THE PHILOSOPHY OF SPORT

A Collection of Original Essays

Edited by

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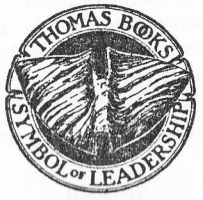

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To my wife, Kerry,
and children: Kris, Nicole, and Kirk

(Chapter I)

THE ONTOLOGICAL STATUS OF SPORT

INTRODUCTION

Metaphysics is the philosophic sub-discipline concerned with the general investigation of reality. It makes claims about the general form of reality, of its ultimate structure and the criteria for establishing that structure. It provides a contextual foundation (a framework, or perspective) from which reality may be apprehended and a general view of it constructed and refined. It is the most general of the philosophic endeavors; and, as such, tempers all other philosophic reflections. Ontology is that metaphysical sub-discipline which concerns the general nature of existence, or the general principles of being. It examines primarily the nature of man and his relation to the other two major metaphysical objects of inquiry, the cosmos (inanimate existence and nature) and God. It is more specifically devoted to an investigation of the nature of self, the relation of mind and body, and the problem of freedom. The essays here presented, then, address themselves to these ontological issues as they are located in the sport condition.

The anthology begins with a series of three essays. The first one of these (by Paul Weiss) presents a view to which the second and third (by Richard L. Schacht and Warren P. Fraleigh respectively) respond.

In "Records and the Man," Paul Weiss offers a general discussion of the nature and significance of athletic records. Such records, he contends, are most properly regarded as objective summaries of what man has done, as indications of that which he is capable, as a medium of comparison among men of differing times and places; more specifically, as symbols of the best that man has yet achieved under con-

trollable conditions through the agency of a well trained body. It is further observed that there are various sorts of records, that they are not obtainable in all sports (not a common attribute of sport generally), that they are neither entirely accurate (objective) measures of performance, and that they do not exhaustively chronicle the occurrences of a sporting event. With respect to this latter concern, Professor Weiss argues that records may be said to provide only partial evidence of what has been done. That is, all such facts fall short of an entirely accurate and complete description of what actually occurs in a sporting event. There are, by this view, aspects of every such event which invariably escape the grasp of measurement, for they occur in conditions which are concrete and unique (unrepeatable), subject to contingencies (every event could conceivably have occurred otherwise), involve novelties, are affected by luck, are beset by obstacles, and are benefitted by opportunities. Most important of those things which athletic records fail to indicate, it seems, are the qualities, or sources of abilities requisite to establishing them. They signify what the recordman has done, but not what he is. They have abstracted from the individual, and so say little of him. According to this account, then, in order to fully understand the sport phenomenon one must go beyond the records, toward the man.

In this essay, Professor Weiss also discusses his views concerning athletic activity and the engagement of the athlete in that activity. He contends that the athlete, through the rigorous and dedicated use of an excellent body, determines the articulation of past and future; that is, seeks a unification of a worthy past and a desirable end, so as to attain a maximal present result. By this view, the athlete attempts to realize an idealized conception of himself (a view of himself at his utmost) in an objectively judged and severe public test. Such that, a person engaged in a form of activity resembling sport in phenomenal appearance, but for the purpose of realizing pleasure or relaxation, is said to be inauthentically involved—playing at, and not in, sport.

It is precisely to this notion, and not specifically to that of athletic records that Richard L. Schacht's "On Weiss on Records, Athletic Activity, and the Athlete," objects most vigorously. Professor Schacht argues that it is Professor Weiss' emphasis upon the *results* of athletic

activity, of which athletic records are an example, which leads him to his errant conception of it. According to this view, these results are quite incidental to the fundamental nature of athletic activity, and to the sort of intrinsic enjoyment and satisfaction available to participants in such activity who perform to the best of their ability. Professor Weiss' notion of an athlete is thereby regarded as an excessively limited and demonic one—one not dedicated to the attainment of a complete and fulfilled life. That is, its criteria for allowing one to be regarded as an athlete (or as being engaged in athletic activity) are much too strict and also give insufficient attention to the intellectual requirements of athletic involvement. In order to properly understand the nature and significance of athletic activity as a potentially important component of a truly human life, Professor Schacht contends, one must seek a thorough awareness of the nature and significance of man generally. One must not merely look beyond the record to the athlete, but look beyond the athlete to the man as well.

Professor Schacht concludes his examination of this matter by claiming that his view, unlike that of Professor Weiss, has the virtue of neither dehumanizing athletic activity nor placing the athletic goal beyond the reach of all but the very young and the very talented. This appeal comes to one of a largely existential dimension: it is an existential response to a predominantly idealistic thesis. And of athletic records themselves he suggests merely that the imprecision pointed to by Professor Weiss is generally the well known case for all historical records, and so says nothing peculiar, nor distinctly instructive, of their athletic form.

In "On Weiss on Records and on the Significance of Athletic Records," Warren P. Fraleigh holds that, like all such devices, athletic records are only capable of approximating that which actually occurs during an event. It is, therefore, not reasonable to expect complete insight from them. Professor Fraleigh then quickly turns his attentions from the nature of athletic records to an examination of that which an interest in keeping records tells us of humankind generally. He holds that they are of interest principally because they act as sources of symbolic meaning which are available and important to us. That is, they are significant in terms of which they satisfy a continuing human desire for knowledge of the human condition, of human

status in the world, of self-identity. In effect, records (in various forms) offer a comparison between oneself, other selves, and certain standards of performance.

Professor Fraleigh also attempts to clarify Professor Weiss' notion of the distinction between the end sought by an athlete and that sought by musicians, scientists, philosophers, religious and ethical men. He suggests that more so like than dissimilar from involvement in these other endeavors, the athlete seeking the achievement of the so-termed well-played game uses his body in greater measure than these others, though not essentially unlike them; is able to articulate what a complete, fulfilled life is, though in somewhat different terms than these others; and is engaged in an essentially cooperative enterprise, also much like the others. That is, unlike Professor Weiss with respect to this issue, Professor Fraleigh argues that the difference here is primarily one of degree, and not one of a substantial order.

In "Assumptions About the Nature of Human Movement," Roselyn E. Stone examines the general theories of movement advanced by François Delsarte, Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, Rudolf Laban, and Rudolf Bode. In some measure, each of these theorists regarded movement as a medium for the expression of spirit/soul/self, the harmonization of body and mind, and the communication of the self with other and larger metaphysical entities.

To Delsarte is attributed the view that movement frees expressive impulses thereby bringing one into an unobstructed relationship with the Divine—that it effects an intimate fusion (unity) of Mind, Life, and Spirit, of art and science. To Dalcroze, Professor Stone attributes the view that movement harmonizes body and spirit in such a fashion as to create individuality, which is the basis of all the arts. By this view, then, movement may be further construed as an idealized form of musical rhythm through which the whole of man's spatio-temporal familiarity is established. Laban conceives of movement as a rhythmic relating and balancing of inner efforts to environmental (external) forces—as a medium of expression by which man's highest and most fundamental inspirations are cultivated and fulfilled. And to Bode is attributed the notion of movement as an individual, instinctive rhythm which manifests itself in terms of its freeing the individual toward his fuller expression. Professor Stone concludes that despite

their general logical inadequacy, there is about each of these conceptions a certain intuitive attraction. And it is also apparent that each serves to draw our attention to the high ontological place enjoyed by movement and its various forms.

Through a rigorous analysis Bernard Suits in "The Elements of Sport" demonstrates that the elements of sport are essentially identical to those of game. Games are identified as attempts to achieve a particular state of affairs (prelusory end), using only means permitted by rules (lusory means), where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favor of less efficient means (constitutive rules), and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity (lusory attitude). And it is this lusory attitude which unifies the other elements into a cohesive view of game-playing. This sort of activity (game-playing), it is further argued, differs so signficantly from ordinary activities, that it allows one to realize that which is not otherwise readily realizable—a fact which serves to explain our engagement in it.

Also proposed is a conception of sport as any instance of game, which primarily involves skill (as opposed to chance) of a physical sort, and which enjoys a wide following that has achieved a certain measure of institutional stability. With an allegiance to the leisure (play) ethic, Professor Suits holds as well that sport is precisely like the other prominent leisure interests; that is, a type of intrinsic good (play) which gives work its derivative seriousness, and not, as the fashionable work ethic would have it, itself (as a form of play) metaphysically or axiologically derivative of work.

In the best traditions of phenomenologic treatments of sport, Scott Kretchmar's "Ontological Possibilities: Sport as Play" examines the possibilities of sport being play; that is, demonstrates the intelligibility of sport being played. Much in the form and spirit of the transcendental method of argument, the essay argues from an inchoate order of experience, or consciousness, which identifies sport as a form of play, and proceeds to an examination of the bases of this consciousness. Also in the best expectations of phenomenologic forms of inquiry, the essay seeks an apprehension of the absolute, or universal, cognitive bases of this consciousness, and is not content with a mere description of particular, external, biological, psychological, or socio-

logical reports of it. Professor Kretchmar's penchant analysis allows him to reduce play and sport to their most fundamental levels and to there determine the relationships among them. From this analysis the essay attempts to offer a positive notion of the elusive nature of play—to tell what it is—and to indicate what such a view says of play (and subsequently of sport) as distinct from work.

The themes of freedom (from worldly concern), intrinsicality, unique temporality and spatiality, and opposition are developed in an effort to show that the play act, unlike that of work, is not a curtailed thrust toward specific ends, but a spontaneous expression of self. The analysis further leads Professor Kretchmar to a uniquely attractive notion of competition as opposition. By this view, the phenomenon of opposition as located in play is said to entail something distinct from oneself, which fully cooperates in assisting one to express that which he is. Such that, in play one expresses himself *with* the hindrance of so-termed opposing forces and not in spite of it. This motif effects a sympathetic, self-constructive bond among players (and sportsmen), which is not accessible to those who act in accord with the spirit of work. In the work motif other men and the task at hand are extrinsically valued and thereby regarded rather as empirical objects to be vanquished or used in the achievement of a future goal. The essay concludes with a denial of the notion that one's lived experience in any situation is defined by the pure content of either work or play, but opts rather for the view that the phenomena of work and play are most commonly admixed in the experience of all activities.

In accord with its avowed existential and phenomenological allegiances, William Morgan's "An Existential Phenomenological Analysis of Sport as a Religious Experience" rejects conceiving of the essence of sport in terms of its institutional forms. Such conceptions, he contends, merely report extraneous responses, or extrinsic capabilities, and do not serve to distinguish the ontological status of sport from that of play, recreation, physical education, and the like, and thereby allow insufficient insight into its essential nature and significance. Mr. Morgan proposes instead that, the quest for sport is best regarded as an aspiration of being itself—being as disclosed by conscious experience, and not as manifest in disparate social encounters. By this view, being is construed as the fundamental interpretive principle of reality, and, resultantly, as the source and end of all striving (to include that form common to sport). The essay further argues that the true stuff of sport is best revealed by cultivating the religious inclinations of being which are inherent in, and fundamental to, sport. The religious experience of sport, then, is defined as a self-surrender to the forces of being.

Discussions of such familiar existential themes as absurdity, anguish, anxiety, asociality, boundary situation, choice, despair, emptiness, faith, finitude-infinitude relation, revolt, struggle, and transcendence as they are located in sport as religiously experienced serve to further refine the general thesis of the essay. As a result of this analysis, Mr. Morgan comes to regard the other in sport not as a mere object of appropriation, but rather as one of love. In his examination of competition-in, competition-with, and competition-for, he holds that competitive success is most constructively regarded as an inward triumph, an integrating and liberating experience, an opportunity to be what one is most fundamentally.

It is the intent of Warren P. Fraleigh's "The Moving 'I' " to demonstrate in a phenomenologic-tending fashion, the terms in which self-knowledge, or self-identity, is available to participants in sport, dance, aquatics, and exercise; that is, to show the meaning of man as a moving being. Professor Fraleigh argues from a report of personal experience to an interpretation of the meanings, or significance, of that experience for man generally, as well as for his involvement in these human movement forms. He contends that through an experience of, and a reflection upon these forms one comes to an awareness of his own identity as an individual, and as a member of humanity (an awareness of being at once, though in discrete terms, different from other beings, yet alike them).

Further discussed in defense of this thesis are the ostensibly paradoxical lived-body experiences of freedom (the self as controlled only by the exercise of one's own free will) and necessity (the self as externally controlled, or determined), tenderness and violence, and cooperation and competition in these activities. By this view, the moving self may experience himself as a free agent, voluntarily choosing, or entering, a particular sport condition within which certain move-

ments are necessitated. As such, he becomes aware of his identity as an objective I (represented by his action) and as a subjective I (represented by his intention), and realizes a unique conciliation of them. He may achieve here as well a direct bodily awareness of a personal capacity for both tenderness and violence, cooperation (which leads one to regard ones so-termed opponents as other subjects) and competition (which encourages the regarding of others as objects to be overcome). Professor Fraleigh is further convinced that participants in these activities are paradoxically enhanced by their association with these seemingly opposing experiences—that the positive and negative self-identity feelings accruing from such experiences are mutually reinforcing.

In his "Some Meanings of the Human Experience of Freedom and Necessity in Sport," Warren P. Fraleigh in a phenomenologic-tending fashion, further extends his analysis of the lived-body experience of freedom and necessity in sport. Once again, he proceeds from an experience to an interpretive treatment of its meaning in an attempt to show that sport provides an opportunity for the clarification of ones self-identity. Profesosr Fraleigh's insightful observations with respect to the differing senses in which men may experience freedom and necessity in sport suggest the conditional limitations of ones freedom therein.

The lived-body experience of necessity in sport is variously construed as: deterministic (the human body as an object subject to control by natural laws), a personal condition of motor inability (failure to perform motor acts effectively due to psychomotor insufficiency), a personal condition of physiological inability (failure to respond effectively to sport conditions due to physiological insufficiency), and a restriction upon the choice of movements performed (self-chosen rule restrictions). And the lived-body experience of freedom in sport is diversely conceived as: the freedom from deterministic necessity (the appearance of an ephemeral conquest of restrictive natural laws), the freedom for the realization of personal intentions (the ability to perform prescribed skills, to realize performance intentions), the freedom for creating new personal intentions (the ability to create new personal intentions by developing entirely new skill techniques), and the freedom to be unified (the unification with self and with not self—the acting in accord with all that which is both

internal and external to self—the creation of a harmony of self and not self).

The first chapter concludes with Francis W. Keenan's "The Concept of Doing." In this essay, Professor Keenan examines the Deweyan concept of doing as a general educational activity, and suggests the implications of this view for physical education, sport, and physical activity. Though commonly overemphasized (under the guise of Deweyanism) in such endeavors as physical education and sport, doing is regarded by Dewey as only the initial stage, albeit a necessary one, of the learning process—as the foundation upon which all else is learned. Indeed, the doing stage of the curricular process provides only experiential data and a knowledge of *how to do* things, all of which acts as a mere prelude to achieving the sorts of understandings (cognitive forms of awareness) Dewey wished to cultivate foremost (in the information and science stages of curriculum). These understandings culminate, then, in the science stage, which seeks to create a better life for man by advancing an awareness of the continuity of socio-cultural values and thereby supporting a commitment to democracy.

According to Professor Keenan, consequently, physical education and sport are assigned a place in the curriculum for intellectual and social, rather than expedient, reasons. Like all other curricular inclusions, then, Professor Keenan concludes, physical education and sport must pursue an understanding (a refined, conscious experience) in this case of the fundamental nature and social significance of human movement phenomena, and not merely provide opportunities for a mindless doing of things. That is, physical education, like the whole of education, must promote an intelligence with respect to doing, and not merely engage in the performing of acts.

RECORDS AND THE MAN

Paul Weiss

I

Athletic records often have an attractive mathematical precision. They then allow one to measure with some accuracy just what is