

THE SPACE FOR SEEKING THE MEANING OF MOVEMENT ACTIVITIES AND THE MEANING OF THE HUMAN WAY OF BEING: MOVEMENT CULTURE

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The paper focuses on the horizon of meaning as it can be experienced by human beings through movement activities. Although the phenomenon of meaning is not producible by natural sciences, it does not mean that philosophy could not question its validity. The meaning is apprehensible in an existential situation and it comes out clearest at the moment of the loss of the possibilities related to the concrete beingness. The meaning of life can be found in four possible areas. The answer to the question asking about the meaning is religion; the accumulation of experience situations; active work or moral acts; and the rejection of this question. The meaning of life is introspectable in the field of movement culture and it is closely connected with the topic of authentic existence. Metheny offers a distinctive symbology of the meaning of movement. She uses the neologisms of *kinescept*, *kinestruct* and *kinesymbol* highlighting the originality of movement experiences that cannot be transferred onto any other cognitive form. It is possible to look for the meaning of movement in the connection with the meaning of life in the various fields of movement culture as schematically summarized in the final chapter.

Keywords: Meaning, meaning of life, meaning of movement, movement culture.

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy is always in some way related to the whole and wholeness; it radically differs from the scientific way of grasping of the world (which is characterized by its specialization, by its interest in partial aspects of reality and by its methodically unified process of research). The phenomenon of meaning is one of the phenomena that are not present in the area of science (namely the natural sciences). This however does not mean that it is not possible to ask questions about the meaning, that it is excluded from being looked for in the process of seeking. That's why the word "seeking" is in the title of this paper, which endorses the philosophical, not the scientific grasp of the world. To seek suggests that the topic is not closed, but open (including hermeneutic openness for continual new ways of understanding). It is therefore not a topic of science that answers the given question by description or definition, but it is a topic of philosophy which questions and tries to understand on a deeper level. It means that in this text, we will not deal with scientific attitudes in philosophy, but rather on hermeneutic and phenomenological traditions in the history of thinking.

The word "meaning" contains (the Czech word "smysl" signifies meaning and sense, too) several different notions. First off there is the ability (a potency) of physical organs to perceive various kinds of information by sight, smell, hearing, taste and feel, i. e. senses,

the possibility to perceive meaning as a physical and a sensual organ ("to be conscious"). Another is the sense of fairness or that of movement, i. e. something described as "the sixth sense", some specific sensual access to reality, the skill to be able to feel a certain theme or relation more finely and sensitively than the common population.

Another notion that is created from the same root (in Czech: "smysl" – meaning, sense and "smyslnost" – carnality) is carnality, i. e. not some kind of special sensitivity, but rather an ability to engage sensually, to "heat the senses". This paper does not deal with any of these notions. It focuses on the "deeper meaning", on the words that can be to a certain degree perceived as synonyms, e. g. reason, meaning, purpose, central value, ideological purpose, the ultimate goal of an effort, etc. I am trying to imply that this is an axiological category, that the meaning will be contemplated in its relation to values and evaluation; that this is not by any means a category of empirical cognition. The meaning cannot be discovered and examined separately, e. g. with the aid of natural sciences. That however does not mean that meaning as such does not exist or that it is a mere chimaera. As Frankl suggests (1997): "The meaning simply doesn't supervene in the terminus of clear natural science. The cut, which natural science leads to in reality, doesn't get at it." Frankl depicts this cut on a projection of the cylinder. If we take a look at the cylinder from the side, we will see a rectangle (or a square). This might

be the view of the exact sciences and I would not dare to say that this view might be distorted or false. But this shape is certainly not identical with the shape of the circle, i. e. the view of the cylinder from above. This might as well be the view of philosophy that is thus able to conceive the meaning, and it neither means that this view is inappropriate or meaningless. The way that leads us to the meaning can hardly be described with words but can be manifested by means of an existential situation. The phenomenon of meaning comes out clearest and in full plasticity at the moment of the restraint of the implementation of a certain opportunity as rendered by the given beingness. If we lose a certain thing, for example, that meant a lot to us, or if we realize the closure of the original openness of opportunities related to that thing. For example, when we have a finger amputated, we will never be able to play the violin. Regardless of whether we play that instrument at present or whether we would like to play it at all, we will never be able to play it – this opportunity is completely restrained. Similar is a situation when someone dear passes away. We come to appreciate the asset of our relationship only after we realize the impossibility of implementation of any further contacts with him/her. In a similar manner we can inquire about the meaning of movement activities and ask what life would be like without, e. g. sports. Through such consciousness, the meaning is manifested much more clearly than by any verbal description. The meaning assumes in itself as an a-priori condition the possibility of choice and thus the freedom of decision, the variety of contingencies we can choose from.

Another preliminary remark related to the title of this paper refers to the human way of being. We could of course simplify this a little and speak of human life, of the way of experiencing, and so on. If we however take seriously Heidegger's ontological difference between being and beingness, we have to thoroughly differentiate between existence (i. e. the way in which one is) and occurrence (the way in which a thing, an object is). And it is this difference, this human uniqueness, the fact that the people do not just occur, but rather exist as they are aware of their occurrence and the opportunities existence brings, that we will focus on in the following parts of the present text. Within this way of thinking the otherwise quite common differentiation (e. g. between the characteristics of human physical versus intellectual life, individual versus collective life, etc.) is not functional as we are dealing with human life in its complexity and entirety. It is life in its entirety and its focus on the whole and therefore human movement is not the movement of the body but rather the movement of the personality. We can nevertheless contemplate – while being aware of a certain degree of simplification – the “meaning of life” for this is a clearly distinct theme in the history of thinking even before Heidegger's speech. The theme of the

meaning of life has been the theme of questioning since the beginning of human self-reflexion and we encounter it in all cultures and civilizations, in religious, mythological as well as in philosophical manifestations.

The first thing we notice when comparing the various concepts aimed at finding or defining the meaning of life is the fact that none of them wants to lead to misery as the meaning of life. No compact thought system aims at contempt for human specificity. On the contrary, all these various concepts claim their goal to be happiness, the meaning of life, in a word, fulfillment. What they differ in, however, are the concrete measures and methods needed to reach that goal and what specifically (what value) is considered to be that goal (the meaning).

For our purposes we can summarize the basic forms of the meaning of the human being as summarized and characterized by Machovec (1965, 2004).

The first possible answer is a religious one, i. e. god (God) becomes the goal and meaning of life's endeavor. Various religions seek the meaning in something beyond ourselves, they may perceive the category of that external meaning personally or im-personally (karma, tao, the law).

Today, we are witnessing the experiencing of existential “esuriency” and inclinations to various spiritual and religious streams, but the question remains whether this is really a deep, innerly experienced faith. It surely is a reaction to the eternalization of the human being, to the spiritless pursuit of things; it is the search for real values.

Another option is the pleasure and joy of the animal and spiritual ways of life (*hédoné*). Although we would not be satisfied with mere low animal hedonism (sexual hedonism or supreme pleasure in eating and drinking) and would be heading towards the consumption of more demanding cultural conquests (usually mediated by books, theater, film or television), we would still retain the attitude of mere consumers. If we do not want to lose the meaning of life, we cannot construct it upon indulgences exposed to coincidence or temporariness nor at the same time engage in anything so much that we miss these joys, either.

The third alternative includes activity, work, moral conduct, and social assertion. From material security we now aim at higher and more demanding ways of self-assertion. The cultural symbol of this way of life is without any doubt Faust who underwent the complicated inner journey from the hunger for knowledge through his inclination to supra-natural powers to love and vigorous activity in shaping the future. The meaning of life can thus be the conviction of the value of an act and the value of freedom and life determined by the struggle for them.

The last option is resignation and skepticism regarding any possibility of finding out the meaning of

life. It is a rejection not only of every one of the previous individual concepts of the meaning of life, but also a protest against all of them together. Skepticism towards the question itself as well as towards any hope of an answer comes forward, especially in those moments of individual endeavor seen as being inconclusive, hopeless, or tragic.

In the area of movement culture, these ways, of course, remain legitimate: can sport be exalted in the place of god? Can competitive movement become the meaning of life? Is the pleasure of victory the highest value to which our lives should look to? Does, if such is the case, does the life of a top athlete retain or lose meaning after the end of his or her sporting career? Can sport be the agent manifesting the meaning of what it is to be human? What meaning has movement activity for us as human beings?

We would like to look for the answer within the limits determined by the authenticity of human existence. If we accept death as a part of our life – we will live with the experience of our death, the unobviousness of our own life with respect for the authenticity of experience. Then there is no reason that there should not be, within a meaningful context of authentic experience, enough room for the movement culture as an environment that can be meaningful because it is an experience providing authenticity. Sporting experience can be an authentic manifestation of human existence if it is embedded in a holistic context and not one dimensionally devaluated.

Through the prism of the meaning that is not some abstract term, but rather a requirement of human conduct, a specific opportunity to decide in every situation regarding the demands of existence allowing for the transcendence of one's self, we can evaluate the movement culture as well, or its individual manifestations. What is the meaning of movement? Does refined human movement have any common inner meaning at all? "What makes those people able, perhaps during demanding practice periods, to engage for prolonged periods of time in such a life style that with its self-discipline can only be compared to life in a monastery with the strictest orders?" (Wolf, 1998). If we stick to the statement that meaning does not have any transcendent category but that we have to look for it in movement itself, then we have to adhere unambiguously to the context. Circumstances, relegations, as well as conditions of concrete movement point at its meaning, adding meaning to movement itself. The meaning of movement can be found within contextual relegation because "every movement ensues from the whole personality and has in itself the complex life style of that personality, every expressive form comes from the unity of personality in which there are no substantial clashes against this unity, no ambivalence and double face. The way a person moves,

that's the meaning of his/her life" (Adler, 1995). The form of movement testifies to the plasticity of the personality, to individual, generational and racial specifics. This context creates conditions for an adequate interpretation of movement that can always be perceived on the level of a cultural symbol. Human movement is endowed with symbolism and efforts to understand movement as symbolic may lead to diverse interpretations and attempts to somehow theoretically derive such interpretation not on the basis of language but rather on the basis of movement abilities and skills.

We can find a distinctive, but inspiring theory of the meaning of movement in Eleonor Metheny's writing (Ellfeldt & Metheny, 1958). She starts from the premise that the meaning and sense of movement (as a somatically perceived experience) can be conceptualized by the human mind. The human being differs from the animal – in the area of movement – precisely in the fact that he or she can think of a movement and can transform kinetic perception into specific meanings and find meaning in movement through which she or he can live in another, symbolic dimension of reality. With language and speech, this ability to symbolically transform stimuli becomes evident through words that are symbols for the terms denoting meaning or sense. The ability to transform sensoric stimuli into abstract ideas is also the background on which the theory is based. Not all distinct kinds of symbols, however, can be transformed into words and language. For example, music is a way to symbolically formulate nonverbal sounds; or a painting can never be fully contained in words because the visual symbol of the painting has a much broader meaning. The symbolic nature of the language can also be seen in poetry or in the symbolic transformation of the movement in dance art. Wherever we encounter symbols, we also encounter meanings and therefore their sense. Metheny is convinced that it is not only in dance where the fundamental human ability to transform movement – kinesthesia (as a general form of fundamental human experience) into meaningful non-discursive conceptual symbols is manifested. For the sake of their clearer appreciation and easier work with them, she creates specific vocabulary that could identify all the elements common for all forms of movement. To the words identifying the notions of structure, perception and conceptualization she therefore adds movement characteristics (from the Greek *kinein*) and submits three names – neologisms for general consideration and possible usage. The first artificial name is *kinestruct* that describes the dynamic form created from continuous changes in the muscle tension of the moving body. Another one is *kinescept*, perceived as a sensoric form created by the kinesthetic perceptions of kinestruct. The kinescept – kinestruct interaction as a coordinated answer of the personality

to the individual interpretation of the stimulating situation is kinestructuralization. "This sensory perception of the 'feel of a movement' can never be satisfactorily described in words. Just as a sound must be heard, as a color must be seen, so a kinescept must be felt to be identified. It can be comprehended only in its own" (Ellfeldt & Metheny, 1958).

The last neologism offered is the *kinesymbol*. It is the conceptualized form testifying to the abstract significance or importance of a kinestruct and its kinescept within the psycho-somatic-social context of the situation. Movement perception is thus transformed into an abstraction that serves as a symbol of meaning that a given person gives to these perceptions. This kind of conceptualization of the kinesthetic perception cannot be expressed with symbols of any other kind. It is not verbal, visual, auditive or anything else – it is kinesthetic, it is a kinesymbol, the abstraction of a movement experience that is not distinguished by consciousness. "But every kinestruct and its kinescept is a kinesymbolic formulation of personal experience which adds one more trace of meaning to a human life" (Ellfeldt & Metheny, 1958). Kinescepts of similar kinestructs have a very different emotional and intellectual meaning for different individuals depending on the meaning experienced in that situation. For example, a very different perception of the same position or movement (say bending a knee while jumping) by a football player and a ballet dancer is borne by a different meaning and connotation of such a situation that has no analogy in the mutual comparison of both, identically executed movement activities.

Although this theory did not take deep roots and the neologisms introduced are not used, it presents us with the substantive opportunity to understand movement activity as a cultural, symbolic form of personality manifestation endowed with meaning and sense. It is namely the formulation of the originality of our perception of the movement that cannot be transferred to any other forms of perception, that is a permanent asset of thought. When the kayaker "reads" the river, when the swimmer "feels" the water or the skier "gets" the snow, they have to recur to various analogies and metaphors. The idea of kinesymbol very neatly covers perceiving and experiencing movement in a concrete environment that is nontransferable to any other cognitive forms. Kinesthesia (movement experience) thus can be experienced on the level of meaning and values and can be identified as a part of the human mentality, as a form of understanding of the person him/herself and of the world. It can be distinguished as a substantive part of the human way of being.

The first thinker to address the topic of the meaning of movement in our environment was Hodaň (1997).

He sees the meaning of movement above all in the area of the meaning of physical exercise (because he understands kinanthropology as the field analyzing exclusively physical exercise and no other forms of movement) and places it in the category of being a social topic of the consumer society or in the category of philosophy of the "postmaterial" society with the human being in the center of its interest. The meaning of movement is for him closely bound with the "humanisation" of the society. The conclusion – that must be emphasized as it can become a moment of inspiration in a broader sense – expresses the symbolic perception of the character of the movement behavior, i. e. a concrete movement (or physical exercise) is a manifestation of a symbol. In accordance with his classification of physical culture he then declares that the meaning of physical exercise depends on the meaning of physical education, sport and physical recreation.

I believe that on the basis of arguments summarized elsewhere (Jirásek, 2004, 2005) the question of the meaning of movement can be linked not only with the individual areas of the executed movement activity (i. e. with the environment of movement culture and its subsystems) but also with the theme of the meaning of life being found (discovered) through movement and its cultivation. Then we can briefly say that movement may lead to authentic existence (that can also be perceived as the meaningfulness of our conduct) as much as sport activity may be perceived as an inauthentic way of being. The authenticity of human existence is characteristic for a certain environment, for example exclusively for sport. In sport we will probably not find more opportunities for authentic experience than in other life circumstances. It depends on our way of life, its whole context and our concrete perception of movement activities as a suitable environment for a deeper realization of the finiteness of our life, for the consciousness of the responsibility of our deeds and our own future and for experiencing ourselves as a whole. It is without any doubt that at moments of rendering maximum performance when the person reaches their own limits, or during their stay out in the wild when they experience themselves as being in the world, such experience can certainly be viewed in the mode of the deepest authenticity. And what meaning does a certain movement activity have? With what meaning can I make the movement activity meaningful to remain in the mode of authentic existence? I firmly believe that it is the value, the goal and the purpose of a concrete movement and therefore its specification into the individual fields of the movement culture that tell much about such meaning. A brief summary of such possible meanings of movement in the movement culture and at the same time of the meaning of life through movement is presented in the concluding TABLE 1.

TABLE 1

Subsystem of movement culture	Meaning of movement	Meaning of life through movement
Sport	Maximum performance and victory in competition	Possibility of reaching one's limits (not a victory at any price)
Movement education	Educational potential	Not only skills and knowledge, but the awakening of a whole-life interest in sports
Movement recreation	Recreational, regeneration, relaxing dimension (in leisure time)	Movement as a natural part of life style
Movement therapy	Regeneration or rehabilitation focus aimed at health	Health in the form of harmonic balance gained through sports
Movement art	Aesthetic dimension of movement	Experiencing beauty shown in movement

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POHYBOVÁ KULTURA: PROSTOR PRO HLEDÁNÍ SMYSLU POHYBOVÝCH AKTIVIT I SMYSLU LIDSKÉHO ZPŮSOBU BYTÍ
(Souhrn anglického textu)

Príspevek se zabývá horizontem smyslu, jak jej může člověk prožívat prostřednictvím pohybových aktivit. Ne-ní-li fenomén smyslu vykazatelný přírodními vědami, znamená to, že se na jeho platnost nemůže ptát filosofie. Smysl je zachytitelný existenciální situací a nejzřetelněji se vyjeví v okamžiku ztráty možností, jež jsou s konkré-

ním jsoucnem spjaty. Smysl života je možno nalézt ve čtyřech možných oblastech. Odpovědí na hledání smyslu se stává náboženství, hromadění prožitkových situací, aktivní práce či morální čin, poslední je pak rezignace na tuto otázku. Smysl života nahlédnutelný v prostředí pohybové kultury je úzce spjat s tematikou autentické existence. Svěráznou symboliku smyslu pohybu nabízí koncept Methenyové, využívající neologismy *kinescept*, *kinestruct* a *kinesymbol*, zvyrazňující originalitu pohybových prožitků, jež nelze převést na žádnou jinou kognitivní formu. Smysl pohybu v propojení se smyslem života je možno hledat i v jednotlivých prostředích pohybové kultury, což schematicky shrnuje závěrečná tabulka příspěvku.

Klíčová slova: smysl, smysl života, smysl pohybu, pohybová kultura.

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