

Synopses

The individualist's marathon: a strange competition

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The individualist's marathon is a special competition with odd rules: it begins unofficially with our birth or even a little later and officially when we acquire the conscience of our 'ego' and perceive one's interactivity with others. The competition ends when we say farewell to life, as all living beings, regardless of any metaphysical implications. Hence, although the starting point is known and certain to everyone, the finishing point is different and *ab initio* uncertain for every one of us.

The bizarre rules of this game are the reason that in the individualist's marathon those who finish first or those who succeed in reaching the finish line sooner or later do not win. On the contrary, in this game, the winners are those who stop before all others and, after leaving the competition, start seeking their fellow athletes. Nevertheless, paradoxically, few are aware of this crucial detail; the vast majority of the participants consider naively the game in question as any other sport with conventional rules. Thus, almost everyone believes that the winners are those who will finish first and so they do their best to exhaust and surpass all their opponents.

It is certainly a fact that in this case, and especially when the first winners are quickly distinguished, e.g. after the first one hundred meters or after the second, third marathon lap, their opponents are greatly surprised—another peculiarity is the fact that this sport has no spectators but takes place only in the presence of co-athletes. Most of them are consequently speechless from the early stop of the game's 'losers', because they wonder why athletes who have been preparing for a long time to run about 42 kilometers give up only after a few meters beyond the starting line.

However, fortunately or not, their surprise does not last for long, since their mind and body are instantly focused once again on the competition and the athletes try to accelerate and gain the few lost seconds.

Nevertheless, most athletes are astounded a few meters before the finish line. This happens because, after they pass the last lap, they realize that after the finish line there is nothing more than a huge stone wall which is impossible to be jumped or climbed. The surprise gets bigger when they look back. Then they realise that none of their opponents are visible in the horizon, as if they were all lost along the way.

It is surprising that none of them noticed a different pathway on the right or left during the course which could lure someone astray, because the road seemed like a one-way road. However, the explanation is once again

unnaturally simple. In this sport not only are the beginning and the finish line different but, in addition, almost the entire route. A few hundred meters after the starting point countless narrow pathways open between the trees and every athlete unconsciously enters into one of them. So everyone follows an isolated course, an individual marathon. One may think that he competes with his opponents during the course, but this is just an illusion due to the fact that his path shortly crosses with the other people's paths; so, the athlete remains under the false impression that he is running with them, while he actually passes in front of or behind others briefly before he continues his unique course.

However, since even this characteristic of the sport is unknown, everyone complacently concludes that he has left all his opponents many kilometers behind without even realizing it because of his exceptional performance. This is actually the version nearly everyone adopts. So they stay still in front of the huge wall and proudly await their opponents for all their life. But they never appear, since –as it has already been mentioned– the finishing line is different for everyone.

Hence, for this reason, the winners are those who, having realized the competition's awkward development, quit the race shortly after the first few meters and begin searching for their co-athletes in order to decide on a common course. Furthermore, winners are also the few ones who will reach at the end of the course (or rarely in some other point) the same conclusion and decide, despite being exhausted, to take the opposite course in order to encounter their starting co-athletes. Nevertheless, in the end, the greatest winners are those who can continue together with their co-athletes until the end of the marathon by following a common course without being discouraged or carried away by the lonely pathways which will frequently appear in front of them.

Nonetheless, the strangest thing in this peculiar competition is that its rules allow everyone to be a winner, as long as everyone wishes so.