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1ST LECTURE

Sport

What is sport? Is there any definition of it? Do we need any? Movement and sport. Leisure time and working time. Relation between sport and play.

What is sport?

There is a problem in this question. Everybody knows very well about what I am speaking when I utter the word "sport". However, when I ask you what is sport you might be puzzled. How could we give general characterization of this cluster of activities? What is sport exactly? Of course, we can enumerate components of the cluster. We can start with soccer, ice hockey, rugby-football, volleyball, basketball etc. We can continue by track and field athletics, biathlon, alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, figure skating, rowing, shooting etc.

Yet no enumeration says us what sport is. When we do sport – for example, when I do play soccer – I don't need to know what sport is. We play the game or we running, but we do not know what sport is. What has been written here is of great importance and we will get back to it in the course of this lecture. However, let me continue with asking the question. What is sport? Why do we need to know it, when we muse about sport? When, for instance, we do some research? Some sociological, or psychological, or what ever, research in sport field?

Of course, it is common to assume that if we reflect something we should know what it is that we are reflecting. If we want to say what marks people off from animals, for example, we should know what words "people" and "animal" mean. This is the thing, which was recognized by ancient Greek philosophers. For instance, Socrates or Plato asked his disputants what they bear in mind when they say, "Courage is this and this." To continue questioning, they urged disputants to find more and more displays of courage: courage is when arm forces launch attack, courage is when small group of people do not become frightened when they see superiority of enemies, courage is when one man causes damage of the

enemy's troops, courage is when somebody resists unjust government... and so on. Then, they tried to generalize about all these single examples and found universal definition of concept "courage".

Let us take an example from our field. When my colleague, Sekot, said something on "contemporary features of sport from sociological point of view" he should have known what he meant by the words "feature", "sport", and "sociology". Trying to set some definition of sport, we shall need a list of features of the activities called "sport". What is typical of these activities? What is general feature of volleyball, football, soccer, ice hockey?

[Collective sport, rules, obedience to rules, playing, game, movement, competitiveness]

However, there is the second set of sports: track and field, ski jumping, speed skating, boxing, fencing... What is different from the first group?

[They are the individual sports.]

Sports could be collective or individual. So, the features that remain are rules, obedience to rules, playing, game, movement, competitiveness. Now we ask: what about chess? We can see chess championship on TV, in sports journals, but is it really sport? If not, what is chess? Is it work? Of course, it is not. It is a spare time activity in the same sense as track and field, soccer, or ski jumping. (There was uttered a new characteristic – spare time activity. Please, keep in mind this feature; we will turn back to it in a moment.) In what does the problem of chess consist really? What marks off football from chess?

[That one thing is movement. There is almost no movement in playing chess. There can be found strategy, competition, championships, and rules and so on; however, movement is restricted to slight moves of hands above a game board]

here.]

However, what about snooker and pool? Are they not sports? They are probably sports, although in comparison with track and field, or soccer, or figure skating there is much less movement in these games. In that aspect, they are similar to chess.

As we can see, movement is a troublesome characteristic. Could we discard movement from the list of characteristics? There is a problem here. Doing it, we would discard the feature, which is typical of the majority of sports and simultaneously, we would bring sport near to the activities like playing of strategic computer games.

Let us get "movement" aside for a while and try to inquire into other features that were mentioned above, like – spare time activity. Sports are activities, which we do in our leisure time. We are playing sport games in the time when we have no serious responsibilities. Yet, it is important to see in the previous sentence the two obstructions:

1. I said "playing sport games". I used adjective "sport" in collocation "sport games". I had to do that because I needed to differentiate sports activities from other type of activities we do in our leisure time. For example: listening to music, visiting museums or theatres, playing erotic games with our mates, hitchhiking across Europe, working for some volunteer's organization.
2. When we observe the field of contemporary sports, we could easily find that some sports are carried on in working time. There are thousands and thousands of people that are professionals. Detaching the first obstruction, we might say, in history, people had done sports

in their leisure time, but from the end of the 19th century when the first professional sportsmen appeared, this relation to spare time has been disrupted. However, that is not the whole truth. As we will see in some of the next lectures, this point of view is significantly reduced. Strictly speaking, there were also professional sportsmen in ancient times, even in golden times of ancient Greek Olympic Games. Our idea of ancient amateur sportsmen is an idea, which was created in the 19th century by the sporting nobility and bourgeoisie that wanted to exclude working class sportsmen from competitions and from sport clubs.

Therefore both, concepts: "movement" as well as of "spare-time activity", are troublesome because they don't suit all activities, which are usually covered by the term "sport". Nevertheless, two features of sport seem to belong to definition of sport entirely, i.e. play (or playing) and game. (Having in mind, of course, that competition is not structuring part of all sport activity – for example, jogging or spinning or hang-gliding.) Let us inspect closely some theories of play and game.

We are starting with the most popular definition of play that Johan Huizinga set at the beginning of the 1950th. He stated his synoptic characterization of play in these words:

"... We might call it [I. e. play] a free activity standing out consciously outside "ordinary" life as a being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gain by it. It proceeds within in boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise and other means..."

(Huizinga, 6)

It is apparent that concepts of "play" (or "playing") and "sport" are not concepts, which represent each other. In many instances of play there is no sporting activity (theatre play, playing the violin etc). On the other hand, many philosophers and sociologists hope play to be the hypernym of sport (i.e. super ordinate word in terms of significance). They think that all sport activities have to be playing. We could easily see that it might be only if we greatly change Huizinga's definition. The reason is that professional sports are not activities "standing out consciously outside 'ordinary' life as a being 'not serious'" and that they are doing sport for profit. They do sport as a profession, as a job. In spite of that, it would be useful for our next analyses to continue inspecting this definition and reactions of other theoretician.

Summing the Huizinga's definition, we can single out four main features of it:

1. Play is a non-ordinary activity (it means that it suspends common world of seriousness and needs).
2. It is an activity, which is not pursuing material benefit or profit.
3. These are activities that have its boundaries of time (the length of game or the duration of some performance) and of space (a playground, an athletic field, or a theatre stage and so on).
4. The activity supports groupings because it helps to build identity of groups by contrasting them to other groups and ordinary world. The main tool of this process is secrecy. Something, which nobody except members of the group could know.

Roger Caillois, another theoretician of play, attempted to understand the topics in a different manner. He sets four types of play. Plays are either the *agon*

type, or the *alea* type, or the *mimicry* type, or the *ilinx* type. (Cf. Caillois, 7–16) We learn from this distinction that almost all sport activities are "the *agon* type", i.e. they have competitive character. Not all of them, of course, however, I am afraid, that this differentiation could not help us in our effort to define sport. On the other side, he noted some comments on Huizinga's definition that might be helpful for us in late analyses. That is why I am going to mention them here.

1. He criticized Huizinga's stress on relation between play and secrecy. Caillois, on the contrary, turned our attention to the fact that information on plays are often publicized (in sport especially, we can add, there are publicized scores of matches, line-ups, strategy, transfers of players, funding for team) and that is why they negate secrecy in a way. (Caillois, 7) However, we will see that these factors of groupings and of secrecy have been very important part of sports activities and that these factors affected sport from the year dot until now. For example, in the 7th lecture we will speak about the 19th century tendency of sportsmen from nobility and bourgeoisie to exclude lower classes from clubs and competition. But, those intentions were secrecy and it was covered by the myth on superiority of amateur sport.
2. Caillois also criticized what we have mention in the first paragraph, i.e. Huizinga's belief that play, from its nature, avoids material interests. He pointed out that this definition of play excluded betting, gambling, and other games of chance from the rank of plays. (Caillois, 7–8) These plays are the plays that Caillois classify into the *alea* type. Here I only make a slight note: the

play "dice" was counted as the sport activity in the Middle Ages.

At the end of this lecture, I will back to this problem.

Now let me turn our attention to relation between words "play" and "game". In English-Czech dictionary, we find Czech word "hra" as the equivalent of both English words. However, we can easily recognize that the words have differences in their usage. At the beginning of the 20th century, these slight differences were used by George Herbert Mead for his theory of formation of the Self. In the same manner, Bernard Suits differentiated meanings of the words in his texts where he tried to clear concepts of sport, play and game. (The text *Words on Play* was very important paper, especially for analytical philosopher of sport, which establish widely accepted frame of similar disputes.) He illustrated the distinction by the help of narrative from the every day life. As analytical philosopher, he believed that in ordinary language the true shape of world is coded. Therefore, analytical philosophers think, we could get to know truth about world through careful analysis of language. That is the reason why Bernard Suits used so many examples from everyday life. Here is one of them:

"... 'Johnny', says Johnny's mother, 'stop playing with your mashed potatoes.' It surely would be straining usage to conclude that Johnny is engaged in playing a game with his mashed potatoes... If Johnny... [Was] playing games (and not simply playing), then presumably these following questions would be answerable: What are the goals of [the game]? What are the rules? What counts as winning? What counts as cheating?" (Suits, 19)

There is an apparent difference found in the narrative. Play (or playing) is an activity and at the same time activity without rules. Something similar is meant in the example when we say, "she is playing with her hair", and there are no rules how to play with ones hair. It is an auto-telic activity. (Cf. Suits, 19.) Here "auto-

telic" signifies an activity that has no goal in advance. Here we play only for the purpose of joy. We play to lead our superfluous energy somewhere. It is the same what Huizinga said. When playing only for joy, we need energy and other sources (hair, potatoes, little pieces of woods, or other humans) that we use in everyday life, however, now we use them in another manner, different from needs or demands of everyday life. Mashed potatoes are for eating primarily, not for playing. (Cf. Suits, 22) Hair is covering of our head it is a type of protection, but hair is not for playing primarily. The other people are there for cooperation, which we need for saving our lives, or for reproduction, not for playing erotic games or playing drama.

In contrast, game is a system of rules and at the same time, an outcome of play. But play, which is led by rules. In other words, for constituting game, we need "play" (the spontaneous desire to do something only for joy) and the rules that we decide to obey.

You might be confused by this definition because it says, "game arises there, where play starts to follow the rules". Does it mean that a play cease to be play and transform itself completely into game? It would be a strange, but coherent explication. Play is free, unenforced, auto-telic activity without constrains. However, rules of the game are limitations indeed. This confusion would pose this question, "Does meanings of the words 'play' and 'game' overlap, or not?", and to be coherent, we should answer, "No, they do not. Having in mind that the play ends where the game begins, there is no immediate connection between them." Actually, a few philosophers of sport would agree with this. They want auto-telic and extraordinary character of play to be a component of meaning of the word "game".

For example, Bernard Suits, at the end of his above mentioned paper, wrote on play as if it would be the component of game. He also introduces other narratives. It is a story of the mixed double event (tennis), when the team A consists of a visitor from Utopia and a highly gifted amateur woman, the team B consists of woman tennis professional and in a creature – Grasshopper. Grasshopper – molded and named according to the ancient fable where the grasshopper play the violin for such long time until he die – is willing to play the game endlessly long until he die. In the story, Suits wishes to point at the fact that excluding the amateur woman, the other three players is not playing, it is only do the game. The professional does the game for payment. The man from Utopia does the game because we cannot differentiate work time from leisure time since in Utopia people are not urged to save his life by work. Grasshopper do the game as well because spends his life for the game. The three are participating in the game, but they are not playing. In their activity, either auto-telic character (in the case of the professional) or possibility of suspension of common day needs and demands (in both cases: the Utopia man and Grasshopper) is lacking. According to Suits, the amateur woman is a player in the proper sense of this word and at the same time, she plays the game. (Cf. Suits, 24–25) So, we can see that, for him, play and game need not be in contradiction – and it is useful to catch that it is the same in cases of many sport specialists.

Why do they want (or need) to hold this strange confusing position? This stubborn effort of analytical philosophers to find truth in language by the help of "careful" analysis of language is very strange for me. In spite of this oddity, it is instructive to think about this attitude and its background. Why do Suits and other philosophers of his cast want to preserve close relation between play and game,

although they worked very hard to define play as a wholly auto-telic, free activity, which suspends needs and demands of everyday life? The reason is, I think, they want to and need connect "advantages" of the game, which has given rules beforehand, with ethos of free, unforced, non-benefit play. This paradoxical connection has two disciplinal functions:

- 1) To take control over playing, which naturally tends to change or proliferate and hybridize rules.
- 2) To separate clearly the activities of working day and everyday life from the activities of spare time and extraordinary time.

This is, of course, not a feature of analytic philosophy only. We can discover it in phenomenological inquiry of sport too. Both groups of specialists use these functions in order to structure our contemporary concept of sport in an odd way.

In the next lecture we will see that combination of these functions enable philosophers and other people, using philosophers' ideas for their aims, to take control over the discourse of sport and set ideology, by which they are capable to rule mechanisms of sport-machinery. Unfortunately, their ideology keeps us from accurately understanding contemporary sport.