

From the volume Editor: *Some remarks on sport from its historical-cultural horizon*

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The beautiful parable of Pythagoras, handed down by Cicero (*Tusculanae Disputationes*, V, 3), about the Greek Games as a metaphor of human life, is well-known. In this parable, the great philosopher and mathematician presents three groups of people who come to the Games (figuratively, the World Games, the Theatre of Life): these are athletes – applying for fame and a wreath of victory, viewers – motivated by an impartial desire to watch the competitions and merchants – putting up stalls for the sale of goods and profit. The featured groups serve Pythagoras as allegories of social roles and human aspirations for values: prestigious and elite (athletes), cognitive and exploratory (spectators) as well as mercantile and consumer (merchants). This parabola essentially serves to expose a sense of philosophy, love wisdom, based on pure and autotelic cognitive curiosity (viewers represent this attitude). The fact that Pythagoras uses the image of the Games here is not accidental, since Greek philosophers were greatly interested in athletics (Pythagoras was friends with the famous wrestler Milo of Croton). Greek athletes were, in fact, spectacular and faithful representatives of their culture, marked by strong individualism flourishing in the tensions between the two oppositional poles: time (fame) and *ajdos* (shame). The sources of the ancient Hellenic “culture of glory and shame” are rooted in the heroic myths of Homer’s rhapsode. These myths were later subjected to rational sublimation in the ethical and anthropological considerations of philosophers (Pythagoras made a brilliant and, at the same time, raw contribution to them). They also became an archetypal element of the pan-Hellenic agonist ethos and the local athletic and artistic games. Pierre de Coubertin, nostalgically fixated on noble myth and heroic ethos, transferred his senses and values to the ideology of neo-Olympism, desiring the modern Olympic movement be not only a government of bodies, but also a lesson of character, a government of souls. He initiated not only modern *Olympiads*, but also the theoretical hermeneutics of sport, which is still doing well and developing in the form of, among others, Olympic education, philosophy and ethics of sport, histo-

ry of sport and physical education, sociology of physical culture. Here is today’s participation in the Games of these Pythagorean spectators – theoreticians (Greek *theoria*, a panorama, observation), researchers, scientists who develop an ideological and axio-normative basis of sports practices.

Despite didactic efforts, effective crystallization and articulation of principles and ideological imperatives by Coubertin and his followers, sport today seems to be losing its archetypal *eidōs*. According to numerous diagnoses, this is the result of the faster appropriation of athletic spaces by heterogeneous economic influences (Pythagorean traders!), – those political, media- and marketing-related. Pure sports values, such as competition, perfectionism, pageantry, bodily and psychological power of man are today subjected to instrumentalisation processes and are used for non-sporting purposes. Critics practicing jeremiads on the condition of modern sport and the decline in the value of its ethos even go as far as to theorise that “sport no longer exists” because it gave the field to foreign dictates. Therefore, sport may appear as a “contemporary slave market”, “marketplace of vanity and greed”, “post-human laboratory”, “pitch of imperial skirmishes of world political powers”. All these affairs actually concern the condition of not only sport, but also the state of society and culture in general. Sport, due to its spectacular presence in the global world, is particularly predisposed to focus dominant trends, influences and interests within it. Sport is not more immoral than the world of which it is a part. For these reasons, it is so eagerly analysed by historians, sociologists and cultural scholars, for whom it is a heuristic model for studying the dynamics of cultural changes. Sport is a mirror focusing the whole of social life and historical processes occurring within the human world, i.e. culture. Approaching this from a hermeneutic understanding and interpreting reflection towards sport, we can (as Hans-Georg Gadamer taught) fuse horizons of historical tradition and contexts that are the result of problems, crises and dilemmas of our time. A meaningful interpretation of these collisions regards

extracting vital meaning for current life, as well as increasing the level of human self-knowledge and responsibility. Sport, in its rich historical tradition, in the solstices, barriers, temptations and challenges of present day, requires such a complex understanding. In the introduction to *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel expressed an unusual and invariably current formula: "The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk". Wisdom is born at dusk, it is the knowledge of the times that passes by in the eyes of the people who create it. Only at the end of events can one clearly and unambiguously draw (against the symbolism of dusk) explanations of their important moments, including the symptoms and causes of crises. There is no wisdom without a historical sense and reflection on the transformation of culture. Wilhelm Dilthey, the creator of philosophical hermeneutics, extended the self-knowledge of man to the knowledge of the vast history of the past, stating that only history tells man who he really is. We can use these directives to study the evolution of sport, both in its historical forms of flourishing and decadence, as well as in the institutions, biographies of sports champions, the fate of ideas and values deposited in it. Sport studied in such a manner has the

power of anthropological recognition, it can tell a man who he himself is. Despite the symptoms of crisis, sport is still important for a person, arousing his enthusiasm, giving birth to new masters who become admired models and personal authorities. A man defends sport, fair play and the values that fund his ethos, because he cares about sport, considering it an expression and fulfilment of the rudiments of his own existence. The collection of articles presented in this volume of *Studies in Sport Humanities* can be viewed as a small fragment of the wider fresco of sport culture in its historical changes and present shapes. Two historical texts relate to the development of sport in the Polish inter-war period, on the example of the individual career of the Polish footballer Ernest Wilimowski and institutional management of sports disciplines in Volhynia, an extremely ethnically and culturally diverse province at the time. The other two articles present contemporary discussions on sports tourism (casus of the Philippines) and the religious dimension of sport. We invite you to read, and through these texts to, continue the debate on the historical and current great and smaller matters of sport.

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