

Not Everything is a Contest: Sport, Nature Sport, and *Friluftsliv*

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ABSTRACT

Two prevalent assumptions in the philosophy of sport literature are that all sports are games and that all games are *contests*, meant to determine who is the better at the skills definitive of the sport. If these are correct, it would follow that all sports are contests and that a range of sporting activities, including nature sports, are not in fact sports at all. This paper first confronts the notion that sport and games must seek to resolve skill superiority through consideration of sport activities that have no such aim. The reduction of sport to game is also shown to be untenable and due to misunderstanding the point of sport activities, specifically, why people engage in them. This leads to reconsideration of the dominance of an instrumental conception of sport and the pursuit of excellence as anthropomaximising efficiency. The Norwegian tradition of *friluftsliv* is explored as a counterpoint to both conventional and nature sport.

A difficulty in defining what is and what is not a sport is that the would-be definer oft times comes to the task with the aim of including a favoured exemplar or of excluding a despised pretender. I shall offer no high road here, as I will be deliberately making the case for the inclusion as sport of activities that some would deny as such, though I hope in doing so to demonstrate some problems with a prevalent account of what makes or unmakes sport. The purpose here is more critical than constructive; whether or not the activities whose part I take are sports or not is of less concern to this author than how we understand sport—those who, for example, ski in remote places will still do so whether or not what they do is “sport” or not, but our concepts ought to accurately reflect the world to which they refer and, ultimately, help to shape.

The Competitive Imperative

The “position” to which I refer is in fact two, namely that all sports are games and that all games (and therefore sports) are competitive contests designed to determine the better, which is commonly taken to mean the most skilled, that is, the most successful, opponent. The first of these strikes me as implausible: a philosophical conceit that is both historically and practically dubious. The second has a much stronger if not unassailable claim to plausibility, though it is ultimately self-destructive if unmoderated and it is presumably because of this that games are *also* held by many to require a number of additional criteria, such as autotelicity or respect for constitutive rules, and the like.

The conviction that sport is inherently competitive is one with wide adherence. For example, historian John McClelland puts forward no fewer than 35 defining features of sport, among them that sport is pleasurable but functionally gratuitous activity that is both disciplined and “necessarily competitive”, agonistic, oriented to victory, strategic, ritualistic, evolutionary, temporally autonomous, the excessive and ostentatious expenditure of energy, as well as voluntary, and economic (2007, 16-18). The inherent competitiveness of modern sport is amply attested in the philosophy of sport literature. Verner Møller, for example, declares that a crucial feature of sport is the code of winning and losing. “If winning is not the aim of the game, we are not talking about sport but about play or exercise....Sport is inextricably linked to a striving to win” (2003, 130). Alan Guttman, likewise, declares that “All sports are contests in which the participants agree to compete against one another, against nature, or against their earlier selves. Competition...cannot be eliminated if a game is to be classified as a sport....In fact, the term ‘sports contest’ is redundant because noncompetitive activities are not sports” (in Møller, 130).¹

The conception of sport or game as *contest* has a long lineage in the sport philosophical literature² which I will not trace in detail here, but Kathleen Pearson offers a succinct characterisation of the view in the following:

“What is the purpose of athletic activities? Why even have such things as basketball games, football games, tennis games? I suggest that the purpose of these games, in an athletic setting, is to test the skill of one individual, or group of individuals, against the skill of another individual, or group of individuals, in order to determine who is more skillful in a particular, well defined activity.” (1973, 116)

Fraleigh, similarly, argues that what sports contests do is “test particular kinds of skills....The unique skills in sports contests are moving some mass in space and time by means of bodily movement requiring developed motor skills, physiological and psychological endurance, and socially approved tactics and strategy” (1986, 67). The unfailing outcome of this activity, for Fraleigh, is the knowledge of relative abilities. The question of whether sporting contests are best suited for providing that knowledge is itself contested, as the sport contest can be skewed in various ways (see Dixon (1999)) or simply unsuited to producing a reliable result, as in the case of attritional tournaments. This is also to say nothing of the human capacity to fail or refuse to take up any such knowledge if it can, indeed, be generated by such a venue.

These worries aside, it seems reasonable to admit that at least a central aim of *games* is to provide a context within which participants can measure themselves in various ways against the standards of the game and other participants. There are some compelling reasons to be wary of asserting that the whole point of the exercise is to *win* and nothing else even though

¹Note, however, that Guttman is here marking out certain kinds of games as sports rather than sports as games.

²See also, of course, Kretchmar(1975).

the activity in which one engages is structured so as to produce a result of this nature. For example, to play any given game one must acquire and refine the movements and strategies appropriate for reaching that game's end-point or else not be playing that game; everything (almost) that one does then has that structural relationship to the end-point, but that may not be *why* one plays; one may just like exercising those particular movements and skills. This may constitute a phenomenologically complicated condition, but it is not a logically contradictory one.

It may be telling that it is easier to make this case for sports that are not in any obvious way games. Thus, in the case of sports such as rowing, or speed skating, or running, the movements one makes and the refinement of technique and physical conditioning are all directed to moving oneself through space as fast as possible. Improving those foundational movements does then result in faster performances because the structural direction of those sports is to go faster, with the functional outcome that one crosses the line first. One cannot do this sport without also effectively doing all that one can to go faster than anyone else. But one may yet do so simply because the experience of skating or rowing or running as perfectly as possible, which is to say, really fast, is exhilarating in itself and so not care much about the placing. In this case, the pursuit of excellence is about what one can do in oneself, not winning, even if winning is structurally presupposed and would be a welcome experience.

These observations do not, by themselves, eliminate contest from games or sports; indeed, contest is here assumed in the dynamic relationship that holds in athletic activities carried out between multiple participants. A shared striving is the core of the testing of self that is the experience of games and many sports.

Sports as Games

The contention that all sports are games is, so far as I am aware, a relatively recent one that has been supported by a Suitsian strand of thinking in the philosophy of sport. I do not propose here to either dispute or even deeply analyse Suits' definition of games, but to draw attention to the curiously prevalent view that all sports are actually games. Suits' claim is that "the elements of sport are essentially—although perhaps not totally—the same as the elements of game" (2007 (1973), 9). Namely, that both sport and games comprise a pre-lusory goal, lusory means, constitutive rules and, and lusory attitude. He offers four criteria sufficient to then make a game a sport: that it be a game of skill, that the skill be physical, that it have a wide following, and that its following have a level of stability (14). Hence sports are just public physical games of skill that have been around long enough to acquire social institutionalisation (16). Suits admits that he has "no theory to support the list, except the theory that the features are more or less arbitrary, since they are simply facts about sport"(14).³ Stipulation

³Suits' later (1988) exception for judged sports such as figure skating or diving as not games is not relevant for us here, not because it is not the case that not all sports are games,

aside, Suits is relying on the structure of a sport being essentially the same as that of a game, and, if so, he concludes, then they are the same kind of thing.

When it comes to an activity that seems distinctly ungamelike, such as mountain-climbing, Suits claims that activity to be a game by virtue of the mountain-climber's adoption of inefficient means over efficient ones (i.e., climbing with ropes and pitons instead of taking a helicopter direct to the summit) (2014, Ch 8). This, in turn, rests on the circumstance that the climber's goal isn't just being at the summit in any old way at all, but to *climb* to the summit in a particular way. In effect, to win at *mountain climbing*. These restrictions on efficiency of means function as rules defining the activity such that not following the rules means not performing the activity. Therefore, the sport of mountain climbing is a game because the climber, in effect, sets for themselves the "game" of getting to the summit in a way that is amusingly inefficient by forgoing more direct means and relying on constitutive practices appropriate to the institution of mountain climbing and a set of specific (in this case, physical) skills.

There are a number of worries that we might have at this point, apart from the relative paucity of argument. For one, the characterisation of game is broad enough to include so many practices as to make the designation of something as a "game" less illuminating than might be desirable: if mountain climbing is a game, then knowing that chess or Skyrim are as well tells us less about any of them than we might wish to know. All the more so if sewing or cabinet-making or hand carving (as opposed to CNC machining) are also games, along with baking, singing, indeed, any nonindustrial art or craft. In fact, sports are different from each other in all sorts of ways, not only in the way that games are distinct from each other but still all games; some sports have structures that are, in some cases, *not* gamelike. Sometimes this is because there is nothing to win.

Nature Sports and Contest

Now, if all sports are games, and if all games/sports are contests, that is, are structurally directed to determining who is the best at some activity, then it would appear to follow that certain kinds of activity that are commonly considered to be sports, aren't, specifically, those that are not competitive. These are often described as merely recreational, or pastimes, i.e., not "really" sports proper. If this is so, one of the categories of physical activity that must be cast into the sporting darkness of "mere recreation" is nature sport.

Kevin Krein has argued that

'The intensity of nature sports comes from the fact that, in them, athletes interact with constantly changing features possessing awe-inspiring amounts of force and size. The

but because this is a bad example. See Meier (1988), who maintains the designation of sports as games, but especially Hurka (2015).

nature of this interaction, rather than competition, is the source of intensity. In short, the size and power of natural features creates compelling opportunities to interact with them athletically, both mentally and physically, without the need for competition.’ (Krein 2015, 282)

While it seems clear that many nature sports can be pursued competitively it is equally clear that they need not be. In other words, we can ski down a mountainside or through a valley, skate along a fjord, paddle a remote river, without any goal of demonstrating our superior skill over another participant, even if we are also focussed on improving our own skills and devising better ways of adapting to the environmental conditions (whatever “better” might mean here).⁴

Krein rejects competition as a feature of nature sport for two main reasons. In order for two people to meaningfully compete against each other there need to be standardised conditions for the competition. In urban sport, we ensure these by marking out even playing surfaces and using clocks and measured tracks, etc. These are not available or desirable in nature sport, where the variability is itself a matter of interest and challenge. More important for Krein is the circumstance that one does not need other competitors in order to engage in nature sports; in these sports one is interacting with some natural environmental feature, not another human, and one simply does not compete with mountains or big surf (2007, 2015). Nature sport, then, can be pursued in isolation from other persons. This doesn’t by itself rule out competition (one might still endeavour to be first or fastest on some route), but it means that competition is not *required* in order to be engaged in a nature sport: if backcountry skiing is a sport it does not cease to be one because one is doing so independently of other skiers.

This has further consequences for the assumption that sport in general is essentially public. For example, suppose that two people engage in a skilled physical contest against each other, with rules that both follow, and which only one can win, but which no one else witnesses and about which neither ever divulges the details. Or suppose a solitary runner, or boulderer, training entirely on their own, without their activity ever being observed by another or even known of. In neither case, do these individuals do anything that is not also done by other athletes working hard in, say, high performance training centres. The activity is exactly the same. In that case, there seems no clear reason why it is not equally sport.⁵

⁴I have argued (2008, 2018) that there is a kind of competition that may occur in nature sport, namely the sort of conflict within the self that we sometimes call competing with oneself. I don’t think that this applies to the current discussion as this is not the sort of competition at issue; Krein is only concerned with garden variety dyadic competition between individual humans and this kind of competition is what the present paper also addresses.

⁵Speculatively, there may be an historical reason for what I take to be a general reluctance to regard private or unwitnessed activities as sport, and this would be the close association between sport and gambling in the modern era.

Various sports do not easily fit the model of game-contest and nature sports in particular. These largely confound Suits' distinction as many instances of nature sport do not have any straightforward prelusory or lusory goal other than the performing the activity itself—which Suits explicitly rules out as a lusory goal (2007, 10; 2014, 39).⁶ When a person heads to the hills or the river they may have the goal only of spending the day moving in a way that they find especially enjoyable and perhaps perfecting that movement, but not of getting to any specific place, or doing so many more runs, or going faster than before, etc. One notable aspect of many nature sports is their revisability; one may plan to do *x* but then choose midstream to do *y* instead without thereby cancelling out the sport. Such revision is not defeat, though it would be for a game.⁷

There is reason to think that concentration on the (prelusory) goal is problematic even in conventional sport. Berman (2013) offers such a criticism with respect to sprint running. For Suits, as Berman explains, sprints are games because they employ inefficient means to achieve a prelusory goal, which is to be first to cross a vertical plane or to cross it in the shortest time. The problem with this characterisation, as Berman rightly points out, is that this isn't a very good way of describing what the participants are themselves setting out to do. As he puts it, "...as far as the phenomenology of the participants is concerned, all of the following ingredients appear to be components of the prelusory goal for a sprinting contest: that the goal is to run, that the goal is to run a relatively short distance, and that the goal is to run that distance faster than competitors who are running that same short distance (164)." If someone were to suggest that the goal could be achieved more efficiently by other means (rather like my one-time dentist who suggested my rowing shell would go faster with a motor attached) the appropriate response would *not* be that it would be against the rules but that it wouldn't correspond to what one wants to do: the goal is to *run* (or in my example, to row) (165). There is no prelusory goal that is not also a lusory goal. Thus, the efficiency of means is also, in a sense, irrelevant. One can run more or less efficiently, i.e., technically proficiently, but running is not an inefficient means to run; running is the point.⁸

⁶See also Schneider and Butcher (1997).

⁷One possible response to this would be to suggest that the nature sportsperson is engaged in a kind of "open game", with the specific environment acting as a contesting partner. This is a desperate move to save the view. Natural objects do not contest with us; contesting requires consciousness and the intentional pose of voluntary contestation, a willing participation in an activity conceptually devised and recognised, which is not a position that even animals take when we are using them for "game".

⁸Suits states that "winning can be described only in terms of the game in which it figures, and winning may accordingly be called the *lusory* goal of a game" (2014, 39). For Suits, winning cannot simply be the goal of a game because you can only *win* if there is something *else* that is the goal; this state of affairs is the prelusory goal (36). Schneider and Butcher

It is also worth noting that many of the means employed in nature sports are, in fact, the most efficient ones available: skating is more efficient for travelling over ice than many other options, as is skiing or snowshoeing over snow, and paddling over white water. Yes, a hypothetical helicopter may be “more efficient” but if conditions prevent its use or if one just doesn’t happen to have one on hand or if what one actually wants to do is move oneself through the environment, especially in a way that engages directly with that environment, skates, skis, or canoe constitute the most efficient means of achieving one’s goal. Moreover, where the activity does involve “inefficient” means we must question why anyone would put up with them unless those means were more enjoyable than the external goal. If the inefficient means, i.e., core sport skills and activities, are worthwhile in themselves, we don’t really need the external goal in order to experience a satisfaction in exercising them and improving our exercise of them.

Why “Sport”?

Earlier it was suggested that if nature sports are not competitive it would then follow, given that sports, as games, must be competitive, that nature sports are not sports at all. Instead, the converse seems likely to be true: since not all sports are competitive, including many instances of nature sports, not all sports are in fact games. Moreover, the fact that the Suitsian game structure of prelusory goal, inefficient means, constitutive rules, and lusory attitude does not apply to many sports, including many nature sports, only reinforces the point that the view that sports are a subspecies of game is one that has been overextended.

But what is the point? To some extent, whether activity **P** is a sport and activity **R** not is of no significance for the doing of the activity, and the designation of **P** or **R** as “sport” is arguably a matter of mere stipulation. Since there seem to be few relevant characteristics of sport that are also defensible as sufficiently definitive to rule out any of the kinds of activity we have been considering here, why should we be concerned about this *apparently* arbitrary label? We need to be vigilant here because of certain practical consequences of identification. These can be characterised under two headings: (a) recognition and (b) autonomy. With regard to the first, being recognised as a sport is an important step for entitlement to funding,

(1997) point out that there is no reason for a prelusory goal absent the practice from which it derives its meaning and conclude that this is an unnecessary move. This is partly right, but what Suits is doing here is preventing his definition of a lusory goal becoming tautologous. “Winning” cannot define itself and if the lusory goal is winning then we need to have something else that tells us when this has occurred. But this doesn’t work either, both because only certain practice-defined states of affairs can qualify and because Suits misidentifies the lusory goal, which is the activity or movement itself that makes winning concrete rather than abstract. Thus, the mountain climber’s lusory goal isn’t just winning at the activity of mountain climbing; it’s mountain climbing, which is why she may well climb something other than Everest for fun.

access to physical resources and use of facilities, and a voice in the determination of the practice. To be recognised offers social legitimation; it means that one's interests have a validity that other institutions are obliged to accommodate. To not be so recognised may mean exclusion from the means and opportunity to pursue one's activity. On the other hand, what may accompany that recognition is a greater *institutionalisation* in the sense of regulation, normalisation, and restriction of the activity. This sets up a potential conflict between those who regard recognition as legitimising, and thus enabling, and those who reject it as restrictive or exclusionary. Hence for those who seek to engage in certain kinds of sporting activity as autonomous individuals, being brought under the umbrella of "sport" means losing control of one's activity, as it becomes one of those institutionalised, regulated, "competitive", structures that one perhaps sought originally to get away from. Clearly, then, these apparently abstruse terminological issues have a political import.

Many outdoor sports, in particular, have faced this transformation in recent years, snowboarding and climbing, for example. Another case currently playing out is that of stand up paddle boarding (SUP), governance of which is being fought over by the International Surfing Association (ISA) and the International Canoeing Federation (ICF) (Butler (2017), Duckworth (2017), Mather (2017)). Since SUP uses a board it looks like surfing and since it uses a paddle it also looks like canoeing. Many paddleboarders dither slowly on waterways singly or in groups of two, with some smaller number pursuing a more determinedly athletic approach⁹, but the ISA has also organised mass races, and thus considers itself to have a greater right to control of paddleboarding altogether, whereas the ICF has a long pedigree in paddling. At stake is control of Olympic participation and the bounty of media, sponsorship, and presumably national Olympic funding that would follow. There has been little indication in this dispute of any attempt by paddleboarders to establish their own federation and control their own future, perhaps further indicating a radical division in the field between competitive SUP and those who just want to paddle a board. Whichever federation ultimately wins at CAS, it may turn out that once SUP becomes a bona fide Olympic sport, most of those paddleboarders wandering around my local river will no longer "really" be paddleboarders.¹⁰

Many attempts to define sport concentrate on one aspect of a complex beast and attempt to reduce explanation to that one aspect. A wider recognition of activities as sport might be a component not only in wresting control of "sport" from its governors to those performing it, but in widening its overall base of participation. Humans need to move and to play; the more "sport" is thought to be something that only a few can or should be able to do, and only in the prescribed manner, the worse off we all are for both sport and society. Since the good of sport is *human*, resources for sport as movement and play should not be

⁹At least on the waterways familiar to me; this is certainly a limited sample.

¹⁰Parkour is now also facing such a, it appears, hostile takeover by the Gymnastics Federation (Bull, 2018).

monopolised but democratised.¹¹ As Henning Eichberg explains, sport can be understood and analysed in relation to any of three broad explanatory categories: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the rational, but can also be approached in other ways as well, such as the existential (2007, 56-8). In many ways, the instrumental-rational approach has become the dominant interpreter for us, and one that underlies even our assessments of the aesthetic and ethical. We tend to view sport in terms of a perfectible series of physical movements, and even the subjective experience of the athlete is treated as another measurable factor that can be assessed and moulded in order to enhance quantitative performance. Sport then is little more than a laboratory for the advancement of anthropomaximology (2007, 77; 2009b, 422, n. 17). To understand sport as it is pursued, however, we do need to do more than simply define it from the outside—sport is not, or not only, played for the sake of fulfilling the truth conditions of an objective definition. A fuller account must include the phenomenological and existential: what the people pursuing sport think that they are doing.¹² This will not be infallible, but it will also not be as narrow or as abstract.

Friluftsliv and a Wider View

One reason, then, to concede that nature sports are indeed sports is to break down the connection that is often assumed to hold between sport and an instrumental-rational competitive structure. This is a matter of coming to re-value movement activity for more than its quantifiable outcomes, such as maintaining a career or advancing beyond opponents. Among those other values that could be attached to these activities could be the connections that we make with the environment within which we move, whether that is a social environment, as with the traditional games described by Eichberg (2003) or with the natural world. Loosening the grip of anthropomaximology on modern sport doesn't require nature sport *per se*, but nature-oriented sport, at least, can contribute to redirecting the sportsperson's focus from a fixation on record-oriented measured performance ideally abstracted from location to the phenomenological or existential experience of self *in relation* to the unmistakably and relentlessly nonhuman.

¹¹I can put the preceding point in this way: as impressive, even awe-inspiring, as Olympic level athletic performances are, it doesn't really matter if a small number of humans can run 100 metres faster than 9.58 seconds (or 10 seconds). It does matter that so many humans are woefully under exercised and have so little in the way of means to alter their condition—and, moreover, think their attempts to be unimportant compared to those of high performance competitors.

¹²For example, there is a long historical precedent for counting activities such as hunting, fishing, and bullfighting as "sport". This author has strong moral objections to these activities for sporting purposes but those do not alone discount them as sport: immoral sports are still *sports*.

Having said that, however, nature sport still possesses significant “sport” characteristics, independent of the question whether it is sport enough to qualify for the name. Participants in the various sorts (and degrees¹³) of nature sport are, like conventional sports participants, engaged in physically demanding and/or complex movement through space (here, a natural environment), with or without technical equipment appropriate to environment and activity, movement that requires fitness and technical skills of differing kinds and degrees, which the participants have a proper interest in developing and perfecting. Moreover, the activity will have a specific character: skiing, canoeing, climbing, hiking, have definitive actions and equipment demands or restrictions that make, for example, skiing, skiing and not snowshoeing or snowmobiling. Thus, each nature sport has a set of characteristic movements and requirements such that one can succeed or fail to do that sport, and one can endeavour to improve one’s physical and technical ability while expending greater than ordinary effort. Nature sport encompasses, like urban sport, the pursuit of excellence in physical movement.

“Excellence”, however, has a slightly different content here. Because mainstream urban sport, by its abstraction from specific conditions of location and time (its “placelessness” (Bale 2003)), its core experience is of the agents’ movements in isolation from specific spatio-temporal location. Local conditions do often affect performance, but it remains the case that only the athletic event, narrowly construed, is of significance, and this requires an *in principle* identity of circumstances. For nature sports in general, including nature-instrumental ones, perfect neutrality of conditions cannot be achieved: Kitzbühel is not Mont Ste-Anne and these differences *must* affect the event in a more profound way than the fact that the Montreal Forum is not Madison Square Gardens. But these are still differences that do not do more than complicate the focus on the athletic event alone and the results generated by the athlete as athlete. For nature oriented sport the situation is otherwise as the specificity of the environment is of central importance to the experience and goes some way to determining the kind and degree of excellence that is achieved.

This brings us to *friluftsliv*, an approach to nature-oriented activity in which the experience of the environment and self-in-environment is paramount. There are at least as many conceptions of *friluftsliv* as there are of sport and I will not even begin to attempt to adjudicate these here. The term can be said to cover a very wide range of outdoor life experiences, from simply going for a walk or picnic in a green space to extended self-sufficient trips in the backcountry, mountaineering, ocean touring (rowing/paddling), and the like. What is evident in some of the discussions around the concept and its practice is a tension or conflict that has its echo in our present discussion, namely, that between a “traditional” or “genuine” conception, requiring attention to and immersion in the environment (Gelter 2007, 43), and an attitude to *friluftsliv* that Gelter describes as a “post-modern” version (Gelter, 39) and Dahle in

¹³See Howe (2012).

terms of consumerism (Dahle 2007, 31).

This conflict is between an understanding of *friluftsliv* in terms of, in Gelter's words, "a way of life in relation to nature, where the interconnectedness and immersion in the natural setting is at the centre of a philosophical experience of nature" (Gelter, 46), and one which simply consumes nature "as an arena or playground for recreation and sport activities where nature functions as a big coulisse for competition and personal challenges" (Gelter, 39). This tension is not a new one. In Fridtjof Nansen's address to students at the University of Oslo in 1921, he warns against an increasing emphasis on sport and socially oriented sport activities in the outdoors at the cost of the spiritual development of the individual engaged in the activities themselves in *friluftsliv* (Nansen 1921). Likewise, Dahle decries the advance of "outdoor leisure activities" and the "sportification" of outdoor life (Dahle, 25-30). Both Dahle and Gelter are critical of modern narcissistic attitudes that treat nature as instrumentally valuable for an enhanced sport experience but as not of overwhelming importance in itself. These attitudes are self-centred rather than attuned to encountering nature as something more than oneself and are thus the opposite of seeking connection with nature.

On the one hand, we have a disagreement about whether nature sport is sport and, on the other, about whether nature sport is a good thing, particularly for our experience of nature. Once again, though, the answer to both questions depends in part on how you count an activity as *sport*, but the answer to the second question also turns on the way in which the sportsperson approaches the natural environment within which they pursue their activity—not just what they do, but how.¹⁴ A possible objection to the sportification of *friluftsliv* and to bringing nature oriented activities in general under the mantle of "sport", specifically modern contest-based sport, is that the sport orientation breaks the immersion or interconnection of the individual with the environment and puts the attention on the individual *as athlete*, as a self-interested agent. At that point, nature recedes in significance to the status of instrument or backdrop to the great human drama. Nature then has use-value, not value in itself, or not sufficiently so to persuade us to value it above our own aesthetic pursuits. But we come back to the first question, which here becomes: does sport *need* to be exclusively and selfishly anthropocentric?

Since most thinking about sport makes it a definitively human activity, this might seem a pointless question. But it has its counterpart in the question of whether humans *must* be anthropocentric or selfish in the ways in which we engage with the natural world or other humans. That is, we are inevitably "anthropocentric" in the weak sense insofar as we see the world and ourselves in it as humans, through human physiological and cognitive structures and

¹⁴See also Eichberg (2009a) for a discussion of some of the different ways we can understand the interrelations between us, nature, and sport, including in this context of differing expressions of *friluftsliv*.

not as would elephants or penguins, much in the same way that we are “selfish”, again in a weak sense, in that as living centres of consciousness we unavoidably have ends that we pursue and wish to realise. Neither of these, however, entail that we must be either anthropocentric or selfish in the strong sense that means we pursue our individual or group ends *at the expense of others* who have competing ends. Since it is clear that we are, in fact, capable of deferring our own ends in favour of others, human or otherwise, it seems reasonable to ask whether such a human activity as sport must always be only about the satisfaction of human ends *at the expense of* all other beings and their environments. If sport is a human activity, we can shape it however we want; we just have to want to not be such self-centred jerks.

The objection to the sportification of *friluftsliv* appears to be about this kind of anthropocentrism, which is really a kind of selfishness on the part of some sportspersons about the priority of their ends of personal enjoyment/achievement over either (or both) other persons and the nonhuman world. What the proponents of “genuine” or “traditional” *friluftsliv* want us to see is the value in connecting with the natural environment by paying attention to it as its own thing, rather than maintaining or accelerating our present isolation from it. This is where modern contest oriented sport fails, as does a certain kind of nature-instrumental sport, namely, that which sees natural environments as primarily facilitators of exciting personal sensations and narratives (see Dahle 2007, 31; Gelter 2007, 38; Ese 2007, 53-4). The attitude that these traditionalists opposed is nicely encapsulated in Ese’s observation on the views expressed by a Norwegian snowboarder he interviewed, namely that cutting down the forest would be bad because “it gives him challenges when he is snowboarding, not because he wants to preserve it.” (Ese, 2007, 54).

Insofar as we understand sport as a system of rules and standardised measurements the purpose of which is to determine who is the most skilled at some essentially arbitrary activity by contesting and generating data, then nature sports must fall outside this norm. Because they do not entail competition, or make use of standardised conditions, or produce reliably quantifiable results, they defy the objective rational-instrumental model. Nature sports are in that respect unruly, chaotic, even anarchic. But nature sport is not necessarily compatible with *friluftsliv* either. Nature-instrumental sport, sport which *uses* nature for the sake of big experiences that address only the human and not the environment or the human self in *interchange* with that environment, defeats the aims of *friluftsliv*; it simply transports the selfish-anthropocentric into another place and ignores the otherness of the place.

Conclusion

“Nature sport” as a broad category of activities is ambivalent with respect to its commitment to nature as something with value in its own right. Consequently, also, the compatibility of any given nature sport with traditional or genuine *friluftsliv* is contingent on whether that sport puts the experience of nature first or, at least, does not negate it. Some

nature sports will be *friluftsliv*-compatible, many will not. Of course, if nature sport is not sport, no *friluftsliv* activities could count as sport. But these considerations suggest another reason why nature centred activities might be accounted as not sport. Earlier, we considered the importance placed on contest as definitive of sport and more latterly we have explored the value that *friluftsliv* places on nature for itself. These emphases and the presumed divergence are not unconnected. That is, contest is something that has human significance. If one does not contest with nature, then, if this is essential to sport, any activity which failed to foreground human contesting could not be sport. This would condemn to non-sport status activities involving physical exertion and technical skill that are primarily concerned with the non-agonic experience of the environment as it is rather than as it serves some superimposed anthropocentric end. A problem with this conclusion is that it assumes that the only things of human concern are those that are about what it is to be human. Apart from being false, it is also an unfair assessment of nature sport and of *friluftsliv* both, since how we interact with the natural environment is of great importance to what it is to be human: self-in-nature is not an alternative to self-as-human, but a component of it.

A separatist attitude, particularly on the part of nature sports proponents, may also have some other practical consequences about which we should be cautious. To withdraw from “sport” on the grounds that it is a hopeless sewer of commerce and exploitation is to leave it in the grip of instrumentalism when it could be reclaimed for a richer experience of embodiment. In other words, there is another way to think of sport and seeing it as an opportunity for embodied expression is to reconceptualise it in terms of a conception of self in play that celebrates the body, not only for what science can make it do and not only in terms of an abstract agency, but for how it expresses existential meaning, lived experience, and our embeddedness as individuals in a wider physical and social world. Nature sport, and *friluftsliv*, have a place in such a reconception.

Moreover, a danger of rejecting *sport* is that we reject not only much that is still good in mainstream sport but that we reject active organised movement, that is, structured forms of play. Not everything is a contest but not all contesting is as such bad. Nor is the pursuit of excellence, nor rule-governed physical activities. There is a problem in attaching all the social rewards to one kind of sport when broadening our view could help to expand participation in movement of some kind. Maintaining “sport” as exclusively a search for the fastest, strongest, etc., *might* help to maintain sport as an elite activity, but it is counterproductive to the aim of increasing the number of people engaged in sport and structured physical movement activities, whether we call them “sport” or not. Given the increasing immobility of people in modern society, the better option seems to be to encourage movement of whatever sort and to allocate our social resources to do so.

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