# Sport as Part of a Good Life: Investigating the Debate

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## *ABSTRACT*

This paper is concerned with the question "What is the role of sport in a good life?". My aim is to highlight the key approaches and core positions in the philosophical debate on the role of sport in a good life. I argue that these approaches can be divided into three general categories: (1) negative: sport does not belong to the realm of a good life); (2) differentiated: sport contributes to living a good life, but it is not the main domain; and (3) affirmative: sport significantly contributes to living a good life. I want to point to those aspects of sport to which the identified positions refer and some interesting arguments that these positions offer. The originality of this research lies in clarifying the main approaches (i.e., describing their general content and structure) and making their arguments explicit. This article is of theoretical nature and uses tools that are standardly used when dealing with these types of research questions, with the most important ones being description, demonstration of relevant thoughts, comparison, evaluation, and interpretation.

**Keywords:** philosophy of sport; good life; sports ethics; wellbeing, flourishing

## INTRODUCTION

The problem of living well in relation to the potential role of sport in it has been discussed quite extensively among philosophers of sport (Suits, 2014, originally 1978; Pisk, 2006; Morgan, 2010; Feezell, 2013; Breivik, 2022). This is understandable since the debate on what a good life consists in presents one of the main topics in the history of thought. My intention here is to focus on the question "What is the role of sport in a good life?".

The goal of this paper is to point out the key positions in a debate on the role of sport in a good life. My ambition is therefore not to map the debate in detail nor to offer an exhaustive list of all the existing approaches since this would be a task for a comprehensive monograph. I also won't

attempt to evaluate all the pros and cons of particular positions to defend the one I subscribe to. As the discussions in the scholarly literature are quite extensive and sophisticated, my task here will be to look at them from a certain distance to see the overall picture of their structure. My intention is to offer a philosophical perspective on the relation between sport and a good life. In doing so, I focus on the core approaches that, in my opinion, represent the basis for the philosophical investigation of the aforementioned question. References used in this text are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive. Based on my readings I divide the main approaches into three general categories:

- Negative (sport does not belong to the realm of a good life);
- Differentiated (sport contributes to living a good life, but it is not the main domain); and
- Affirmative (sport significantly contributes to living a good life).

I want to highlight those aspects of sport to which the identified positions refer and some general arguments that these positions offer. I work not only with approaches that directly speak about sport in relation to a good life, but I also include those lines of thought that represent an implicit argumentative basis of these positions, although they do not directly refer to sport or a good life. The importance and originality of this essay lies in clarifying the main approaches (i.e., describing their general content and structure) and making their arguments explicit. This "mapping of the terrain" is valuable because it helps us to understand better what the debate on the role of sport in a good life is about. It also helps one to see what lines of thought are worthy of a detailed future investigation.

An important specification concerns the term "sport". I take (modern) sport to be "an institutionalised, rule-governed, structurally game and play-like (non-necessary, non-ordinary, arbitrary, and gratuitous) encounter in various tests and contests of human physical skills" (Mareš and Novotný, 2023, p. 43). Although the word "sport" first appeared in the 15th century (McClelland, 2017, p. 83) and its etymology reaches back to the 12th century (Olivová, 1988, p. 8), the cluster of activities that the concept of sport represents is rather old and already traceable before the invention of the word, for example in the ancient Greek culture.[1] I do not intend to simplify a rather complex history and meaning of various physical activities by simply calling them "sports". Not everything we call sports are in fact sports. On the contrary, some activities that are not called sports might actually be sports. When I refer to sport in this article, I mean the type of activity described above. When appropriate, I also refer to other types of human activities that are similar to sport (e.g., physical exercises – techné gymnastiké, or games). The fact that a particular activity is not inherently a sport does not mean that the theses about it cannot apply to sport by analogy. The quoted authors usually have their own notion of what sport is. Since they share a common point of reference, I leave the details of their conceptions aside and focus only on their arguments regarding the value of sporting activity.

1 The use of the term sport in the context of ancient Greece is problematic, given its linguistic origins and modern usage. Although the physical and competitive activities of the ancient Greeks had strong ritual, religious, and philosophical overtones, I consider it possible to describe many of them as "sporting", given the intrinsic aspects of the activities in question. However, this designation should be taken with a grain of salt. In many ways, physical encounters meant something different from what they mean today. It is also problematic to draw a line between sports, physical exercises, and the various games that were practised in ancient Greece.

Another important specification concerns the term "good life". I approach this concept only through the discussed positions. In particular, I briefly specify what conception of a good life is preferred or presupposed by the relevant authors. Detailed analysis of the content of these positions must be left for another occasion.

### *Sport as Part of a Good Life*

Conceptualizing sport within the domain of a good life is a theoretical project. However, it is also tightly linked to a more practical concern, namely how shall we live our lives and to which activities shall we devote our limited time. Is it reasonable to devote our lives to sport? If yes, on what rational basis can we do that? On the contrary, what are the arguments that speak against such a devotion? What is the precise point of reference of these arguments? Philosophers discussing sport have provided interesting (implicit or explicit) answers to these questions. I will now address the main positions in the debate on the role of sport in a good life which will be discussed in the following order: negative, differentiated, and affirmative.

### *Negative positions*

In general, negative positions refer to certain defects of particular sporting forms or occurrences (predominantly highly competitive or professional sport and Olympic sport), or point to sport's little value in comparison with the more important pursuits. In case of the former, authors especially criticize excessive performance connected with a strong emphasis on results, material prizes, and winning at any cost. This emphasis represents a challenge for modern highly competitive and professional result-oriented sports, but it is already tracible in the context of ancient Greek sport (Pisk, 2006, p. 68). Jirásek (2005, pp. 141-142) states that sport contains traditional and authentic values and opportunities (fair play, performance, victory, or sportsmanship), but it is also exposed to risks of immoral attitudes (cheating to win), instrumentalization of human body (depersonalisation), commercialisation, and politization (ideological manipulation, indoctrination). This position is further developed by Feezell (2013) who claims:

"Certain critics are disturbed by the moral atmosphere of sports and the way they encourage the inevitable side effects of competition: aggression, violence, alienation, and a lack of civility. As highly commercialized competitive activities, sports often highlight greed, crass materialism, egotism, and, at least every four years, jingoistic nationalism." (p. 190)

Feezell points to the Olympic sport which is criticized also by other authors. Kreft (2019) formulates his criticism of the Olympic sport as follows: "[Sport] initially was and still is organised based on the aristocratic and elitists distribution of power, which allows elite associations and elite Olympic movement… to rule over sport and athletes." (p. 257) A radical leftist critique of modern Olympism is offered by Simonović (2004, pp. 9-11). Olympic games are described as the instrument for integrating people into the spiritual orbit of capitalism. Simonović presents Olympism as an aggressive totalitarian ideology that promotes, among other things, sex segregation, abuse of children, turning sportsmen into modern slaves, and drug abuse. Considerably less radical critique is offered by Suits (1988, p. 9) who maintains that in the Olympics there is a kind of compulsion to win which turns a game that could be play into something that is not play, i.e., the valuable play potential of sport is not realised.

It is important to note that these critiques (whether or not we accept their adequacy is a separate issue) do not refer to sport as a type of activity, but rather highlight certain negative features of particular sporting forms and events situated in a given historical and cultural context. They are mainly concerned with professional sport and often they point to some wider cultural problems of which sport is a certain mirror (e.g., materialism, emphasis on results, or wasting resources especially in case of sports mega events).[2] The critique is therefore cultural or sociological, not primarily conceptual (i.e., does not refer to sport as a type of activity). This cultural critique does not deny the positive potential of the Olympic sport. As Loland (2012) notes: "If practiced in sound and responsible ways, Olympic sport can be an exponent of admirable forms of human excellence with validity not only in sport but in society at large." (p. 163) Stronger critique would deny this potential and point to the fundamental problems in the concept of the Olympic sport as such. Simonović seems to go in this direction.

The critique presented so far implicitly rejects the inclusion of sport into the context of a good life on the basis of sport's defective forms. It does not tell us explicitly what a good life consists in, but only suggests what is not desirable in life. An overemphasis on performance and results together with economic or power-oriented instrumentalization of sport generally stand out as undesirable elements that obscure the playful (autotelic) and developmental potential of sport.

The latter critique of sport attempts to show sport's little value with respect to potentially more valuable activities. Already in the late 6th and early 5th century BC, philosopher Xenophanes (Fragments DK 21 B2) mocks the importance of physical strength and athletic achievements. He suggests that these qualities do not make the polis better nor do they stand higher that the pursuit of wisdom. Modern representative of this critique is Chomsky (2014) who characterizes (professional) sport as an "…area which has no meaning and probably thrives because it has no meaning…" Chomsky argues that there are different areas that really matter to human life. Focusing on sport is compared to living in a fantasy world without paying attention to the real issues: "One of the functions that things like professional sports play, in our society and others, is to offer an area to deflect people's attention from things that matter…"[3] Presented thesis is a glimpse of a larger objection against the role of sport in a good life, namely that sport is either worthless, dangerous, and even despicable (Feezell, 2013, p. 189), or at least not as important as other areas. This latter part of the objection can be explicit (as in the case of Xenophanes or Chomsky), or implicit (as in the case of conceptions that do not exclude sport but highlight different ways of living, e.g., contemplative, religious, or political). Such critique goes deeper than the former (pointing to some defects of some instances of sport) as it refuses to ascribe positive value to sport in general. Instead, it interprets sport and its defining properties (e.g., competition with others) as something undesirable, even harmful.

A detailed critique of competing with others is formulated by Luper (1986) who argues against the position of Competitivism.[4] The central distinction of such view is between competitive and non-competitive properties. The second group of properties involves the examples of roundness,

2 Oborný (in our private correspondence) claimed that a good life and the professional sport are incompatible categories. According to Oborný, this form of sport is too cultural and unnatural for human beings.

3 The question remains whether this criticism applies exclusively to sport or whether it can be extended to other "non-productive" activities, e.g., fine arts (painting, sculpture, music, or poetry).

4 Luper (1986, p. 167) presents Competitivism as a type of Perfectionism. This theory holds that excellence is either essential to a good life or at least intrinsically good.

redness, or having a friend. These properties are not competitive in a way that having one does not imply that others won't have the given property. Competitive properties, on the other hand, require rivalry and certain polarization. Luper offers the following example (1986):

"… we might say that a good sprinter is one who can sprint faster than the average sprinter, that a good swimmer is one who can outswim the average swimmer, etc. The property of being able to outrun the average racehorse has a characteristic in common with being able to outswim the average swimmer: in order to have either, an item must compete successfully with other items of the same type. Such properties are the offspring of rivalry, and can aptly be termed 'competitivist'." (p. 167)

The author then extends this model to the concept of living a good life (1986):

"Just as a good racehorse must have the competitive property of being faster than average, the thought goes, so a good live must possess various properties to a degree that exceeds the average… a good X is one that has certain properties to a greater degree than the average X." (p. 168)

According to Luper, the claim that competitive properties are essential to a good life is a tragic error generated by the absurd view that a worthwhile life is like a contest won. One of the problems of such view is that it precludes a plurality of good lives ("if to be good is to score higher than the average life, then some lives must be average or below, and hence not good"). Luper (1986, 170) concludes that competitive properties cannot be essential to the goodness of life.

The critique of Competitivism as applied to sport could be formulated in the following syllogism: (a): Good life does not involve competitive properties (i.e., trying to be better than others); (b): Sport involves competing with others and a commitment to excel in a contest; therefore (c): Sport is not part of a good life. Although the conclusion follows from the premises, both premises could be problematized. For example, one could say that the second premise does not apply to all instances of sport, but only to its competitive, performance-oriented variants, which consider the main purpose of sport to be outdoing others and winning the competition. It is also possible to problematize the first premise, i.e., that competition with others is purely negative.[5]

In contrast to the first line of criticism, the second critique is more explicit about what a good life consists in and what types of activities are worth pursuing in life. These include the pursuit of wisdom and an active interest in solving social and political issues (Xenophanes, Chomsky) or building good interpersonal relationships (Luper).[6] Sport is interpreted as an activity that does not significantly contribute to these valuable endeavours, and thus does not belong to the sphere of a good life.

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5 Some philosophers of sport (among others Hyland, Simon, or Nguyen) have attempted to demonstrate that competition is not necessarily something negative. It could be conceptualized as a cooperative enterprise. The intention then is not to beat or destroy the opponent, but rather to strive together and approach the other as an important element in the process. Under this view, although someone wins and the others lose, everyone can benefit from participating in a contest.

6 Luper (1986, p. 174) suggests that a crucial element of a good life (and a universal intrinsic good) is being in a certain sort of non-competitive relationships with others. My impression is that Luper does not deny the value of excelling in something (even in sports), but only point to the negative aspects of extreme dedication and strong competition with others.

### *Differentiated positions*

The common ground of the differentiated positions is that they ascribe some positive value to sport, but also add that sport's value is limited, conditional, and that sport is not the main domain towards which (all) humans should focus their attention. Representatives of this position are ancient Greek thinkers Plato and Aristotle, who acknowledge educational role of sporting and sport-like activities (techné gymnastiké) in the context of living a good life. In Plato's Republic, physical training and sporting activities are presented as part of a rigorous, yet balanced educational programme which prepares certain classes (guardians, rulers) of the polis for a good community service. These activities are important, but not exclusive means for cultivating the goodness of character (Cooper, 1997, 410b–412b). Reid (2007) summarizes their role as follows: "In Plato's Republic sport serves the educational objectives of personal virtue, intellectual achievement, and political harmony." (p. 160)[7]

Similarly, Aristotle understood physical cultivation as a way to acquire virtues (specifically fortitude, andreia, see Barnes 1995, 1337b, 20–30), health, and beauty (i.e., external goods and conditions for happiness, eudaimonia), but the activities that best fulfil the purpose of human beings are of a different sort, namely intellectual activities, specifically contemplation (Barnes, 1995, 1177a, 10–20). Reid (2020, 69) in the context of Aristotle's conception further specifies that athletic training can only contribute to virtue when it is complemented by an effort to understand what is good and beautiful. Moreover, such sporting practices must be well-balanced and must avoid excesses (Barnes, 1995, 1338b, 40-1339a, 5). Therefore, sport's overall value in the context of a good life is limited and conditional. Sport is valued as an instrument for reaching higher goals and as a platform for personal cultivation if it meets certain standards and criteria. Hurka (1993) summarizes Aristotelian position on the value of physical activities as follows:

"Most of us are not outstanding athletes and cannot achieve the highest physical perfection. Still, we can preserve our basic health and pursue whatever mild athletics are compatible with our main projects. We have instrumental reasons to do both these things. Physical activity keeps us alert and can be the medium for some exercise of rationality. If Aristotelian perfectionism is correct, however, this activity is also a modest intrinsic good, as the development of our physical nature." (p. 39)

Under the discussed "differentiated" view, sport could also be interpreted as a form of compensation. It not only helps us to develop our physical nature, but also to distract ourselves from the workaday concerns and to regain physical and mental strength for pursuing projects of higher value. Sport is then seen as a type of relaxation after work.

Moreover, sport is approached as an instrument for developing healthy cooperation between people. This notion is apparent in the modern Olympic movement. The aim and purpose of the new Olympic Games, captured in the Olympic Charter (2021), is an educational ideal of human development (Jirásek, 2018). The second fundamental principle of Olympism states: "The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity." Sporting competition is intended to build not only individual character, but also human community through

7 Sporting activities in ancient Greece were closely connected with military preparations and were meant to produce soldiers that will protect the polis. This is apparent not only in Sparta, but also in Athenian gymnasia (Olivová, 1988, pp. 100, 106).

fostering bonds of friendship between people and a sense for belonging (Jirásek, 2005, p. 277).[8] However, to what extent is this goal actually being realised remains to be a question and a potential subject for criticism.

The aforementioned examples of the differentiated positions see sport as a potentially valuable instrument for cultivating the goodness of character, enabling individuals to pursue projects of higher value, and promoting interpersonal relationships. Sport in a sense of active participation is part of a good life, but only to a certain extent. These positions highlight that there are other more important things in life that one should pay attention to, namely public service (Plato), contemplation (Aristotle), production (capitalism), or peaceful cooperation between nations (Coubertin).

Differentiated positions also calculate with individual/personal perspectives and subjective preferences. Fry (2004, p. 41) in this respect states that a well-played sport is an intrinsically valuable activity (insofar as it exemplifies fairness, decency, teamwork, and a quest for excellence), but a passionate participation in sport is not a norm for humans in general. One does not have to be an excellent athlete to live a good life. However, Fry adds that for some individuals, the challenges posed by sports are especially meaningful, because the goods that are realizable through sports (e.g., the felt quality of the sport experience) are not readily available through other avenues. This conception shifts our attention from sport to a sporting individual. Here, sport is part of a good life for those individuals (or communities) that have a personal relation to it, but those who don't may pursue different quests that will be important for them.

### *Affirmative positions*

Positions that conceptualize sport within the domain of a good life highlight internal qualities of sport together with its positive impact on human wellbeing and flourishing. Classical representative is Bernard Suits who considers playing games and sports to be the essence of his Utopian vision and constituent of the ideal of existence (2014, pp. 189, 194).[9] Throughout his body of work Suits provides various reasons why these activities are so important. He considers sport to be a type of intrinsic good that, along with many other things, makes up the class of goals to which we ascribe primary seriousness (1973, p. 19). Due to its inner structure (specific rules, goals, and means how to reach these goals), game playing (and arguably sport) "… makes it possible to retain enough effort in Utopia to make a life worth living" (2014, p. 189).[10]

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8 In the Czech context it is worth mentioning the figure of Miroslav Tyrš who regarded physical exercise as a means for achieving national goals, the establishment of democracy, and catalyst to Slavonic cooperation and mutuality. Tyrš was an opponent of competitive sport. He championed harmony and kalokagathia (Platonic teaching based on a philosophy of corporeal, moral and spiritual whole), aesthetics and ethics in physical activity (Jirásek and Hopsicker, 2010, p. 257).

9 Utopia represents a state of affairs where all of the instrumental activities, economical and interpersonal problems are eliminated and where all of the basic goods are easily accessible. Suits then looks for activities that his Utopians would pursue and identifies game playing as the most suitable candidate (Suits, 2014, pp. 182-189). Suits positively values both games and sports. In his main text (The Grasshopper), he does not offer a clear distinction between the value of playing games and the value of participating in sports, i.e., both types of activities are of a similar importance.

10 Suits offers a detailed conceptual analysis of play, game, and sport. His well know definition of game playing states (Suits, 2014): "To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs (pre-lusory goal), using

The significance of games and sports is based not only on ontology (the nature of the activities in question), but also on philosophical anthropology (human nature).The reason why Suits paid such a high attention to games and sports is partly because they enable to realize human potential in a unique way: "People play games so that they can realize in themselves capacities not realizable (or not readily so) in the pursuit of their ordinary activities." (1973, p. 14) Playing games thus resonate deeply with what does it mean to be a human being. Suits here seems to advocate a certain kind of perfectionism about wellbeing (Fletcher 2016). He asserts that humans have a specific set of capacities that derive from human nature and whose exercise and development is good for humans. Lopez Frías (2022) describes Suits' anthropology in relation to his theory of gameplay as follows:

"… for Suits, the defining marks of human nature are the struggle to overcome obstacles and the exercise of autonomy… human beings fulfil their nature when they manage to arrange their lives to give themselves obstacles of their choosing to exercise and develop the capacities from which they derive the highest level of satisfaction." (p. 129)

Sports, although not the sole constituents of a good life, possess qualities that significantly contribute to human flourishing. For Suits, sports are important platforms for exercising and developing human capacities whose exercise and development is an important element of living a good life.[11]

Another account of a good life that involves sporting practices is presented by Morgan (2010). Good life is conceptualized as one in which wholehearted engagement in the social practices that human agents take up is the significant feature. Sport is presented as a sector in which such engagement is the norm rather than the exception. Morgan (2010) specifies that being truly engaged is dependent on recognizing sports' internal value and sports' internal goods: "… in order to engage fully in a practice like sport one must be motivated principally by, and committed foremost and utmost to, its internal goods." (pp. 249-250) Sport may bring about external goods such as money, fame, or power, but the true value of sport comes from its inner structure and the standards of excellence it embodies. Similarly, Breivik (2022, p. 28) states that by taking part in sport people can experience the intrinsic values and meanings that come with such participation.

The value of engagement in sports and games is also based on the assertion that they allow us to carve out new ways of being and even confront the absurdity of our existence. This point is developed by Ryall (2021) in her reaction to Nguyen (2020):

"The best games are those which allow us to stretch our abilities but also our imagination. Games allow us to carve out new ways of being and experiment with the consequences. The fact that I can play and replay a game in a way that is not afforded in other aspects of life, or even with

only means permitted by rules (lusory means), where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favor of less efficient means (constitutive rules), and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity (lusory attitude)." (p. 43) The shorter definition has this form: "Playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles." (p. 43) According to Suits, games and sports are more sophisticated than play and due to their inner nature more valuable. For more details on the relation between play, game, and sport see Suits (1988). The author who defends the value of play is the classic Huizinga (see his opus magnum Homo ludens), according to whom play and playfulness are the symbol of a good life.

11 Suits (1974) further argues that there is not a single proper function that human beings should perform. Instead, he advocates that there is virtually an uncountable number of functions that are proper for human beings. He formulates this claim as an argument against Aristotle's conception of human nature and its proper function.

other forms of art, gives it a special value. In this sense, it portrays the ultimate existential value: I can create and recreate myself infinitely… games may also force us to confront the absurdity of our lives in a way that other activities do not, since we are aware that the goal towards which we are striving is a temporary one that we may choose to ignore." (Ryall, 2021, p. 434)[12]

Ryall here bases the value of playing games on the possibility of repetition which allows one to re-create oneself in the process of playing. The goal of this process is "only" temporal and somehow unforced (arbitrary). It reminds an individual of the temporality of her existence and encourages one to explore the new ways of being that open up in the process of playing. For Ryall, games (and also sports) thus emerge as an existential category. On a general level, they represent a specific possibility of coming to terms with the world. They are meaningful ways of grappling with the fate of a finite, inscrutable and in some ways absurd existence.

These and other affirmative positions refer to sport as a type of activity involving various positive qualities internal to it. Such qualities (e.g., a difficult framework that allows a person to act in the new modes of action) are presented as ones that contribute significantly to individual and social wellbeing and flourishing.[13] The good life in these conceptions means active immersion in activities that bring pleasure to a person, allowing him to realize and develop his ludic nature, motor skills, specific capacities, and modes of action. What matters is living with a passion for movement, play, and the quality of experiencing the present moment.

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN THESES OF THE PRESENTED POSITIONS

### *Negative positions*

- **Critique of particular forms of sporting practices:** *There are many problems associated with the specific forms of sporting practice (especially with professional sport), such as overemphasis on performance, one-sided obsession with results, exploitation of athletes, instrumentalization of the human body, corruption, cheating, or aggressive behaviour of athletes (or fans).*
- **Critique of the value of the activity***: Sport is generally not a valuable activity. There are more valuable activities and areas in human life that one should be interested in.*
- **Critique of Competitivism:** *Competition with others involves certain problems, e.g., polarizing people into categories of winners and losers, and is therefore undesirable.*

12 A radical view related to the absurdity of our existence would question whether there is such a thing as a good life. However, even under such view, sport (due to its inner qualities) could still be conceptualized as a certain antidote to a meaningless existence.

13 Jirásek (in our private correspondence) problematizes the idea that the goodness of sport is constituted by the structure of the activity and its internal qualities (e.g., specific goals related to the framework of testing various physical skills). He advocates that this level is insufficient and emphasizes the role of values that are represented by the activity. My intention here is to point to the internal qualities of sport that are highlighted in the scholarly literature. I agree that a comprehensive discussion on the goodness of sport and its role in a good life would have to include values and specific contexts of their manifestation. For a comprehensive discussion on a good sport see Mareš (2023).

***Differentiated positions***

- **Sphere of upbringing and education:** *Sport is one of those areas of physical culture in which a person is specifically educated for life. Sport contributes significantly to the development of physical fitness and character of a person, i.e., to the acquisition and strengthening of certain virtues (e.g., bravery, endurance, or discipline).*
- **Sphere of compensation:** *Through sport, people can regain energy after strenuous work tasks. Sporting encounter is a form of rest and recharging for the pursuit of worthwhile human activities.*
- **Sphere of interpersonal relationships***: Sport helps to build healthy interpersonal (personal and societal) relationships based on cooperation, mutual respect, and respect for shared rules.*
- **Sphere of individual interests:** *Sport is a meaningful and valuable activity for selected individuals, namely those who are interested in it and enjoy their participation, but participating in sport is not the "norm" for all.*

***Affirmative positions***

- **Sphere of activity:** *Sport involves the goods inherent for this type of human practice. It is an activity with inherent qualities worth pursuing, i.e., an area of intrinsic value. This value relates primarily to the performance of physical (movement) skills.*
- **Sphere of human engagement:** *Sport contributes significantly to human flourishing by the way it engages people physically and experientially, and through the modes of action to which an athlete is exposed. Sport enables an individual to develop his/her natural (especially physical) capacities. It also brings joy, satisfaction, and a range of other valuable experiences.*
- **Existential sphere:** *Sport significantly enters into the life situation of a person. It allows to create new ways of being and specific confrontation (or coping) with the finality and possible absurdity of human existence.*

## CONCLUSION

Presented list of positions shows that in their critique or support of the role of sport in a good life, authors focus on different aspects of sporting practices. Negative positions point to certain defects of particular sporting forms and occurrences. In doing so, they do not necessarily criticise sport as a type of activity, but rather they argue against some ways of how sport is being practiced. This critique could be interpreted as cultural since sport mirrors certain general features and values of a particular culture. However, some of these positions refer to sports' little value in comparison with other types of activities. Sport is then presented as an area that serves no valuable purpose and that is undesirable, even harmful. Differentiated positions acknowledge sports' positive features, but they try to frame them into a larger context of what a good life consists in. Here, sport is not the main domain, but it may be a valuable part of education (in a broad sense) that aims at some higher goals (e.g., political leadership, intellectual achievements, peaceful coexistence between nations, and production) or it may be valuable for some people, but not for everyone. Affirmative

positions highlight sports' internal qualities, i.e., its intrinsic value together with the unique forms of agency and experiences connected with this type of human practice. Their focus is on debunking the nature of sport to demonstrate its relevance in a good life.

So how does sport stand in the context of a good life? Contemporary sport is clearly not without its problems. Various literature on sport ethics (e.g., Kreft, 2019; Zurc, 2019; Pérez Triviño, 2013) reminds us of the challenges that the contemporary sport faces. Moreover, despite its potential inner qualities, sport (and virtually any other type of human conduct) is arguably not the sole occupation in the context of living a good life. When we put too much emphasis on one good (i.e., sport or play), it will be at the cost of some other goods. Therefore, it will lead to disbalance which represents a threat to a good life. Luper (1986) in this respect says:

"To excel at something requires an inordinate amount of attention to one limited area, and the neglect of equally important concerns. For example, training schedule required to be the best swimmer would impose an inordinate sacrifice on one's education and social life. Skewing our activities toward one goal would lead us to neglect other projects and the needs of our spouses, children and friends." (p. 173)[14] Whether or not sport belongs to the realm of a good life is not determined solely by the sport itself (i.e., by its form and its desired properties) but also by the preferred notion of a good life. Here I only wish to suggest that considering sport and taking its positive qualities seriously may open up space for a more holistic notions of a good life. Such considerations may enrich our thinking about the human nature, its capacities, and the types of conduct that will promote human flourishing. Moreover, sport brings into light topics that are often neglected in a wider philosophical debate on a good life, such as corporeality (i.e., human physical skills), game, play, and "positive" encountering (with rules, other people, ourselves, nature, and the surrounding environment). Taking sport seriously may challenge some traditional, more rationally based conceptions of living a good life and stimulate us to look at the traditional philosophical questions such as "Who we are?" and "Why are we here?" from a different perspective. Therefore, I conclude that the future philosophical debates on a good life will benefit greatly from considering this area of human practice and the spheres it thematizes.

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14 It is important to note that whenever we devote ourselves to something, it is at the expense of something else. If we want to be good at some activity, it requires sacrificing time and a number of other items. This is a problem when the sacrifices involved are disproportionate, i.e., when some basic goods (e.g., friendship or knowledge) are neglected in the long run and only certain activities are unilaterally prioritized.

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