

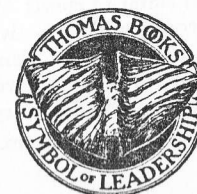
THE PHILOSOPHY OF SPORT

(A Collection of
Original Essays)

Edited by

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To my wife, Kerry,
and children: Kris, Nicole, and Kirk

dents and organized content are both important, and doing is an efficient means of bringing the two together.

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(CHAPTER II)

THE ETHICAL STATUS OF SPORT

INTRODUCTION

AXIOLOGY IS THE philosophic sub-discipline concerned with explaining the realm of value, or significance, as distinct from that of being and knowledge. It is, more directly, the general theory of value. It considers the nature, criteria, and metaphysical status of value. Axiology is further distinguished in terms of its three major subjects of interest: morality, beauty, and the common good. Ethics, or moral philosophy, is that axiologic sub-discipline concerning judgments of approval and disapproval, rightness and wrongness, goodness and badness, virtue and vice with reference to dispositions of actions or states of affairs. It is the study of ideal, individual conduct in view of the nature of good and evil—a prescriptive, or normative, treatment of moral principles and obligation. Major issues in ethics include the nature of the greatest good, the criteria of moral conduct, the motivation of moral conduct, and the merit of life. The essays here presented, then, address themselves to these ethical issues as they are located in the sport condition.

Like the first chapter, this second one begins with a series of three essays. Also like the first chapter, the first of these essays (by James W. Keating) presents a view to which the second and third (by William A. Sadler, Jr. and Robert G. Osterhoudt respectively) respond.

In "The Ethics of Competition and Its Relation to Some Ethical Problems in Athletics," James W. Keating opposes those who emphasize the negative effects of competition, choosing instead to concentrate upon its positive contributions. Professor Keating conceives of competition as an attempt, according to agreed-upon rules, to get or to keep any thing either to the exclusion of others or in greater

measure than others; and suggests that this attempt is rather an ineradicable trait of human nature and one that unreplaceably assists in the construction and maintenance of a viable social hierarchy (the common good).

Professor Keating further distinguishes playful activity (a free, creative activity in which the goal of the participants is to maximize the joy or pleasure of the moment, seeking no goal outside the activity itself) from athletics (physical contests designed to determine human excellence through honorable victory in a contest). That is, the two are radically different in terms of their objectives, and since it is the objectives of each which determine the attitude and conduct proper to them, the attitude and conduct proper to playful activity cannot therefore also be suitable to athletics. By this view, then, playful activity is regarded as a cooperative venture in which the participants seek a mutually obtainable goal, and which is consequently dominated by a spirit of generosity and magnanimity. And athletics is conceived as a competitive venture in which the participants seek a mutually exclusive goal, and which is consequently dominated by a spirit of legalism and interpersonal antagonism. Moreover, Professor Keating concludes, the moral problems created by athletics are largely traceable to its highly competitive nature, and to the excessive desire for victory encouraged by that nature. As a result, the moral category of sportsmanship (as herein construed) applies in a strict sense to playful activity only; such that, its application to athletics becomes merely a rather secondary attempt to mitigate the force and ferocity of the competitive struggle.

William A. Sadler, Jr. in "A Contextual Approach to an Understanding of Competition: A Response to Keating's Philosophy of Athletics" opposes Professor Keating's notion (and defense) of competition on the dual grounds that as conceived it is detrimental to the realization of full humanness (it interferes with regarding others more so as persons than material objects), and that it fails to understand competition in its full cultural context. An examination of competition in cross-cultural perspective, it is held, reveals that it (as construed by Professor Keating) is not a universal occurrence, but one appropriate only to a particular form of cultural bias. In support of this view Professor Sadler presents four types of society in which the

dominant values, and as a result the view of competition, differ: a being society (past-oriented, submissive to nature, fatalistic, in which competition of the Keatingesque sort has no significant place), a becoming society (present-oriented, cooperative with nature, in which competition within a perspective of moderation and cooperation is tolerated), a doing society (future-oriented, controlling of nature, practical, productive, utilitarian, in which competition performs a highly significant role), and a having society (future-oriented, acquisitive of nature, consumptive, in which a spectatorial interest in competition is primary). According to Professor Sadler, then, Professor Keating's view of the competitive motif in both athletics and playful activity rests in a transitional stage between that appropriate to a doing and that proper to a having society. And he is further convinced that it fails to account for alternative views of competition as occurring in other cultural contexts.

The essay concludes with a proposal which suggests the compatibility of play and competition (though differently construed than in the case of Professor Keating's thesis), and expresses support for a so-called sharing culture (in which play and competition would converge to create a condition by which self and social development are at once revered and cultivated). In such a culture, sport could well (and in any instance ought to) promote the development of a more humane world.

In "On Keating on the Competitive Motif in Athletics and Playful Activity," Robert G. Osterhoudt grants Professor Keating his disposition to axiologic subjectivism, as well as his notion of competition and its social utility. The essay concentrates instead upon developing a discussion of the implications of these views for a synoptic conception of man, the social substance, and the common good. That is, according to Professor Osterhoudt's position, the competitive motif as located in athletics and playful activity must be carefully examined with respect to its relation to the public interest (the social order), and not be considered in isolation by itself alone.

Professor Osterhoudt argues that the proposed distinction between athletics and playful activity is, in effect, a discrimination between two radically different ways of regarding activities which may be similar in phenomenal appearance, but are necessarily discrete in

essence, in terms of their goals, or objectives (the primary intentions of their participants). These ways are, in point of fact, the germ of two radically discrete, indeed opposing, views of man, the social substance, and the common good. Professor Osterhoudt then holds that the notion appropriate to playful activity is best preferred, for it allows the coalescence of self-interest and public interest, and thereby creates a harmony among men which is unknown when they are conceived apart from one another. That is, as an essentially cooperative venture, playful activity entails the genuinely sympathetic regard for other men which we seek openly for ourselves, and which is not apparent in the exclusivity of athletics, wherein other men are regarded rather as objects to be overcome and are employed primarily as means for our own gratification. This latter notion (that with respect to the competitive motif in athletics), it is further argued, is potentially destructive of the whole of humanity and resultantly, of the whole of the social substance as well.

In "The Grasshopper; A Thesis Concerning the Moral Ideal of Man," Bernard Suits shows, through a parable presented in dialogue form, that the activities commonly termed work (activity which is only instrumentally valuable to those who engage in it) are self-contradictory in principle, as they seek in the end their own extinction. That is, by this view a life of play (activity which is intrinsically valuable to those who engage in it) is the only justification for work; as it is principally the opportunity to play that work attempts to secure. Such that, it is a state of idleness (a being at play) that man ought to seek foremost—it is an acting in accord with this Grasshopperian ideal which is most worthy of human allegiance.

Game-playing (as an attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by rules, where the rules prohibit more efficient in favor of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity—a voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles) is construed as one instance of play activity. And, irrespective of the phenomenal appearance of such activity, it is the purest form of intrinsic engagement. It is an activity in which what is instrumental is inseparably combined with what is intrinsically valuable, wherein the activity is not itself an instrument for some further end. As such, then, game-playing is

regarded as the essential constituent of the moral ideal of man (that thing, or those things, the only justification for which is that they justify all else). According to this view, consequently, it is game-playing which makes Utopia intelligible; and even in our non-Utopian world, it is game-playing that offers us salvation, that allows us insight into a future and better world.

Professor Suits further observes, however, that virtually everyone alive is engaged in the playing of elaborate games, while at the same moment believing themselves to be going about their ordinary affairs. Most persons, then, allegedly do not, nor will not foreseeably, wish to live their lives as game-players. They are rather disposed to regarding life as worth the requisite effort to preserve it, if, and only if, they believe themselves engaged in doing something useful. The essay thereby concludes on a pessimistic note, which portends the implausible prospect of achieving the Utopian state (realizing the moral ideal of man) earlier envisioned.

Jan Broekhoff in "Sport and Ethics in the Context of Culture" examines Huizinga's segregation of ethics and play, and consequently that of ethics and sport (conceived as a contest for something with all of the characteristics of play). Professor Broekhoff holds that play in its transition to sport incorporates some aspects of the work condition, yet maintains its intrinsic, free, extraordinary, and non-rational qualities, thereby continuing to stand outside the valuations of virtue or vice. Even the rules (laws) of sport which determine its boundaries and the terms of conduct proper to players in a game are not themselves regarded as moral laws here; but merely as terms by which the activity in question is distinguished, or defined.

According to Professor Broekhoff, it is rather through the uncertainty and tension located in sport that morality enters its realm, and then largely from without; that is, largely from the emphasis that a particular society places on the winning and losing of sporting contests, or games. Thus a discussion of the ethical status of sport leads rather inexorably to an examination of the cultural context in which sport appears. The greater the emphasis on winning, it is observed, the greater the proclivity of players to interpret the rules in a strict legalistic manner, to regard them as external sanctions, rather than as exhortations to follow the inner conviction of conscience. That is,

The second chapter concludes with Carolyn E. Thomas' "Do you 'Wanna' Bet: An Examination of Player Betting and the Integrity of the Sporting Event," in which the general nature and significance of gambling, as well as its more specific place in sporting events are explored. Professor Thomas claims that the essential attraction to gambling is attributable to our interest in the chance factor of success; that is, to our risk-taking propensity. Whereby, stress in the forms of chance, uncertainty, adventure, excitement and challenge is actively sought. Unsurprisingly, then, given this rather natural quality, the excessive focus upon the negative aspects of gambling, common in American society, is regarded as inappropriate. Indeed, it is generally the case, so Professor Thomas argues, that such practice is condemned not for itself, but for the consequences commonly accompanying it—occurrences which interfere with so-termed normal societal duties, or demands. At any rate, the positive psychological and social contributions of gambling have been greatly overlooked, according to this view. It is consequently, to an examination of these contributions that the essay is primarily devoted.

By this account, sport, like gambling, provides man with a fertile arena for expressing his risk-taking affinities. In some sports, however (most particularly the so-termed "better than" sports), unlike yet others (most notably the "conquest" sports), the involvement in the sport itself is not a sufficient gamble. In these cases, player betting introduces the chance that coaching and training practices are increasingly designed to eliminate. Assuming the integrity of the players, then, they may be said to gamble for reasons other than the legal and illegal economic ones most commonly cited; in which case the mere act of making a bet does not destroy individual or game integrity, contrary to fashionable claims. According to Professor Thomas, the authoritarian ethic of those who have categorically disallowed player betting is based, then, upon a suspicion of the player as controlling the game in accord with his bet or outside connection, and denies the player the choice to decide and to know what is right and wrong for himself. All of which raises the question as to the function of law generally wherein the integrity of the constituents to it is unconditionally assumed or assumable. Player betting then, by this view, serves the positive function of introducing a risk and excitement into the

game which is not apparent without it, and may even serve to augment performance by offering an additional impetus to it. As such, it is concluded, some means for allowing, even encouraging, player betting ought to be developed.

THE ETHICS OF COMPETITION AND ITS RELATION TO SOME MORAL PROBLEMS IN ATHLETICS

JAMES W. KEATING

COMPETITION DIVERSIFIED

Suppose a person was just beginning an investigation of the subject of competition and he turned to the general catalogue of a large library. What could we safely assume would be his first impression? The chances are overwhelming that he would conclude that "competition" is primarily an economic term and that practically all of its serious investigation has been carried on by economists. Other scholars have, in fact, examined the term but, from the viewpoint of a card catalogue, they appear as rare exceptions.

An investigation, however, soon reveals that we live in a society where other types of competition are almost daily in evidence, obvious in so many different ways. Our political system with its electoral process frequently supplies examples of the most intense competition. Few of us can think of more appropriate alternatives for determining our leaders. How many of you would prefer inheritance as a selective mechanism for choosing our leaders rather than our present form of free elections with all of its short-comings? Our legal system with its advocacy system of law is clearly competitive in many of its aspects and, while it is far from ideal, there has been no mass movement to replace it by another. Even our method of choosing a mate has strong competitive elements whereby prospective suitors often vie with others, similarly motivated, for the attention, affection or marriage of some third person. So natural does this type of competition appear to us that we can hardly conceive of workable alternative methods of selection. Yet for centuries courtship and marriage have been arranged