sport, rules and values

philosophical investigations into the nature of sport

Graham McFee

Sport, Rules and Values

Sport, Rules and Values presents a philosophical perspective on some issues concerning the character of sport. Central questions for the text are motivated from 'real life' sporting examples, as described in newspaper reports. For instance, the (supposed) subjectivity of umpiring decisions is explored via an examination of the judging of ice-skating at the Salt Lake City Olympic Games of 2002. Throughout, the presentation is rich in concrete cases from sporting situations, including cricket, baseball, American football, and soccer.

While granting the constitutive nature of the rules of sport, discussion focuses on three broad uses commonly urged for rules: in defining sport; in judging or assessing sport (as deployed by judges or umpires); and in characterizing the value of sport – especially if that value is regarded as moral value. In general, *Sport, Rules and Values* rejects a conception of the determinacy of rules as possible within sport (and a parallel picture of the determinacy assumed to be required by philosophy).

Detailed consideration of some ideas from classics in the philosophy of sport, especially writings by Bernard Suits and William Morgan contextualize this discussion. Overall, this work exemplifies the dependence of philosophical considerations of sport on ideas from philosophy more generally. Thus it sketches, for example, the contrast between rules and principles, an account of the occasion-sensitivity of understanding, and the place of normative and motivating reasons within practical reasoning.

The book's argumentative structures originate in the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein without explicitly being an exposition of those ideas. It views philosophy as addressing the specific issues of particular persons, rather than approaching perennial problems. In this way, the view of sport, and of sporting practices, that it supports has the flexibility to approach new issues. The result is a distinctive and appealing conception both of sport and of its philosophical investigation.

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2004
by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004.

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN 0-203-29987-6 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-67229-1 (Adobe eReader Format)
ISBN 0-415-32208-1 (hbk)
ISBN 0-415-32964-7 (pbk)

Contents

Acknowledgements

Ancestors of parts of this work have been previously published (although all sections are extensively revised here). So my thanks for permission to recycle material to: Greenwood/Praeger for McFee (forthcoming) in Introduction; Leisure Studies Association for McFee (2000c) in Chapter 8; Meyer & Meyer for McFee (2000d) in Chapter 9, and sections of which I was the primary author from Keech and McFee (2000) in Chapter 10; Routledge for McFee (2000b) in Chapter 7, McFee (1998b) in Chapter 10.

This work has debts to many people: I hereby thank them all. Some of my key ideas have been presented to national and international conferences, or to other interested parties. But, in roughly its present form, this text grows primarily from teaching the Philosophy of Sport to students in the Chelsea School at the University of Brighton, to whom my thanks are due.

I single out for special thanks: Myrene, my wife, for all her help, both material and intellectual, as well as her aid in preparing the text; Katherine Morris for support, for discussion of some key themes here, and for giving me sight (again) of some unpublished work of Gordon Baker's; Mike McNamee as series editor, and especially for encouraging me to cast the text in terms of what I had to say about the study of sport; Paul McNaught-Davis for financial support (as Head of the Chelsea School) and moral support; Alan Tomlinson for discussion of many topics, and especially for encouragement with study of Olympism (and joint work on it).

Finally, my gratitude is due to the late Gordon Baker who contributed immeasurably to my understanding of philosophy in general and Wittgenstein in particular, through conversation and through commentary on things I had written. When I envisaged completing this book, I saw myself acknowledging specifically Gordon's contribution to (not to say, complete reshaping of) my view of rule-following. His death in 2002 raised a question about whether this was an appropriate way to recognize his massive contribution to my thinking on this issue alone – putting aside others – a huge debt going far beyond those places where I draw explicitly on some of his writings.

Although we discussed some of these issues (to my benefit), Gordon did not see this text – it would have been better if he had! I would not seek to saddle him, much less his memory, with any of my 'readings'. But, equally,

I do not want to imply that I would be presenting even any version of this view of the philosophical project without his friendship for roughly the past twenty-five years. I would certainly have dedicated the book to Gordon, had I thought it worthy. Were it not hubristic (and gross inflation of my powers), I would imagine his response to my efforts as John Wisdom expected Wittgenstein to view his: that giving a whole book to a small issue in philosophy was still '. . . not sufficiently hard working – a bit cheap and flash' (Wisdom 1952: 1 note). But, of course, I would have willingly accepted the censure, since it would have been discussed point by point, with unfailing good humour.

Introduction

Sport, rules and values

A common-sense idea – also propounded by some sociologists of sport – connects the idea of sport to systems of rules; and (ideally) to formalized and codified rules. For example, Eric Dunning and Ken Sheard (1979) argued that one feature of modern sports, marking them out from folk games, was the use (or presence) of a codified system of rules. Whatever one makes of the detail here, the initial intuition – connecting sport and rules – seems sound: on the face of it, we cannot have sports untrammelled by rules nor can there be sporting actions (such as the scoring of tries or touchdowns) without such rules. And this intuition has been explored and exploited by many writers on sport.[1]

The central ideas in this text, though, are first that misconceptions concerning the nature and operations of rules distort accounts of sports while, second, a clearer conception of rules can clarify some of the issues concerning both the nature and value of sport – and even solve (or resolve) some of them. Moreover, the misconception and the clarification both turn on views of determinacy, and especially on the nature of the requirement (if any) for determinacy within philosophy.

As those who know my other writings might expect, I find the appropriate discussion of rules and rule-following in the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein. But this text is not an exposition of Wittgenstein, nor does it argue explicitly that this conception of rules *should* be ascribed to him, although I have included quotations from Wittgenstein to emphasize key points, sometimes giving references to places in his work where exemplification (and additional argument) might be sought. Rather, Wittgenstein's insights into the nature of rules and of rule-following are deployed to help understand the nature of sport, with explanation of those insights (to the degree needed) as we go along.

Organization of the text

This text is in three main parts. The first considers the role of rules in *defining* sport; the second looks to rules used in *judging* sport – hence, to the role of judges or umpires; the third considers how the *value* of sport might be explained in terms of rules, especially moral rules.

The first part primarily concerns ideals of definiteness: it is often assumed that rules *do*, or *should*, completely circumscribe a particular sport, such that we can exhaustively characterize or define that sport in terms of those rules. This assumption imports three kinds of mistakes: a mistake about the possibility of definition; a mistake about the need for definition; and a mistake about the connection of rules to definiteness.

These mistakes follow from a conception of rules whereby, if faced with some case the rules do not presently fit, one can always modify the rules – with the implication that, in principle, a *perfect* set of rules (one that deals with *all* possible situations) might be achieved. We see this conception, for instance, in attempts to modify definitions in the light of counter-examples, or in the attempt to rule out inappropriate behaviour on the sports field (or avoid refereeing judgement or discretion) by modifying the rules of sports – say, by changing the offside rule in soccer or the leg before wicket (lbw) rule in cricket. [For those unfamiliar with cricket, the batsman is out if the bowled ball hits the wicket; and the batsman will also be out if (roughly) his/her legs prevent the bowled ball from striking the wicket: leg before wicket or lbw. This is to prevent him/her avoiding the bowled ball striking the wicket by standing in front of it. (The rule itself is complex.)]

Of course, I may be puzzled about what a particular rule prohibits. (Can I wear nose-expanding strips when playing rugby? Well, if they are not specifically mentioned as permissible, and if the guiding idea is the enumeration of what *is* permissible, then. . . .) So this idea reflects the importance – and the difficulty – of determining what *exactly* follows from the application of a particular rule in a particular context. It highlights a central difficulty, confronted throughout this work, from occasion-sensitivity (see Chapter 2 pp. 49–51): that the application of a rule is less straightforward than is often assumed, as new circumstances of *this* context may leave that application unclear or problematic.

The examples reflect the fact that this text was written by a UK citizen. Yet the distinction among sports is tendentious; and the examples are not only from typical 'British' sports like soccer (football) and cricket but include both general sports such as tennis and figure-skating and US sports such as baseball and (American) football. Further, the examples are just that – if they help the reader to see the point, they have been successful: but readers should supply their own examples if those make the points more crisply for them than do mine.

Another word may be needed, not about the examples as such, but about their relative absence in some places. Perhaps the remarks could be more *generally* tied into particular sporting cases. But, as hinted at earlier, the general philosophical point can become lost or obscured, with the attention focused entirely, or largely, on the example – as Wittgenstein's discussion of the term 'game' (PI §§66–7[2]) is (sometimes) thought to be about *games*! Moreover, one can forget how *general* (and even *abstract*) much of the required discussion necessarily is: that this follows from its being discussion

in philosophy. Many chapters contain an excursus into pure philosophy – on definiteness (Chapter 1 pp. 28–31); on occasion-sensitivity and understanding (Chapter 2 pp. 47–52); on *principles*, in Dworkin's sense (Chapter 6 p. 105); on value-particularism (Chapter 8 pp. 141–4); on the nature of reasons (Chapter 9 pp. 151–5); and on truth (Chapter 10 pp. 142–3). Even when philosophy is treated in a particularist and concrete fashion (see below; especially Chapter 8 p. 00), it will never be *wholly* particular or *wholly* concrete – and nor should it be: that would undermine its character as philosophy. For example, Arthur Danto (1993: 206) urges that his remarks on the nature of *art*, if philosophy, *must* apply to *all* art, rather than just to *some* artworks: 'Philosophy's task is to say what is essentially true of artworks as a class. . . .' So the idea is that – being philosophy – the position must apply to *all* genuine examples;[3] that the choice is between those where it is transparent or revealing and the rest.

But, to repeat, readers are encouraged at every stage to supplement my examples with their own (or to add their own where appropriate); or, where my *examples* fail to carry conviction, to replace them with their own.

The emphasis in Part I on the definition of *sport* might strike some readers as old-fashioned, especially since my chief example (Bernard Suits's linked definitions of *games* and *sport*) has been widely discussed. But the problems raised here for this example are problems for all possible attempts at definition; this example has the linked benefits (in a diffuse context) of familiarity, brevity, clarity, and a critical literature. Of course, were my point simply to ask whether or not *Suits* had defined the term 'sport', the accusation of old-fashionedness might be warranted. But my claim, argued in the text, is that the *project* of such a definition is flawed. Once this point is granted, all putative definitions have the same misguided status; one looks for collateral reasons to discuss this one rather than that.

Part II considers the role of judges or umpires. The ideal here might *seem* to be rules whose application was so transparent that umpires need do nothing more than *apply* the rule to this situation – conceived primarily as a species of 'reading the rule aloud'. But this conception is flawed in at least three ways. First, and following from our view of rules, rules cannot *in principle* deal with all situations (and cannot be modified so to do). Second, for some sports (roughly those David Best [1978: 104] calls 'aesthetic sports'), human judgement is necessarily integral to the scoring: what is important is the *manner* in which, say, the pairs skating or the gymnastic vault is achieved. Third, even for other kinds of sport, the application of the rules could never be as unproblematic as has been assumed – partly because what is being considered is *human action* (see pp. 5–6). So the question of what *action* was performed by such-and-such a sportsperson can rebound on a judge or referee – for example, as the question for American football: did he have *control* of the ball when he landed? That is, as a question where the rules have a bearing on the matter, or where the referee must decide if such-and-such did or did not occur.

For Part III, the connection to rules is, at first glance, less direct. The issue concerns what intrinsic value might be ascribed to sport: or, more perspicuously, whether or not that value can be thought a moral value (as, say, De Coubertin thought). The negative reply often given[4] is motivated, in part, by a view of morality as a system of rules, and partly by the way the application of rules is understood. For clearly some sport, sometimes, does not promote morality. Were this not so, we would know automatically that the accusations of domestic violence against former basketball star Dennis Rodman (McKibben 2003: B3) were unjustified – how could someone with such exposure to sport behave badly? For the same reason, we would know beforehand that basketball star Shaquille O'Neal (*Los Angeles Times*, Sports 2003d: D1) was not a racist, despite some badly chosen jokes – we would not need to judge his explanation. In fact, sports players and teams can behave badly: moreover, discipline on the field of play does not preclude indiscipline off it. But none of that disputes that sometimes consideration of what is appropriate in sport turns on notions of justice, exemplified through ideas such as *fair play* or a *level playing field*.

On the contrary, once we understand morality aright – which means in a *particularist* way, in contrast to the mainstream sports ethics literature – we are well-positioned to see that at least *some* sport *sometimes* has just that possibility. Perhaps this will not explain *the* value of *all* sport: but the idea will have earned its keep if it explains some value of some sport. A guiding thought here recapitulates, in a different context, an earlier point: that motivating forces for rule-changes in sport are regularly *moral*; in particular, the appeal to *fairness*. But, more concessively, the obligations to rule-following in sport already provide a (weaker) *moral imperative*.

Some central ideas for this text

Three further considerations help explain the distinctiveness of this text, considerations each shared with only *some* other texts in this area. First, when thinking or writing about sport, we must remember that sport is played in many contexts – in the park with one's friends as well as on the professional stage, and so on. Hence, while many of the real examples come from high-level or elite sport, the intention is that *most* remarks apply to sport at all levels. Sometimes a conception of the kind of definiteness it is assumed *philosophy* requires makes us doubt that, say, the game of soccer (football) in the park is *really* soccer. After all, it has – let us suppose – a heavily modified 'handball' rule (compared to professional soccer) to stop the ball disappearing into the distance; the goalposts are piles of coats; there are not exactly eleven players on each side; and so on. On the other hand, it is not obviously some *other* game; it is still recognizably football.

As often, considering a yet simpler case helps: I give my grandson a Queen's 'start' in a chess match – are we playing chess? Clearly, no simple answer is satisfactory. If my grandson wins, he will certainly claim a victory

at chess: and, equally, we are not playing draughts, or solitaire, or bridge. . . . Still, if I play against the best player in the world, Garry Kasparov, in a simultaneous display where he gives me a Queen advantage, and (*per impossibile*) I win, I will not be claiming to have beaten the world's best at chess – or, at least, I will do so only in a highly qualified way.

My point, of course, is to move away from *some* idealizations of what sport *essentially* is: no set of activities is *really* chess or *really* soccer. On many occasions, an idealization of elite sport provides an image of sport 'played to the full' to which other occasions offer a tacit nod – as when children play-act the conflict between elite teams, taking the names of major players: as parodied in a school football lesson in the film *Kes* (1969: director Ken Loach), where the teacher designates his side as Manchester United, and himself their most famous player of the time. The importance of such cases can be overstressed. Yet sometimes, in order to consider sport at its zenith of performance, with all its (codified) rules in play, examples are best taken from elite or professional sport. Since a methodological commitment here is that *my* accounts of sporting events have no special weight or authority, I typically draw on others' descriptions of sporting events, where possible, so that nothing of substance relies on *my* view of events.

The second, complex consideration recognizes sport as the province of *persons*: that people (and only people) watch sport, participate in sport, referee sport, and enjoy sport. That may seem a trivial concession until it is recognized that the study of *persons* is not straightforwardly equivalent to the study of persons' bodies: that is, to the study area of the sports sciences. For the doings of persons are not simply equivalent to what happens to those bodies. To illustrate, imagine an English-speaking Martian arrives at a church on a Saturday afternoon (McFee 1992: 53; McFee 2000a: 85): he or she will understand what is said, of course, but not what is happening – he or she will not understand that these people talking together constitutes two of them *getting married*, which (in turn) has implications for, say, inheritance. And his or her perplexity will increase when, traveling backwards in time to the previous Thursday, he/she finds the same key players saying the same words, but with nothing following – for this is the rehearsal! So, to understand what happens here requires understanding it as a collection of human actions. Further, such actions require agents capable of intending, choosing or deciding: that is, these are agents, not robots (McFee 1992: 55–6).

Moreover, persons essentially act in contexts (McFee 2000a: 88–9): what distinguishes the person *able* to name a ship from the person *not able* will not, typically, be some capacity of either person's anatomy or physiology. I can *say* 'I name this ship *Morning Cloud*' as well as the present Queen; I am capable of breaking a champagne bottle across its bow. But her doing these things might name the ship while (at least typically) my doing them would not.

In these ways, we learn *not* to treat explanation of action in sport as essentially a matter of the causal, psychological story. For persons must be seen and treated as unities, rather than as minds (or souls!) attached in some mysterious way to bodies. In this guise, it is a familiar rejection of, say, dualistic assumptions about minds and meanings. For, as David Best (1999: 103–8) has repeatedly illustrated, there is still a lot of such dualism about! Moreover, the dualism of mind and body should not be replaced with some *other* account: instead, explanation of action is needed only when it *is* needed, for some particular purpose – persons should be regarded as autonomous agents living in social situations (which grants, of course, both that such situations *constrain* what actions can be performed and that characterizing actions makes ineliminable reference to the normativity of a network of social practices). In particular, persons should be taken as centrally able to follow rules, so that the question, '*How* do we follow this rule?', taken generally, is silly. For granting the kind of agents characterized above is recognizing (potential) rule-followers – or rule breakers! Then *obeying* the rule is just a matter of determining what it precludes or permits: simply *following* it is then not especially problematic – if one wants to, if the situations arise, and so on, and so on. (Wittgenstein captured this idea eloquently with a quotation from Goethe: 'In the beginning was the deed' [CV p. 31; OC §402; PO p. 395].)

This discussion becomes integrated with others since a typical way of putting this point speaks of human action as *rule-governed* or *rule-related* behaviour: the rules create contexts in which such actions are possible. Hence the actions cannot logically be separated from the rules thereby embodied. In this vein, we recognize the formal rules that turn the exchange and distribution of pieces of paper into cashing a cheque (McFee 1992: 53) – or the redistribution of pieces of wood on a chequered surface into playing chess – as well as the informal 'rules' that turn a wooden post by the side of a road into a signpost (PI §85, §87).

The crucial point here is sometimes made by saying that these activities are *institutional*.[5] Although not wrong, this formulation can mislead, because central cases, such as *promising*, are institutional in one sense but not in another. Certainly, the institution of promising holds in place my obligation to you, once I have promised you that I will do such-and-such; and therefore my having promised is an *institutional fact* (Searle 1969: 50–3; Anscombe 1981: 22–5). But no particular set of persons constitutes this institution – there is no authoritative body here (Baker and Hacker 1984: 272–3), which makes up the 'promising police'. And many important human activities – sometimes rightly called *institutions* – are of this sort: (human) language is perhaps the most important. The forces behind these institutions 'come to us from a distance' (Cavell 1981: 64): we do not sign-up to them, nor can we specify how they were started, or by whom. In contrast, some human institutions are regulated by a fairly specific authoritative body: for example, that such-and-such is money or currency is a

human institution, but one with specific authoritative structures – a person cannot just *choose* such-and-such and proclaim it money. Further, whether or not something is a machine is not in the gift of just any Tom, Dick or Harriett, but one where those knowledgeable can have a 'say' in ways most of us cannot. Thus there are two kinds of institutional structures. So, for example, promising is not institutional in one sense (there is no authoritative body), but is institutional in the other sense. When, as for many sports, we have a body which regulates the competitions and the rules – as FIDE does for chess – it is tempting to study the institutional structure; but our concern with the nature of the sport renders many features of the institutional structures beside our (philosophical) point. Indeed, for most purposes, sport is better regarded – like promising – as institutional in the first of my two senses only: it features the product of human contrivance, without ascribing that contrivance to any particular group of humans. (This will be one way to avoid dealing with the sociology of sports consumption.)

The third consideration noted above has already been sketched: that nothing here depends on my view of sport. Indeed, given that this is a work of philosophy, it would be inappropriate if it did. (Discussion here takes us towards the fundamental insight of this work.) As discussed earlier (pp. 4–5), this idea provided a constraint on the examples used. That is, of course, correct. But it also points *across* to the outcome of this work: that, in most places, the arguments of this text will not change what we *say* about a particular sporting event. For, if what we say *might* be changed, we might need to look for the *best* (or even the *correct*) account of a particular event for our examples. Of course, there may be exceptions here: how we think of certain events *may* be inflected by how fair we take their judging to be – and justifiable *when* we take an official to be suspect. But, as we will see (Chapter 5 pp. 98–9), the mere fact that an official was pressured to act in a certain way does not mean he or she would not have acted in just that way without the pressure: the *outcome* might still be the right (or fair) one.

Of course, a big danger here concerns the *myths* sport attracts – it may be difficult to cut through the myth to what actually occurred. For instance, it has often been asserted (especially in the USA) that the outcome of the basketball final at the 1972 Olympics was unjust; that the US team was 'robbed'. But if an account recently given in the *Los Angeles Times* (Wharton 2002: D3) is correct, the two major incidents – that is, the fight between two players that got them both ejected from the game, but with the US player (arguably) the more valuable, and the two (or three) attempts at the end to correct problems in the timekeeping – were simply not as claimed. In the first, the player from the USSR was a 'starter' (that is, one of the major team members) and the one first fouled by his American opponent; the second resulted from confused signalling from the scorer's table, but was an outcome typical of games at the time. So the outcome of the final *was* fair: or, at least, was marred only by error. As one commentator reports it, 'It was obviously a poorly supervised game . . . but I don't think it happened

the way many people remember it' (Wharton 2002: D3). Yet the event has acquired a mythic status, no doubt fuelled by Cold War jingoism: the story (that is, what happened) has become myth-eaten. As a result, any account of it – especially in the USA – is likely to be distorted, if not plainly mistaken. Even the *Los Angeles Times* forgot its own account when a later article concluded: 'Still waiting for their . . . Gold medals: the 1972 US men's Olympic basketball team' (*Los Angeles Times, Sports* 2002b: D12). So determining in practice what occurred can be hard. For that reason, I simply accept the events as described – if it seems clearer, readers should treat them hypothetically: suppose such-and-such occurred, then. . . . In this way, the *accuracy* of the examples should not become an issue here.

Hope for a philosophy of sport?

The above is partly an attempt to diffuse the criticism that nothing here *need* change how one views sports events. Actually, though, I doubt that my view will leave one's conception of sports events unchanged: seeing the rules of sport *my* way at least transforms how you *explain* appeals to rules, perhaps which rules you appeal to.

What is being advocated here might seem to amount to a contribution to the *philosophy of sport*. Certainly, philosophy provides the disciplinary tools and sport provides the subject matter. Is this going back on my commitment (McFee 1998a: 16–17) that – once moral questions are set aside[6] – discussion of sport can add nothing (except examples) to a quite general discussion from philosophy? Not really, for three reasons. First, the pedigree in (general) philosophy is quite apparent in the discussion of most topics: as noted above, many chapters contain explicit discussions of these general issues. So this connection to the *body* of mainstream philosophy is essential.

Second, the *appearance* of a change of heart reflects a change in the scale of my interest in the moral dimensions of sport. Arguments in Parts II and III suggest that perhaps the influence of the moral is more pervasive than previously thought. I always recognized (McFee 1998a: 5) that sport was not *just* one such human practice among many, since ethical questions arise naturally from the inherent characteristics of typical sports: for example, sports are typically culturally-valued[7] and viewed as united (as one thing, Sport); they typically have explicit rules (whose contravention is therefore possible); the possibility of harm to participants (especially if rules are not followed) does not prevent participation; and the rhetoric of sport is replete with metaphors employed in general ethical discussion – in particular, the idea of *fair play* or of a *level playing field*. In this way, ethical issues are ineliminably linked with the existence and practice of sport: a concern with such issues would be both a centrally philosophical concern *and* a concern with sport. I have added a stronger sense both of how fundamental for sport ethical principles are; and how the acquisition and mastery

of such principles might explain (some of?) the value of sport. So sport has more to tell us about the moral – and vice versa – than I had thought.

But, third, even granting the rule-governed (or rule-related) character of sport, my thesis is *still* that the points are found in *other* activities where rules are important. So the issues here are mostly genuine but their employment in philosophical enquiries consists in applying conclusions from elsewhere *to* sport, or taking sporting cases as examples. Even questions about the concept *sport* – insofar as they are general, abstract questions – already have a home within philosophy.

A traditional account of philosophy as *reasoning about reasoning* fits with some of these considerations: that philosophical attention is turned onto the sayings (and doings) of those who discuss sport. But this can make philosophy seem second order, its rationale resting in tidying-up the first order practice. Yet philosophy is not, in this sense, second order. (As Wittgenstein might have pointed out [see PI §121], the situation is a bit like etymology, which itself studies the origins of the term 'etymology'.) To put the point concessively, one undervalues the scope and power of philosophy in taking it *purely* as second order.

A view of philosophy?

At a more profound level, the target in philosophy is less the misconceptions of detached practitioners, viewed with detachment, than powerful tendencies one recognizes in oneself. This picture of philosophy has been called a *therapeutic conception*, since it is directed at the specific puzzlement of some particular person. The aim is not to produce answers to perennial problems, nor to analyse concepts in ways that preclude future misunderstanding: indeed, both these targets are illusory since sources of misunderstanding appear and disappear – for example, from the activities of scientists (see below). And the question addressed is always contextual: the form of words in which you articulate your precise problems might ask something different in someone else's mouth. Further, drawing on some of the points about rules, one cannot preclude *all possible misunderstanding*, since there is no finite totality of possible misunderstandings, no sense to the word 'all' here. Instead, as Wittgenstein urges: 'Work in philosophy is . . . actually more a kind of work on oneself' (PO: 161). So philosophy typically consists in identifying how puzzlements arise either because some peculiar (and unwarranted) inference is being drawn – you hear me talk about sunrise, and infer that I have a pre-Copernican cosmology – or some piece of jargon has been misunderstood. For instance, talk of chaos theory leads someone to think that scientists now regard the world as chaotic: but, of course, chaos theory is fully deterministic (McFee 2000a: 155–8), as is demonstrated by the fact that the preferred research tool of chaos theorists is the computer! Rather, a clear view of one's (mis)understanding is needed here. But we regularly acquire misleading ideas. As Wittgenstein put it:

> Teaching philosophy involves the same immense difficulty as instruction in geography would if a pupil brought with him a mass of false and falsely simplified ideas about the course of rivers and mountain chains. (PO: 185)

One has to try to get a clear view of what is misleading one since, if it is a philosophical problem (and not one in, say, natural science, where empirical investigation might help), this is the only way to move forward. And one might be aided here. For example, in the best moment in the Derek Jarman film *Wittgenstein* (1993), two students assert that the reason 'people' typically believed that the sun went round the earth was that it *looked* as though it did – then Wittgenstein asks how it would *look* if the earth went round the sun. It takes a moment for the students to realize that, since that *is* what happens, it must look like this! The scales fall from their eyes.

But Wittgenstein also rightly insisted upon a *slow* cure: how is that compatible with the *revelatory aspect* I have been emphasizing? The answer lies in the following key passage: 'In philosophizing we may not *terminate* a disease of thought. It must run its natural course, and *slow* cure is all important' (Z §382). In this context, *slow* is contrasted with *hasty*: a *slow* cure here is one that takes its time, that is not hurried. Hence it must be suitably slow, for the 'working through' of the particular confusion. Of course, such a slow cure *might* be achieved in a flash (perhaps with a 'liberating word' [PO: 165]) were that the appropriate timing for *this* cure: what Wittgenstein speaks of as the cure running 'its natural course'. Relatedly, the danger here (as Wittgenstein identifies it) lies in trying to 'terminate' the condition – to bring it to a slick resolution. A kind of *briskness* would be a major vice: not genuinely addressing the problem. Thus philosophy can be done trivially, by (say) paying mere lip-service to alternatives, rather than investigating them.

The *therapeutic* conception of philosophy has a direct bearing on the structure of this text. For instance, how could we describe the *thesis* of this text? At one level, our reply is clear: it highlights misconceptions within the study of sport concerning rules and rule-following – in particular, concerning the determinacy of rules, and the degree to which an understanding of the (intrinsic) value of sport is concealed if one misunderstands rules. Yet such a concern with misconceptions and misunderstanding might *seem* puzzling: why do we not just say what is correct here, and be done with it? Whatever is urged must be both explained and proved: that alone must count against simple presentations. Further, in line with the *therapeutic* view, there are no abstract, general problems here, but only the perplexities of specific individuals, which must be *worked through* as best we can. So the text functions (at best) as a handbook for the self-treatment of some of those perplexities. We cannot expect that treatment to be achieved simply by being *told*!

Indeed, although much of the discussion might be phrased in terms of what to *say* in certain situations, our topic cannot be what *words* to choose.

First, that cannot bring about the insight, revelation or enlightenment required by philosophy; second, the *words* used are typically only important when they reflect some more profound contrast – say, in calling an action 'murder' as opposed to 'manslaughter': the different word here, if justified, amounts to something different having happened.

So philosophical problems are emphatically *not* problems with language.[8] Rather, one could *say* what one liked (see PI §79): the importance rests in what connections, distinctions and contrasts one is thereby drawing. What matters is not the *words* but, as Wittgenstein insisted, the *uses* to which those words were put on this or that occasion. Since typically these uses differ with the occasion or with speaker's interests or purposes (PI §132), assuming in advance of investigation that each term had just *one* use, or a fixed number of them, would be a potential source of confusion about what others were asserting, what questions they were addressing, and so on.

Of course, language matters to philosophy just because some of our philosophical problems arise when an *apparent* similarity (say, the same word being used or the same grammatical structure) conceals an important *difference*; or vice versa. We get inappropriate '*objects of comparison*' (PI §130). Failing to pay attention here can lead to 'the bewitchment of our intelligence' (PI §109). Yet the remedy is not found in language, but through careful attention to where we might be misled. And it is a central claim of Wittgenstein's that such 'misleading' occurs during schooling (hence besetting us all), and particularly when learning philosophy. So we must be especially on guard against the urgings both of 'experts' and of 'the philosopher in us' (Ms 219: 11).

The audience for this work

Describing the projected audience of this work says, roughly, what might be expected of 'the philosopher in us'. Although not conceived as a text primarily for students, this work is 'student-friendly' in not assuming too much of the *philosophical* literature, and so on. This also acknowledges the variety of backgrounds with which people come to the philosophy of sport. Hence, *some* things said at length may be self-evident, or very familiar, to some readers. As noted above, many of the chapters contain material in general philosophy, to provide additional background; and especially where my views diverge fairly widely from what is commonly assumed within philosophy. But these interventions are typically flagged clearly, so that anyone who is master of the material can see what to skip – and similarly for those not wishing to go deeper into the philosophical underpinnings. And I have regularly provided further references for those who wish to pursue them.

The material is not all equally transparent; and in places it may be compressed in a way that greater space would have prevented. I can only plead for clemency here, and ask (again: McFee 2000a: 36) for a reader 'ready to

meet [the author] halfway . . . [and] . . . not begrudge a pinch of salt' (Frege 1960: 54). Further, my enthusiasm for pursuing philosophical issues, or their intrinsic interest (for me), sometimes leads me farther into philosophical thickets than the minimum this text requires – especially true of some passages in Chapter 2 (pp. 47–52), Chapter 4 (pp. 77–82) and Chapter 9 (pp. 151–60).

This text is continuous with my other writing on sport, and on persons; in particular as beginning to discharge some of the obligations of an earlier research agenda (from McFee 2000c) – repeated here, in modified form, in Chapter 8 – and partially discharged there, and in Chapters 9 and 10. But it remains a research agenda, partly because – consonant with my general view – much of the work lies in the consideration of general philosophical issues, not sporting cases.

This work aims to begin from fundamental concerns or first principles. For that reason, there is no detailed discussion of the vast literature growing up in philosophy of sport. Still, my perplexities sometimes arise from, or are fuelled by, what others have written. One strategy would have been to consider only those texts which lead *me* towards my perplexities. Yet my reading might be too eclectic to make that a profitable way forward. Moreover, the intentions here were never scholarly (in the sense of discussing the minutiae of other texts). Instead, 'classic' texts are used to elaborate and explore my issues. The texts chosen for discussion were selected partly as typical of important positions, partly for the clarity of the exposition of those positions, and partly for their wide use by others, especially students. But the discussion has always gone only as far as is necessary to explore my points. I hope those whose work is briefly discussed – with the discussion truncated by my purposes – will understand this.

The concerns with definiteness and rule-following that ground this work are not thought fundamental in much contemporary writing in the philosophy of sport.[9] (That is part of the 'old-fashioned' objection mentioned above.) But these *are* fundamental issues; moreover, ones which reveal the potential contribution of philosophy, partly through showing how conflicting insights can sometimes both be acknowledged. Were I right, this would only be a beginning – but it would offer a research agenda; to apply to problems presently in the forefront of the philosophy of sport the methodological insights here.

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