

# Existential journey to the ring: the anthropo-philosophical meaning of the Olympic stadium

Antonio Sánchez Pato

Olympic Studies Center. Catholic University of Murcia (Spain)

*apato@ucam.edu*

Alejandro Leiva Arcas

Olympic Studies Center. Catholic University of Murcia (Spain)

*aleiva@ucam.edu*

Emanuele Isidori

Università degli Studi di Roma “Foro Italico” (Italy)

*emanuele.isidori@uniroma4.it*

## Abstract

In this work, we are going to develop an anthropo-philosophical analysis of Olympic athletics from three perspectives: 1) from the Cartesian doubt as a methodical doubt emerging from the human being's interiority, by making ourselves doubtful about our senses when we try to interpret (from a subject-object perspective), and understand the meaning of athletic disciplines; 2) from the putting in parentheses of the concept of “human being”; parentheses from which we will apply so-called “epoché”, by bracketing the data coming from common sense (from a subject-world perspective, where the human being is, as Heidegger says, “thrown”). Based on these pieces of information, we will normalise these exceptional actions that have lost their usefulness and perspective; 3) we will dive into the ontological meaning of athletics events by using Heideggerian categories of space and time, trying to understand so-called “dasein” of homo deportivus from a subject-world perspective where the human being is “ejected”). That will reveal the process of cultural evolution concerning the human being, where the sport should not contribute to forget but to reaffirm the being. Consequently, the meaning of athletics events performed in a stadium will be analysed to understand that it is always the human being which makes them meaningful, and that sport is a very particular type of “dasein” which expresses the relationship of the human being with the world around.

## Keywords

Anthropology, Philosophy, Stadium, Olympism

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## Introduction

We rarely reflect on the anthropo-philosophical meaning of sport, partially because, driven by habit, we end up deeming as ordinary extraordinary sport acts that have undergone a process of cultural evolution and which, if we know how to decipher them, will tell us more about the human being. This article aims to analyse the meaning of athletics events held on the track and field stadium, using philosophical anthropology as an instrument.

Anthropo-philosophy, according to Gaston Bachelard, embraces the “total human being, with the ability to dream and to think rationally, whose development materialises into various praxes” (Silva de Souza, 2004, p. 323). Track and field events symbolise the human dream (a myth) to overcome physical barriers imposed by Nature (inherent in laws such as universal gravitation, formulated by Newton, or particle mechanics). By contrast, human reasoning narrows down and sets limits to these dreams. In so doing, the human being has created athletics disciplines that are subject to rules, and express the human desire for transcendence, typical of *homo sapiens* (Carlos Linneo -1731: genus: *homo*, species: *sapiens*), who turned him into *homo deportivus* (Gustavo Bueno, 2014) and into *homo religiosus* (Mircea Eliade, 1959), according to Porfirian classification (genus, species, difference, property and accident).

According to Bachelard (1972), “humans need to join together to know and to understand” (Silva de Souza, 2004, p. 324). Bachelard conceives the “human being” as the subject and object of science power, “with imaginative rationality, dynamic, truly active, immanent and transcendent at the same time, able to leave common sense aside and to make science possible”, outlining an interesting anthropo-philosophical path (p. 326). We find ourselves in this path of scientific construction, leaving common sense aside to understand the cultural meaning of human actions and to understand ‘together’ the meaning of athletics events.

In ancient Greece, the human being challenged themselves through two activities to determine their real value: war (*polemos*) and games (*athlos*). Through that confrontation, they came out of their current, everyday value to understand their authentic value or arete. Because the human being only knows what they are worth and, therefore, they are only truly valuable, when they fight other individuals, either for life or the victory; they can only prove their virtue in the *athlos*. Nonetheless, the meaning of such athletics events must be built as the combination of the perspectives and experiences of actors and spectators.

The historical origin of the first athletics track is confused with its mythological origin. Without debating about the originality of Amrit Phoenician stadium, from XV century BC, sustained by Dr Boutros (1981), the 192.27 metres of Olympia stadium's track (from V century BC), venue of the ancient Olympic Games, was the distance that athletes needed to cover to complete the stadium event, and the fact of covering it several times and with various impedimenta constituted the different events (*stade*, *diablos*, *hippies* and *dolichos*). In its mythological origin, that distance corresponds to 600 times Zeus' foot (of about 32 centimetres long).

Nevertheless, the current track of 400 metres long on the inner lane, partially heir of the one mentioned above, is much more than a standardised sport venue; it is the modern field of Mars, where people learn, suffer, triumph and fail. The first surprising aspects of an athletics track are its colour, shape and extension. Hashes of lines run and meander through it and limit it, highlighting both the central area and the oval rail around it.

The inner grass area, shared in occasions with football or rugby, is open and bright, intended to be a receptacle, space or a place to fall. Only judges may enter it during a competition, as well as a series of seemingly military or working devices: javelins, hammers, shots and discuses. However, out of competition, it is shared by athletes to run, walk, rest, jump, throw, etc. It is a multipurpose area.

From the ring, speed is expected; space where to move nimbly on an apparently static wheel, where movement is brought in by athletes. This fact differentiates it from a Ferris wheel or a laboratory wheel, where guinea pigs serve science purposes. There may be part of that in this ring, but it is evident that it is a running track, divided into lanes and where its flatness becomes noteworthy. A slight camber is missed to provide a faster and more aerodynamic profile, although it does not seem necessary (as it is in indoor tracks, with shorter inner lanes—200 metres—and cambered curves).

One semi-circle from the same material as the surrounding track can be found on each side, where the activity is frenetic. The material there used for practice is massive and complex: cages, mats, take-off boards, runways, landing pits, containers, etc.: a series of implements that challenge the imagination of those who face them.

One may wonder: what is actually at stake in such a magnificent scene? Several existential topics of ontological Nature that arise upon the courteous confrontation of the athletics sport meeting will be analysed.

## Methodology

A triple approach will be applied, combining three philosophical perspectives in a complementary manner: Cartesian methodical doubt, Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian ontology. To do so, we will proceed as follows:

1) We will start from the *Cartesian doubt* as a methodical doubt emerging from the human being's interiority, making us doubt our senses when valuing (from a subject-object perspective) sport feats and their difficulty. That will enable us to understand the meaning of the different athletics modalities and to question the relativism of such activities;

2) Subsequently, from the concept of a human being who is thrown outside, we will conduct *epoché*, bracketing the data coming from common sense (from a subject-world perspective, where the human being is thrown). Based on this information, we normalise exceptional actions that have lost their usefulness and perspective, because they are only considered phenomena, as human consciousness is intentional and goes beyond itself;

3) Lastly, we will dive into the *ontological meaning* of athletics events with Heideggerian space and time challenges, trying to understand "dasein" as *homo deportivus* (from a subject-world perspective where the human being is ejected). This will reveal a process of cultural evolution that tells about the human being, where the sport should not contribute to forget but to reaffirm the being.

Concurrently, from a philosophical anthropology standpoint, the meaning of athletics events performed in a stadium will be analysed. The aim is to understand that the human being is who makes them meaningful, and that sport is a very particular type of "dasein" in their relationship with the world.

a) We will address all the above in two consecutive analysis levels: analysis of the existential meaning that the main stadium "agones" (running, jumps and throws) provide to the study of the human being, and

b) analysis of the values inherent to the nature of these events

(finish, limits, measurements, discipline). Since the human being is who gives meaning to the world, athletics events cannot be understood out of their anthropological and existential meaning.

### *Cartesian doubt as a methodical doubt*

We start from the *Cartesian doubt*, understood as a methodical doubt—emerging from the human being’s interiority—, making us doubt our senses when valuing (from a subject-object perspective) sport feats and their difficulty. This will enable us to understand the meaning of the different athletics modalities and to question the relativism of such activities.

The Cartesian methodical doubt is “the voluntary suspension of judgement used systematically as a means to reach certainty; i.e. this method consists in calling all knowledge into question until having sufficient reasons to affirm truth as something certain and immutable” (Descartes, 1970, Preface, p. 13). The goal is not to imitate the sceptics, who doubt with no other aim but doubting, but on the contrary, “to cast aside the shifting earth and sand in order to find rock or clay” (Descartes, 1970, p. 45).

Only by putting ourselves in the athlete’s position, we can understand the sport feat, so minimised from the spectator’s position at a distance, from where space and time lose their referential value. Therefore, Descartes invites us to “carefully avoid precipitancy and prejudice and to comprise nothing more in my judgement than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly as to exclude all ground of doubt” (pp. 34-5).

The same as when we perceive a little aeroplane flying across the sky we know it is large, we should watch athletics events applying an equivalent correcting factor, since “because our senses sometimes deceive us, I wanted to suppose that nothing was exactly as they led us to imagine” (Descartes, 1970, p. 48). Moreover, because “the things we conceive very clearly and distinctly are all true” (p. 54), truth is hidden behind the magnificent structure of athletics events and the stadium itself. Events whose original purpose has been removed (running to escape or to catch a prey, skewering an animal with a javelin or spear, jumping over an obstacle or a river, etc.). The spectator must be perceptive and know how to decipher the deep sense underneath the performance they are being offered, considering that “all the things that had ever entered my mind were no more true than the illusions of my dreams” (Descartes, 1970, p. 49).

Only in-depth knowledge on those events and on their meaning beyond the stadium will enable us to understand their depth, transcendence and the magnetism generated on the audience: “whether awake or asleep, we should never allow ourselves to be persuaded except by the evidence of our reason” (Descartes, 1970, p. 55). Because there are two only ways to knowledge: “experience and deduction (...); experience is frequently deceiving; deduction, on the contrary, that is to say, the process through which we infer one thing from another, can be omitted if it is not conceived” [own translation] (1970, p. 96).

Thus, when we see an athlete jump almost nine metres in the long jump or six in the pole vault, it is not the experience that enables us to value the singularity of such feat, but the inference that the athlete is jumping the equivalent distance to road width or a third-floor height. We can doubt our senses; they are indeed deceiving. We can even do it as a method, in order to seek unbreakable truth that provides a solid foundation on which we can build our judgements. However, we should not underestimate what we see because we do not understand it. The feats achieved on the track are expressed as mathematical (arithmetical and geometrical) truth, quantified in centimetres and seconds, of which Descartes would not doubt.

#### *Understanding man as being thrown outside*

Starting from a concept of a human being who is thrown outside, we conduct *epoché*, bracketing the data coming from common sense (from a subject-world perspective, where the human being is thrown). Based on this information, we normalise exceptional actions that have lost their usefulness and perspective, because they are only considered phenomena, as human consciousness is intentional and goes beyond itself.

The Greek term “*epokhē*” (etymologically) means for the sceptics suspending judgement, when being in front of two equally defensible propositions but opposed or contradictory to each other. That is what seems to happen when we observe some athletics events that are apparently absurd, such as running with no destination, jumping without overcoming any obstacle or throwing an object with no clear target. However, once that first puerile interpretation of the athletics events is overcome, we can try, following Descartes, to search for a clear and distinct idea that

can assure it does not depend on our consciousness, that it is not a dream, but evidence. Subsequently, we will move forward with Edmund Husserl and his phenomenological method, with the bracketing of the world's reality that leads to appropriation of self's reality, of one's own consciousness.

“Epoché” is a phenomenological abstraction of the non-essential and the acquisition of the fundamental, since its purpose is to serve as a method to unify the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) and the science world (*Weltwissenschaft*), separated by Descartes. As they cannot be joined together, they constitute, according to Husserl, the crisis of European sciences.

The first step (“*epoché*”) would consist of transforming “the human” into a phenomenon, “ignoring” this or that empirical-real appearance since it is “real” (Osorio, 1998). For example, if we would like to understand the essence of the colour red (“redness”), it would not be relevant whether we are seeing, remembering or imagining something red, or whether there has never existed anything of that colour, as it occurs with “human” essence or “humanity”.

To advance from a Cartesian understanding of the world and human being through the theory of knowledge and avoiding psychologism, we must perform the phenomenological step. That is, suspended judgement (“bracketing”—*Einklammerung*—, “disconnection”—*Ausschaltung*—from the everyday world) to reach phenomenological reduction. The natural attitude is full of interpretations that are accepted as valid, prejudice or confusing intellectualisation that leads to lack of understanding. As a result of epoché, our attention moves to objects, to the way they appear in consciousness. After *epoché*, which leads us to the starting point for subjectivity, comes the eidetic reduction.

All consciousness is a consciousness of something, different from consciousness itself. There is an unbreakable connection between consciousness and its object, called object-consciousness universal correlation. No consciousness experience can be conceived separated from the object it refers to, at which it intentionally points. Likewise, the object is not independent of consciousness either, which is the only source of meaning. Therefore, experience essence is twofold: a subjective (noesis of the experience: the action of intentionally exercising consciousness) and an objective one (noema of that experience).

*“The tree plain and straightforward, the thing in Nature, is as different as it can be from this perceived tree as such, which as perceptual meaning belongs to the perception, and that inseparably. (...) However, the meaning—the meaning of this perception, something that belongs necessarily to its essence—can not burn away; it has no chemical elements, no forces, no real properties.”*

(Husserl, *Ideas*, 1962, p. 216)

Likewise, athletics events have, strictly, no real properties either. Husserl disagreed with the separation between a world of reality and a world of appearance or merely subjective sensory phenomena. That happens because:

*“(...) every intentional experience has a noema and a meaning in it through which it refers to the object; the other way round, everything we call object, what we talk about, what we have in front of our eyes as reality (...) is, only by being, an object of consciousness and (...) it has to be represented within real and possible consciousness by meanings or propositions, filled with the corresponding more or less intuitive content”* [own translation].

(Husserl, *Ideas*, 1962, p. 236)

The only epoché can help us understand the intentional meaning of the athletics events beyond the mere Cartesian doubt. To that end, first of all, we must not affirm or deny anything; we must not take part. We must bracket any judgement about them and, by doing so, we will avoid all possible mistakes. It is a descriptive method of the experiences of pure consciousness. We must only keep consciousness, bracketing the contingent, the accidental, marks, distances, metres and seconds of athletic feats, and removing all ideas of space and time in order to determine the Nature of consciousness content. In such a way, we will be able to describe purely and objectively consciousness content. Then we will be able to study the ideal objects with objective and universal validity.

This vision of reality required by *epoché* (Schütz, 1974), putting life into brackets, avoiding all prejudice, brings us closer to the vision of sport as a nucleus generator of intersubjectivity; because sport creates and recreates social reality. Phenomenology is a theory about significant action, the result of a situation, image of the social world as a universe of meaning, determining outcome from the everyday interpretations and interactions that occur in the sport world.

Through phenomenology, we can understand what happens in sport, in interactive relationships, in order to understand how they affect, as everyday activities, the creation of social reality. Sport is entering many people's life: practising people, spectators, media—who are continually redefining that reality—, politics, economics, etc.

Schütz distinguishes two types of meaning, subjective (to the actor) and objective (to the observer). These are connected to the intentionality issue in sport actions. The meaning of an action (e.g. an elbow during a race to try to get the best position) is conferred retrospectively, once it has occurred, or prospectively when the behaviour is aimed at achieving a specific goal in the future. This is the reason why Schütz distinguishes the “reason to...” from the “reason why...”, the former being the purpose at which the action is directed, while the latter needs a retrospective analysis. Upon sport behaviours, we must distinguish both types of reasons, since it is not the same “what purpose we do something to” or “why we do it”, and only the action-outcome will reveal the *reason (why)* for the behaviours. In the relationship between both meanings, it resides one of the most significant problems of sport studies: to distinguish the purpose from the cause. We will examine the causes that drive athletes to try to achieve maximum performance in athletics events.

### ***Ontological meaning of athletics events***

We will dive into the *ontological meaning* of athletics events with Heideggerian space and time challenges, trying to understand “dasein” as *homo deportivus* (from a subject-world perspective where the human being is ejected). This will reveal a process of cultural evolution that tells about the human being, where the sport should not contribute to forget but to reaffirm the being.

As well as we can find in poetry traces that the being emits through its presence, according to Heidegger, we can find them in the artwork, because the artist, we would say the athlete, “expresses Being with no concepts, with no logics, because these are actually which have contributed to the concealment of Being in the western tradition” [own translation (Terino, p. 12)]. Thus, we can see sport as a poetical language that is expressed through profoundly aesthetic language, based on corporal techniques, which can reveal the being.

The un-concealment of modern technology is displayed in “causing”, requiring Nature to supply energy that can be extracted and stored, with two effects: the ability to transform and to store energy. This type of un-concealment needs imposition to Nature (Terino, p. 15). A technique that, applied to athletics sport, represents domestication of space and time through corporal techniques that allow the human being to apprehend and master both categories.

According to Heidegger, “technique, typical of and connatural to the human being, turns against them in many of its current applications, distancing them from their natural essence and placing them in the artificial construct that determines our world and our environment” [own translation] (Terino, pp. 15-16). The paradox that, on the one hand, athletics limited to the track represents control on Nature, while its technique is connatural to the human being. Physics, through biomechanics, tends to impose technical models and patterns on human movement in sport, “physics defined by Heidegger as the precursor of the imposition on nature through the experimentation conducted by science” [own translation] (Terino, p. 16). Athletics technique movements (from gait and running to jumps and throws) are imposed by repetitive and automated technical models derived from biomechanics, which distance us from natural and spontaneous movements, producing a sort of dehumanisation and denaturation.

On the one hand, the imposition of this technique blocks all un-concealment; on the other hand, such imposition “occurs in whatever lets the human being keep being who they are, in favour of the safe-keeping of true essence, and here appears ‘the saving’” (Terino, p. 17), allowing for disclosure of the human being. Here it resides the paradox: the repetition that distances us from truth allows for the achievement of sport mastery (sport understood as art), which is un-concealment close to the truth: “Art represents a type of un-concealment closer to the original *Aletheia*, to the truth, although it should be kept, in some sense, far from technique, i.e. art should not be technified” (Terino, p. 17).

Heidegger denounced the danger to the human being, due to the technical rationality “prevailing in their life and environment, making them forget their roots and the natural and original environment where they come from” [own translation] (Terino, p. 19). Possibly, there resides the explanation to the return of postmodern man to Nature through extreme sports (*bungee*

*jumping, rafting, kitesurf, etc.*), applying the most extreme technique, in a Rousseauian turn that lets us regain and revive our reconnection to Nature.

We keep running and jumping, despite having created machines that do it for us, to stay human, when technical and technological advancements “were called into question due to the denaturation they bring to our life and our world, together with the risk of the so often announced dehumanisation (...)” [own translation] (Terino, p. 19).

Therefore, as spectators, we must not lose the philosopher’s (the myth’s friend) astonishment upon sport feats. Since, if we deem the technique that helps the athlete achieve the sport feat as natural because it is conventional, we will be distancing from the being that becomes patent in sport *techne*.

We will now continue with our analysis in two consecutive levels:

- a) Analysis of the *existential meaning* that the main stadium “agones” (running, jumps and throws) provide to the study of the human being, and
- b) Analysis of the *values inherent* to the nature of these events (finish, limits, measurements, discipline).

## **Existential meaning of the stadium agones**

*Citius, Altius, Fortius* is the Olympic motto attributed to Henri Didon and spread by Pierre de Coubertin that represents the goal in the athletics events: faster (running), higher (jumps), more robust (throws), and encourages us to give the best of ourselves: to run faster, to reach higher and, therefore, to be stronger.

### ***Running***

Common sense tells that, if someone is running, it is because either they are running away from danger, or they want to arrive at their destination earlier than they would do walking. However, since “it is not enough to possess good spirit (common sense), but the essential is to apply it properly” (Descartes, 1970, p. 19), we understand that individuals sometimes run with no clear destination; they do it just for sport. In such a case, reward takes the place of necessity.

In the stadium, an apparent contradiction becomes evident: in

running events longer than 400 metres, the athlete starts and finishes at the same point, repeatedly passing through that point: twice in the 800 m, four times in the 1,500 m, twelve in the 5,000 m, until twenty-four times in the 10,000-m event. This running once and again over the same steps, like Sisyphus, carrying the load of effort and suffering implicit in the event, is just the spatial transfer of each specific distance to an appropriate scenario to watch and be watched (panopticon).

The singular aspect of running events in the stadium is the roundness of some of them, due to sport spectacle, which provides (social and cultural) meaning to the individual effort. Furthermore, not only is the path already drawn and used but also the only goal is to reach the finish as soon as possible. The fact that the finish coincides with the start is only due to logistical reasons derived from the need of ensuring sufficient audience capacity for the sport spectacle. However, it also provides, both the actor and the spectator, with a round view of repetition (very different from the classic Greek model of going and coming back in the linear running event in Olympia's stadium) of sport and life.

That makes us lose perspective on the distance covered in a particular time, making it possible for the action to be perceived only by experts, who appreciate the meaning of running 400 metres in barely a minute for almost half an hour (in the 10,000-m event). The pace (per lap) becomes then the time measurement, which is difficult to perceive.

### *Jumps*

Likewise, the natural ability to jump has been useful to humans to overcome distances and spaces on our way to reach something. In athletics, the distance reached does not help overcome any obstacle or space on the way. Either vertically or horizontally, the jumper only competes against themselves, the only consequence of the distance reached or overcome being victory or defeat. Nevertheless, it is a fight against gravity's law, which ties us inevitably to the ground; it ties us once and again, at the same time that it allows us to propel to fly further, higher. The abstraction of jumping (not to overcome a river or to reach a piece of fruit from a tree) leads us to the essential fight against the laws of Nature, which remind us that we are human and which only Icarus dared to challenge.

We lose reference from our position as spectators, being it hard to translate the results in terms of difficulty. Eight metres in long jump or almost two and a half metres in high jump seem to be empty measurements. However, when we transport them to familiar environments (to jump two parallel-parked cars, or above a door lintel), we become fully aware of their actual value and oddness.

### *Throws*

To throw an object is not exclusive from the human race; nonetheless, it is to throw a javelin, a shot, a discus or a hammer with the only aim of improving past performance. It is the pure measurement of the most elementary human progress. The tradition that emerged from the mere confrontation among human beings to determine who is best, who throws furthest, turned everyday objects (such as a blacksmith's hammer, a shot—bullet—, or a simple discus) in flying objects very far from their original function. Only the javelin throw preserves its primitive spear function to hunt or hurt, but to lose its goal. That proves once again that what is important is not how fast or where we run, what we jump over or what we throw, but the courteous confrontation subject to rules used to assess our performance and to determine who the champion, the hero, the myth is.

### **Values inherent to the Nature of stadium events**

Every sport activity brings into human play values that tell about its own Nature (McFee, 2004). Values that are not the athlete's, but the human being's heritage (as individualisation representing humanity), but it is through the sport that they reach their maximum level: to achieve goals, reaching and overcoming our limits, expressed in distances or measurements, and all under the vigilance of the rules of the various athletics disciplines.

Because when running, throwing or jumping, there are underlying anthropological values like the search and achievement of *goals* (understood as a metaphor of life) (McComb, 2004), the overcoming of our limits (proof of our finiteness), the control of *space and time* (when fighting to extend life) and the *discipline* as the necessary asceticism to achieve all the above.

### *The finish*

The finish is the start, the end and the beginning. The athletes experience a continuous moving around the track that forces them to go once and again through the same point. Until the finish is reached, determined by a certain number of laps, everything seems to be cyclical. The athlete, after the first lap, has lost their horizon and is relegated to the museum the stadium turns into, becoming a carousel. It is a living museum, where the most astonishing human feats, but also the most useless, are experienced and re-experienced. Nothing is produced by them apart from themselves. Their value is just symbolic, unreal, a mere sign of an agreed and recreated value.

It seems to indicate that we must run to reach a destination, jump to overcome an obstacle or throw to hit a target. Every motor action has in our world meaning of usefulness, an aim; but on the track, the finish is the start, and the landing pit is at the ground level. There is nothing to ford, nothing to overcome, except un-soundable space and intangible time.

Argonautica, by Apollonius Rhodius, describes Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece. The goal is the trophy, the conquest, the feat. Books about journeys, which seem to have found a model in Jules Verne, constitute a genre that expresses the human desire to discover new horizons, the desire for adventure and conquest. Nevertheless, the sport has created an artificial sea where these goals can be pursued in front of an excited audience. Stories are not to be told but watched. Thus, the stadium allows for experiencing the feat jointly with the hero, shortening space and time.

### *The limits*

The fastest men or women in the world are about to face the 100-m distance on the track. They occupy eight lanes, knowing that the champion's individuality is still to be determined. That man or woman—who represents all of us—alone, genuflected, will face a certain distance, but will be judged for an, in principle, uncertain time. There are two maximum judges, two arbitrarily-measured entelechies, space and time: metres, minutes, centimetres, seconds. The shot is heard, and they rush towards the finish. Only one, necessarily one, will reach it first, in rigorous and atrocious chronological order.

On that 16th August 2009, the fastest man on Earth, one single athlete, represented the whole humanity when he reached the end of the space in the minimum time: 9.58 (nine seconds and fifty-eight hundredths). We measure athletes' feat through time, but it is written in space. They have improved their own world record by eleven-hundredths of a second, something imperceptible to our biological clock and our logic, but he has achieved much more, he has been able to steal a few centimetres from space. He has not covered one hundred metres in a shorter time, but he has covered the longer distance in the same time he had done in his previous record. For him, less than ten seconds correspond to one hundred metres; one second to slightly longer than ten metres; and a tenth of a second to slightly longer than one metre.

What did the fastest athlete in the world do with that tenth of a second they were given, or they have stolen from *Cronus*? They may have consumed it in their own running inertia, or they may have wasted it in a fast deceleration. It does not matter; it only belongs to him. That is the price of his fame, the content of his glory. This man, HE, has not stolen one-tenth from space but has taken one metre from time, from his time of glory, which raises him directly to champions' Olympus.

#### *Measurements and distances (time and space)*

Which perceptive mechanisms occur in athletics events to make us always lose perspective and the feeling of reality? The physical, mechanical and social laboratory that runs on the athletics track is such that the straight lines look shorter than the curved ones, 400 metres barely represent what they are, 6 metres in pole vault seem to be an impassable wall compared to 6 metres in the long jump, 2.40 metres in high jump are insignificant compared to a broad jump, etc. The technical difficulty, gravity, the morphological and biomechanical conditions make 6 metres in the pole vault and six poor metres in long jump be poles apart. However, what is most important is perspective, which is lost in the horizon, but falls in on us when it is a wall.

#### *Discipline*

Sport is not only accompanied by the search for excellence, but also by discipline. Why so much determination, so much effort, energy, resources or championships to run, jump or throw, when

we can move faster, reach higher and further, or throw with almost no limits using cars, aeroplanes or cannons? The athlete is a fighter, reminiscence, a survival, a living museum of *illo tempore*, when the human being did not have other means, other devices, other tools.

Nevertheless, after the industrial revolution, but already since animal domestication (mount) or the invention of the wheel, the human being threw themselves into the development of other means, resources, inventions and discoveries (poles, all-weather material, styles and techniques, spike shoes, training systems, doping) in order to improve something that is socially, but not existentially overcome. It seems like we would like to squeeze it to the limit, to continue exploiting and taking advantage of our physical abilities in a disciplined manner when we do not seem to need them anymore. It is probably because through these activities we can achieve a more precious goal: to approach our limits and to achieve virtue, although this may only consist in perseverance, determination, discipline; this is, to live life to the maximum. The most excellent and most intense feeling of speed is provided by our own body's movement when it is generated by itself. The feeling of flying is greater during the vertical fall of a high jump than when travelling by aeroplane. We need to live those experiences or others to live them for us. We should not forget the wise words of great Carl Diem:

*“The game is a means used by Nature to prepare living beings for life. Animals and humans play. The animal stops playing when it stops growing; in the human being, the impulse of playing continues, but with different features. In the beginning, it has animal characteristics, but from a certain age, it acquires spiritual content. Since the human being is a spiritual being, they continue developing even after they reach body maturity, until death.”*

(Diem, 1966, p. 7)

## Conclusions

In conclusion, we believe that, since it is the human being who gives meaning to the world, it is not possible to understand athletics events without their anthropological and existential meaning. This is particularly significant in classical Olympism, where the further involvement of sport in the construction of the individual was decisive

In the Olympic stadium, there is something else at stake other than victory or defeat, business or mass entertainment. The most archaic myths, which provide meaning to the human being's life, are revived there.

In this article, we have stressed how philosophy can help us grasp the very essence of human actions, be they the sports or other things. This work shows that the methodological proposal employing three philosophical paradigms (Cartesian doubt, Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian ontology) is valid for understanding the anthropological meaning of sport

Also, we have argued that, by examining the human being's actions by the lens of the sport, we can advance within the analysis and comprehension of what we are. This can be carried out not only by expressing the way of doing them but also and above all by investigating the cause and the purpose of human actions.

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## **Author**

**Antonio Sánchez Pato:** Degree in Philosophy. Degree in Physical Activity and Sports Sciences. European. PhD in Sciences of Physical Activity and Sports Sciences. Full Professor of Sociology of Sport, History of Sport, and Education in Values and Olympism. Dean of the Faculty of Sport. Director of UCAM-Olympic Studies Center. UCAM-Catholic University of Murcia.

**Alejandro Leiva Arcas:** Degree in History. Master in Social and cultural anthropology. Lecturer of History of Sport, Sociology of Sport and Teaching Innovation in Sports. Member of the UCAM-Olympic Studies Center. Coordinator and Head of Studies of the Bachelor's in Physical Activity and Sports Sciences. UCAM-Catholic University of Murcia.

**Emanuele Isidori:** Degree in Arts. Degree in Philosophy. Master in E-Learning. Master in Lifelong Learning. Master in International Relations. PhD in Physical Activity and Health. PhD in Educational Sciences. Full Professor of General, Social and Sport Pedagogy at University of Rome Foro Italico.