

The Symbolic Dimension of Sport in Greek Tradition and Its Marginalization in Brazilian Public Education: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract: *In Greek sport, as noted by Junito Brandão, there exists a pronounced symbolic dimension of “Man.” This symbolic dimension, a fundamental attribute of the nature of human language, has been preserved not only within the Hellenic tradition but also among the traditions of so-called primitive peoples. Nevertheless, this dimension falls into crisis when translated into practice—likely owing to the interests and desires inherent in Homo sapiens. Brazilian schools, operating as public administrative bodies, appear to disregard the significance of this symbolic dimension of language. Instead, they tend to devalue the role of sport by confining it to a mere curricular obligation, unsupported by adequate governmental administration, thereby trivializing public sports practice as a social benefit for Brazilian society. As a result, sporting activity is only sporadically observed as a genuine social welfare initiative.*

Keywords: Ancient sports games; Sport in current schools; The dimension of symbolism in sport; Social pragmatism.

1. INTRODUCTION

A dictionary consultation leads us to reflect on education: the verb "educar" (to educate) comes from Latin, and researcher José Pedro Machado puts the following in quotes: "to create, to nourish, to take care of; to form, to instruct; to produce, perhaps from the French *éduque*. 17th century, Morais. (Educar)" and Ernout and Meillet highlight the prefixal composition Ex-, which opposes In-, denoting movement outward.

Physical education: why is it not privileged in Brazilian schools? Why do government bodies fail here and there to provide adequate time for practice and teachers in this field? We also ask why we have abandoned music and drawing as disciplinary foundations in Brazilian schools, in addition to the disdain for gymnastics.

In the chapter "The Place of the Greeks in Education" (Jaeger, 1995: 3 onwards), the condition of humans is emphasized in contrast to animals, which only approximate human beings solely in their biological functions of survival through procreation. It is through forms of play that animals learn survival skills. For humans, games and play became rich and evolved into major public games; they transformed from social rituals into institutions, such as the theaters of Ancient Greece—which include music, dance, and drawn images, emblematic of the unity of the social group.

In an era like ours, where violence prevails, it may seem mere idealism to assert that education, like the 'paideia' of the Greeks, is a privilege of humans, and that it includes them in the bosom of the community. Here applies Aristotle's maxim: by nature, in fact, man is a social animal (Politics, 1278b 19; 1253a 3, Nicomachean Ethics, 1097b 11; 1169b 18). History has enshrined his expression "a social animal", translated by Seneca (Tosi, 1996: 488) (De beneficiis, 7, 1, 7; De Clementia, 1, 3, 2) as "sociale animal"—man is a social animal—which forms the foundation of modern sociology, from its bases in Auguste Comte.

Still with Jaeger, in this same chapter, exhausting and revisiting, as a pull, the search for a project that would be the genuine Greek 'paideia'. In the Greek endeavor, there is no individualism, notable in the Hellenistic period, but humanism—here discarding the meaning of a humanitarian action, but including that of the Latin etymon, present in Varro and Cicero: *humanitas* is an individual shaped by community norms; thus, 'polis' for the Greeks would be a collective set of spiritual interests that brings the individual together. Therefore, 'paideia', the formation of the Greek man, is even more important for the formation of the spirit than for the acquisition of physical aptitudes in the *agón* (Jaeger, 1995: 18).

1.1 Olympics and Modernity

This was the thought of Baron de Coubertin, who strove to introduce Physical Education into French schools. His name was Pierre de Coubertin (1863 - 1937); he worked to establish the Greek Olympic Games in France, but because he was concerned with education. Now, in Ancient Rome, Homer's verses were taught, and the first teacher in Rome was Livius Andronicus, an enslaved Greek from the city of Taranto, who translated the Odyssey into Saturnian verses as early as the 3rd century BCE. The term "escola" (school), which comes from the Greek σχολή, 'scholé', meaning "leisure time," a product of study, was introduced into the Portuguese dictionary in the 13th century, as recorded in this entry in the Houaiss Eletrônico.

We modern people can say that it's a good thing idealists still exist. Junito Brandão would say:

For Wolfgang Weltsch, in *Ética e Estética* (Ethics and Aesthetics), in his chapter "Esporte - Visto Esteticamente e mesmo como Arte?" (Sport - Viewed Aesthetically and even as Art?), states that there is no doubt that aesthetics is central to sport, although historically humans have always tended to value the upper body, rationally and religiously. The other organs of the lower body were disdained... But there was a shift from this ethics towards aesthetics. In Weltsch's words: "Contemporary sport is one of the spheres where the intrinsic relationship between the aesthetic and the erotic is allowed to manifest itself." (p. 146)

In this way, the pagan spirituality of Ancient Greece prevailed over the rational Christian spirit of modernity, and those nude male athletes return in the insinuations, even feminine ones, of our era in sporting acts. Thus, for Pindar, the gods should inspire the 'ánthopos', which corresponds to the Latin "homo / humus" – terms more symbolic than the Greek, as they express the advice to man to remain grounded in the Latin radical "hum-", clearly present, as in Portuguese, in "humilde" (humble), "humilhar" (to humble)... in the Portuguese language, or as Latin dictionaries state: "humilis, humble; humilitas, of low stature...", in short, beings who need the thread of nature, or divine support, as in this Pindaric ode, translated by Junito Brandão:

Ephemeral beings! What is each of us?

What is each of us not?

Man is the dream of a shadow!

But when the gods cast

A ray of their light upon him,

Then a living radiance surrounds him

And sweetens his existence.

2. USE OF THE BODY

Social competition is part of human nature. It is also natural to be uninterested in certain sports, as Wolfgang Welsch emphasizes on page 151: "Isn't it simply ridiculous to drive at high speed around a circle (as Niki Lauda said when he retired from Formula 1?)" Thus, this critic compares the above situation to that of a play: "If Othello were to strangle someone in normal life, after leaving the stage, he would be arrested, just as a lineman would be if he continued to throw his entire weight against attackers and push them away on the streets." This is because "what the stage is to theater, the playing field, boxing ring, or race track are to sport." (p. 151) At this point, the "pretending" creates a circumstance of Aristotelian mimesis, as it articulates a type of social competition typical of humans.

Modernity has weakened the ethical question, even with that old religious tone still evident earlier in Pindar, a representative poet of the Greek Olympic Games. Incidentally, it should be noted that the name "Olympic" was restricted to just one Greek city, as it derives from the city of Olympia, whose patron deity was Zeus; there were games in other locations, such as Athens, where the patron deity was the goddess Athena, with another denomination, the Great Panathenaia; the Isthmian Games honored Poseidon in the city of Corinth; the Pythian Games, derived from "Pythia," the priestess of Apollo, the deity whom the Pythian Games honored, etc. These festivals included a solemn oath to the gods, just as we currently create protocol at the start of ceremonies, with local anthems, a solemn entrance like that of football players carrying small children in their arms or holding boys

and girls by the hand...

In archaic and other primitive societies, ethics prevail because they are still imbued with religious principles. This seems important for this question of identity. There are certain religious traits, as Johan Huizinga well observed regarding the importance of play in poetry. For Johan Huizinga, play is the essence that presides over a social origin: the sacred play of worship—indeed, in Greece, theater emerged from the ritual cult of the god Dionysus, and similarly other games such as the festive play of the courtly love tradition—with the celebration of marriage, the martial play of competition—fights in rings...

This is what inspired Gonçalves Dias to write the poem *I - Juca Pirama*. In it, he adds a footnote explaining that the title of this poem, when translated into Tupi, "is equivalent to saying in Portuguese 'that which is to be killed, and which is worthy of being killed.'"

At a certain point in the indigenous ritual, in preparation for the banquet to be offered with the death of the Tupi prisoner, the chief of the Timbiras, the people who subjugated the Tapuias, as read in the verses:

Then, the Timbira chief says to the Tupi's offensive boldness, since he invaded the forests, the Timbiras' territory: You will die a vile death by the hand of a strong man. (v. 105). He then orders the Tupi to speak up, to present himself to the Timbiras, or else to defend himself. The challenge is issued.

In contrast, the Tupi warrior steps forward but asks to be spared from death, because he is the support of his family—his father is a blind Tupi who needs his help to eat and a place to sleep in the dangers of the forests. And if he, a Tupi, is crying for his father who may be left helpless without his aid, once he, the young Tupi, secures protection for his father, he will return and honorably fulfill the ritual.

In counterpoint, the Timbira chief retorts that the Tupi should be freed because he cried in the face of death, and this means that if the brave Timbiras eat the Tupi's flesh, they will become as weak as this Tupi is.

Upon reuniting with his father, who, having lost his sight, has a sharpened sense of smell and thus detects the scent of paint, then feels his body and notices other ritual banquet adornments, he accuses his son of cowardice for fleeing death and leads him back before the Timbiras. During the father's dialogue with the chief, the Tupi son shouts "Alarma! Alarma!" (v. 421), a loanword from Italian that etymologically means "to arms in a tone of military challenge." After defeating many Timbira warriors, the Tupi son hears the chief interrupt the fighting: "-Enough! cries the Timbira leader," admitting that the Tupi son is an illustrious warrior. And thus, the ritual will be completed...

In teachings to young Timbiras, an old Timbira who saw the valiant one in the large courtyard shouted, as the Poet states: "An old Timbira, covered in glory, / Kept the memory / Of the young man, warrior, of the old Tupi!" (459-61)

It is necessary to highlight the use of paint, as the Indians valued the art of drawing. With body paints in primitive peoples. In addition to the example cited above, we have in José de Alencar's *Iracema*, in Chapter XXIV: "It was the custom of the race, daughter of Tupã, for the warrior to bear on his body the colors of his nation." Therefore, drawing is a unique element of primitive tradition. In other words, it is part of the indigenous education.

There has been a dilution of the ethics of archaic and primitive societies in the history of our Western civilization, due to a new Christian ethic regarding its view of the body, which is only sacred from the waist up, and besides the distortions of capitalism, sport, once practiced in the realization of the cult of the mind's mastery over the body, has become subjugated to physical weakness and desire.

But in Ancient Greece, a profane triumph occurred, where athletes practiced without any clothing, using earth powder to protect the skin from contact with rough surfaces. Apud Wolfgang Iser, p. 141, for Hegel, the Greek Olympic games elevated the body to the sense of "organ of the spirit" (Author's emphasis).

Also in modern times, capitalist interests prevail—and we will not raise issues of speculation like pornographic magazines, but rather contrasts with the ancient Greek ethic. Thus, in hiring practices where athletes migrate between rival teams, even to the point of changing national citizenship. Due to colonialism and the resulting racial miscegenation, one notices a sports team representing countries characterized as white or Caucasian, such as

France, England, etc., with the presence of the African, Muslim race... in other words, the national question is no longer a patriotic identity...

Sport has undeniably drawn aesthetic lines to fix the body's configuration in its athletic practice, in addition to emancipating it from religious rules in general. Thus, what is new in sport is the unashamed erotic status, but as a demonstration of health and beauty. There is high-performance sport that promotes young disabled athletes, given the effort in competition. There are also sports that present risks to the athlete's physical integrity: the average number of injuries among football players is known to all. (p.146)

We highlight a media report: Johnny Weissmuller (1904 - 1984), a gold medalist in swimming at the Olympics, successfully portrayed Tarzan as an actor on movie and TV screens. He was once a model champion of physical strength and agility, but he would struggle in a competition today with a young female newcomer in current swimming... Such is the degree of improvement of a body through today's exercises. BRAUNSTEIN and PÉPIN, p. 10, demonstrate this as languages and not outside language: Indeed, over the course of history, the body has become multiple as they define and reference it.

Given the modern tendency of art to break down the lines of separation between high art and popular art, it will include sport in the artistic realm, since art itself is divested of nobility and admits its taste for the popular. However, there are traits in sport that could deny its artistic competence, such as its final result: the physical performance, which, although the result of concentration, is fluid, volatile, perishable, while the result of an artistic effort is a work, which often does not depend on the artist's senses, as is the case with Beethoven's music, who was deaf: his music did not depend on his hearing. It is said that Homer was blind, but in his descriptive text he had geographical topics in his mind; in the description of human bodies he perceived fundamental traits... The rigor of criticism here denies artistic activity in sport in its result, because although athletes perform performative acts, they can lose a sports match in the end. There is properly no immanent effect in sports practice, since the end is victory.

Another point is that there are no absolute rules for making art - note the example of modern art - but there always are for sport.

Wolfgang Wetsch draws attention, on page 144, to the muscular curves achieved by Linford Christie through admired sport. Everyone waits for athletes to undress and display their musculature. It is clear that this underlyingly creates a repertoire of industrial possibilities, such as stimulating the practice of body cult and, from the capitalist perspective, the creation of physical education schools. There is also a Latin expression underlying this: *Mens sana in corpore sano*, a healthy mind in a healthy body - taken from the poet Juvenal, in his Satire X, although appropriated in another direction, since Juvenal speaks of a subject completely unrelated to sport. However, the strength of this new appropriation serves as a motto even for football fields and teams...

What is important to say is that one ends up configuring the athlete's aesthetic area: a slender body, ability to move... As for agility and speed, which create expectations in the eyes of spectators. This is a fact that has caused a shift from the ethical and valued the aesthetic, as even stadiums are filled as spectacles. Was it not for this reason that Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714 - 1762), that is, human nature includes in its appreciations sensual pleasure, charm, and contemplation. Hence, he defined aesthetics, from the Greek 'aisthesis', perception, sensation, sense organs...

Thus, on page 145, Therefore, what is happening today in the emphasis on the body in sport in a way reinstates the original—and subsequently lost—intention of aesthetics.

Thus, the dialogue between the school and the Olympics, Football, and other sports practices does not exist as a sports practice, even with the efforts of Physical Education teachers. Such sports practices are confined to journalistic programming in the media and economic sponsorships without any interdisciplinary contact with the school network. In the work *Ética & Compromisso Social nos Estudos Olímpicos*, we read:

In Brazil, the Olympic Academy of the Brazilian Olympic Committee (AOOB - COB) was founded as a body in 1998 but operated as a function within the COB structure since 1989. Its first coordinator, still during the phase of integration into the COB, was Lamartine DaCosta, who initially mobilized students from Gama Filho University (UGF) in Rio de Janeiro (RJ) and soon after from several other universities, especially those from master's and doctoral programs in Physical Education. (DACOSTA: *Estudo Olímpicos no Brasil*: 92)

Now, Gama Filho University has gone bankrupt, and only document records remain. Even with the encouragement of periodicals—even efforts like those of UGF—and other scientific instruments, we do not see any stimulus or interest in sports practice as support for education in the public school network. It is not just the objective prevalence of governments to achieve, for there is a lack, even in very objective areas, of teachers even in Mathematics; they reduce the class hours per group so that with that tiny class they can fill the gap in schools.

3. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

However, there is a point where Sport attracts Man. Its nature is to be competitive. Any sport includes competition or emulation. For this reason, it could not be removed from school. In the world of music, we have the repentistas (improvisational singers) of Northeast Brazil. This is another form of attractive competition.

One must also ask why the industry values the paintbrush and small paint pots so much, which attract so many people with amateur practices, in many cases, but which circulate industrial products such as canvases, papers, paintbrushes, paints, etc. Now, would it not be Man's own composition: the issue of physical activity—with gymnastics—and creative activity, such as drawing and music. With the repentista's music as well, and skillful activity—with the hands... Thus, school education would be inspired by human beings themselves, that is, by their competitive nature...

In our debates throughout history, the Aristotelian *poiesis* implicitly leaves a rivalry between man and nature... according to MOISÉS, p. 336, since *mimesis* as the imitation of men's inner life—their passions, their character, their behavior—is in flagrant opposition to Platonic idealism. For Platonic idealism sees in man a limitation of the perception of reality.

We are not so certain if repressive policing of social behavior deviating from the family good resolves the problem of social coexistence, which is so intense today in large metropolises. We do, however, hope that, given adequate care for students—this word, whose etymology is linked to the Latin verb *alo*, *alere*, to nourish, to feed—well nourished by the school, these students would come to practice social interaction in a healthier way.

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