

Dejan Donev\*

## Moral values in sport as a necessary part in the concept of ethical education

### ABSTRACT

---

Starting from Plato's *The Republic* where we can easily note Socrates' statements that music and gymnastics can be applied to creative activity, i.e. that "there are two arts for which I would say that a god gave them as a present to the human race – music and gymnastics because ... love for knowledge in them – not for the soul and the body separately, but for their harmonious alignment" – it is logical to wonder about the importance of sport for the moral upbringing of an individual, but what is more, about its importance in the development of an individual into an ethically autonomous person (personality), i.e. whether moral values of sport should be included today not only in the moral upbringing but also in the ethical education of an individual? This comes from the fact that in addition to instrumental values of sport, there are also its intrinsic values which are very important for further development of a person on his/her way to autonomous formation.

All of the abovementioned only indicates the main basis for the direction of considerations in this paper: what are the ethical values that sport offers and that we set in sport and from there about the role and importance of sport in broader spheres of moral development; further, the role of school in setting and necessity of sport and its ethical value in moral upbringing and ethical education in a person's character development, to be able to respond to the dilemma about the basis and justification of UNESCO's imperative on the introduction of sport and its ethical values into the concept of ethical education.

**Key words:** sport, moral upbringing, ethical education, fair play concept, personality.

---

\* Correspondence address: Dejan Donev, Ph.D., Center for integrative ethics, Done Božinov 41, 1300 Kumanovo, Macedonia, e-mail: d\_donev@yahoo.com.

We live in an era of technical and technological advancement that changes significantly the former characteristics of human life asking from us to reinvent new solutions to old problems, in an era where very complex issues of human survival have been reopened, but this time with quite different and fatal consequences. They require urgent solutions, but in a new, ethically grounded way. This has happened after a series of undesired consequences of development which are the result of man's careless actions, and especially because of the irresponsible attitude and utilization of everything, including biomass.

Nearly all modern age analysts agree that this is the consequence of the inability to ensure, together with the development, an appropriate ethical value and control system that would be applicable in all aspects of living. To put it more precisely: in the race for profit and consumption as status symbols, both citizens and the society have forgotten that development comes at a price, and part of that price is the cultural shock due to the rapid technical and technological development and conflict of interests of both developed and undeveloped economies. It is more than clear, as Joseph Ratzinger says, that the real threat of destruction of humanity does not come from intercontinental ballistic missiles, but from the destruction of moral forces! That is why new firm ground is sought after in order to resolve and thus surpass this grave situation. Will it be the famous call from the Renaissance: "Let us go back to nature and reestablish our human nature – which is in its essence, despite the attempts to negate it, in its nature it IS ethical!", or will it be something completely different and new? The next move is on the humanity, or more precisely the person!

\* \* \*

Therefore, it is about the Person, their ethically creative engagement as a means for finding solutions. It is so because the person (personality) is the highest reach of the development of life on Earth. Man is a developed biological being, but at the same time also a social, psychological and ethical being. These dimensions make him a responsible subject of action who can not only live and take, but must also think, plan, care, preserve and give. But for one to become such a developed person (personality), conscious of his/her needs, but also responsibilities, that person must cross the way from the heteronomos to autonomos – become conscious of one's rights and obligations! The person must go through the stages from the completely heteronomous (behavior motivated by imitating previous actions for fear of mistake) to autonomous behavior (respecting moral norms that are created from knowledge and understanding of their value, as well as from formal sense of human duty).

In evidence of this, scientists Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg, analyzed the development of consciousness and practical actions of young people analyzing<sup>1</sup>, determining that a young man is firstly **heteronomous** – adopts and follows other people's attitudes on morality. Then he grows (can grow) to an **autonomous** person – who constructs his own attitudes, follows them confident of their propriety, recommends them to others and thus advances human morality. Thus, foundations were laid for a new **educational activity**, which is called **ethical education**, as a path to cognitive and emotional maturation of a young person who is very important to the world for his/her purity, vital creativity and moral courage.<sup>2</sup>

The task of ethical education in modern society is the development of an **autonomous person (personality)** with the capacity to independently produce ethical solutions and create proper and effective moral norms. The hope of the world rests on such persons for the humanity to find the way out of a difficult situation, i.e. it is a modus, perhaps the most important one, for resolving the mounting problems of humankind. Moral upbringing, as before, continues to exist, but it represents a complete adaptation of a young person to social objectives and values and his/her qualification to execute the norms of the society.

This means that ethical education goes a step further, i.e. the goal of ethical education is to instruct the young about the essence and the mechanism of ethical decision-making, as well as to help them to develop into self-confident and capable persons for such decision-making. Therefore, the goal of ethical education is the spreading of ethical spirit and ethical seriousness, responsibility and creativity, which means that the need to implement it today is undeniable!<sup>3</sup> The evidence to support this position is also visible in the efforts of the UNESCO from the end of the past millennium about the revitalization of philosophical and especially ethical education.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> In the study "Moral Judgment in Children" (Jean Piaget: *Le Jugement moral chez l'enfant I* (1932), Paris, 1978) Piaget put forward his theory on two stages of moral existence of every person – heteronomous and autonomous – this study later becomes a source of new ideas about ethical education of the young. In the study "Essays on Moral Development", in the first part from "The Philosophy of Moral Development: moral stages and ideas of justice" (Lawrence Kohlberg: *The Philosophy of Moral Development*, San Francisco, 1981) Kohlberg gave an affirmative answer to the question about whether psychological and moral development are connected so that moral development goes hand in hand with psychological, stating that there are certain stages of moral development (more precisely, three levels of moral development, each with two stages) and that there is a measure of consensus between moral and psychological development, whereby as a consequence of psychological development, due to cognitive skills, there is also moral development.

<sup>2</sup> Kiril Temkov, *Etika na kulturata*, Dom na kulturata Ivan Mazov-Klime, Kavadarci, 2009, p. 86.

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO, *Philosophie et démocratie en Europe*, Sofia, 1998, pp. 183-187.

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO Strategy on Philosophy, APPROVED DRAFT December 29, 2004, <http://wpf.unesco-tee.org/gr/unstr.htm> ili <http://www.aiphp.eu/download/strategy.pdf>.

\* \* \*

A part of this corpus of questions and issues that we face at the moment of the development of an autonomous person who will be ready to resolve problems of modern age, is also connected with a specific form of value education, which is of special significance for the formation of mind and body, and that is sports value education!<sup>5</sup>

The aforementioned once again confirms the complexity of the process of development of an ethically autonomous person in which a multitude of different insights and values from different domains and fields of modern age must be incorporated.

Thanks to Postmodernity, out of the many disciplines that examine the sport phenomenon, nowadays it is the subject of special interest for philosophy, and even more for ethics, which does not discover in it only the negativities, but also very important elements of contemporary life, i.e. a spectrum of issues that are not only of factual and empirical character, but also philosophical, i.e. cognitive and moral, and also very important for the development of a proper ethically autonomous person.

This means that, starting from a philosophical and especially ethical standpoint in the explication of sport, we should speak of and consider the value aspects of sport, what are the important axiological guidelines of sport and what is desired and can be truly achieved by sport in the moral sense. These are the issues related to moral values in sport, their fundamental aspects, i.e. in what way they can be implemented into and contribute to the strategy for the development of an autonomous person. As pointed out by Robert L. Simon "they do not relate only to what people think of sport, or to what value they are held, but they relate to what people *should* think of sport".<sup>6</sup>

This, on its part, requires recognition and incorporation of acceptable moral standards and values and their practical application in sport. Critical examination in philosophy of sport is comprised of formulating and rational valorization of such standards and values, as well as their testing through their application on concrete cases, which would answer the question about the importance of sport for our moral life. If sport has this role, then we must answer the question about the basis, i.e. principles and moral values on which this can be justified and if they are a necessary part in the development of an autonomous person?

According to with the long-standing belief that sport has great influence on the development of the person's moral character, as well as the latest research<sup>7</sup>, moral val-

<sup>5</sup> This view of the connection of sport practice, sport games or any other sport activity with the development of qualities of moral character of a person goes deep and far back to Plato's work *The Republic*, in: E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (Eds.), 1961; and in: *The Collected Dialogues*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, Book III, Section 2.

<sup>6</sup> Robert L. Simon, *Fair Play - The Ethics of sport*, Second edition, Službeni glasnik, Belgrade, 2006, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Resolutions 58-5, 58-6, 59-10, 1980-67, 60-8, and 60-9 of UNESCO related to the role and importance of sports education for development and peace.

ues have great significance for the moral life of man, and it is, therefore, no surprise that sport is looked upon as a field where values should be learned, transferred from one generation to another, in line with moral upbringing, and especially their incorporation into ethical education. Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the UN, expresses similar views when he says that: "sport is a universal language that can bring people together, no matter what their origin, background, religious beliefs or economic status", on the occasion of declaring 2005 as the International Year of Sport and Physical Education.<sup>8</sup> Another example would also be the Olympism itself, as one of the inspirations and constituent elements of Universal/Global Ethics as a common new world morality.

This is the so because at the heart of sport we must put a logical ethical base in relation to burning issues and problems, thus giving them ethical dimension.<sup>9</sup> The matter is that sport encourages, firstly, a competitive spirit, where one should not exaggerate so as not to harm others and to avoid one's own moral degradation, but which is also necessary for any kind of human initiative and action.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, sport also promotes collaboration, as a system of exercise and competition, but also as a sense of partnership with everybody that participate in sport and that we meet in sport. Sport also has, as we mentioned previously, an embedded and developing in it, sense of **fair play** as one of the most prominent sports values and moral norms.<sup>11</sup>

Such moral values and principles are also the idea behind constant competitions as part of important (all)human communication; liking and collaboration of all athletes and their friendship; help provided by the more developed to the less developed and younger in sports development; ideals of good physical appearance, sports figure, sport successes and stars, as part of life's transpositions of almost every person, etc..., but also avoiding of negative stimulants that destroy both the beauty of the game and the health of athletes.

In this context, there are some doubts about the following questions: should schools be involved in teaching moral values in sport, and how? If yes, then what values should they teach, i.e. what is it that gives schools, and governments, the right to decide on the "official" morality they should teach individuals? These questions point to two very important problems related to the idea that schools should be in charge of moral upbringing, that is of teaching moral values in sport. The first problem is bias, and the second indoctrination, but for the lack of space and time, as well as the possibility of their consideration as separate problems related to the phi-

---

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.un.org/sport2005/>

<sup>9</sup> Adrian Walsh and Richard Giulianotti, *Ethics, Money and Sport*, Routledge, New York, 2007, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Margenau, *Sports without pressure*, 1 edition, Routledge, 1990, and Alfie Kohn, *No contest. Why we lose in our race to win*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986.

<sup>11</sup> For more details, see: Sigmund Loland, *Fair Play in Sport*, Routledge, New York, 2002, pp. 143-151.

losophy and ethics of sport, we can discuss them in another paper. Here we shall only summarize that the possible answer to the previous question could be the following: only if the schools support independent moral principles, i.e. they could teach their students how to consider their own values, to teach them techniques and procedures of moral reasoning<sup>12</sup> - in other words, instead of traditional upbringing, to go one step further towards ethical education, which as the final purpose has the development of ethically autonomous person.

\* \* \*

Although in the modern age most people feel that the values in our society are increasingly fading and sinking, while violence, drugs, violent crime and urban decay are gaining ground, we should all do, as participants or observers, sports! Sport is a successful defense against the dangers of drug abuse, alcoholism and other addictions; sport is the best activities for young women to develop, be healthy and bear children without special difficulties; sport is part of the vision of the new *anti-aging* movement for effective help for elderly persons as an ideal preventive medicine; sport as a means and form of social inclusion for disabled persons and persons with developmental difficulties...

In its best sense, sport is a motivational challenge for the mind and body je, which means that through sport we can learn to overcome difficulties and value excellence, as well as to appreciate activity as such, independently of any reward. In brief, through sport we can develop and express our morality and illustrate all the importance of dedication, integrity, sense fairness and courage, as well as the importance of the game standards and conduct. Is this what sport does little as contribution to the development of ethically autonomous person!? We shall mention here also a thesis of a great humanist Albert Camus who bestowed special to sport by saying that in sport "he had learned everything he knew about ethics".<sup>13</sup>

To sum up, the future of sport as a cultural phenomenon is once again confirmed with the necessity of ethical values, i.e. as we value sport and what values we put but also find in sports events.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, we can rightfully conclude that moral values in sport are more than necessary, and it is, therefore, imperative that we put them as a systematic part of the ethical education concept!

<sup>12</sup> M.J.McNamee and S.J.Parry (Eds.), *Ethics and Sport*, E & FN SPON, London, 1998, p.131.

<sup>13</sup> Drew Hyland, *Philosophy of Sport*, New York, Paragon House Publishers, 1990, p. 34.

<sup>14</sup> Torbjörn Tännjö and Claudio Tamburrini (eds.), *Values in sport*, E & FN Spon, London, 2000, p. 1.