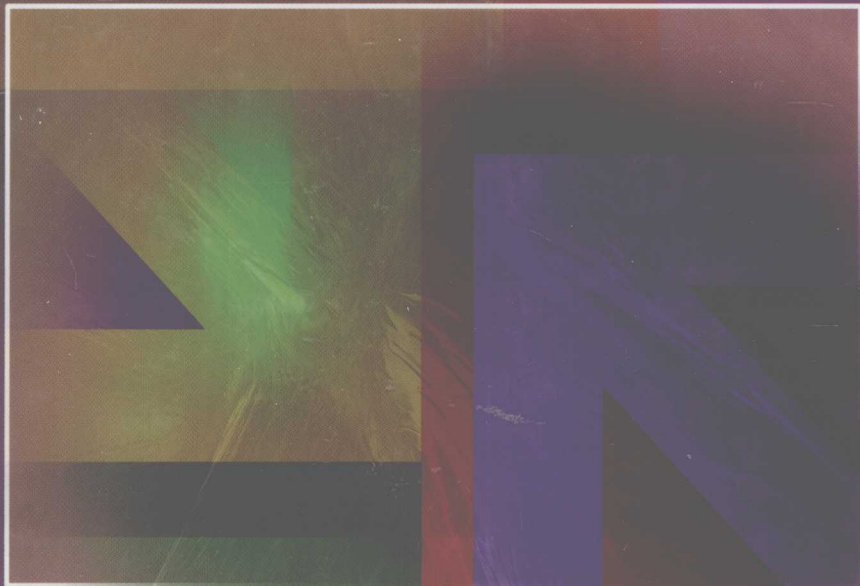


SECOND EDITION

Practical Philosophy of Sport and Physical Activity



R. Scott Kretchmar

PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

SECOND EDITION

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*For Janet Kretchmar,
my partner for life and my best friend*

PREFACE

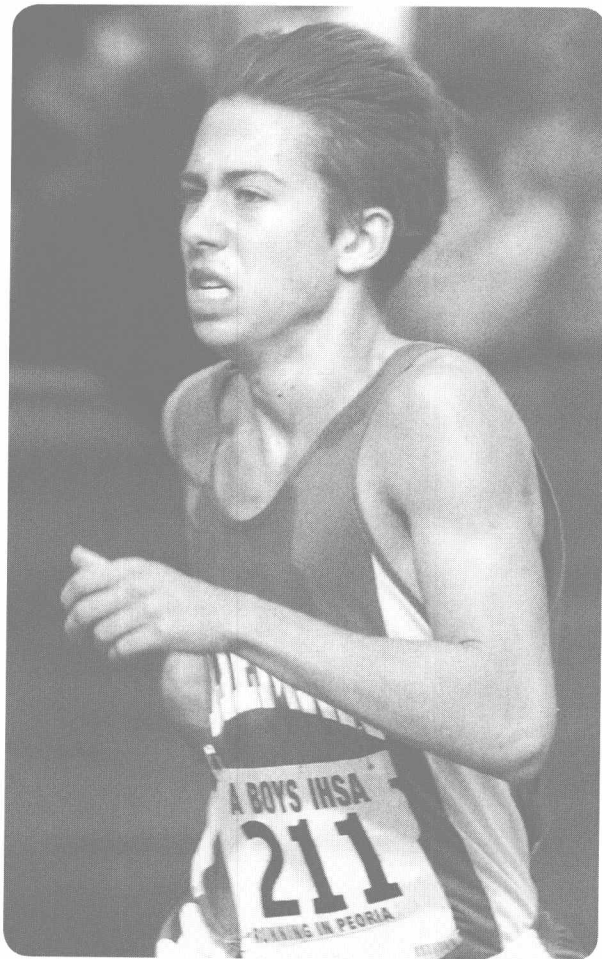
Kinesiology professionals today work in a schizophrenic environment. On one hand, people seem almost fixated on physical prowess—on professional athletes and their remarkable feats, on the drama of the Olympic Games, and on the fate of local teams. Many individuals value physical health, good looks, youthful attitude, and long life above almost anything else. Televised sport and the income it generates have produced athletes who make more money than university presidents, world-renowned scientists, and heads of state. The leisure industry is the second largest industry in America, producing over \$400 billion annually in direct spending (AAHPERD 2003).

On the other hand, physical activities are often devalued. We continue to endure stereotypes about “dumb jocks” and claims that university kinesiology programs are not intellectually challenging. Physical education is often the first subject to be cut from public schools when budgets are tightened. In a world that values productivity and work, games and play have an ambiguous status at best. And where dualistic thinking still holds sway, mind is valued over body, thinking over doing.

It is difficult to know what to make of this. Should we be flattered or disturbed? Optimistic or pessimistic? My personal conviction is that we should be optimistic, but not because sport is popular, or because people are preoccupied with how they look, or because athletes are among the best-paid performers in the world. Rather, our optimism should be rooted in something that is much more fundamental—our humanity. I hope that this book will help us come to see that to move skillfully and expressively is part of being human. I claim that this is so for all people, no matter where they live. While the form and meaning of physical activity vary under these conditions, and while the differences may be as important as the similarities, the fundamental value of movement and many of its qualities are common to the human community.

This optimism regarding movement may sound strange in a push-button, sedentary world where technology has eliminated or reduced many of the physical demands of living. Both rural and urban residents have laborsaving devices that lessen their reliance on endurance, strength, and refined motor skills. While physical skill and vigor were once requirements for human existence, they now seem to be optional.

While this is true at one level, in this book we will attempt to see why reduced activity is not really a human choice—or better said, why it is not a good choice. In order to see how movement is integrated with well-being, we need to consider alternative ways we can incorporate activity into our lives. Some ways may



In movement we find our humanity.

not work as well as others, and as movement professionals, we need to understand why this is so. Movement can be boring, painful, even alienating. Half an hour on an exercise bicycle is a torturous eternity for some people. Angry or vengeful competition can turn our opponents into hated enemies. Adolescent athletes who are pushed too hard can burn out and end up hating the very activities that once brightened their lives.

But movement can also be joyful, liberating, and a resource for friendship and community. We need to examine philosophic principles that support these positive experiences.

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

This book is for aspiring and experienced kinesiology professionals, not for card-carrying philosophers. I do not assume a background in sport philosophy or philosophy in general. This volume should be accessible to advanced undergraduates, to experienced kinesiologists, and to any other lovers of human movement

who are reasonably well-read and have an inquisitive mind.

This text may also be useful for entry-level graduate students who want an introduction to the philosophy of sport and would like to better understand philosophy's role in a field that has been associated far more with empirical science than with the humanities. Graduate students need to use this text in conjunction with other texts that provide a more in-depth treatment of various issues, such as analysis of the mind-body relationship, sport ethics, movement aesthetics, and educational philosophy.

In the acknowledgments, I mention my debt to Dallas Willard, an early mentor of mine who taught me that the value of philosophy lies in the search for practical answers, the kind that improve the lives of real people. This book has been written in that spirit. It is an attempt to see how and why skilled movement can play a central role in our search for a happy, healthy existence.

However, I am also aware that good answers are hard to come by. This volume is not an answer book or a compendium of wisdom. It is a book that raises questions that are worthy adversaries not only for kinesiologists but also for generations of philosophers. Much like science, philosophy is never finished. In both fields, we work hard to get more complete and accurate answers and then, just when we think we have it right, a new perspective presents itself and gives us pause. We return to the laboratory or the library and try to do better. This text puts us on a philosophic path, has us wrestle with potential insights, but does not lead us all the way to our destination.

COMMITMENTS AND ASSUMPTIONS

In this book I borrow from a number of philosophic traditions. I have found that answers to questions about the significance of activity do not fall under any one school of thought. For example, several existentialists pay close attention to the central role of embodiment in human development; Zen Buddhists provide insights about the power of intuitive thinking in movement; pragmatists are open to hands-on experiences and holistic understandings of personhood; anthropological philosophers help to uncover the crucial role that movement has played in our evolutionary development; and even certain idealists discuss embodiment and its significance in human culture. For instance, Plato, in spite of valuing contemplation over action, believed physical activity had an important role to play in the education of Greek citizens.

As with most philosophic works, however, this volume favors certain points of view over others. To be sure, this comes in part from personal bias. But it also comes from a commitment to find at least partial answers to philosophic questions. Those of us who are interested in applying philosophy to real-world problems are more committed to getting things at least partly right than to being comprehensive and even-handedly dispassionate. Those of us who want to put philosophy to work naturally favor positions that better explain our experiences at school, in the gymnasium, or at the clinic. We naturally gravitate toward philosophic positions that best help us solve the problems we encounter in those places.

I picture philosophy as a journey from lesser to greater clarity and insight. Because we are fighting our way through this overgrown path and have no way to get a bird's-eye view of our progress, it is difficult to say where we are at any one time. But our reflections should stimulate us to move forward even if some of the positions supported here do not exactly clear the trail. By the end of the text, we should have found some answers that will make a difference in our personal and professional lives. We should fully expect to make some progress in figuring out the nature and value of human movement.

Here are some of the commitments I have made that color the analyses in the chapters that follow:



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Philosophy is a journey.

♦ *I doubt that analytical, logical analyses provide the deepest insights about movement.* While principled abstractions provide useful information about such matters as games and play, messy, lived experiences provide even better resources for insight. I appeal to uneven and varied life experiences for verification of claims while using analytic distinctions judiciously, usually only to clarify extreme positions or outline the terrain to be examined.

♦ *I am convinced that holistic understandings are more powerful than monistic or dualistic understandings.* For example, holistic medicine appears to have advantages over other forms of therapy that treat the human being simply as a collection of cells (monism) or as a composite of body plus mind (dualism). I argue for a holistic understanding of who we are as human beings, which provides important clues about how we might maximize the benefits of physical activity.

♦ *I am biased in favor of pragmatic approaches to answering movement questions.* I do not see the world as ideally fixed once and for all, even though it is fairly stable in many ways. Movement and good living seem to be intertwined in multiple ways ranging from the extrinsic use of activity for health and fitness to its intrinsic satisfactions and playful excesses. This interconnection also exists at different levels, from the chemical to the cultural, from the biological to the

artistic. Movement can work toward the betterment of humankind in a variety of ways, but it can also have less salutary effects. This ambiguity is present when we try to determine what works best in our professional settings. In spite of our desire for decisive answers, this approach suggests that good professional practices are frequently built not on clear-cut, black-and-white solutions, but on solutions that are shades of gray.

♦ *I place little emphasis on the philosophy of culture.* While it is not possible to strip this book of all political, economic, and religious ideology, the text does not explicitly look at sport through the lenses provided by, for example, Marxism, capitalism, nationalism, or any particular religion. The emphasis here is on the philosophic roots of movement in human life. The text focuses on what we share as members of a common species while acknowledging that cultural, economic, and political perspectives are important.

ORGANIZATION

This text is arranged in four parts. Part I discusses the nature and tools of philosophy. Chapter 1 gives first-time philosophy students a sense of the field—what philosophers do, how philosophy complements science, and whether or not we can place any confidence in philosophic conclusions. Chapter 2 focuses on giving you the skills to think critically and clearly.

Part II turns to the nature of people. We start by looking at two of the most popular interpretations of human beings, mind–body dualism (chapter 3) and scientific materialism (chapter 4). While both positions have their strengths, I argue that they are also misleading in important ways. Thus, in chapter 5 we enter two hypothetical tournaments to see how well kinesiology can compete under the banners of dualism and materialism. We do not fare very well, so in chapter 6 we look at an alternative position called holism. Then in chapter 7 we attempt to see how holism may allow us to be more effective in the kinesiology workplace.

Part III directs us to the subject matter of kinesiology. What do we offer our students and clients? What are we about? In chapter 8 we look at movement and play. In particular, we examine the process of growing playgrounds and strategies for growing genuine players. In chapter 9 we turn to games, competition, and the significance of winning. We also examine movement as work, dance, exercise, and routine living.

Finally, in part IV we turn to professional ethics. Chapter 10 provides an introduction to ethics, including our moral responsibilities as professionals and ways we can improve our ethical behavior. Chapter 11 directs our attention to “the good life.” We look at the traditional movement values of health, fun, skill, and knowledge, examining a strategy for ranking these potential contributions to good living. Then in chapter 12 we speculate on one ranking that gives priority to skill and a brand of knowledge called lived wisdom. We look at our services in terms of liberal-arts values, intrinsic goods that improve the quality of life.

We also review four profiles of the active lifestyle and draw conclusions about whether the good life is available to those who turn their backs on embodiment and choose to live their lives mostly in chairs.

FEATURES

At the start of each chapter, you will encounter a brief introduction to the topic at hand. This should stimulate your curiosity about the material to come. Accordingly, each introduction concludes with a series of provocative questions that we address somewhere in the chapter.

Next comes a brief road map of where we will be heading. This bulleted material identifies the key topics in the order in which they appear.

Philosophic exercises interrupt the text from time to time. These activities require you to think for yourself and draw some of your own conclusions. Philosophy is, after all, an active, rewarding process. It is important for all of us to practice our philosophic thinking, and these exercises provide just such an opportunity.

In most cases, it is important to complete the philosophic exercise before moving ahead. This is because you will frequently find at least partial answers to each exercise in the text that follows. While peeking at answers may save time, it does little for developing philosophic skills. More important, it takes the fun out of doing philosophy ourselves.

Where chapters are long or the material is unusually complex, brief summaries keep us on course. These summaries remind us where we have been, why we visited those places, and what we discovered.

At the end of each chapter you will find a review, a brief description of where we are headed next, and study questions. While all three elements are useful, the transition to future chapters is perhaps most important of all. The 12 chapters of the book are more places of respite on a single trail than a dozen separate trips. It is important to see the connections between where we have been and where we are going to next.

Taking philosophic trips like this is a luxury. Some individuals are pressed into work before they have a chance to think. Others are in a rush to make money, make a name for themselves, or simply get a degree and get out. Still others prefer to be told what to do. Philosophy asks you to slow down, think for yourself, and intelligently evaluate your personal and professional options.

Experience has taught many of us that we have limited opportunities to find our way on the highway of life. You might best do some planning before you pull out into the busy traffic. You will certainly have other chances to ponder and plan, but I hope you will take this opportunity to slow down and enjoy the reflective terrain in the pages ahead.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to many individuals for any ideas in this book that have merit. For all the others, I take full responsibility. In the extent to which the former is the case, I thank all of you for your good papers and books. In the extent to which the latter is true, I can only say that I should have read more carefully and listened more intently.

Many individuals who shaped my thinking are cited on the pages that follow. I read their work, was impressed by it, and shamelessly adopted it followed by an appropriate reference. Others are not included in footnotes or the bibliography, but their influence is nonetheless here. In some cases, I may have forgotten where an idea came from and improperly presented the notion as if it dropped out of the sky or, even worse, as if I were its source. In other cases, those who influenced my thinking did not write much themselves, or their publications did not fit the format and topics of this text. This too resulted in deserving names being absent from these pages.

While I was at Oberlin College, my philosophic interest was kindled by Professor Ruth Brunner. Against a background provided by the dominant pragmatic physical education philosophies of the day, she introduced me to the exciting anthropological philosophical thinking of Eleanor Metheny and the existential-tending analyses of Howard Slusher. Both were then located at the University of Southern California, so the choice of a doctoral program was not a difficult one to make. Metheny and Slusher were dynamic and inspiring—though in very different ways. As an erstwhile philosopher, I could not imagine studying at a more exciting place. A third individual at USC, Professor Dallas Willard, invited several fellow students and me into the Philosophy Department. He helped make this otherwise intimidating environment a place to learn and, most importantly, a resource for thinking that would have a practical impact on the world. I can still hear him sternly pulling us back to earth when, one day, a few advanced students reverted to some philosophic showmanship, “If philosophy does not help us live better lives,” he warned, “then we have absolutely no reason to be here!”

My mentor after USC was Warren Fraleigh. I worked for him at Brockport for 13 years and loved every moment of it. He was, and still is, my surrogate father. Warren taught me a great deal of philosophy but, even more importantly, provided an example of academic courage and integrity, in short, a profile of a good person. I continue to watch and learn.

At Penn State I have been blessed with a number of fine colleagues, but most notably with Doug Anderson from the Philosophy Department. His support of my graduate students (I should say, *our* graduate students) has been most gratifying.

Over the years, we have watched a number of bright, young people grow and thrive at Penn State. Many of them are cited in the pages that follow, and all of them helped to shape the ideas that made their way into this book. Among those who wrote philosophic theses, dissertations, and articles are David Dimmick, Tim Elcombe, Luanne Fox, Alun Hardman, Doug Hochstetler, Pete Hopsicker, Rich Lally, Doug McLaughlin, Jim Nendel, Brian Richardson, Susan Saint Sing, Howard Shultz, Cesar Torres, and Kurt Zimmerman. Sigmund Loland spent a year at Penn State en route to his degree in Norway.

I am also indebted to my wife, Janet, the person to whom this volume is dedicated. She spent many evenings and weekends wondering when this volume would be completed. (I too spent many evenings and weekends wondering when this volume would be completed.) But she always understood that this book was something that had to be done, and her support during the process was invaluable. So too was the moral support provided from a distance from my children, Matt and Jen. In truth, families write books, not individuals.

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◆ *Part I* ◆

THE NATURE AND METHODS OF PHILOSOPHY

In this section you will become acquainted with philosophy and its methods. It is important to start here for several reasons. First, many of you may be more comfortable with the techniques of science than those of the humanities. Second, you likely have been socialized to trust science more than philosophy. Finally, you need to understand where and how philosophy fits in—what it does and how it can join science in providing more complete answers to our questions.

The following two chapters provide an introduction to philosophy that starts from the ground up. In chapter 1, you begin by testing your philosophic readiness and learning to identify basic philosophic questions. In chapter 2, you will use the methods of philosophy on two complex ethical questions—the moral acceptability of running up the score on an overmatched opponent, and the ethics of using performance-enhancing substances in order to improve competitive capabilities.

