

## **Synopsis in-depth**

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### ***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. Critically historical philosophy of sport.**

**2**

### ***Philosophy of sport***

**Philosophy of sport and theory of physical education. Analytical philosophy of sport. Phenomenological philosophy of sport. Critically historical philosophy of sport.**

**3**

### ***Myth***

**Myth. Functions of myth in human life. Sport and social reality.**

**Sports myth. The overriding myth in sport.**

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### ***Kalokagathia***

***Kalokagathia* in ancient Greece. The golden Age of *kalokagathia* and *gymnasiums*. *Gymnasiums* as a social sieve. *Kalokagathia* in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Kalos kai agathos* today.**

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*Sport and body in Middle Ages*

**Body in the early Middle Ages. Body in the late Middle Ages. Parallel between body and sport in Middle Ages. Medieval sport.**

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*The 19<sup>th</sup> century mythologies*

**Sports of gentlemen and establishing sports club. Construction of ideal form of ancient Olympics in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Golden age of ancient Olympics and time of degeneration. Myth as a means of exclusion.**

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*Athlete like a hero*

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**1<sup>ST</sup> 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. Critically historical philosophy of sport.**

## **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 a 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 with 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 run, but we do not know what sport is. What was just said is an important thing and we'll turn back to it in the end of this lecture. However, let me continue with questioning. 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 whatever, 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" means. This is the thing, which was recognized by ancient Greek philosophers. For instance, Socrates or Plato asked his disputants what they had in mind when they said, "Courage is this and this." Continuing questions, they urged disputants to find more and more displays of courage: courage is when arm forces launch an attack, courage is when a small group of people doesn't become frightened when it sees the 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 find 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 know what he meant by the words "feature", "sport", and "sociology". Trying to set some definition of sport, we should 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 hokey?

*[collective sport, rules, obedience to rules, playing, game, movement, competitiveness]*

However, there is the second set of sports: track and field, ski jumping, speed scating, 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. Yet, what about chess? We could see chess championship in TV sport journal. Is it exactly sport or not? If not, what is chess? Work? Not, of course. 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'll turn back to it in a moment.) In what does the problem of chess consist really? What marks off football from chess?

*[The only thing – movement. There is almost no movement in playing chess. There can be found strategy, competition, championships, rules and so on.]*

However, what about snooker and pool? Are they not sports? They are probably,

although in comparison with track and field, or soccer, or figure skating there is much less of 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 feature that was mention above – 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 find easily that some sports are carried on in working time. There thousand and thousand people they 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 19<sup>th</sup> century when the first professional sportsmen appeared, this relation to spare time has been disrupted. However, it is not whole truth. As we will see in the 5<sup>th</sup> and

7<sup>th</sup> lectures, this point of view is overly reduced. Strictly speaking, there were professional sportsmen in ancient times also, even in golden times of ancient Greek Olympic Games. Our idea of ancient amateur sportsmen is an idea, which was created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the sporting nobility and bourgeoisie that wanted to exclude working class sportsmen from competitions and from sport clubs.

Therefore both, concepts of "movement" as well as of "spare-time activity", are troublesome because they don't suit all activities, which we cover 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 1950<sup>th</sup>. 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 gained by it. It proceeds within its 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" is not

concepts, which represent each other. Many instances of play are not a 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. superordinate 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 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. But of course, not all of them. However, I am afraid that this differentiation couldn't 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, turn our attention to the fact that information on plays are often publicized (in sport especially, we can add, it is publicized scores of matches, lineups, strategy, transfers of players, finance 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 7<sup>th</sup> lecture we will speak on the 19<sup>th</sup> century tendency of sportsmen from nobility and bourgeoisie to exclude lower classes from clubs and competition. But, these intentions was secrecy and it was covered by the myth on superiority of amateur sport.
2. Caillois criticized what we mention above, i.e. Huizinga's belief that play, from its nature, avoid 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 concept of sport, play and game. He illustrated the distinction by the help of narrative from the every day life. As analytical philosopher, he believed that in ordinary language is coded the true shape of world. 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 the 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)

From these narrative is apparent the difference. Play (or playing) is an activity and at the same time activity without rules. It is meant here something similar when we say, "she is playing with her hair", there is no rules how to play with own's hair. It is an autotelic activity. (Cf. Suits, 19.) "Autotelic" signifies here an activity that has no goal in advance. We play it for joy only. We play to

lead our superfluous energy somewhere. It is the same what Huizinga said. For playing for joy only, we need energy and other sources (hair, potatoes, little pieces of woods, or other humans) that we use in another manner than needs or demands of everyday life want us to use them. Mashed potatoes are for eating primarily, not for playing. (Cf. Suits, 22) Hair is covering of our head it is a type of protection, and maybe type of signalization – skinheads are often baldheads, followers of EMO-style have a violet strands and so on – 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 game or playing drama.

In contrast, game is a system of rules and at the same time, 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 for joy only) and the rules that we decide to obey.

You might be confused by this definition because it says, "game arise where play start 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, autotelic activity without constrains. However, rules of 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 don't. Having in mind that play ends where game starts, there is no immediate connection between them." However, a few philosophers of sport would agree with this. They want autotelic and extraordinary character of play to be a component of meaning of the word "game".

For example, Bernard Suits, at the end of his paper *Words on Play*, write as if play would be the component of game. He introduces other narratives there. It is a story on the mixed double event (tennis), when the team A consists in a visitor from Utopia and in highly gifted amateur woman, the team B consists in women tennis professional and in creature from the ancient fable – Grasshopper, which is willing to play the game so long that it would die. By the story, Suits wants to say that excluding the amateur woman the other three players don't do playing, they only do the game. Professional do the game for payment, a man from Utopia doesn't troubled himself by demands of common day because in Utopia he is not urged to save his life and Grasshopper spend his life for the game. The three are doing game, but they are not playing. In their activity, either autotelic character (in the case of the professional) or possibility of suspension of common day needs and demands (in the case of both, the Utopia man and Grasshopper) are 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 play and game need not to be in contradiction for him – and it is useful to note that for many sport specialists also.

Why do they want (or need) to hold this strange because confused 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 of mind want to preserve close relation between play and game, although they worked hard to define play as a wholly autotelic, free activity, which suspend needs and demands of everyday life? The reason is, I think, they want and need to 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 not feature of analytic philosophy only we can discover it in phenomenological inquiry of sport too. Both groups of specialists use these functions to internally structure our contemporary concept of sport.

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 on sport and set ideology, by which they are capable to rule mechanisms of sport-machinery. Unfortunately, their ideology keeps us from understanding of contemporary sport exactly.