

# ***The Complexity of Value, Fact and Performance in Science and Sport***

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## **Abstract**

The influence of sport science on sport and society is a complex phenomenon: the discipline of sport science itself covers fairly diverse ways of scientific thinking. It may seem that the *theoretical, practical, natural and social scientific* methods comprising sport science are difficult to harmonize and are incoherent. However, behind this incoherence, there stands, or rather, moves the common subject of all these sciences: the integrated natural-social human in their personal, value producing activities. Different sport sciences do not only have a common topic, they also have a common goal: enhancing the value of sport with their own means. Despite this commonality, sport sciences diverge from one another and the explanation of this divergence is not to be found in sport alone, but rather in the cracks created by the theoretical approaches of science, which concern our entire culture. On the one hand, the majority of sciences can still be characterized by the so-called Cartesian dualism, which splits the spiritual and physical existence of the human being, and since sport is by its nature a physical-spiritual-intellectual activity, *the gap between the different sciences is even more prevalent*; the theoretical handling and resolution of this issue is of fundamental interest for sport sciences. The other gap, which does not only concern sport sciences, but other sciences of our age as well, is the communicational disorder between *fact-based and value-based sciences*. The actual topic of this presentation is this second problem: can the judgement of scientific facts and performances be independent of our value-judgement? As sport is undoubtedly an activity which produces values, and sport can only be called sport until it can create human and social values, it is of vital importance for sport sciences to clarify the relationship between sport-related facts and the values making sport to be sport. The objective of the paper is to explore the interplay of values and facts in science and sport science with the instruments of philosophy and sport philosophy, and to sketch the value-based scientific aspect of sport science.

**Key words:** sport sciences, fact-based sciences, value-based sciences

In the presentation I would like to reflect on the particular situation of sport sciences from the point of view of philosophy and theory of science, and on the question how the relations of sport sciences to facts and values can influence the social presence of sport.

The concept of sport science generally covers diverse ways of scientific thinking. Having a unified sport science acknowledged may be difficult, since it seems that the theoretical, practical,

natural and social scientific methods comprising sport science are difficult to harmonize and are incoherent. However, behind this incoherence, there stands, or rather, moves the common subject of all these sciences: the integrated and hopefully healthy natural-social humans in their simplicity, while producing values that are important for them. Different sport sciences do not only have a common topic, they also have a common goal: raising the value of sport with their own means. *The divergence apparent in sport sciences is not so much about the heterogeneity of sport, since sport is an integrated phenomenon; behind this disharmony, there are much deeper issues related to issues of theory of science.* The existence of certain cracks in the theory of science is characteristic of modern culture, but owing to the integrative nature of sport, they more emphatically appear in studies related to sport. Let us see these cracks in the theory of science, which at times tear sport sciences apart.

1. The majority of sciences even today can still be characterized by Cartesian dualism, which splits the spiritual and physical existence of humans and confronts the human self as a subject and the human body which is imagined as a machine and is deprived of the personality (Vermes, 2006). And even though this issue has been resolved philosophically, and the best of natural scientists and professionals engaged in human sciences all work on elaborating an integrated model of personality, the gap is still present in the communicational difficulties of natural and human sciences. *Since sport is, by its nature, a physical-spiritual-intellectual activity, the gap between the different sciences is even more prevalent; the theoretical handling and resolution of this issue is of fundamental interest for sport sciences.* Even so, the epistemological problem of body and soul/mind shall be put aside in this paper. Partly, because the literature of this topic is fairly extensive in contemporary philosophy and sport philosophy, and partly because it has been explicitly addressed in the research work of the Body Science Workshop established at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Sciences. In the present paper, another major science philosophical question is to be discussed.
2. In addition to the opposition between natural and human sciences, there is also another gap characteristic of modern scientific thinking, which is not independent of the previous: the communicational disorder between fact-based and value-based sciences. The reason for the tension is a question of theory of science, namely, can science always and completely be value-free? Is the judgement of facts independent of our value judgements?

*As sport is undoubtedly an activity which produces values, and sport can only be called sport until it can create human and social values. Thus, sport sciences are very much concerned by this second science philosophical tension: the unclear relationship of facts and values in the majority of sciences.*

### **Drafting the epistemological problem of value-based and fact-based sciences**

From the direction of social sciences, there are two possible kinds of approaches to sport. We can talk about it in a descriptive way, as the complex of existing social phenomena. In this case, in addition to the richness of ‘existing sport’, we also have to reflect on the anomalies threatening sport, since these belong to the current situation of sport. Nevertheless, this descriptive approach does not necessarily involve any criteria with regards to which one of these manifold activities can be labelled as sport. Is everything sport that is referred to as sport? (Svachulay, 2006) For this, only a normative approach can provide an answer, in other words, the value-based analysis of sport. What makes sport to be sport? What gives the value of sport? How do the different values composing sport relate to one another and to the more general human values? The mission of human sciences, among them sport philosophy is to connect the descriptive and normative analyses in a reflective manner. The definition

of the fundamental horizons of values and senses is inevitable: what is the meaning and value of sport with respect to the totality of individual and community existence? (Morgan 2006)

Traditional philosophical and scientific thinking did not separate values and truth in ancient and medieval times. Considering the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle or St. Thomas of Aquinas, it can be seen that seeking for truth had always been connected to the quest for the ultimate meaning of totality, which in the end is Good, and carries our moral values. The concept of *kalokagathia*, which expresses the integrity of sport sciences, is rooted in the spiritual unity of true, beautiful and good. According to the epistemological stance behind the ideal of *kalokagathia*, the ultimate goal, the telos of cognition is to approach the meaning of totality, and not the collection of data, or efficiency (Aristotle 1987). The relationship of values and facts has been problematic since the claim for scientific neutrality was announced in the age of Enlightenment. The separation of judging prejudices from facts was an important milestone of scientific development. An incredibly prospering process of scientific research started, which shook off all the burdens of philosophy and moral, and through technical development, it transformed the face of the Earth and human societies. Science, and primarily natural science, was convinced of its own neutrality in the process. Yet, already the age of Enlightenment was accompanied by a critical scientific current, which revealed the blind spots of sciences and the dangers of the natural and social processes triggered by them. It was Kant, who already called for attention to the fact that the task of the truly enlightened person is to undertake the moral responsibility and accept the human autonomy on which the limits of knowledge and scientific thinking are based on. In spite of this, the period after the 17<sup>th</sup> century can be characterized by the absolutisation of the way of thinking and the methods of the natural sciences, the identification of facts revealed by the methods of natural sciences with the ‘truth’, and the enforcement of the natural scientific methods and norms on social sciences (MacIntyre, 1999, 77-91.). This is why it became necessary in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to differentiate between fact-based and value-based sciences and to demonstrate the importance of the latter. This task was first completed by Dilthey, when he expanded on the science theoretical distinction between natural and human sciences (Dilthey, 1974). He described that human sciences derive from the context of life in a direct way, *they are about the totality of our relation to reality; therefore, they cannot be objective. They are always filled with our interpretations and values.* However, even the so-called objective sciences are constructions based on social intellect and values! After Dilthey, Max Scheler, Husserl, Heidegger, modern phenomenology and deconstruction and several other intellectual movements have seen it as their mission to explore the hidden values behind ‘objective sciences’ and to approach their one-sidedness in a critical way.

### **The risk of the illusion of neutrality in sport sciences**

Facts are judged to be factual in relation to, or abstracted from certain values. The claim for neutrality can always, thus also in natural sciences, can only be realized in a relative way and temporarily, for the sake of a higher virtue. The so-called neutrality always creates or destroys some value. (The ‘love of facts’, for example is such a fundamental value, which is a necessary condition of the existence of science. On the other hand, the ‘love of values’ is a precondition to the functioning of human and social life, thus to the value production of science and sport as well.) Fact-based sciences select the experience they examine from the infinity of human experience on the basis of certain preferences, and even structure the selected experience according to certain values (MacIntyre, 1999). The critics of 19<sup>th</sup> century positivism already accentuated that there are no ‘clear scientific facts’; facts and the correspondences revealed by them are partly the products of science, and however efficient

they may be in a subsequent theoretical or technical development, they are always built on a given judgement of reality, a hidden set of values.

As it is evident today that the presence of the apparatus or the person doing the experiment may modify the results of the experiment in natural sciences as well (Heisenberg discovered that the nature of the wave or particle of light also depends on the mode of observation), the unique preferences of the scientist and the community of scientists also determine the pathways of scientific development (Kuhn 1984). If this is true for natural sciences, then it is even more valid for social and human sciences and for sport sciences, too. Scientific neutrality is indeed a valuable attitude, but cannot be absolutised. Sciences do not only have to understand the interaction of facts and values in connection with cultural phenomena, but also have to reflect on their own value judgements. As Karl Mannheim (1996) explained: it is impossible to analyze social phenomena without any ideological, conceptual or evaluating background. The best that a social scientist can do is reflect on their own value judgement as much as possible, and undertake the duty of value analysis, the examination of the interaction of facts and values in the society and in social sciences alike. *It is only those who can think about social and cultural creations, like sport in an adequate way, who are clear with their own normative judgements.* But for this, the illusion would be created in the maker of science or in the community that there exists a neutral description, and that social processes, thus, processes undergoing in sport as well, are neutral processes, like those of nature. As if the world of humanity was the playing field of blind forces and not normative subjects. *When we exclude social values from the circle of research in the name of scientific neutrality, we at the same time relativize them and deprive them of their importance. Thereby, even if unintended, but we become the advocates for a fatalistic, instrumentalist and utilitarian set of values, and every neutral fact that was discovered can only be accounted for the instrument of efficiency. As we might know, the ideal, or in other words, 'scientific' idol of neutral efficiency in sport can become especially dangerous.*

The social scientist who does not clarify their own normative standpoint may, under the spell of natural scientific neutrality, become the promoter of the value degrading all values of moral and community disappointment! Husserl reflected on this problem as follows: "The exclusiveness, with which the total world-view of modern man, in the second half of the nineteenth century, let itself be determined by the positive sciences and be blinded by the 'prosperity' they produce, meant an indifferent turning-away from the questions which are decisive for a genuine humanity. Merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people..." (Husserl, 1970, 5-6.)

If it is true that sport produces social value, then it is a fundamental duty of sport sciences to take values into consideration, and to analyze them in a critical and reflexive way, but consciously of one's own values. Moral values are notions (Plato, Kant) which cannot be grasped as objects or facts, yet they play a key role in the interpretation of the objective world. *If the sole objective of science is to accumulate data, to enhance productivity, performance and competitiveness, then it will have no counter-power whatsoever to challenge dangerous or inhuman social processes;* for example, to seek alternatives for the reproducing crises of overproduction in consumer capitalism, or to prevent the instrumentalist deprivation of humanity. Morgan (1985) analyzes how controversial a relation a man of our age has with the utopia of performance enhancement. On the one hand, it seems that our civilization is kept alive by the improved performances; but for these our world would collapse. On the other hand however, we also have an anti-utopia in connection with performance enhancement: overproduction and oversupply lead to the depredation of our personal and social life and the Earth, forces unsustainable processes upon us and threatens with the fall of our civilization.

The ‘crisis of overproduction’, or the performance enhancement overcoming all limitations, and the mechanical manipulation of human personalities are fundamental problems for sport sciences as well, and the critical understanding of this process required in-depth value analysis. If value-based analyses are excluded from sport sciences and natural sciences gain too much significance, then this may result that the meaning and value aspects are overshadowed (Holowchak, 2002). *If the world of meanings and values of sport science is not elaborated, it will be unprotected against alienation and devaluation!* The predominance of natural sciences, the precedence of the descriptive definitions of sport and the one-sided demand for neutrality in sport sciences creates the illusion as if sport itself was neutral in its values. However, the illusion of this ‘neutrality’ of sport leads to the cynical, utilitarian perception of sport. The danger of instrumentalizing human body and soul intensifies. Natural science serves victory! Yet, the question is the following: Whose victory is it? Why is it good to win? (McNamee 2008) There is no possible natural scientific answer to these questions; the analysis of values is required. In the following, a brief attempt is made to provide an example of philosophical value-based analysis related to sport.

### **A sport philosophical example of value-based analysis**

The normative, sport philosophical definition of sport, which is based on values and meanings, is as follows: *sport is a social activity in which primarily two values: fairness and fitness predominate in a parallel way. Sporting activity sets the difficult goal of combining two contradictory ethical values for the athlete.* How is it possible to activate all our strength and contest in such way that we never abuse our own strength? Fitness refers to the ability to mobilize all our strength in order to achieve our goals. The word *virtue* is etymologically related to the word *strength*. Only those can live a valuable life that is able to use their strength. I cannot be completely fair if I have no strength to fight for justice. Virtue without strength is inability. The value context of *fitness* is rooted in the antique interpretation of virtue perceived as strength. The antique concept of virtue, *virtus* or *arête* mostly connected excellence to active action. As the current use of virtue refers to bravery, energy, willpower and vitality, similarly, in antiquity it was those free men who were considered as valuable, who could act and fight. Slaves, women, children, strangers, cripples or the poor were limited in their actions, in the use of strength, *virtus*, therefore they were not recognized as full members of the antique world, the holders of virtue. The ideology of *fairness*, although it was present in antique sports as well, in its modern form is rooted in a different world of values of western culture, and that is Christianity. The Christian set of values contrasted the value of active strength with the value of containing one’s strength. The Christian concept of *agape* emphasized the value of the poor and the weak, and that every human soul is equally valuable from the point of view of a universal divine standard, regardless of their strength, health and power. We act right if we do not use our strength against the weaker ones, but refrain from it for the love of the child, the old, the sick or the weak. It is a sin to defeat the weaker. The equality and justice ideals of modernity are deeply rooted in the Christian set of values. Thus, the idea of fairness in modern sport also leads back to Christianity. Without this sport can be degraded into an unfair and barbarian game of gladiators.

Modernity itself is derived from antique and Christian heritage and one of the most difficult moral duties of modern humans is to balance between these two sets of values. How should I live in a way that I mobilize all my strength and yet do not do harm to others and stay fair to my neighbours? *Sport can be an ideal typical model of connecting these two fundamental values that is, fitness and fairness.* This is what can also explain its extraordinary popularity: in clean sport we can see the model of fair contest that is so difficult to realize in society. However, the distortion of this integration can

both be a symptom and an indicator of the crisis of modern society. The desire to win without real fair play, to make sport spectacular without an inward moral conduct will lead back to the barbarian circuses of the declining Roman Empire. Authentic sport carries the integrity of the two contradictory, yet coherent sets of values of western culture; therefore it can be a special source of value-conscious action. Sport has the opportunity to show human dimensions that have been split in modern culture or are difficult to hold together in their original unity: authentic sport can connect body and soul, fact and value and the values of fitness and fairness. A sport competition which mobilizes the best of strengths and yet does not allow room for the abuse of strength is an ideal typical model of well functioning democratic competition.

At this point the counter-argument may arise: why is sport supposed to be fair if the modern society it embeds in is in fact remarkably unfair. Let me answer this argument with an everlasting thought of Plato (1984): The origin of moral values is never to be found in experience, but in our inner ideals. *A fair person is not fair because the world is fair (it has never been!), but because he understands that this is how his life can be meaningful.* Fairness is not in the world. Fairness is where we create it and take responsibility for it. Turning back to science, the neutral description of experience does not make us conscious of our values. In science there is also a need for taking values in a free and conscious way, and for in-depth and critical analyses. Sport science has to undertake its human tasks of value analysis, both concerning its own development and owing to its social responsibility. Only a sport science which is reflexive about its moral values and is humanistic in the best possible sense can truly enhance the social value of sport.

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