

# Anthropology of Sport Education: A Bio-Metaphysical Interpretation of the Relationship between Body and Movement

Emanuele Isidori

Laboratory of General Pedagogy, University of Rome Foro Italico, Italy

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**Abstract:** The main goal of this study is to reflect on the concept of movement through the lens of an anthropological approach aimed at showing how the concept of movement is deeply linked to sport and education. This study will show how the main fundamental components of both Being and sport originate from movement, and from the bodily nature of human beings. Movement sums up the transcendent and divine nature of the human being. Moreover, his study will also demonstrate how in sport one can discover the transcendent bio-metaphysical essence of the human beings as well as her/his natural anthropological vocation to transcendence and spirituality that should be cultivated and developed from the standpoint of the anthropology of sport education.

**Keywords:** movement, sport, anthropology, education, bio-metaphysics.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Western philosophers, from Parmenides to Heidegger, have always been interested in studying Being (to *ón* in Greek) and its meanings [1][2]. The history of Being and its multiple meanings [3] is an integral part not only of the history of philosophy but also of Western culture [4]. Language confirms this statement. The verb “to be” is never expressed in some languages, in Western languages, nevertheless, the verb “to be” is massively present. This continuous and constant presence of Being in Western languages is evident in the main topics of continental philosophy, and it has been conveyed in the philosophy of language by Plato and Aristotle. Probably, it was the same Greek language, the first language spoken by philosophy, to initiate a debate and a reflection on Being, turning it into a central issue in Western culture and in the philosophy of existence. In Greek language, the verb *eimi* (I am), from which etymologically Latin verbs *esse* and *sum* (corresponding to *eimi*) derive, means “I move” or “I go towards” [4]. In a nutshell, linguistics shows us that the Greek verb *einai* (to be), with its counterpart *esse* in Latin, come in their third persons (*esti* and *est*, she/he is) from a Indo-European root \*eti that means not only “to have relations” and “to be connected to,” but also “to go” and “to move” [5].

To be clear, the third person of the verb “to be”, in both languages Latin and Greek, is referred to the “continuous motion” and “permanent movement”, to a “going towards the world”, towards its light and voices coming from the “cosmic waters” that the Indo-Europeans regarded as the origin of the world, and from which the seeds of knowledge came. To be clear, the above mentioned root which connects the verb *esti/est* with the concept of movement interpreted as a spring of the human life and existence, and as a relation with the world around us and with others, expresses four pivotal concepts for cultural anthropology and metaphysics. These four fundamental concepts that make anthropology and metaphysics meet are that: a) movement is a cultural universal that belongs to all cultures and human beings; b) Being always refers to a relation with others and has a social-inter-relational dimension; c) movement and Being are strictly tied and interconnected, and they always deal with a bodily and transcendent and religious dimension of the human existence; d) movement and Being are always present in sport. Thus, sport must be conceived of as a human practice in which both the above-mentioned anthropological and metaphysical dimensions represent its main essence and create its main meanings and sense.

## II. BEING, MOVEMENT AND BODY

To be clear, the idea of Being as movement is also present in Heidegger, who, in his writings, speaks of *Bewegung* and *Bewegtheit* as characteristics of Being. Actually, for the German philosopher, the *Dasein* has to be seen as “Being” and “movement” together. Thus, the problems of Being are the problems of movement (*Dasein* does not exist before and then moves, because it is constituted by its basic movements which are “occurrence” and “thrownness”). For Heidegger, philosophers after Aristotle have ignored the centrality of movement in the metaphysical debate [6].

Thus, so called *be-wegen* of woman and man consists of a “going”, of a “clearing a path” in a territory of other paths and roads that are nothing more than experiences made possible by the body. These paths are the ways of Being as opening to the world that the movement, as a dimension of *Dasein*, incessantly discloses to woman and man.

To be clear, movement – and sport as a whole which implies it [7] – opens Being to its very existence. Therefore, inspired by Heidegger, we can affirm that Being is movement. This movement is embodied. For this reason, if the problem of Being is the problem of movement and its issues are often seen as obscure and, in some respects, mysterious, it is necessary that metaphysics removes this darkness by clarifying its hermeneutical meanings reflecting on sport as a metaphysical and anthropological practice (that is a cultural practice framed in the context of educational and social values to transmit).

From a metaphysical point of view, Being and movement are not separated from each other. They are, we could say, “coupled” in the body, which is the first “component” of sport. The human being is such because it is the presence of a body that exists, and it exists because it moves and is open to the world. Through movement, the human being becomes capable to opening herself/himself to the existence as embodied life. Movement and body are a unified “whole” which are experienced by the subject. We could say that both body and movement do not exist per se but only as experienced and lived as a unified whole by the subject-person. Therefore, movement and body are always “personal” experiences. This happens in sport as well as in another main component of it, namely, the play and game element of sport.

In a Heideggerian philosophical terminology, we could say that movement is *Leibende Leben*, that is to say, movement is embodied life that is represented by the human being, which is *Leibende-Lebende Mensch*, that is an “embodied human living thing” that moves herself/himself because it is a “body” in the world. The world is nothing more than a space where this “embodied human living thing” can freely move herself/himself. This movement into the world of existence and Being, which we call “*Dasein*”, is *Spiel*. Movement thus understood is an action expressed by a sort of dance-play in the sense of a moving in a living world [6]. To express herself/himself as an embodied movement and personal existence, *Dasein* needs space where to move and to freely play (that is a *Spielraum*, or a game-space). The human being is therefore an entity who plays (and is played by the same play) because he/she is embodied movement, and his/her playing is made possible by the freedom of playing and of having at his/her disposal a place where to play.

To sum up, according to the metaphysical perspective of interpretation of Being in its philosophical and anthropological foundations and meanings, there always exists a movement which tends to develop into a set of actions directed towards a “play” (transcendence) played within a “game” (the world) in a body-kinetic mode. The metaphysical and anthropological essence of Being, seen as a set of experiences, can be found in the abovementioned actions and tendencies.

## III. AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL VIEW OF DASEIN AS EDUCATION

We can find the main characteristics of Being in sport. Among the human practices, sport, as a practice that involves the body, play, and movement, expresses, more than any other practice the metaphysical essence of human beings and their vocation to transcend their mere material/biological being [8]. In sport, the abstract metaphysics of Being is incarnated and manifested in a concrete action phenomenally evident in a body that moves and plays a game under a codified set of rules that turns the game into a sport. Sport makes possible the effective implementation – in terms of a set of kinetic actions and bodily emotions experienced in different situations – of the Heideggerian *Dasein*. Therefore, in sport, the *to ón*, Being as movement of the Western metaphysics and of its philosophical language becomes an “embodied-kinetic-living” entity which, through the action, becomes part of a relation system with the world understood not as an abstract space, but as an environment, or better, as a place of possibilities and freedom for the implementation of its “personal” essence. This essence consists of a vocation for the transcendence which develops from a world in which there are others who are “embodied-kinetic-living” entities, and by who I am also seen as such.

In sport, Being of *Dasein* perceived as “I” becomes an existential relationship with others who are other singular “I” that I meet when I compete (this “I” could be “myself” in case of individual sport) playing sports or doing physical activity. We could say that “I” and “others” when play sport are all components of a single playing played within *Dasein*. To be clear, the existence of games (and sports) is made possible by the fact that *Dasein* is pure play or better, a universal activity of playing which belongs to all (human) beings. Therefore, without the playing, which is a fundamental characteristic of Being, there would not be any game. For this reason, we can affirm that the game exists because there is a play or an action of playing which is performed by Being, and not in the other way around. The same thing can be said about movement: movement exists because there is a Being that acts and implements it.

When we play, move or play sport, we experience ourselves and others as embodied-kinetic-living entities who are persons and share a common destiny and a universal anthropological project, that is, to play together and to experience each other as living bodies within the eternal playing of Being. This experience is, at the same time, both relational (anthropological) and transcendent (metaphysical). By playing the game of the world, we, as embodied-kinetic-living persons, contribute to create – or better to say, to develop – it. To be clear, it is not this playing to create the world and its game(s), but rather the property of metaphysical Being to make it possible [9]. The world created by Being, in turn, makes possible the playing of the “I” as an embodied-kinetic-living person, and it gives her/him the possibility to continuously interact with others and with the Being itself.

Sport is always an anthropological and metaphysical path towards the other, and it refers to a socio-relational and primordial dimension of human life which shows the presence of Being as a permanent Movement capable to create, through education and learning, the world and its meanings. We could say that sport is a unified whole which allows the passage from the “metaphysics of Being as movement” to the “anthropology of movement as body-person who interacts with others”. Interpreted in light of sport, metaphysics as a science becomes hermeneutics as well as anthropology of gestures and of the social relationships that sport, as embodiment of Being, opens up. The abstract Being expressed through the concept of *Dasein* on which metaphysics reflects upon becomes both the “human” and “Divine” Being embodied in the person who plays sport.

Therefore, it is not surprising that metaphysics is one of the main key branches of the philosophy of sport, and it focuses on specific problems dealing with reflection on the ontology of sport, its essence and meanings in light of an interdisciplinary interpretation perspective aimed at showing the interconnections of this science of Being with theology as a science of the Divine and the Spirit [8]. Sport, since it refers to woman’s and man’s original and natural dimension, seems to fully embody the metaphysical project of Being identified with the Divine and with that movement towards the Light and its Openness to the world that the verb *eimi* and *sum* expresses in their etymology

#### **IV. ANTHROPOLOGY AND BIO-METAPHYSICAL APPROACH TO SPORT EDUCATION**

The metaphysical and theological meanings and sense of sport should motivate us to deeply rethink the concept of sport education, its topics, and the way of teaching it. At this point, it should be clear that sport, serving as a bridge between anthropology and metaphysics, actually represents a path to the Divine and to the Spirit. But the spiritual dimension of sport is often forgotten in sport education and its pedagogy, although over the last few years there has been a growing interest towards the topics relating to that dimension in the arena of the philosophy of sport [10] [11] [12].

Not to take into account and to neglect the theological and metaphysical dimension of sport undermine our understanding of the deep sense of sport. As a human practice, sport is rich in meanings that connect it to Being and its essence. For this reasons, (sport) education should take awareness of these dimensions and help people who play sport explore them and understand their sense. Sport philosophy and sport pedagogy – in school, gyms, clubs, or whatever educational contexts – should promote a serious reflection on sport. Sport is tied to the world of life, it implies risks and death, and people need a conscious awareness of its ethics and spiritual dimension which makes sport a universal experience for all human beings. The absence of reflection and understanding of the spiritual dimensions and meanings hinders the possibility of turning sport into an integral aspect of general human education, as stressed by some of the most important sport philosophers and educators of the last century [13].

Thus, a new perspective is necessary. This new perspective should be radically new, and be develop by both theology and anthropology of sport to help people understand the spiritual meanings of sport, avoiding interpreting it just in a mere biological-physical dimension.

This understanding of the above-mentioned spiritual dimension can be gained through a continuous reflection on sport, and through a new starting point. An example of this new starting point for reflecting on sport it is given by John Paul II [14] who has stressed the importance for teachers and educationists of a new theology of the body to approach and teach sport education. For John Paul II, sport is a means to reach God, and the spiritual values, and what gives sense to sport can be understood by new generations by using forms of teaching and languages less abstract and more immediate that can be translated into concrete educational projects.

The project of teaching spiritual values of sport to new generations requires a new philosophy and pedagogy which do not tend to reject a priori, because of a secularist prejudice, the idea that sport is bearer of spiritual, religious, and transcendent values. Sport represents a form of education for transcendence and life because it is tied to the same essence of the human being. By playing and moving, the human body reveals its being both an anthropological and metaphysical project, which consists of living together with others, communicating and looking for a “good life” through a balance between material and spiritual goods in the framework of virtues and values.

For all these reasons, education should take sport as a model to show the importance of respecting the rules and of living in compliance with them for a better communitarian life in which others are not only “singular” identities who limit our freedom but also possibilities to both “alternative” understanding of the world and transcending of its limits toward the Divine Spirit.

## V. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, sport is an anthropological practice carried out and enhanced through a set of actions based on a systems of communitarian rules and values metaphysically rooted in a Transcendence and Openness to the Other. Sport expresses Being as a movement and play embodied in personal relationships which require respect, obligations, duties and self-control that must be taught through sport education. To be clear, sport is an anthropological and metaphysical practice rooted in the existence of Being as Embodied Spirit, and it is a duty of pedagogy to teach that, promoting the spiritual and religious components of sport itself. Through the practice of sport, understood as “good life” and path to transcendent values and the Otherness, human beings can achieve that well-being which represent one of main scopes of their existence. This well-being can be achieved by the human being through taking awareness of the importance of cultivating spiritual values through sport as embodied movement and path to a permanent contact with the Spirit.

Sport – as play, movement and body – is a life experience which belongs to all human beings and can give sense to their lives. Through sport and the specific education devoted to that, people can understand themselves as “embodied-kinetic-living” entities permanently interconnected with others and the Otherness.

In conclusion, we are convinced that, in the future, the development of a dialogue among metaphysics, anthropology and pedagogy will contribute to a better understanding of sport as a form of education and educational practice which involves philosophical, spiritual and social dimensions whose conceiving them as a unified whole in the framework of Being gives sense to the human existence.

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