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Instrumentality and values in sport

KAROLINUM

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I. Introduction

1. Introduction

Whilst I was writing this book, I watched the 2011–12 UEFA final between Bayern Munich and Chelsea. During the whole game Bayern was more offensive, having more chances to score, and was superior on the overall match statistics. The score of the prolonged game was 1–1. It went to penalties, and Chelsea won 3–4. It might be said that Chelsea achieved superiority in the match only with its final kick. After the game, one of the Czech television commentators remarked on the final score: “But history doesn’t ask *how*, but *if*.” For a historical comparison of the victories of different clubs, what counts is only: *if* they won. However, this book is written within the discipline of philosophy of sport, and my pervading focus will be on *how* sport is practised.

Since sport is an activity created by and engaged in by human beings, it cannot be understood without reference to the character of human existence and its meaningful realization. Sport is practised by millions of people worldwide nowadays, and they often use it instrumentally to fulfil their various purposes. Through the influence of the expectations of wider society, we tend to emphasize these purposes (ends) over the means with which we gain them, and sport is no exception in this respect. This approach is mirrored in our sayings “The end justifies the means” and “If end is good, all is good”. Generally, in present times, sport results have become more important than other aspects of sport performance, and the overemphasizing of results heavily influences the way in which sports are practiced. The tendency to emphasize results, rather than the means and processes that produce them, leads us to overvalue victory and the other values that victory brings, and to side-line those values that we usually associate with ‘process’, such as, for example, fair play, aesthetic

experience, joy, friendship and quality of movement – or, in summary, the quality of the process of sport performance.

This kind of thinking, that values the result of an activity rather than the process itself, may be called instrumental thinking. Instrumental thinking originates in the most basic fact of our existence: that we humans need to sustain ourselves on a daily basis, and if we wish to be (to exist), we need to take care of ourselves and to fulfil our everyday needs, for which we need to use various means. However, the importance of instrumental thinking in supporting our very existence leads us to extend this mode of thinking to many other aspects of our existence, too. We have a tendency to think about many different things in this way, even about people. Yet the instrumental approach is not appropriate for just anything and everything.

In ethical theory, instrumentality is usually considered to be negative, and is often understood as someone abusing someone or something. One is reminded of Kant's injunction to treat other people (and also oneself) never merely as a means to an end: "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only" (Kant, 1975, 47).

In sport, instrumentality is also often associated with some negative aspects, the two main objections being:

1. Problems arising when sport is used as a means for pursuing values external to it – such as fame and finance – which bring a greedy and selfish attitude, and one that is likely to lead to cheating and corruption, and to distort the process of sport.
2. Problems arising when sport competition is understood as negative, as setting one human against another, as using another to demonstrate one's superiority.

As to the first objection, it is important to emphasize that in practice we do not see all cases of instrumentality in sport in negative terms, since we esteem highly some values external to sport, and we find it desirable to pursue them. For example, we do not usually think it problematic if sport is practised as a means for moral education or health. So to think only negatively about the instrumental pursuit of external aims fails to notice that we do so only when we negatively perceive the value pursued.

As to the second objection, it may be true that a problematic consequence of competition is that we put too much emphasis on attaining victory, and that this might adversely affect other values of sport. But competition might have positive effects, too. For example, competition

might be considered a valuable motivation for participation in sport – as did Pierre de Coubertin in his effort to install sports into education as well as into the general life of citizens at the end of 19th century through his ‘brain-child’, Olympism. Also, the twofold challenge of testing one’s skills together with testing oneself against an opponent enables competition to be regarded as a reliable way of improving one’s level of performance and level of vigorous activity. Two athletes racing stride for stride, breathing down each other’s necks, may be able to push themselves (and each other) to a much higher level of performance than just one person practicing alone. So whether competition is to be seen as good or bad depends on how we approach it, and what outcomes we expect of it.

However, it is important to realize that instrumentality in sport is not just the result of external valuation and competition. It is also implicit in the structure of many sports, an integral part of which is an objective to be achieved. The rules of all sports specify what is to count as the objective to be sought in the sport, and what means are permissible. So, the achievement of any such objective presupposes instrumentality – I must take certain prescribed means (and avoid means proscribed by the rules).

Thus, at least two factors contribute to the necessary presence of instrumentality in sport: the competitive element in sport, and sport-specific objectives. And their effects are often amplified when extrinsic values are involved. Now, it is clear that it is not possible to remove instrumentality from sport. Thus, on the one hand, instrumentality is unavoidable in sport and, on the other hand, it is likely to damage sport in a variety of ways – especially when it overrides the intrinsic values of sport. So it is of the first importance to understand the nature of instrumentality in sport, since this will help in devising a more adequate approach to the problems it causes, and to their prevention. Thus I shall argue that instrumentality does not have to be considered as negative aspect of sport, if properly understood and treated.

The aim of this book is to analyse contemporary sport with respect to instrumentality and its influence on intrinsic values of sport and the human being. By sport, I mean a competitive sport performed on different levels, which includes elite sport, performance sport, sport for all, youth sport, and sport within Physical Education (to be explained in more depth later). I shall discuss the tension between the necessarily instrumental nature of sport and various problems it causes for sporting performance and the human existence. And I shall suggest possible ways of coming to terms with and dealing with instrumentality in sport.

The main topics that will be addressed within this book are:

- the definition of instrumentality, sport and values,
- the role of instrumentality in human existence,
- extrinsic and intrinsic instrumentality in sport, and problems with both of them,
- the extrinsic and intrinsic values of sport, and
- various ways of balancing the instrumentality in sport.

2. The structure of the book

This book unites and develops further my previous work concerning the topic of instrumentality in sport and the related topic of values in sport and human existence. The book has four sections. After an introductory section, the core of the book consists of two main parts: the first part (section II) discusses the idea of instrumentality with respect to values in sport, while the second part (section III) examines in what ways it is possible to ‘balance’ instrumentality in sport, and thus to highlight sport’s intrinsic values. The fourth section is a conclusion which unites the central topics of the book – instrumentality, sport and human existence.

The first section introduces the main objective of the book, the structure of the book and the methodology. These first three chapters are followed by a chapter on the definitions of the central concepts of this book, i.e. sport, instrumentality in sport, and values in sport. Finally, I will present an analysis of some themes in the early work of Martin Heidegger, in order to give a wider understanding of the role of instrumentality within the existence of the human being.

The second section of the book introduces the logic of sport with respect to instrumentality. Chapter 6 presents complex analyses of instrumentality within sport and an identification of two kinds of instrumentality – extrinsic and intrinsic. Further, it identifies five elements of instrumentality in sport. These two kinds of instrumentality are examined in detail in chapter 7: ‘Sport and its extrinsic instrumentality and values’, and chapter 9: ‘Sport and its intrinsic instrumentality’. The former chapter discusses extrinsic values that are often attributed to sport, and the latter shows the complicated structure of the instrumentality of internal ends in sport, which is formed out of the objectives of the given sport, together with the aim of competition, i.e. victory. The chapter on

intrinsic instrumentality is followed by a chapter 'The intrinsic values of sport' (chapter 10). This section also includes two chapters (8 and 11) that describe and reflect upon the problems arising for the human being from each of the two kinds of instrumentality in sport.

The third section of the book deals with the 'balancing' of instrumentality in sport with respect to education. Balancing is defined as putting appropriate emphasis on all the five elements of instrumentality in sport that I have identified in the second half of chapter 6. The relationship between instrumentality and education is considered in chapter 12, called 'Education, sport and the balancing of instrumentality'. The rest of the section deals with conclusions arising from the discussions in the second section of the book – since instrumentality causes various problems in sport, it is important to balance it, so that these problems decrease or even disappear. For this reason, seven different approaches towards balancing the instrumentality in sport are introduced (chapters 13–19).

The first two chapters in this section deal with extrinsic instrumentality, which is the only kind of instrumentality that can be fully eliminated from competitive sport. Chapter 13, 'Decreasing the 'constraining' extrinsic values of sport', describes two ways of decreasing (or even eliminating) extrinsic instrumentality of sport – one focuses on the individual athlete and his or her questioning of the extrinsic values followed through sport, while the second one presents an effort to regulate sport from the top-down approach, such was done, for example, in the case of amateurism within Olympism. And chapter 14 'Promoting the 'enhancing' extrinsic values of sport' discusses educational efforts within sport that try to improve sport through extrinsic values that support intrinsic values of sport, often giving them a wider human dimension. An example of these efforts is Olympic education.

All the remaining chapters of this section focus on balancing intrinsic instrumentality in sport. Chapter 15, 'Keeping the intrinsic values of sport in perspective' presents examples of balancing the intrinsic values that have been defined earlier, highlighting the importance of keeping all of these values in sport practice. Chapter 16, 'Understanding the athlete and the nature of sport', describes how our deeper understanding of the human being and sport can help diminish the problematic effects of instrumentality in sport. Chapter 17, 'Re-designing sport disciplines', shows a creative approach to sport that is based on rethinking the logic of sport so that its intrinsic instrumentality is balanced within practice. Chapter 18, 'Focusing on the process', draws the athlete's attention to the quality of the processes involved in athletic performance, which helps to

diminish the athlete's focus on victory and results. Chapter 19, the final chapter of this section called 'Adding non-instrumental activities into sport training', describes what it means for a movement activity to be non-instrumental, on the basis of descriptions of practices from the Far East. This chapter is based on my previous work on Zen Buddhism and its connection with martial paths. It suggests the possibility of including this kind of non-instrumental activity into athletic training, so that athletes learn to pay better attention to the quality of the process of their sport performance.

The concluding section includes one summarizing chapter called 'Choosing the fair or the temple'. It discusses all the main themes of the book and puts the topic of instrumentality into context of the overall direction of the athlete's existence. The name of the chapter comes from Pierre de Coubertin, the reviver of the Modern Olympic Games, and President of the International Olympic Committee (1896–1925), who described two possible directions of athletic development, naming them metaphorically 'the fair' and 'the temple'. The notion of 'fair' (or 'market') is characterised by a human being's following the prevailing patterns and ends prescribed by society, without much reflection upon them, nor on his or her own existence, putting the emphasis on an instrumental approach to things. Within sport, this is represented by wanting to win at all costs, lack of respect, self-promotion, and doing sport for extrinsic values. The notion of 'temple' is based on a certain clarity about one's existence and striving – one's doing and thinking – and about understanding of what sport is about. Within the context of sport this is instantiated as a kind of self-development based on self-understanding and critical reflection, which incorporates an understanding of instrumentality and an ability to approach it and to engage with it in appropriate ways, so that intrinsic values of sport can thrive.

3. Methodology

The aim of this book is to examine the idea of instrumentality and its influence on values in contemporary competitive sport, with special reference to the athlete. I shall discuss instrumentality as found in the logic of contemporary competitive sport and, to show the importance of this topic, I shall also discuss aspects of the philosophy of existence that highlights the tendency of human beings to be instrumental. I shall use two methods for achieving this end.

Firstly, I shall introduce the logic of contemporary sport with respect to its instrumentality. I shall analyse instrumentality in sport using a method from analytical philosophy – that is, conceptual analysis. Here, I shall draw mainly on the previous work of philosophers of sport who work within the analytical philosophical tradition, who have analysed the concept of sport, and ends and values in sport. However, there is not much written on the concept of instrumentality, which is the main contribution of this book to this tradition. Analyses of various ends that are realized in sport practice will help me to present the complex structure of instrumentality in sport. In addition, I shall also need to examine many values that routinely occur within sport practice – both extrinsic and intrinsic values.

Secondly, I shall use philosophy of existence in order to give a wider scope to the main theme of the book. I shall present an account of human existence that incorporates instrumentality within it, based on phenomenological analysis as described in the early work of Martin Heidegger, who discusses these issues in his work *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*).¹ Heidegger's work was chosen because of the acuity of his seminal analyses of human existence, and the power of his influential account of instrumental understanding within our everyday existence.

Heidegger's central question is one that we might see as the most fundamental question in philosophy: the meaning of Being (Heidegger, 1978, § 7). However, since this very question is one posed only by the human being, there is a logically prior question: what is the nature of the human being – the one who seeks to understand being? So, within his project of fundamental ontology (*Fundamentalontologie*), Heidegger examines the nature of human existence, and this analysis of the being of the human being (Dasein) shows that 'understanding' is one of its basic features of existence (one of its Existentiale).

Heidegger then proceeds to show that 'instrumental understanding' is the primary and necessary mode of understanding of Dasein (which is of obvious importance for the subject of this book). However, it is also important to realize that instrumentality is not the appropriate mode of understanding for the understanding of just anything at all – and especially not for an understanding of the human being, whose mode of

1 To enable easier orientation within different editions and translations of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, I refer to it by both the pagination of the original work *Sein und Zeit* (which is also printed on the side of the translated English text) and the pagination of the English translation itself (trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, 1978). The pages will be noted in the following order: original pagination/pagination of the English translation.

being is 'existence' (*Existenz*). It is in his analysis of the everyday world of Dasein (1978, § 14 ff.), and especially his analysis of 'things' in the world, whose mode of being is that of 'instruments', or 'tools', that Heidegger examines the idea of instrumentality, using the term 'readiness-to-hand' (*Zuhandenheit*). This will be explained in chapter 5.

I shall discuss various kinds of problems that arise from instrumentality for the human being. Within these discussions, the philosophy of existence will make its contribution, since these problems concern the quality of the process of sport as well as the quality of human existence itself.

Understanding both contemporary competitive sport and human existence with respect to instrumentality will help me to grasp the general problem and also to suggest various ways of balancing instrumentality in sport, so that the intrinsic values of sport can thrive and the human being can be enriched by sport. Both of these methods will be united in the concluding chapter 'Choosing the fair or the temple', in which I shall show how instrumentality in sport is related to human existence.

4. Definitions

Defining sport

From amongst the vast range of areas of experience that are open to human beings, the subject and focus of this book is the area of experience generally described as 'contemporary sport'. However, this area itself is impossibly large, given the wide scope of its many and various definitions, some of which would include almost any kind of physical or movement activity. Since we can understand sport in so many different ways, it is important to offer some definition of how it is to be understood here. For the purpose of this book, sport is understood as:

Organised, rule-governed competition, in which abilities to accomplish a task associated with gross bodily movements are contested.

Sport is more formal, serious, organised, and institutionalised than the games or other (usually pragmatic) activities from which different kinds of sport arose. Defined in this way, I shall refer to this kind of sport as 'competitive sport'. This definition tries to grasp sport as it is found in contemporary society.