



Resource Guide in:
Philosophy of Sport

Introduction

The philosophy of sport is concerned with the conceptual analysis and interrogation of key ideas and issues of sports and related practices. At its most general level, it is concerned with articulating the nature and purposes of sport. The philosophy of sport not only gathers insights from the various fields of philosophy as they open up our appreciation of sports practices and institutions, but also generates substantive and comprehensive views of sport itself. The philosophy of sport is never fixed: its methods demand an inherently self-critical conception of intellectual activity; one that challenges its own preconceptions and guiding principles continuously both as to the nature and purposes of philosophy and of sports.

Body of Knowledge

Being a form of philosophical discourse, the philosophy of sport embodies the formal and contextual character of the parent discipline: philosophy. Unlike the biomedical sciences of sport, philosophers (just like social scientists and humanities scholars) generate research that is overtly reflective of its non-theory neutrality. Intellectual progress can be made in philosophy and the philosophy of sport without presupposing an idea of linear development - or at least largely shared view of cumulative, commensurable, knowledge - that is assumed within the natural or biomedical sciences of sport.

The Fields of Philosophy and their Application in Philosophy of Sport

The philosophy of sport then, is characterised by conceptual investigations into the nature of sport and related concepts, areas and professions. It draws upon and develops many of the diverse branches of the parent discipline, philosophy, and reflects a broad church of theoretical positions and styles. It has most specifically interrogated substantive issues in the following sub-fields of philosophy as exemplified within sport and related human activities involving the use of the body in social practices and institutions:

- aesthetics (e.g. is sport a form of art? are sports events works of art? can we objectively evaluate sports actions aesthetically?)
- epistemology (e.g. can kinaesthetic awareness properly be called knowledge? what precisely do we know when we are able to perform skills? must a coach have performance knowledge at elite level to coach effectively at that level?)

- ethics (e.g. does sport necessarily develop good character? what do we agree to when we agree to play a game? is there such a thing as the ethos of sports?)
- logic (e.g. are sports separate from other spheres of logic by their nature? are the concepts of sport and game logically discrete?)
- metaphysics (e.g. are humans naturally game playing animals?)
- philosophy of education (e.g. can we morally educate through sport? is paternalism in sports coaching and teaching inevitable? what do we mean by the concept “sport skill”?)
- philosophy of law (e.g. can children give consent to engage in elite sports training? do rules underdetermine conduct?)
- philosophy of mind (e.g. is mental training just a form of imagination? are sportspersons simply to be thought of as machines?)
- philosophy of rules (e.g. are regulative sports rules just a species of constitutive ones?)
- philosophy of science (e.g. is there such a thing as a singular method for all sciences? what does a sports scientist mean when they say a given statistical procedure has explanatory power? why do sports psychologists ignore the (post) Freudian tradition?)
- social and political philosophy (e.g. did a pure conception of sport ever exist in a given social and political time and order? are sports competition necessarily capitalistic in nature? do sports institutions always corrupt pure play?)

East and West: the Traditions of Philosophy

Despite the diversity of these fields of applied philosophy in sport, there has been a tendency for one philosophical tradition to dominate: analytical philosophy. This is not to deny that continental philosophy has not developed a sport philosophical literature. Indeed the labels themselves are somewhat misleading – and both, being traditions of western philosophy take no significant account of Eastern philosophy, which in Japan notably has spawned a significant volume of sport philosophical literature.

Given that philosophical research is always and everywhere internally related to the expression of ideas, the idiom of that expression somewhat shapes the boundaries of what can be said. In contrast to the idea that the biomedical sciences of sport represent a universal language housed in technical rationality (“the” scientific method) philosophers working in the continental tradition have largely developed research within the fields of existentialism, hermeneutics and phenomenology. Although the label is itself driven by geographical considerations (the work emanated from communities of scholars in Continental Europe), one finds philosophers of sport right across the globe drawing upon those traditions. Similarly, analytical philosophy though the dominant tradition in the Anglo-American tradition of Western Philosophy is misleading in the sense that some of its founding fathers were indeed from Continental Europe. The drawing of distinctions to represent our experience of the world, however, is common to all schools or traditions of philosophical and sport philosophical endeavour. Given the dominance of the analytic tradition in the English-speaking world, a few more specific words are required in order to make sense of recent developments in the philosophy of sport.

Analytical philosophy emerged as an essentially conceptual enquiry whose aim was foundational. It is often captured in Locke’s famous remark about philosophical work being akin to an under labourer working in the garden of knowledge. As a second-order activity, its central aim was to provide secure foundations for other disciplines by articulating their conceptual

geography. Its pre-eminence was captured by the insistence that conceptual work precedes all proper empirical enquiry. Its exponents were equipped with the analytical tools of dissecting concepts for constituent criteria, drawing conceptual distinctions by their logical grammar and seeking fine-grained differences in their employment. In some quarters, the discipline of philosophy was reduced to the detailing of ordinary linguistic usages and their necessary and sufficient conditions in order to detect the proper meaning (or essence) of concepts that others had to operate with and between. Despite this “new” direction there remained a strong sense of continuity here with the ancient past. Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle too were concerned with making distinctions, bringing clarity where before there was puzzlement or, worse, commonsensical acquiescence.

Many philosophers argue now that we are in a period of post-analytical philosophy. What this means is not entirely clear. We are living through a period of exciting intellectual development in the subject, which is very much reflected in the Philosophy of Sport. While the careful attention to conceptual analysis will always be an essential component of the philosophers’ toolkit, research-driven analyses of the key concepts of sports, games and play, have to a clear extent declined. Of much greater prevalence in the contemporary literature has been the development of substantive axiological issues ranging from social and political philosophy of sport to the rapidly growing field of ethics of sport. Philosophers have been clear about the need to throw off the cloak of apparent neutrality of analytical philosophy in favour of arguing for substantive positions in terms of the “commodification” of sports, their “commercialisation”, and their “corruption”. The development of substantive normative positions has proceeded in addition - rather than in opposition - to the careful articulation of precisely what those concepts logically entail. If these debates have also raged in the social scientific literatures then it is clear that academics in this portion of the philosophy of sport have made their own important contributions, premised on a clear understanding of the potentially diverse conceptualisations of sport. Similarly, in ethics, philosophers of sport have attempted to argue for the aptness of different moral philosophical theories to capture sports’ nature and the nature of sporting actions therein. In these fields, philosophers have generated new ideas about the contested nature of sports ethics itself – whether as contract, or duty/obligation, or utility, or virtue. And in doing so they have often connected with the empirical research of other bodies of knowledge that would have been unimaginable to the “ordinary language philosophers” who saw themselves neutrally dissecting the linguistic usage of others through much of the previous fifty years.

Methodology

Although early analytical philosophers saw themselves elucidating the concepts others used in their sports talk and research, there is a clear sense in which we can say the empirical researchers of the natural and social sciences and the humanities have themselves become much more sophisticated in their conceptual approaches to sports related research. So, one of the traditional roles of the philosophers of sport, to clear the conceptual ground for others to carry out their research, has diminished - though it is never likely to disappear altogether. In politics as in ethics and other branches of study there will always be disputes about what constitutes “democratic processes” or “good character” for these debates are ineliminable from the field itself. Yet the convergence of the conceptual and empirical cuts both ways. Philosophers of sport themselves are paying much greater attention to the processes and outcomes of empirical research. Nevertheless, their focus remains exclusively conceptual in character. Every philosopher worthy of the name still seeks to get things right – even if there is no clear and undisputed sense of what the truth of matters might be. Its task is, through dialogue, to aim at the truth by close attention to valid argumentation entailing the clear

explication of ideas that aim towards truth. In this sense, philosophy does not try to be pure, nor do philosophers of sport attempt to view sports as if they were in a position of complete neutrality, as is presupposed in positivistic research. The old philosophical ideal of philosopher as an ideal spectator embodies a view of sports worlds from nowhere in particular within those worlds. Such a view has largely disappeared in contemporary philosophy of sport. In a clear sense, then, philosophy is returning to its ancient promise to bring wisdom to bear on important matters that concern us (in sports) and not merely to the detailed technical analysis of key concepts.

Relationship to Practice

The diversity of practices that fall within the compass of the different schools and traditions of philosophy means that there is not a universal method to characterise the philosophy of sport. It is impossible therefore to state unequivocally what relations hold between philosophising and practice. While there will always be a portion of philosophical scholarship in sport that is more abstract (whether in the analytical, continental or eastern traditions), there is a growth of more applied work in the fields of axiology. Increasingly, philosophers are making contributions to national and international sports policy development, along with pressure groups, where the need for the knowledge and skills of argumentation philosophers characteristically bring to bear on challenging normative issues is clear. Examples of such applied work include research into diverse conceptions of equity in operation with respect to categories such as gender and race; arbitrating between proper and improper means of performance enhancement and genetic engineering; illuminating the fascistic tendencies of elite sports or the xenophobia of modern sporting nationalism. Many of these issues would have been unthinkable to philosophers fifty years ago but are increasingly becoming part of the standard work of philosophers of sport.¹

Key Texts

The philosophical literature concerning sport is extensive. Historically important and contemporary books in the field notably include the following:

Introductory / Intermediate

Clifford, C. (1995) *The Tenure of Phil Wisdom: Dialogues*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America.

Hyland, D.A. (1984) *The Question of Play*, Washington: University Press of America.

Hyland, D.A. (1994) *Philosophy of Sport*, Maryland: University Press of America.

Inglis, F. (1977) *The Name of the Game: Sport and Society*, London: Heinemann.

Kleinman, S. (Ed.) (1986) *Mind and Body: East Meets West*, Illinois: Human Kinetics.

Kretchmar, R. S. (1994) *Practical Philosophy of Sport*, Illinois: Human Kinetics.

Lumpkin, A.; Stoll, S.K.; & Beller, J.M. (1999) *Sport Ethics: Applications for Fair Play*, (second edition) Boston: McGraw Hill.

McIntosh, P.C. (1978) *Fair Play: Ethics in Sport and Education*, London: Heinemann.

¹ The main text here is adapted from McNamee, M. (2003) "Philosophy of Sport" *Directory of Sport Science*, Champaign; Human Kinetics (in press) to whom we are grateful for permission to reproduce.

- Reid, H. L. (2002) *The Philosophical Athlete*, Durham: Carolina Academic Press.
- Tamboer, J. and Steenbergen, J. (2000) *Sport Filosofie*, Leende: Davon.
- Vanderwerken, D.L. and Wertz, S.K. (Eds.). *Sport Inside Out: Readings in Literature and Philosophy*.
- Vander Zwaag, H.J. (1985) *Toward a Philosophy of Sport*, Fort Worth: University of Texas Press.
- Walton, G.M. (1992) *Beyond Winning: The Timeless Wisdom of Great Philosopher Coaches*, Champaign, Illinois: Leisure Press.

Intermediate / Advanced

- Best, D. (1974) *Expression in Movement and the Arts*, London; Lepus.
- Best, D. (1978) *Philosophy and Human Movement*, London; Allen and Unwin.
- Brohm, J.- M. (1978) *Sport - A Prison of Measured Time*, (second edition), translated by Fraser, I., Worcester: Pluto Press.
- Caillois, R. (1961) *Man, Play, and Games*, New York: Free Press.
- Cantelon, H. and Gruneau, R.S. (Eds.) (1982) *Sport, Culture and the Modern State*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Fraleigh, W.P. (1984) *Right Actions in Sport: Ethics for Contestants*, Illinois, Human Kinetics.
- Galasso, P.J. (Ed.) (1988) *Philosophy of Sport and Physical Activity Issues and Concepts*, Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press.
- Gerber, E. W. and Morgan, W.J. (eds) (1979) *Sport and the Body: A Philosophical Symposium* (second edition) Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger.
- Gibson, J.H. (1993) *Performance Versus Results: A Critique of Values in Contemporary Sport*, Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Gruneau, R.S. (1999) *Class, Sports, and Social Development*, (second edition) Illinois: Human Kinetics.
- Grupe, O. and Dietmar, M. (1988) *lexikon der ethik im sport*, Verlag Karl Hofman, Schorndorf.
- Hargreaves, J. (1991) (Ed.). *Sport, Culture and Ideology*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Hargreaves, J. (1986) *Sport, Power and Culture: a Social and Historical Analysis of Popular Sports in Britain*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hoberman, J. M. (1984) *Sport and Political Ideology*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Hoberman, J. (1992) *Mortal Engines: The Science of Performance and the Dehumanization of Sport*, New York: The Free Press.
- Huizinga, J. (1970) *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, Suffolk: Paladin.
- Keating, J.W. (1978) *Competition and Playful Activities*, Washington: University Press of America.
- Landry, F. and Orban, W.A.R. (Eds.) (1978) *Philosophy, Theology and History of Sport and of Physical Activity*, Quebec: Symposia Specialists.
- Lenk, H. (1969) *Social Philosophy of Athletics*, Illinois: Stipes Publishing.

- Lenk, H. (Ed.). (1983) *Topical Problems of Sport*, Schorndorf: Verlag Karl Hoffman.
- Loland, S. (2002) *Fair Play in Sport: A Moral Norm System*, London: Routledge.
- McNamee, M. J. and Parry, S. J. (Eds.) (1998) *Ethics and Sport*, London, Routledge.
- Metheny, E. (1965) *Connotations of Movement in Sport and Dance*, Iowa: W C Brown.
- Metheny, E. (1968) *Movement and Meaning*, New York: McGraw Hill.
- Mihalich, J. C. (1982) *Sports and Athletics: Philosophy in Action*, Totowa: Littlefield Adams.
- Morgan, W.J. (Ed.) (1979) *Sport and the Humanities: A Collection of Original Essays*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.
- Morgan, W.J. (1994) *Leftist Theories of Sport: A Critique and Reconstruction*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Morgan, W.J. (2000) *Ethics in Sport*, Illinois: Human Kinetics Publishers.
- Morgan, W.J. & Meier, K.V. (Eds.) (1988) *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*, Illinois: Human Kinetics.
- Osterhoudt, R.G. (1991) *The Philosophy of Sport: An Overview*, Champaign, Illinois: Stipes.
- Postow, B.C. (Ed.) (1983) *Women, Philosophy, and Sport*, New York: Scarecrow Press.
- Rigauer, B. (1982) *Sport and Work*, New York: University of Columbia Press.
- Simon, R.L. (1991) *Fair Play: Sports, Values, and Society*, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Slusher, H.S. (1967) *Man, Sport and Existence: A Critical Analysis*, Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger.
- Spicker, S.F. (Ed.) (1970) *The Philosophy of the Body: Rejections of Cartesian Dualism*, Chicago: Quadrangle Books.
- Suits, B. (1978) *The Grasshopper; Games, Life and Utopia*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Tamburrini, C. (2000) *The "Hand of God": Essays in the Philosophy of Sports*, Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg Press.
- Tännsjö, T. and Tamburrini, C. (Eds.) (2000) *Values in Sport: Elitism, Nationalism, Gender Equality and the Scientific Manufacture of Winners*, London: Routledge.
- Thomas, C. E. (1983) *Sport in a Philosophic Context*, Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger.
- Weiss, P. (1969) *Sport: A Philosophic Inquiry*. Southern Illinois University Press.
- Wertz, S.K. (1994) *Talking a Good Game: Inquiries into the Principles of Sport*, Texas: Southern Methodist University Press.

Guide to Journals & Periodicals

Philosophers of sport have tended to publish their research in a wide variety of outlets from scientific to professional journals, including national and international multi-disciplinary journals on sports. Equally, it is very common for philosophers to publish in national and international social scientific sports journals. Only the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, however, published annually since 1974, and twice annually since 2001, is explicitly and exclusively devoted to the subject. The Journal considers the full range of philosophic issues pertinent to sport,

irrespective of the school of thought it emerges from within; it is tightly refereed and internationally indexed. It remains the principal organ for accomplished scholarship concerning the philosophy of sport in the world. The *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* is published by Human Kinetics and is currently Edited by Nicholas Dixon (Editor; Alma College, USA) and Paul Davis (Assistant Editor; University of Wales Institute, Cardiff).

Other secondary outlets for philosophy of sport include:

- International Review for the Sociology of Sport
- Leisure Studies
- European Physical Education Review
- Journal of Sport and Social Issues
- Sport and Society
- Sport, Education and Society
- International Journal of Applied Philosophy
- Journal of Applied Philosophy
- Journal of the Philosophy of Education

Annotated Guide to Internet Resources

<http://www.iaps.net>

The International Association of the Philosophy of Sport (IAPS) website includes all information regarding membership, the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, and information regarding their conference is housed here.

<http://www.philosophyarena.com/philosophyarena/home/home.htm>

The information at the Philosophy Arena website is aimed at lecturers, teachers and students, academic researchers, librarians, and authors. The site also includes resources relating to jobs and conferences.

<http://www.philosophers.co.uk>

The Philosophers' Magazine on the Internet.

<http://www.bu.edu/wcp/index.html>

The Paideia Project On-Line houses 900 papers presented at the 1998 Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy.

<http://www.epistemelinks.com/>

EpistemeLinks.com includes thousands of sorted links to philosophy resources on the internet.

<http://www.smith.edu/~jmoulton/jend.htm>

Guidebook for Publishing Philosophy: Journals.

Additional Resources

The major centres for advanced study and research (in alphabetical order) in the philosophy of sport are:

- Department of Kinesiology, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania, USA
<http://www.hhdev.psu.edu/kines/about/index.html>
- Department of Philosophy, University of Leeds, England
<http://www.philosophy.leeds.ac.uk/>
- Department of Philosophy, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, USA
<http://www.trincoll.edu/pub/academics/departments/philosophy.html>
- Department of Philosophy, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, USA
<http://www.phil.tcu.edu/>
- Department of Physical Education and Recreation, Victoria University of Technology, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
<http://www.srtaustralia.org.au/hotnews/links.asp>
- Department of Physical Education and Sport, State University of New York College at Brockport, Brockport, New York, USA
<http://www.brockport.edu/pes/>
- Department of Sport Sciences, De Montfort University Bedford, England, UK
<http://www.dmu.ac.uk/faculties/ecs/research/sports.jsp>
- Department of Sport, Leisure, and Somatic Studies, / Cultural Studies Program, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA
<http://www.acs.ohio-state.edu/index.php>
- Deutsche Sporthochschule Köln, Cologne, Germany
<http://coe.ed.uidaho.edu/index.cfm?SiteID=8>
- Division of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, Center for Ethics, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho, USA
<http://www.uidaho.edu/ed/hperd/>
- Faculty of Human Movement Sciences, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
<http://www.fbw.vu.nl/indexE.htm>
- Faculty of Education and Sport, University of Wales Institute Cardiff, UK
<http://www.uwic.ac.uk/>
- Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada
<http://www.uwo.ca/fhs/index2.html>
- Institut für Sportwissenschaft, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany
<http://www.fu-berlin.de/cgi-bin/telefon/suche.cgi?name=Berg>
- Institute of Health and Sport Sciences, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan
<http://www.taiiku.tsukuba.ac.jp/>
- School of Sport and Leisure, University of Gloucestershire, England
<http://www.glos.ac.uk/schools/sport/>
- Nippon College of Education, Tokyo, Japan
http://www.nittai.ac.jp/eng/gakubu/tandai_t.html

- Norwegian University of Sport and Physical Education, Oslo, Norway
http://www.nih.no/default_286.aspx.aspx

There are also open learning programmes and resources available via the internet:

<http://www.philosophypathways.com>

Pathways to Philosophy is an open learning programs from the Philosophical Society of England based at Sheffield University, with study guide, essay archive, philosophy notebook, web links and Ask a Philosopher.

<http://www.philosophos.com>

PhiloSophos Knowledge Base provides open learning resources and advice for philosophy students, including feature articles, philosophy lovers gallery, searchable archive of questions and answers, and specialist search engines.

http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/links_stud.html

The Department of Philosophy at the University of Colorado at Boulder website provides links to philosophy writing guides, critical thinking guides, electronic reference works in philosophy, electronic philosophy texts/virtual libraries, and organisations and journals.