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The return to physical activity, leisure and sports in nature: The necessary (re)encounter

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ABSTRACT

Nature is now beginning to be seen not as an object to be exploited, but as a "*subject of rights*" who must be respected, welcomed and protected. Physical, leisure and sporting activity in nature is yet another link between man and nature. A link that benefits both. For nature, through care, protection and interaction; for man/woman (children, the elderly) through the quality of life it provides - particularly in terms of mental, emotional and relational quality of life. The methodology used is based on theoretical/hermeneutic reflection on nature and the possibilities it can contain so that Physical Activity, Leisure and Sport are humanly rewarding. It is a reflective, qualitative methodology. The main aim of this reflection, in the form of a short essay, was to help raise awareness of the importance of nature - and the possibilities it contains for physical, leisure and sporting activity. We believe that physical, leisure and sporting activity in nature is certainly an activity that suits men and women (children, young people, adults and the elderly). It's good for their mental, physical, emotional and relational health; it's good for protecting and respecting nature itself and, above all, it's good for giving nature/humanity a future. These conveniences need to be (are beginning to be) on the political, educational, sporting and social agendas.

Keywords: Man/woman, Nature, Care, Relationship, Quality of life, Physical activity.

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INTRODUCTION

Nature. Primitive man called it Mother Nature, Bulfinch (2006); the Greeks called it Gaia, Aristotle (1990); Spinoza (2009) gave it divine status - God Nature; Pope Francis (2022) calls it the Common Home. Other representations will look at it as the "*first home*" par excellence. There, we find the meaning of life, the material and spiritual dimension, the totality that humanizes us, the metaphorical, symbolic, immanent, transcendent revelation. Becoming aware of this dimension (nature) inevitably leads to the need to protect, respect and interact with it. In this context, physical, leisure and sporting activities in nature have received a great deal of attention because they have shown themselves to be a stage, a locus where we can turn to maintain and recover these (and other) existential meanings, such as: our physical and mental health; our need to live together (conviviality, participation, citizenship, politics); our "*need*" for play - to play, to compete, to cooperate. Thus, the central aim of this reflection, in the form of a short essay, was to help raise awareness of the importance of nature - and the possibilities for physical activity, leisure and sport - that it contains. To this end, in addition to our own personal reflections, we have drawn on a number of authors - from philosophy, sociology, anthropology and education - who have tried to support the text and this objective.

MATERIAL, METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The methodology used is based on theoretical/hermeneutic reflection (Weller, 2007) on nature and the possibilities it may contain for making physical activity, leisure and sport humanly rewarding. It is a reflexive, qualitative methodology that departs from the canons of scientific/empirical/quantitative research methodology.

RESULTS

A look at nature

What is nature? Nature as: original, ready-made, closed, open, real/natural, real/artificial, objective, open, subjective, intersubjective, constructed, being, totality, universe, cosmos, supernatural, material, mental, spiritual, emotional, immanent, transcendent, artificial (technique, technology), knowledge. These are, among others, some of the representations we find, for example, in Aristotle (1990); Nietzsche (2004); Spinoza (2009); Bulfinch (2006); Marx (2008); Costa (2002); Padilla (2015); Darwin (2004) and Esposito (2010). The most traditional and common representation is to look at nature as something that is outside of us - the sky, the sun, the rain, the plants, the animals, etc. But nature is also something that belongs to us, to what is inside us, immanent to us and transcendent of us. Physical, leisure and sporting activity in nature - often unconsciously - synthesizes all these dimensions and with it, well-being and balance are present. That's why there's an urgent political, educational, research and social need to stimulate and create the conditions for this to happen.

The relationship with nature

Our relationship with nature is ambiguous. We either feel we own it or we feel part of it. Either we use it for our own needs or we consider ourselves part of a harmony that surrounds and transcends us. Jonas (2012), drawing inspiration from the Greeks, says that the main cause of our decadence is that we have abandoned our natural life, that we have distanced ourselves from and destroyed (through greed, profit, power, selfishness, extreme competition) nature. Nature, its protection and the necessary positive interaction (return to the original) thus appear as an ethical dimension - which helps us to become human.

Returning to the whole/nature - a necessary reunion

We like the idea of nature (in its natural and anthropological sense) as a Whole. The Whole is everything that exists, regardless of whether we call it God, Nature or Being. However, knowing the whole (the result of our incompleteness) is an impossible process. And so, we endow everything we can't understand with mystery. This is how the various forms of knowledge were born: doxa, religion, art, literature and science. All of them have tried and are trying to go further, to bring new knowledge - this continuity of existence: jumping from knowledge to knowledge. Now, physical, leisure and sporting activity in nature is also a form of knowledge, a way of broadening the ontological horizons of the human being.

DISCUSSION

Physical, leisure and sporting activity as an expression of the human cannot forget that nature is the mother who allowed these expressions of the body and movement to become established. Let's not forget that *homo-ludens* (the first man) appeared at the same time as *homo-naturalis* (man-nature). It was during this original time that man began to humanize himself. In this way, to appeal to the nature of something, of anything, is to try to reach its most genuine meaning, with its original truth. An original truth that would define the human in its pure state - the urgent need to return there.

CONCLUSIONS

Physical, leisure and sporting activity in nature is certainly an activity that suits men and women (children, young people, adults and the elderly). It's convenient for their state of mental, physical, emotional and relational health; it's convenient for protecting and respecting nature itself and, above all, it's convenient for giving nature/humanity a future. These conveniences need to be (are beginning to be) on the political, educational, sporting and social agendas.

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