K. Hardman, eds, Physical Education – A Reader, Meyer & Meyer, Oxford 1998, 36-68.
- [12] Russell J.S., The Value of Dangerous Sport, *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 2005, XXXII, 1: 1-19.
- [13] Steenbergen J., Tamboer J., Ethics and the double character of sport: an attempt to systematize discussion of the ethics of sport, (in:) M.J. McNamee & J. Parry, eds, *Ethics & Sport*, Routledge, London: 2002, pp. 35-53.
- [14] Tuxill C., Wigmore S., 'Merely meat'? Respect for persons in sport and games, (in:) M.J. McNamee & J. Parry, eds, *Ethics & Sport*, Spon Press, London 1998, pp. 104-115.
- [15] Walsh A., Giulianotti R., *Ethics, Money and Sport – this sporting Mammon*, Routledge, London 2007.