

THE PHILOSOPHY
OF SPORT

AN OVERVIEW



Robert G. Osterhoudt

**THE PHILOSOPHY OF SPORT:
AN OVERVIEW**

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Of the rank heap of unaccomplished manuscripts I've thusfar managed, this is the best. Its publication marks the fulfillment of many creative ambitions for me. And it likewise brings to fond remembrance the many extraordinary persons who have contributed so significantly to the thoughtful formulation of those ambitions and to the "successful" execution of them. Not the least of those who on both counts have made me much of what I am and want most to be are the most memorable of my teachers and coaches: Dr. Wilbert Bolton, Dr. Benton Bristol, Mr. David Clemson, Mr. John Doolittle, Mr. Norman Gordon, Mr. Jackson Horner, Mr. William Leonard, Mr. William Long, Dr. Fredric Mitchell, Dr. Chauncey Morehouse, Dr. Richard Nelson, Mrs. Maretta Rice, Dr. Richard Schacht, Dr. Harold Schilling, and Mr. Walter Weaver.

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PREFACE

Sporting (and related) activity is no stranger to the odyssey of human experience. It has been a significant feature of most every culture and most every epoch in human development. Quite a great deal has been correspondingly thought and written about it. The literature concerning its humanistic possibilities (its religious, artistic, historical, and philosophical possibilities) is nonetheless astonishingly thin. The accomplished philosophical literature, in turn, is too especially sparse and it is also remarkably recent. This literature has nonetheless widened and deepened notably in the past twenty to thirty years; its volume and quality now constitutes an essential corpus of insight with respect to sport. From largely empty exhortations and wishful stipulations, the philosophy of sport has developed a highly creative and critical, if, as yet, a diminutive literature. The achievements of the last several decades in this respect have been largely the consequence of importing the rigors of philosophy (in its most searching form) to a study of sport. Among the most telling conclusions of this process demonstrates that a fully human, a "complete" account of sport depends necessarily on an examination of its fundamental nature and purpose, on a philosophical examination of it. For it is on a basis established by such an examination, and only on such a basis, that the other essential features of sport (i.e., the biological, psychological, sociological, religious, artistic, and historical features) and sport itself (i.e., sport as such) can be made wholly intelligible, can be appreciated in an authentically enlightened way, and can be practiced with a sensitivity and a passion befitting genuinely human beings.

The basic intent of this manuscript is to give an overview account of the philosophy of sport in its most fully developed form, to give an overview account of the philosophy of sport in the form of its taking on the character, and developing in the context of philosophy proper. The philosophy of sport is itself interpreted here as a type of philosophic discourse, as a full participant in the broad domain of philosophy as such. The volume thereby aims at a characteristically philosophic examination of sport, eschewing the tendency to scientific accounts, to dogmatic (unargued proclamations of opinion) treatments, and to apologetic (unargued exhortations to believe or to do something) appeals. I have taken caution throughout to give approximately "equal" attention to both the rigors of philosophy and to the issues most pertinent to the

fundamental character and purpose of sport itself. For only in this way can sport be located in the larger perspective of reality as a whole, in the larger perspective of distinctly human event (of which philosophy is the formal end), and may the reign of our fully human possibilities in sport be made aptly conspicuous. Likewise, only in this way can I fairly claim to be talking about the philosophy of sport in the best and most instructive sense. Careful readers of the philosophical literature concerning sport may recall an earlier effort of mine in this direction, an especially sorry, and largely failed effort, I am eager to admit, but an effort that nonetheless established the groundwork for the current attempt. The present volume has grown out of an attempt to improve on the feckless tome of thirteen years ago, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Physical Education and Sport. The revisions, as against the original, are so sharp, however, that they warrant another title.

The original conception of the book and its basic temperament are owed to the formative genius of Earle F. Zeigler's Philosophical Foundations for Physical, Health, and Recreation Education. The largely preliminary and transitional significance of the book, which I have copied from Zeigler, argues from the widest perspective to the finest, both within chapters and (largely) across them. In this way, the most fundamental philosophic ground of reflection about sport is made explicit throughout; reflection about sport unfolds in the "full" context of its philosophic residence, not as fragmented bits of knowledge unconnected to this context or only tacitly related to it. The first chapter is devoted to a concise account of the nature, significance, and method of philosophy as such. It entails a systematic treatment of philosophy's main concepts, and it attempts to sketch the broad foundations, and to thereby make "full" preparation for what follows in subsequent chapters. The second chapter deals with the main concepts of the philosophy of sport, concepts that take the form of philosophy's most fundamental issues, issues which are pointed to in the first chapter; that is, issues, or concepts, of a logical, metaphysical, epistemic, and axiologic sort. It entails a synoptic characterization of such concepts and a systematic account of the extant literature's treatment of them; this latter, in the effective form of a bibliographic essay that constitutes an interpretive guide to the conceptual literature. The second chapter too includes a discussion of the historical development of the philosophy of sport. The third and fourth chapters concern the implications literature; the third is about main philosophic systems and their implications for sport, and the fourth has to do with the main philosophic periods/figures and their implications for sport. These chapters entail a vision of sport in the context of leading world views. The fifth, and final chapter effectively summarizes and unifies the text's principal insights, and it also issues a concluding remark in respect to the

significance of these insights. It entails a concise account of what synthetic sense, if any, I have been able to make of Eastern and Western philosophy's approximately three millennia record of distinguished scholarship, as well as an interpretive guide to the accomplished literature concerning the philosophy of sport in the context of that record. This essay forms the basis of my upper-division undergraduate and beginning-level graduate lectures concerning the philosophy of sport. The appendices (in the form of diagrammatic representations of several major issues discussed in text), a much expanded bibliography, and a new index follow.

The various contributions to the accomplished literature concerning the philosophy of sport discussed here are diverse, their selection often problematic. The main principle of delimitation in this respect pertains both to philosophy and to sport. Although the philosophical perspective is commonly influenced by, and routinely confused with such as psychological, sociological, and historical perspectives, I have confined the discussion to distinctly and authentically philosophical works. Likewise, although sport is intimately related to, and frequently mistaken for such as game playing, bodily movement, recreational activity, physical education, and dance, I have confined the discussion to works explicitly relevant to sport itself. Neither have I attempted to comment on everything that has been ever said of philosophical, or quasi-philosophical moment about sport; only the very most significant literature, by my halting and widely unknown to disrespected view, has been included. Because the development of this literature has been uneven, however, seminal works sometimes receive more attention than their strictly critical acumen warrants. The very most prominent work is given textual expression. Less prominent work and important supporting literature is nonetheless given bibliographic citation. The bibliography thus includes reference to the "entire" literature concerning the philosophy of sport as well as to representative work concerning the broader domain of philosophy proper. The works cited in the bibliography, in turn, of course, themselves refer to a yet wider literature. I nonetheless regret, but have been unable to correct, several qualifications on these few claims:

- an emphasis on published work that virtually excludes unpublished manuscripts, except theses and dissertations,
- an emphasis on work published in English that virtually excludes other-than-English manuscripts (although Hans Lenk's now-dated, *Leistungssport: Ideologie oder Mythos?*, gives an incisive account of the other-than-English literature, recent German work in particular nonetheless remains an especially grievous omission),

- an emphasis on "established" work that virtually excludes manuscripts published in the past two to three years (I wanted to avoid a "tacked on" impression and I had to stop somewhere; by the time a chapter was brought fully current, others had fallen into antiquity; if there is another edition, I'll try to do better), and
- an overestimation of my own work.

I have too aimed at a consistency of style that allows for ready comparisons among concepts, systems, and the views of prominent periods/figures. I regret that this, schematic syntax may, for some, deepen the teutonic surface of the text. I have also, in this respect, emphasized a descriptive treatment of the subject; critical commentary is added (except in the case of the fifth chapter) only in order to even the way for a narrative account of leading alternatives. Although I have aimed at an impartial account of such alternatives, the fifth chapter reveals the fundamental allegiances out of which "all" judgments have been made. This is as near as I have been able to approach an integrity of mind that both says what one thinks and grants others the same prerogative. In this way, beginning students of the subject are informed of its main alternatives and are left to decide the merits of each, perhaps to immerse themselves in such alternatives, to make progress beyond them, and to determine their own vision of life and sport; advanced students of the subject will hopefully find the systematic and "comprehensive" character of the overview perspective at least a passingly useful reference; and I too have been permitted sufficient latitude to make an uncontested fool of myself. In this way, "everyone" gets what they "need," or at least what they suppose they want. Even at this, few uninitiated readers are likely to profit much from an unaided reading of the book; a fully satisfactory understanding may well wait upon the interpretive assistance of one already familiar with the subject.

If all has gone well, as all rarely does, the book has documented the development of the philosophy of sport, it has identified the current status of the subject, it has suggested foreseeable directions for its ongoing development, and it has thus furnished a spirit of "complete" inquiry with respect to it. The book has been written with the conviction that an authentic understanding of, appreciation for, and experience with respect to sport waits upon philosophic accounts of it, that human fulfillment in sport is at least a partial function of such accounts. It has been therefore also written with the belief that the philosophy of sport makes a necessary and a profound contribution to the humanization of sport, that no serious examination of sport is complete, if at all intelligible, without it, and that it occupies a rightful place equally beside the other "departmental" *philosophies and the other sub-disciplinary aspects of sport studies*. It has

been written as well with the hope that it will contribute something, howsoever modest, to an enlightened vision of sport, that it will make a badly needed difference in the life of sport. The provocations that follow, then, represent what, within the sharp limits of a few pages and moments, can be said about the main philosophical alternatives with respect to sporting activity. Although only tentative judgments have been secured, only embryonic instigations for volumes and ages, the manuscript may have at least exposed what is formally required of such judgments.

Bob Osterhoudt
Tempe, Arizona
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