

Sport and Authenticity

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ABSTRACT

Bednář, G. (2014). Sport and Authenticity. *J. Hum. Sport Exerc.*, 9(1), pp.201-209. This article focuses on the concept of authenticity as understood by Heidegger, Taylor, and Ferrara and its relationship to sport. I divide Heidegger's unusual terms (existenciales) from "Being and time" into the categories of authenticity and inauthenticity and provide examples of each from the field of sport. In further I analyse the ethical standpoint of authenticity which is in the centre of both ethical and sociological discourse today. Taylor's conceptions of moral ideal and culture of authenticity are critically assessed. Ferrara's models of authenticity appear to me as a good basis for various utilization in the area of sport. Finally, I argue for a mixed model of authenticity that includes both antagonistic and integrative elements. **Key words:** AUTHENTIC EXISTENCE, ETHICS OF SPORT, HEIDEGGER, INAUTHENTICITY.

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INTRODUCTION

If crucial to life's orientation for the Stoics was ataraxia and autarkeia, for the age of Enlightenment autonomia, then for the present age authenticity seems to play this role.

I say this because the question of authenticity is one of our most important contemporary topics, though the beginnings of its study lie in the 19th century, and are associated with the names of philosophers such as Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. Jacob Golomb proposes that Kant is also an important person in the study of this notion because he “transfers God’s creative functions to human beings, who, as transcendental Egos, create the whole knowable world /.../ around themselves. This move cleared the way for the self-creation of one’s selfhood – for authenticity” (Golomb, 1995). In the 20th century reflections inauthenticity are associated closely with existentialism and names such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

Martin Heidegger and (in) authenticity

Authenticity has been at the centre of attention (not only of philosophers) from the time of Martin Heidegger’s analysis in “Sein und Zeit” (1927/1977), and thus Heidegger has occupied a main role among thinkers about authenticity. Authenticity (Eigentlichkeit)¹ was considered by him in terms of of Human Being (Dasein) - Being (Sein) /cf. § 9/, Dasein - Conscience (Gewissen) /cf. § 45 /, Dasein - Project (Entwurf) /cf. § 53 / and Dasein - Time (Zeit) /cf. § 61/. Heidegger said (a) that Dasein is authentic, if it projects itself with regard to its ownest (the most intrinsic) “to be able to be” (Seinkönnen). Yet Heidegger also said (b) (§ 65) that the temporality of human thinking is intentionally directed toward the future - people think (and act afterwards) toward an anticipated future. The most effective way of embracing one’s future is by throwing oneself open into Being – the individual ought to direct their own projects to this sphere and search for personal truth in the openness and clarity of the truth of Being itself. We can speak of “living in truth” (the term originates from Czech philosopher Jan Patočka, who tried to join Husserl’s and Heidegger’s type of thinking) as another feature of authenticity.

As we know, Heidegger began to study the question of authenticity from the analysis of everydayness (Alltäglichkeit), which was for him the principal sphere of (human) existence. This sphere is under the rule of das Man, often translated as “the They” or “Anyone”. Heidegger referred to this concept in explaining the inauthentic mode of existence and mentioned three main features of it:

Idle talk/Chatter (Gerede)

Curiosity (Neugier)

Ambiguity (Zweideutigkeit)

He who wants to overcome the governance of das Man, must find the courage to “leap into authenticity” characterised by these three linchpins:

Affectedness/State-of-mind (Befindlichkeit)

Understanding (Verstehen)

Discourse/Telling (Rede)

Yet we can find other features of both authentic and inauthentic modes of existence in Heidegger’s “Being and Time”. A summary of some of them are presented here, arranged into opposing pairs:

Authenticity (<i>Eigentlichkeit</i>)	Fallenness/Entanglement (<i>Veffallen</i>)
Authentic selfhood (<i>Eigentliche Selbstheit</i>)	Inauthentic selfhood, the they/the (any)one (<i>das Man</i>)
Disclosure (<i>Erschlossenheit</i>)	Undisclosedness (<i>Verschlossenheit</i>)
Uncoveredness (<i>Entdeckendheit</i>)	Disguise (<i>Verstelltheit</i>)
Resoluteness (<i>Entschlossenheit</i>)	Irresoluteness (<i>Unentschlossenheit</i>)
Truth (<i>Wahrheit</i>)	Illusion/Untruth (<i>Unwarheit</i>)
Self (<i>Selbst</i>)	They-self (<i>Man-selbst</i>)
Conscience (<i>Gewissen</i>)	Public “conscience”
Accepting (“listening to” and “responding”) the voice/call of conscience	Suppressing/ignoring the voice/call of conscience
Running ahead into death (<i>Vorlaufen zum Tode</i>)	Fleeing away from death (<i>Flucht vor dem Tod</i>)
Solicitude/Caring for (<i>Fürsorge</i>)	Concern (<i>Besorgen</i>)
Anxiety/Dread (<i>Angst</i>)	Fear (<i>Furcht</i>)
Uncanniness (<i>Unheimlichkeit</i>)	Involvement in the world
Ready-to-hand (<i>Zuhanden</i>)	Present-to-hand (<i>Vorhanden</i>)
Temporality/Timeliness (<i>Zeitlichkeit</i>)	Time (inauthentic) (<i>Zeit</i>)
anticipation/forerun (<i>Vorlaufen</i>)	expectation (<i>Erwarten</i>)
repetition (<i>Wiederholung</i>)	forgottenness (<i>Vergessenheit</i>)
moment (of vision) (<i>Augenblick</i>)	making-present (<i>Gegenwärtigen</i>)

It is obvious that neither authenticity nor inauthenticity is feasible in its “pure” form. Authenticity cannot be a permanent mode of our lives: it is a dynamic state of self-fighting with the influence of *das Man*. Yet also: “... even in its most fallen state not the whole *Dasein* is immersed in the they-self...” (Golomb, 1995). Moving forward I use sport for interpretation at a phenomena level.

Sports involvement

How is contemporary sport related to the issue of authenticity? And do Heideggerian insights provide any useful guidance for athletes who would benefit from avoiding the pervasive influences of “*das Man*”? I think so, and I am joined by Breivik and others Continental philosophers of sport who think so too. Especially Breivik (2010) argues for this connection persuasively.

Sport can be a strong source of authenticity on the one hand and simultaneously the field of inauthenticity on the other hand. Sometimes we can even observe both modes in one moment: authentic play from players and “cynicism about the authenticity of sport as a sport” (Walsh & Giulianotti, 2001) from (so called) fans.

The whole of sporting life can be seen as a choice between two alternatives—namely, to present only one’s own personality through sport, or to listen to (and to be obedient as a consequence) to the voice of the “anonymous They” (*das Man*). The pressure of it is stronger in the sphere of elite sports and is increasing in recent years as one of the features of the Postmodern Age. I can be more specific about the anonymous sources in the area of sport: media, business, ambitious sports people in authority, governments. There are examples where athletes refused to play the role of “celebrities” or to be puppets in the hands of business corporations; certainly the Olympics have shown cases of rebellion against authorities or ruling ideologies (perhaps the best known case was displayed in Mexico in 1968 when U.S.

sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos took a stand for civil rights by raising black-gloved fists during the performance of the national anthem).

It is important to examine some central Heideggerian notions and their implications for sport:

Neither affectedness nor state-of-mind can explain Heidegger's intention fully. We can agree with Breivik (2010) that human beings are (according to Heidegger) "attuned in a certain way and in a certain state of mind (Befindlichkeit)... accompanied by various moods" and that Heidegger "concentrates on a few moods that play an important role in his analysis of the basic structures of human existence, such as fear and anxiety" (Breivik, 2010). Yet Heidegger's Befindlichkeit tries to say something more and deeper: to be authentic, we have here a special "instrument", a special key opening ("unlocking") our existence. When we are "unlocked", doors to the world, to others and to ourselves are opened. It is also about an existential (not spatial and more than three-dimensional) position/state of ourselves in a concrete period of life. It is neither the result of some analysis nor effort with some concrete intention, nor about some momentary mood – simply we know/feel "how we are". Athletes accurately know a real state both their own bodies and minds, and thus they are close to the "truth of themselves". I think sport can produce a lot of proper "existential keys" – it allows us to find the right caretakers (and the right doors).

Sport also gives a good chance for deeper understanding – athletes have a good grasp of themselves, of team-mates, of rivals, of the "world" (more of Umwelt than of Lebenswelt in Husserl's conception). Especially outdoor activities lead to a better perception of the natural background – skiers have good feeling for snow, water sportsmen for water etc. Rational study of these outward conditions is combined with intuition here. Very special relation is seen between athletes and their equipment and tools. Some athletes cooperate with supporting or technical teams more than simply using their improvements. During sports performances we can often speak about the "dynamic unit" of an athlete and his/her tools (the tennis racket looks like an extension of the player's arm etc.) and this narrow relation to "things" fully complies with Heidegger's demands for readiness-to-hand, opening another doorway to authenticity. Paul Standish (1998) and especially Gunnar Breivik (2010) reflect more on this relation.

Of course, we can find examples of inauthentic behaviour in sports areas as well: misunderstanding of own mission in the whole life perspective (or: of the meaning of life), disrespectful relation to people (including oneself), countryside or things.

Speaking about Heideggerian discourse/telling, I'd like to underline that the basic means of expression for athletes are their performances. When is their performance authentic? When they show their full potential, the best of their skills; when they express excellence or virtue. All these qualities can be joined in the term arete. This Homeric term played a great role in Greek thinking and is also one of the key words of Ancient Olympism (Holowchak & Reid, 2011). Of course, we can find cases of idle talk among athletes as well: inflation of starts or frantic effort to continue the career of the elite athlete though performances decline – in both I recognize escape from themselves and so "getting to forget" about essential tasks of life, about searching for the meaning of life etc.

I judge resoluteness as one of the positive benefits from going in for sports. Athletes are led to be good (and fast) "decision makers" in many variable situations and it is expected that this ability operates in "common" life. Yet it can be a problem, especially after finishing their sports career.

The whole fair play question has its basis in the notion of conscience. I will speak about the ethical dimension of this topic later.

The phenomenon of death is more and more engaged with sports activities. Unfortunately, not so much as a topic for academic discussions, or the firm point in meditations on life, but as a hard reality. Yet there are some studies concerning this topic, especially from an existential point of view. Authors from the field of sports philosophy (Slusher, 1967; Reid, 2002; Russell, 2005; McNamee, 2007; Howe, 2008; Müller, 2008) have provided analyses of risk in sports, confronting it with our personal borders/limits and sense of mortality. Howard Slusher (1967) is close to my opinion, saying: "Facing death makes the man of sport available to awareness of authentic existence... It is rather paradoxical that man needs to escape the 'real' world (...) and enter into the artificial realm of sport in order to determine authentic self." I can summarize: facing death leads to self-transcendence and can lead to self-growth (if one is ready to turn the potential of this confrontation to good use).

Facing death requires overcoming one's fear. Many descriptions of this struggle are possible to find in the books of mountaineers. One example from Reinhold Messner: "Victory over fear that is also happiness in which I am close to myself. . . . I want to have the feeling of being stronger than my fear and that is why again and again I place myself in situations in which I meet it in order to overcome it" (Messner, 1989). The relationship between fear and anxiety was analysed very accurately with Breivik (2010).

Though athletes are under the positive pressure of "public" time (in the employ of *das Man*) and accurate time management is one of the conditions of success (minimally in the MC Model of sports²), nonetheless sport can also be a source of the authentic temporality. Irena Martínková & Jim Parry (2011) have tried to identify this source. Their findings include a group of high risk sports (another unlocking of authenticity!) and sports "where performance is judged on the basis of the aesthetics of performance, or the correct and fluent repetition of given movement forms" (Martínková & Parry, 2011). These authors point out as a contrast (i.e. manifestation of inauthenticity) sports of endurance character with the argumentation that "...the attention paid to one's body during the effort to get to the limit does not manifest one's authentic being, but rather an understanding of one's body as a machine, which is to be controlled, given orders to and pushed to its limits..." (ibid.). Not speaking about the obvious discrepancy between both lines of interpretation (the long-distance runner can also carry on "the correct and fluent repetition of given movement forms" like the dancer; a dancer can "understand of own body as a machine" as well) I cannot agree with the approach of the aforementioned authors as the way for reaching original/authentic temporality, underlying the bodily "doorway" to it. Yes, bodily anchoring is important and forms a "natural advantage" for sports, but the source of original temporality lies in the Self itself, in its deepest structure. In non-heideggerian language: in the mind, or in the centre of the ego; in late heideggerian language: in Ereignis³ as the "centre of acts". Only from here "timing of timeliness" is possible. We can "see" (study, understand, interpret) this process during experiences of a special type. I mean lived experiences, known as peak, flow or zone ones (I compare these "three in one" forms in Bednář, 2011). Paul Standish was close to a "solution" to the problem, speaking of the state in the zone (Standish, 1998). When a player is in the zone "the flow will not be a matter of the well-oiled machinery of rigorously executed set-piece moves but of a spontaneous to luck" (Standish, 1998). Let me add: the spontaneity here has its own "stopwatch" which is in permanent "rebellion" against external timing, being heterogeneous and undetectable. A player in this state plays their own play though immersed well in a sophisticated game.

It would be possible (and necessary) to continue – Heidegger's analysis of authenticity is very inspiring for the area of sports and many authors have discovered its usefulness. I can name - besides those quoted above – Higuchi (1991), Hogenová (2006), Jirásek (2007), Hurych (2009) and Müller (2011). And special attention ought to be paid to Breivik (2010) who concentrated especially on Heidegger's notions of anxiety, fear, ready-to-hand and present-to-hand.

Ethical standpoint of authenticity

To live authentically requires one to not only follow their own aims, but also to respect the needs of others. It moves us closer to an ethical point of view, which is in the centre of discourse today. The crucial work here is “The Ethics of Authenticity” (1992) from Charles Taylor. He uses the term “authenticity” for the contemporary moral ideal. What is meant by a moral ideal? Taylor answers: “I mean a picture of what a better or higher mode of life would be, where ‘better’ and ‘higher’ are defined not in terms of what we happen to desire or need, but offer a standard of what we ought to desire” (Taylor, 1992).

What are the main features of this ideal (Taylor, 1992)?

- To be sincere to myself and to have “intimate contact with myself”.
- To be true to myself. Taylor sees it especially in being true to one’s own originality.
- To act on the basis of “self-determining freedom”.

Because all these features are oriented to “myself” (oneself), I’d like to add “openness” (one of the domains which is used to describe human personality in the well-known Five Factor Model), especially openness to (new) experiences and openness to others – to be open-minded.

From my point of view self-orientation cannot be satisfactory if speaking of a moral ideal. It involves interpersonal relations, of course. It is righteous to say that for Taylor the above mentioned is the background which gives moral force not only to individual lives but also to the culture of authenticity.

Some questions arise here: Is fully authentic conduct possible in society? Is our authenticity acceptable to other people? Can some group or wider society be authentic? One solution was shown by Heidegger, though his model of authenticity is predominantly individual: “...when they /who are hired for the same affair/ devote themselves to the same affair in common, their doing so is determined by the manner in which their Dasein, each in its own way, has been taken hold of. They thus become authentically bound together...” (Heidegger, 1962). The key word here is devoting – not only work or cooperating together.

It seems that a balanced solution is presented by Alessandro Ferrara (1994; 1998). What does he mean by the ideal of authenticity? “The achievement of ‘self-congruency’, the articulation of a way of life that expresses fully the sort of persons we fundamentally are” (Larmore, 2004). That is true, but it is necessary to add that his all-encompassing ideal contains also authentic relations to others (“my view of authenticity presupposes an inter-subjective perspective”) (Ferrara, 1998) and that is why we can structure our lives as a whole. Ferrara (1998) analyses two opposite streams of historic reflection concerning authentic subjectivity. One example of these contrasting models of authenticity, antagonistic (a) and integrative (b), seems most usable for my approach with respect to sport.

While (a) is oriented toward separation from established norms/standards (both individual and especially social when one is in opposition to the demands of society), (b) prefers a synthesis of social factors and aspects of our Self: “social expectations, roles and institutions cannot be understood as playing a merely constraining, ‘disciplinary’ or repressive role, but also somehow constitute the symbolic material out of which authentic selves and authentic conduct can be generated” (Ferrara, 1998). Ferrara obviously prefers (b) which is closer to his model of reflective authenticity.

Ethical model and sport

I prefer a mixed model with periods of antagonistic authenticity and periods of integrative authenticity, because I think it really exists in our life-course and it is necessary for flexible and meaningful life projects. (a) can be useful in situations of “too well-established” identity (i.e. stagnation), when a “leap” away from it

(for example in the form of rebellion or an exceptional experience) can be a starting point for searching out a new identity. Anyway, it needs again the process of synthesis and/or integration - it means (b)...

This model is well represented in the field of sport with its polarisation (in different directions). There are a lot of examples in the history of sport when athletes fulfilled Taylor's requirement of "being true to own originality" and went against the tide. They became "fathers" of new styles (Dick Fosbury) or new training methods (Emil Zátopek⁴) etc. See also fighters against *das Man* on a social level.

Yes, there are also examples of "Apollos", athletes with integrative potential for authenticity. They were/are ready to respect and adopt some objective order of values or social ideals, and to distribute them among (not only) the other athletes. Doing this, they may also choose from Scheler's „order of love“. Max Scheler termed it *Ordo Amoris* (or "Logic of the Heart"), following the seventeenth century French philosopher, Blaise Pascal (Scheler, 1992). "The heart" has a logic of its own, quite different from the logic of reason. It could be understood as a sort of "sixth sense". To draw strength from this source ought to be desirable in the case of forming sports values, shared above all in the Olympic or Fair play movements. Today we speak more of *conscience* in conventional language. The field of sports manifests itself as a proper area for maturation of our conscience, and can play an important role in topical ethical reflections. The fair play movement can work with conscience experiences, having at its disposal many examples concerning athletes' conscience, which are suitable for pedagogical utilization. I mean both positive and negative cases (Bednář, 2012).

The notion of *spirit* is not unknown to athletes either. The so called Olympic spirit is often personalized in athletes like Jesse Owens and others (even after death). They also form a *raison d'être* for sport as a whole.

Taylor's vision of a culture of *authenticity* is a challenge for the field of sport. Though the term team spirit is used often here, we have no guarantee of its fair content (the "team spirit" of some sport groups is based on an inadequate self-confidence, absence of dignity toward rivals etc.). Maybe speaking about team *authenticity* would be better.

CONCLUSIONS

Though my philosophical position is close to the existentialist one, I cannot agree with the kind of meaning that is characterized by a one-sided emphasis on self-realization, intimacy and scepticism concerning values that transcend the self. I plead for a balanced model of authenticity respecting and synthesizing both integrative and antagonistic moments in our lives. The area of sports brings many examples from both poles of authenticity and can be a good educational tool for its maturation and development. Pursuance of sport can add another benefit: "...experience and its authenticity are likely to be enhanced by one's reliance on one's own physical effort" (Howe, 2008). Yes, physical effort, but supported with corresponding skills.

Heidegger's accurate analyses of authenticity and especially inauthenticity can find a specific place in these reflections as well. I did not want to follow Heidegger's terminology in a strict sense, but I wanted to follow his deep insight into human existence.

To strive for authenticity can help to optimally lead a life. It is a real *ars vitae* embracing the strenuous, sensuous, spiritual and excellent lifestyle (Kretchmar, 2005) where "activity-oriented people live all four profiles with various intensities and combinations" (Kretchmar, 2005). It is also the best practice of "the care

of own soul" (*epimeleia tes psyches*) in the language of Socrates and Plato. I am not offering definite answers - many further questions are opened. Here are some of them:

Do we at times have reason to not pursue authenticity? A positive answer shows us that we cannot see authenticity as some "overvalue" (and is it actually a special value?). Things go sometimes better if we do not strive to "be ourselves" – especially in the case of an immature personality, or in life periods when our identity is not the firm basis of our conduct. Moreover, "what we become by patterning ourselves on others, and not by remaining true to who we are, makes us many times better persons, even though we may be able to appreciate it only after the fact" (Larmore, 2004). Could the integrative model of authenticity be the answer here?

There is another dilemma as to whether the authentic experience is full immersion "into oneself" or a contrary sighting of horizons, of background, or of depth. In more poetic language: Must I be – having been authentic – "with myself" dipped into Now, or as much as possible "out of myself" (for example in ecstasy, ergo being-outside-myself) as a stowaway on the fast train of time? (Jirásek, 2007). I could answer using the words of the Teacher from the book of Ecclesiastes (3:5; NIV): "There is a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them" (or maybe a time to be silent?).

NOTES

1. English equivalents of Heidegger's original terminology is taken here from Macquarrie and Robinson's basic translation *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1962), Blattner's guiding round Heidegger's *chef d'oeuvre* (Blattner, 2006) and in some cases also from internet discussions on how to translate Heidegger, when I considered the term more adequate.
2. Here I follow one possible paradigm of contemporary sport from Holowchak and Reid (2011) who divided sports into three groups: Martial/Commercial, Aesthetic/Recreational and Aretic ones.
3. English language has trouble with proper translation of this word. Heidegger began to use it more after 1945 (see especially his talk "Das Ding" from 1950). The straight translation is "event"; closer to the content of the notion is "coming to view", and perhaps best is "arising into one's own" which is apt for our context.
4. The biography of this famous Czech long-distance runner is also a good example of the alternation of antagonistic and integrative periods of authentic life. He developed his moral signature (Kretchmar, 2005) during both sports and community involvement.

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