

「神」出現在運動員裡面： 從梅露·龐蒂及「道」的觀點

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摘要

自從狄佛德的著名文章〈運動裡的宗教〉一文於一九七六年發表以來，「運動與宗教」的議題即廣被討論，尤其是體育運動學術領域。總括不同學者的論點，分別代表了下列三種立場：(1)運動是宗教的一種形式。(2)運動與宗教本質上的區別。(3)運動與宗教是文化的實作。此外，卡普托曾提出的形上學問題：上帝之後誰會來？有一些研究者認為此問題的可能答案是「運動」。本文並不想捲入上述議題的紛爭裡，相反的，本文意圖從梅露·龐蒂的觀點以及「道」的徑路，作為了解「運動與宗教」議題的新途徑，並做出一個大膽的假設，也就是神已經化身為一個運動員的話，結果會如何？研究者或是運動員如何辨識出神喬裝的這個運動員？

經由梅露·龐蒂提出的「可見與不可見」觀點之對照，以及從東方「空性」及「道」的存有論立場抒發，本文提出欲辨識出神喬裝的運動員，須先從認識自己著手。本文發現，「認識你自己」！這句古老的格言，對於當代跨國的社會，特別是運動與宗教的研究來說，也就具備了一層新的意義。循此，也可以找到神如何出現在運動員裡，此疑問的哲學式答案。

關鍵詞：神、運動員、宗教、道、可見與不可見

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God among Athletes: From the Perspective of Merleau-Ponty and Tao

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Abstract

Since Frank Deford's famous article "Religion in Sport" was published in *Sports Illustrated* in 1976, there has been active discussion over the topic of "sports and religion", especially in research fields related to sports studies. Much of this existing work takes one of three thematic approaches: 1) sports as a form of religion; 2) essential differences between sport and religion; and 3) religions and sports as cultural practices. Additionally, drawing from Caputo's question: "who comes after the God of metaphysics?" some researchers indicate that "sport" seems to be an answer. My own work does not enter the boundaries of the above views and arguments concerning sport. Instead, I use an approach building upon Merleau-Ponty and my knowledge of Taoism to explore a new way of understanding sport and religion. My specific concern is with individual athletes and the notion of God present in them.

Overall, using these concepts of Merleau-Ponty's "Visible and the Invisible" and the Eastern thoughts of "Tao" or "Emptiness", I argue that we need to return to the traditional wisdom of "know yourself" in order to recognize the athlete who embodies the spirit of God. Hence, this old proverb has new meaning in contemporary transnational society and especially in studies of sport and religion. Using a framework that illuminates the importance of "know yourself", we can philosophically articulate an answer as to why God shows up among athletes.

Keywords: God, athletics, religion, Tao, the Visible and the Invisible

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I. Introduction

Since Frank Deford's famous article "Religion in Sport" was published in *Sports Illustrated* in 1976, there has been active discussion over the topic of "sports and religion", especially in research fields related to sports studies¹. Much of this existing work takes one of three thematic approaches: 1) sports as a form of religion: the most extreme position to take when discussing this issue is to say that sports are a new form of religion, because both involve expressions of beliefs and meanings that are stronger and more relevant to people today than the beliefs and meanings associated with "Christianity, Judaism, or any of the traditional religions"; 2) essential differences between sport and religion: some people argue that religion and sport each has a unique, separate "essence"; the essence of religion is grounded in divine inspiration, while the essence of sport is grounded in human nature; and 3) religions and sports as cultural practices: most people who study sports in society see religions and sports as two forms of cultural practices created by groups of people as they devise ways to live with one another and struggle to make their lives satisfying and meaningful.² Additionally, drawing from Caputo's question: "who comes after the God of metaphysics?"³ some researchers indicate that "sport" seems to be an answer (e.g., Charles S. Prebish, 1993).

¹ e.g., Frank Deford, 1976; Harry Edwards, 1973; Michael Novak, 1976; Shirl J. Hoffman, 1992; Robert J. Higgs, 1995; Tara Magdalinski and Timothy J. L. Chandler, 2002.

² Coakley, Jay J., *Sport and Society: Issues and Controversies*. 7th ed. (St. Louis: Times Mirror/Mosby, 2001), 459-462.

³ Caputo John D., *The Religious*. Malden (Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 2.

My own work does not enter the boundaries of the above views and arguments concerning sport, because no matter which approach one accepts, two important questions remain: What is sport? and, What is one's specific religious faith? These two fundamental questions can take up most of one's time. Instead, building on Merleau-Ponty and Taoism, I explore a new way of understanding the relationship between sport and religion. Specifically, I am concerned with individual athletes and their notions of God.

II. A bold assertion — that God already is present among athletes

I start from a bold assertion—that God already is present among athletes. Imagine these two scenarios: first, a group of runners running on a track, one of whom is “God”; and, second, a basketball player takes a free-throw and “God” is beside him or her trying to block the shot. Yet, how do athletes, spectators, and researchers recognize God? I believe that to begin to answer this question, we need to know ourselves first. For instance, only after I have felt anger, can I understand someone else's anger; Only after I become a father, will I be able to understand another father's feelings, and so on. Paradoxically, the only way to understand others is to understand ourselves first. Since we recognize ourselves in either a subjective way or objective way — both apply to the sport world and our selves — I will discuss both in terms of their epistemology. But before we discuss that, we need to understand the concepts of “Tao” and the “Invisible.”

III. How can one interpret “Tao”?

The *Tao Te Ching*, the basis of Taoism, one of the world’s great religions, has been translated more frequently than any other work besides the Bible. Articulating the way of poise, serenity, and complete assurance, it teaches us how to work with the invisible forces of nature, the psyche, and the soul for a more successful life. Not passive contemplation, but creative quietism is the Way of Lao Tzu, and it has never been more relevant than it is today.⁴

A. Philosophical Taoism: Main Figures

Lao Tzu [Laozi]

a) Other names:

Li Er [Li Erh] (Birth Name)

Lao Dan [Lao Tan] (Mentioned in the *Chuang Tzu* inner chapters)

b) Contribution: Founded Taoism, composed the *Tao Te Ching*

c) Occupation: Zhou imperial court archives librarian

Philosophical History of Lao Tzu

Lao Tzu was born in 604 B.C. in Henan, China. He was named Li Er [Li Erh], and held a post as keeper of records at Luoyang, then the capital of the Zhou kingdom. Legend says he had a meeting with Confucius. When the Zhou dynasty was near its fall in around 500 B.C.E., legend says that Lao Tzu rode

⁴ Witter Bynner, *The Way of Life: According to Lao-tzu* (New York: The John Day Company, 1995).

a water buffalo to retire in the mountains of the western frontier. An official named Guan Yin Zi who was in charge of the mountain pass begged the sage for a book of his teachings, and Lao Tzu then wrote the *Tao Te Ching*, after which Lao Tzu went westward and was never seen again.

B. The Tao

Literally, Tao means “path” or “way,” and following the Way is what Taoism is all about. The *Tao Te Ching* discusses the way, specifically elaborating on the concepts of *yin* and *yang* and “*Wu Wei*” (“action in inaction”), which governs the “Three Jewels”, among others.

C. Yin and Yang

In Taoism, *Yin* and *Yang* are the negative and positive principles of the universe. One cannot exist without the other, and they often represent opposites in direct relation to each other. As *Yang* increases, *Yin* will eventually appear to establish a balance and vice versa.

The *Yin-Yang* symbol (a circle with black and white sections) depicts this clearly. As you travel around the circle, white or black will increase, until the opposite color is almost gone, but never totally gone. The cycle then repeats for the opposite color.

What seems like *Yin* is often supported by *Yang*, and vice versa. As an example, to truly know what good is, you must know what evil is, and without good as a comparison, nothing is evil. Thus, while keeping to one end, do not shun the opposite end, but embrace both as they are. Allowing *Yin* to flourish, you welcome *Yang*. By letting go of *Yin*, you are waiting for its return. As an example, before you can possess something, you must be willing to let it go.

Yin and *Yang* often represent the following opposites:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Yin</i>• Negative• Female• Dark• Evil• Earth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Yang</i>• Positive• Male• Light• Good• Heaven
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D. “Wu Wei”

“Wu Wei” (literally: “without action”) is one of the main concepts in Taoism. It means to do things effortlessly or by following the natural flow of nature.

E. Governing

In Taoism, the government should follow the Way in governing the people as well. Specific chapters in the *Tao Te Ching* describe ideal ways of governing people. They can be summarized in these key points:

- Do not emphasize status, intelligence, or possessions.
- Govern with the least possible visibility and with a humble attitude.
- Reduce laws and govern lightly.
- Take few actions that involve the people.
- Treat other countries non-aggressively.

F. The “Three Jewels”

There are “three jewels” or characteristics that Taoists should cherish, as

mentioned in the 67th chapter of *Tao Te Ching*. They are:

- Compassion - leads to courage
- Moderation - leads to generosity
- Humility - leads to leadership⁵

IV. The interpretation of “Invisible”

“To touch is to touch oneself. To be understood as: the things are the prolongation of my body and my body is the prolongation of the world, through it the world surrounds me — if I cannot touch my own movement, this movement is entirely woven out of contact with me — the touching oneself and the touching have to be understood as each the reverse of each other...the untouchable of the touch, the invisible of vision, the unconscious of consciousness...is the other side or the reverse,(or the other dimensionality) of sensible Being...”⁶

When my right hand touches my left hand, what the difference compared to my right hand touching a desk? This question is a cue to understand what Merleau-Ponty is saying. This two examples can be presented simply as follows:

My right hand touches a desk.

(subject) (object)

My right hand touches my left hand.

(subject) (object→subject→both)

⁵ <http://www.edepot.com/taointro.html>, 2007.

⁶ Merleau-Ponty Maurice, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Northwestern University Press, 1968), 255.

When my right hand touches a desk, clearly, the desk is an object. However, when my right hand touches my left hand, originally, my left hand is an object like a desk, at the same time, my left hand is also a part of my body, hence, my left hand is not only an object, it is also a subject too; it is both! This is the major difference between this two examples.

According to Merleau-Ponty, “the untouchable of the touch, the invisible of vision, the unconsciousness...is the other side or the reverse of sensible being”. It is very similar to the theory of “*Yin-Yang*”. *Yin* reveals Negative/Female/Dark/Evil/Earth. At the same time, *Yang*, the Positive/Male/Light/Good/Heaven side of Being, exists as its counterpart. The first meaning of “Invisible” is that Invisible is the other side of visible, each Being must have these two “elements”. In the same way that Tao includes both *Yin* and *Yang*, Being includes the Visible and the Invisible. Whenever we talk about Invisible, we cannot ignore the Visible, and vice versa.

“The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term ‘element,’ in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an ‘element of Being’.”⁷

“Flesh” is a new term in Western philosophy; little-used before Merleau-Ponty introduced it. The ontological meaning of the Invisible has confused most Western philosophers and thinkers. However, in my own view, the explanation of flesh is very much like the Chinese term “Tao.” In the first

⁷ Merleau-Ponty Maurice, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Northwestern University Press, 1968), 139.

chapter of the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu tells us:

The Way 【Tao】 that can be experienced is not true;

The world that can be constructed is not real.

The Way 【Tao】 manifests all that happens and may happen;

The world represents all that exists and may exist.

To experience without abstraction is to sense the world;

To experience with abstraction is to know the world.

These two experiences are indistinguishable;

Their construction differs but their effect is the same.

Beyond the gate of experience flows the Way 【Tao】,

Which is ever greater and more subtle than the world.⁸

According to Lao Tzu, you can neither talk about Tao nor describe it; Tao manifests all that happens and may happen. If one compares Lao Tzu's definition of Tao to Merleau-Ponty's term "flesh", the flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. The flesh is, in this sense, an "element" of Being. You may find the similarity surprising!

V. The subjective way to understand ourselves

In the subjective ("know yourself"), the spiritual world of human being is indicated as a complexity, such as the way Gallway understands the athlete self. When we play Tennis, we always speak to ourselves, sometime even

⁸ Witter Bynner, *The Way of Life: According to Lao-tzu* (New York: The John Day Company, 1995).

curse ourselves. Hence, Gallway called it Self 1 (thinker) and Self 2 (doer). Gallway said:

Imagine that instead of being parts of the same person, Self 1 (teller) and Self 2 (doer) are two separate persons. How would you characterize their relationship after witnessing the following conversation between them? The player on the court is trying to make a stroke improvement. "Okay, dammit, keep your stupid wrist firm," he orders. Then as ball after ball comes over the net, Self 1 reminds Self 2, "Keep it firm. Keep it firm. Keep it firm!" Monotonous? Think how Self 2 must feel! It seems as though Self 1 doesn't think Self 2 hears well, or has a short memory, or is stupid. The truth is, of course, that Self 2, which includes the unconscious mind and nervous system, hears everything, never forgets anything, and is anything but stupid. After hitting the ball firmly once, he knows forever which muscles to contract to do it again. That's his nature.⁹

Obviously, our selves are not only one. Yet, as the work of Merleau-Ponty suggests, the existence of a house itself reveals the visible (furniture) and the invisible (emptiness). People usually focus on the furniture and ignore the rest of space in a house. However, the existence of a house needs both! Indeed, if one focuses on the visible and fills the space with furniture and ignores the importance of the space or the invisible, then what may have been a house becomes a storeroom.

Interestingly, when we compare these two examples, we will meet the ontology of Being. Look at the structure of this two examples:

⁹ Gallway W. Timothy, *The Inner Game of Tennis* (New Work: Bantam Books, 1974), 14.

Visible: A house (furniture) is like a human body (hands, legs and organs)

Invisible: Emptiness of a house is like our selves

The ontology of invisible: The Being of the house and the human

I interpret the Being of the house and the human as “Tao”, or the ontology of the invisible. The visible is house/body, the invisible is emptiness/self, and the ontology of the invisible is the Being of the house and the human. In Chinese philosophy, they call it “Tao”, namely, the radical or ultimate “Being” for the world (including house, human being, and everything).

VI. The objective way to understand ourselves

In an objective way, most athletes recognize themselves through sports whereas people understand themselves through external titles and identities. People define themselves in terms of the role they play in the social world, such as student/teacher, child/parent, husband/wife, etc. When we introduce each other, we often introduce ourselves by title instead of who we really are. We see the same thing in the sports world. For instance, though we know “23” symbolizes the best basketball player in the world (Michael Jordan) and that “10” symbolizes the best soccer player in the world (Zinedine Zidane), we don’t know who they really are. For the athlete, the most important thing is to perform well at his or her sport, to break records and pursue athletic excellence.

“Sport understand me!” as a metaphor, represents external titles, positions,

and records that define people and give us a sense that we understand them more than we would with other ways of defining and, therefore, truly understanding them. Many athletes experience this phenomenon. How could “Sport” understand folks? How could running, swimming and playing ball understand folks? Yet, memories, expressions, interpretations and so on—not the shoes, water, and a rubber ball—construct the real meaning of sports as a metaphor. In this understanding, interpreting sport as an objective inquiry reverses to a subjective understanding, an ontology of the invisible.

VII. Conclusion

Overall, using these concepts of the ontology of the invisible, as illuminated in Taoism, in my work I attempt to explore notions of “God” in the athlete and in the realm of athletics. Whenever we want to recognize God among the realm of athletics, it is my contention that we need to go back to the traditional — perhaps universal — wisdom of “know yourself”, and it makes no difference whether one employs an objective or subjective method. In either case, we end up with the same thing: an ontology of the invisible, or Tao. This old proverb has new meaning in contemporary transnational society and especially in studies of sport and religion. Using such a framework that illuminates the importance of “know yourself,” we can philosophically articulate an answer as to why God shows up among athletes.

Besides, according to Merleau-Ponty, he said: “True Philosophy consists

in relearning to look at the world”¹⁰. Knowing yourself is the same! We need to relearn how to know ourselves. This paper uses the interpretation of Tao and an ontology of the Invisible to demonstrate a “Space” where the West and East come together, and such a confluence is invaluable.

Finally, using sport is an excellent way to understand human Being! As a athlete or a researcher of athletics, we should celebrate this.

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¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, translated by Colin Smith, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p.xx.

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