



Is it true: mens sana in corpore sano ?

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1. Practical experience proves that Juvenal's well-known maxim, "mens sana in corpore sano", is only partly true. There is no simple relationship between mental health and somatic health - this is obvious. But there is no reflexive relation between muscle strength and power of the mind, between corporal fitness and spiritual (or moral) development, either. I am talking here about the lack of a clear relationship between the physical and the spiritual aspects of man in context to which Juvenal's thesis is taken to apply. On a popular interpretation, "mens sana in corpore sano" is construed as indicating that physical training, especially sports and physical education, facilitate the development of both bodily fitness and a broadly understood mental sphere, that through physical training a fit body will become home to an efficient mind, inclined to do good.

Unfortunately, today's sport in particular proves that reality is different. Almost every day the media provide new evidence that the superbly fit bodies of many sports champions have become home to ailing spirits. To take just one example, consider the many doping scandals: Ben Johnson, Katrin Krabbe, Maradona, Chinese women swimmers, Bulgarian and Polish weightlifters, and so on, and so forth. Significantly, even though doping arouses public contempt, it demoralizes athletes. They are demoralized by the lenient penalties for illegal drug taking, which makes such practices endemic. Another area which supplies evidence for the weakness of spirit on the part of some athletes - one that is much harder to notice "with the naked eye" is the active role of some sportsmen and sports-women in financial scandals involving corruption (selling games or fights). A more visible confirmation of the inaccuracy of Juvenal's thesis is the aggression of athletes, which they mostly target at their opponents in a sporting competition. However cases are also known of otherwise splendid sportsmen using force and violence against referees, spectators, or in their private lives (e.g. the case of Mike Tyson). It is also not uncommon that the end of the career in sports is the beginning of alcoholism, drug-taking, and crime. The transition reveals inadequate adaptation to a new social environment and may even lead to a suicidal death of a former champion. If we add it all up, we have grounds to conclude that **healthy spirit may - I want to clearly stress that this is only (and at best) a possibility - also develop in a healthy body or more precisely in a body trained in sports.**

Some fundamental questions arise:

- 1) **What is the reason that sport is or becomes a factor that destructively affects the psyche?**
- 2) **Is it possible, and is so, what criteria must be satisfied, to develop both the spiritual and the bodily aspects of personality through physical training?**



2. It is relatively easy to answer the first question. As a result of the links that exist between sports on the one hand and business and politics as well the criminal underworld on the other, ethical norms are treated to a large extent in an instrumental way. The effects of that are directly visible on the sports arenas and also in the private lives of sports stars. Indirectly, we see the results when doping, financial, and other scandals come to light.

In this forum it should be stressed that in some of its manifestations sports becomes a destructive factor also with respect of the athlete's body. What I mean is the absurdly heavy training load; an intensification of participation in events in such exhaustive disciplines as marathon or triathlon; entanglement of high-mountain (Himalayan) climbing in principles of competition based on other, easily quantifiable, contest, which has probably been one of the reasons of the death of people whose principal aim until recently was to compete with themselves and nature rather than with an opponent. Examples can be multiplied.

It is worth pointing out that increasingly money, rather than fame (as many infamous sportsmen and sportswomen e.g. steroid-takers, return to athletic competition), is the factor that hinders a full realization of the concept of "mens sana in corpore sano" in sports. Moreover, as a result of the transfer of some elements from the world of sports to the system of the universal physical education of children and the youth, the foundation of modern man's physical education are threatened with an expansion of the opposite of Juvenal's principle.

3. It is more difficult, especially in a short presentation like this, to provide an exhaustive answer to the other question, which is: *Is it possible, and if so, what criteria must be satisfied, to develop both the spiritual and the bodily aspects of personality through physical training?*

It is of course possible and the possibility may even be characterized in the form of a paraphrase of Juvenal's thesis, namely: **nothing is better for the spirit than such training of the body that the spirit of the body is the supreme adviser, warden, and judge.** The word "adviser" in this context is the synonym of prudence shown before any action is made - *what to do, what not to do, why do this rather than that*, etc. The term "warden" points to the need for the development of the mind's ability to control the body in any action, in any physical activity. The term "judge" refers to conscience, i.e. to the self-judgement of what one does and how one does it, in order to achieve internal peace - and this may only be a consequence of actions which are efficient and at the same time fair, thus being worthy of man.

The principle formulated above is not an intellectual construction. It is the result of my experience gathered over several dozens years as practiser of many sports as well as a combat sports instructor and a physical education teacher in general. It is also the research on the preparation of people for acting in difficult and extremely difficult situations. To a certain extent it is also a generalization of the research results and experiences of pedagogues, trainers, teachers, educators and researchers whose thinking and work in the area of so-called physical culture are similar to mine.

If we do not ignore the principle formulated above and if we more clearly see that in a rather irreversible process traditional physical education is being displaced by mass sport, we must be objective and conclude that only some sports may serve as a vehicle to implement this principle. The reason for that is that few sports and forms of physical training offer an optimum combination of the fitness factor and the ethic factor.



Therefore, only some means of physical culture offer a chance of an optimum development of body and spirit. This is not only a question of means that offer the possibility of experiencing and understanding the psychosomatic nature of the human being, the unity of spirit (mind) and body and the mutual interrelationship between those factors. There are numerous means that satisfy this requirement. What we are after is those forms of physical expression, which additionally at every moment of activity are subject to a combined evaluation, primarily self-evaluation, of physical fitness and ethical aspects. Only direct combat of man against man fully reveals various aspects of human psychosomatic nature, man's psychosomatic individuality. Only such athletic combat, involving direct engagement, demonstrates that fear of defeat paralyses one's ability to act correctly and intelligently, that aggression obliterates cognition, that vanity, physical ineptitude, deficiency in knowledge, persistence, and skill are - in metaphorical terms - suicidal.

There are few sports that fully reveal the various facets of human nature: fear, aggression, pride, vanity, physical aptitude, knowledge and interdependencies among those features. It is likely that few athletes can discover those interdependencies themselves. A rhetorical question may be asked: how many sports teachers, physicians, researchers and managers working in the area of sport are conscious of those interdependencies? And yet it is not only the type of sports combat discussed here and preparation for such combat that requires particular thought before action is taken and a high degree of self-control in action, while appealing to conscience more than any other form of rivalry. Likewise, more than any other form of rivalry, such combat provides precise information to the causal spectator about the physical and ethical qualities of the athlete.

The attitude of a valiant adviser, warden, and judge of one's own actions may be shaped most effectively through judo, wrestling, fencing and those forms of hand-t-hand combat which do not allow a deliberate knock-out of the opponent. This type of possibility is also offered by team sports, albeit to a lesser extent.

4. If we want to be able to call as many human bodies as possible healthy and if we want those healthy bodies to be inhabited by healthy spirits, it is not enough to promote the kinds of sports and physical activity mentioned above through administrative orders. Those sports *per se* do not have a magic power to shape both a healthy body and a healthy spirit. They are only the optimum tools to be made proper use of by the true pedagogue and educator - the competent sports teacher with a broader philosophical perspective on the subject matter and scope of his activities.

Sport itself make the fulfilment of such a dream difficult. Sport not only to an ever larger extent penetrates universal physical education but also in many of its forms induces selective behaviour, and consequently a narrow specialization of motor functions and the development of only some dispositions (e.g. endurance, strength, speed). The principle of an optimized development of body and mind formulated above, combined with the indication of the means that may be used to implement it, has one other advantage. It points to the possibility of fulfilling many human needs of both a biological and psychological nature in one stream of activities. This conclusion relates directly to one of the fundamental directives of praxeology formulated by Tadeusz Kotarbinski "*the greater the extent to which our activity serves the totality of needs, the more successful is our activity*".