

## *2<sup>nd</sup> Lecture*

2

### *Philosophy of sport*

**Ideology of sport. Analytical philosophy of sport. Phenomenological philosophy of sport. Critically historical philosophy of sport.**

Let me to summarize our last lecture.

Firstly, we spoke about our need to define the concept "sport" in order to be able handling with it. However, we couldn't present the list of features that every sport activity should fulfill. We found these features: competitiveness, spare-time, play (playing), game, movement as important features, but we weren't able to generalize the definition because no sport activity fulfill all criterions. For example, the condition of spare-time activity don't comply with top sports, the condition of movement don't comply with chess (and also pool and snooker in a sense).

Secondly, we mused on meaning difference of words "game" and "play". We showed the attempts to define this dissimilarity by specialists as Huizinga, Caillois, and in the first place, Bernard Suits. We mentioned that most of philosophers or other specialists try to distinguish play from game in similar way, in spite of the fact that their

philosophical starting point is different. For instance, Huizinga's point of view is close to the phenomenological analysis and Suits' one is point of full-fledged analytical philosopher. Both camps insist on a common part of definition of play, which set play as a spontaneous, unforced activity that relocate sources of human life and power to other aims than are the aims of everyday needs and demands. They imply from this play to be an activity, which must not be done for benefit; we aren't doing it for some profit. We are doing them for joy, or for pleasure coming from a play itself.

Thirdly, at the end of the last lecture I spoke on typical ideology whose one of displays is just this effort. The effort to see play as an autotelic, non-beneficial activity. This activity is a first of stage of game. However, game, in contrary to play, is bound by rules. Here is the problem or strangeness of this widespread opinion. Play is autotelic, free activity, without specific aims to gain benefits, without boundaries and constrains, but we need it for game. It is its part, the first stage. There is contradiction here. Play is part of game on the one hand, on the other a play is play when, by definition, it has no rules beforehand.

Fourthly, I asked why such different philosophers need to see play in the same way – as being different from game because it is not directed by rules while at the same time they see it as component of game. We could, of course, read this difficulty as saying: Play is a free, starting moment of games. The moment of freedom; of making the world of play, which is different from the everyday world. And just the next stage,

i.e. setting of rules, transforms a play into a game. However, why do we need so complicated explanations of concepts? Where are advantages, which justify so intricate defining method? I was not able to find them in the last lecture. It might be the reason why I turned our attention to functions of these definitions.

I found two main functions of the definition.

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

The first function has known from ancient times. If we want to establish and keep up competition, we need stable and clear rules. The second one is more interesting. It has appeared later, in 19<sup>th</sup> century with the myth of ancient amateur athletes, by which sportsmen of higher classes justified their efforts to exclude the lower athletes. (It might be that this tendency to exclusion could be found in elder history also – for example, social exclusion members of lower classes, slaves and women from ancient Greek *gymnasiums* or strict prohibition "knights' " way of fighting for low-born people in 14<sup>th</sup> century.) This exclusion had its social reasons. Sport could help members of lower classes to break down its social position and achieve higher social status. However, this process of social movement couldn't be stopped and after all, the second function could

start to serve as a base for "moral lectures". Both functions help to gain control over sports and then use them for other goals – making money, creating heroes, manipulating people by the help of sport, creating nations and so on.

Besides positives, i.e. possibility of contest, first function has its dark side. Strictly set rules immobilize or slow down natural free evolution of games. Thus, group of people who could dictate change of game rules controls sports. These people could influence shape of a game. Consider example of basketball. Up to 1970<sup>th</sup> of the last century, it was almost non-contact sport. Under the pressure of media and sponsors, it has changed itself radically. In these days, only narrow group of people (often organized in national and international associations and sport organizations) has impact on sports and thus controls not only competitions, but flow of money and of power also. (See for example, Football Czech-Moravian Association headed by half-mafian Chvalovsky and its uncontrolled power.)

Yet, second function is more doubtful than the first one. We should see – and in our next lectures, we are going to recognize it – that Europeans started to put moral values into sport from the time of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when sport began to serve as a tool of education. It doesn't mean that respective sports hadn't had certain apparent rules which players should have led. But these rules of a game were in relations to the given sport. There weren't any general theory of fair-play or theory of the right form of sport in the time before the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Of course, in the phase of overestimation and worshipping

of competition (not only in sport, but in social life generally it is a time of liberalism, theory of social contract with threat of war of all people against all people, with invisible hand of market), we have needed this theory, but we should not project it into all history of sport.

With this critically historic analysis in mind, we easily see that sport is very hard to characterize. It would be useful to notice that until late Middle Ages, humans hadn't had any general name for activities we call "sport". In that time, the term "sport" arose from word "disportare" that meant "to amuse" or "to entertain". There is connection between sport and leisure time. However, we know that for a long time before (in the ancient time already) there were, in fact, professionals doing sport for payment and other benefits. Even in so called "golden time of Olympics" (see Young, 128–133).

It indicates clearly, I think, that for understanding sport we need careful historically philosophical analysis. In spite of that, in philosophy of sport we can meet other attitudes – mostly phenomenological and analytical.

In its nature, both mentioned philosophical approaches are ahistorical; they analyze affairs and concepts synchronically only. They have done very much work in the field of sport. However, they, in my view, haven't helped us to understand sport much better than we do when we are just sporting. Let me list some features of these

philosophical method to support this. Please, keep in mind that I will simplify the philosophies. Yet, our aim is not to become great phenomenologists or great analytical philosophers, but to point out the basic features of both philosophies and thus to show why the philosophers analyzing phenomenon of sport have failed yet.

Phenomenology is a kind of philosophy founded by Edmund Husserl at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is a philosophy that attempt to study consciousness and its structure. Husserl guided by his teacher Brentano recognizes that main structure of experience is given by intentionality. It means that if we speak, if we think we speak about something, we think about something. Our language as well as our any mental activity is aimed at something. For phenomenologists of Husserlian type, it is important that these intentional "objects" – they call them "*noema*" – create their own structure and if we are able to analyze the structure we could say something crucial about human thinking, speaking, about experience generally. According to Husserl, we could do what Descartes and Kant wanted to in a sense. We could find not only borders and limits of our reason, but first of all, borders and limits of all human experiences.

At his second phase, Husserl wanted to progress his theory. He believed that thanks to careful phenomenological analysis, we could find the true structure of world in our personal, subjective experience or consciousness. We have no time to introduce the main principles of the analysis, let me note only that twofold bracketing of our

experience (*epoché*) could find *lifeworld* (*Lebenswelt*). It is the world which is not disrupted by theories of sciences as well as by misuses of everyday, indigested life. It is our original world. Therefore, according to phenomenologists, we could find the true meanings of all our concepts if we analyze them through this ideal human world.

I hasten to assure you I admit that there are many important things, which come from phenomenological analysis. On the other hand, I am suspicious when phenomenology starts to find the true meaning of concepts, especially of sport concepts. If we open one of the most respected text on philosophy of play – Eugen Fink's *The Ontology of Play* – we find traditional equipment, a sort of mystical insights into the nature of play. I am summarizing the text to document it: Play is commonly connected with playing of child's games, however, the true meaning of the concept we should seek in play of adult people. (Fink, 147–8) In play, adults suspend everyday world and create "the world of play". (152–154) Human life is characterized by these constants – physicality, work, death. We are fragile because our physicality and that is why we have to work in order to avoid death. Yet, there is one more constant – play. Play is an oasis of our life. It has its purpose in itself. It frees us from tragic character of life. Play gives us "present" (it means that in everyday life we have to think forward, to think about future, in contrary the time we are playing). Thus play constitutes fullness of human life. (148–150) Of course, setting the play in this way every activity of play, which mix play with concerns of everyday life, is adulterate play. (149)

There are nice passages on play in Fink's text those speak about representational character of play. These sequences illuminate one of the most important features of play, which help us to understand world. Play (or game – because Fink is not so strict in differentiation of concepts play and game as Suits was) could symbolize our too complicated world, because it could serve as a simplified model of our world. We will return to this interesting moment in the next lecture. Except these passages, however, we have found the same characteristics as in Huizinga's or Suits' theories: A play is distorted when during the play, people pursue other aims than joy of play itself. But I can't exclude from class of playing people those who is professional sportsmen, or who is sporting for their health, or for reason that during some play they can meet their mates and so on. These purist theories cannot help us to understand better such complicated phenomenon like sport or human being or ecological niche.

In approach of analytical philosophers, we could find the same, or (more precisely) similar, purist approach to meanings of words. Elementarily, analytic philosophy attempt to find under our confused thoughts or under our confused language their true structure which mirroring the true structure of our world. In the last lecture we sketch Suits' analysis of play and his unnatural differentiation of play from game. He uses the everyday narratives – remember his story about Johnny who plays with potatoes, playing with potatoes could not be a game because pushing potatoes this or



that way has no rules set beforehand – and then he analyze the narratives by the help of separation the true meanings of words from the fictitious sediments.

There are two kinds of presuppositions (I dare to say prejudices) that phenomenology and analytical philosophy share:

1. The true structure of the world is mirrored by the true structure of our language or of our consciousness; (in case of analyticism, philosopher should carefully analyze the words or mental states to get to something immutable; in case of phenomenology, philosopher should get into the structure of our consciousness by bracketing of our world images and only this way he reaches *noemas*; in this *noemas*, the true world and the given structure of our consciousness meet each other).
2. Since the structure of world as well as the right structure our language or our consciousness are stable, timeless and ever-during we need not to use historical point of view. Historical events have had no impact on these eternal structures. That is why we meet synchronic approach only in both philosophies.

Let me make a note in this place. Of course, I simplify the story because in both camps there have been people who start to introduce historical events and their consequences into synchronic plan of their studies. Recall Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty,

and Patočka on the one hand, on the other Sellars, Davidson, or Putnam. However, at lowest level of works of all mentioned philosophers, passion for finding something everlasting, unchallengedly true could be found (Heidegger's *Being*, Patočka's *care for soul*, Sellars' *analyticity of concepts*, Putnam's *inner realism*). Moreover, most of well-known philosophers of sport work in the synchronic space only.

These prejudices are new varieties of very old philosophical thoughts stemming from the time of Plato or Parmenides. However, neither of philosophers has yet justified these two prejudices. How could we know that there is the stable timeless structure of our world and even if it is there and it is a stable and timeless one, how could we know that our language or consciousness function as a mirror, which reflects the structure?

Of course, it could be both. Yet, it is hard to find warrantor for these answers. I am afraid that phenomenologists as well as analytists go wrong direction. For both of camps don't offer fair and grounded answers the questions stated above and at the same time, they ignore that human experience arises, develops itself and changes itself in time, and in this way creates its own history. To overlook this means to impose our supposedly "true" meanings on reality and thus to distort it. This distortion manifests itself in our narrow-minded efforts to define univocally concepts "sport", or "play", or "human being".

What I propose here is a rival approach. It is historically philosophical analysis and interpretation. This approach study carefully historical differences not only of words meanings, but also practices which are connected with the meanings and then it interprets the changes and their consequences in social environment. For example, we will study what means exactly *gymnastics* in ancient Greece, with which social functions it was related, how they was related to other concepts (for example *kalokagathia*), how they were different from our understanding. We will study conception of sport in Middle Ages and we will compare it with our limited comprehension of that period.

Historically philosophical approach does it without throwing away the good things of analyticism or phenomenology. It analyzes meanings of words and texts as well as analytists, but it doesn't assert that by the help of this analysis grasp the true world or the true structure. It uses interesting and useful insights of phenomenology (for example, Fink's conception of play as a symbol of the whole world), but it doesn't maintain that it is a part of true *noema* of this phenomenon. It uses the insights as a good or helpful tool for interpretation.

As it could be apparent now, critically historical philosophy cannot work with the term "truth" as incoherently as the other philosophies. This analysis has no image of knowledge as mirroring. It follows from this fact that there is no direct access to the only true structure of world. Our analyses and interpretations are tools that are to help us

in confused and complicated situations. That is why we, in the next lecture, revive the concept "myth" as an important category which is not in contradiction to the concept "truth", but in contrary, it is its important complement.