OVERCOMING MARGINALIZATION AND INSIGNIFICANCE:
A PRAGMATIC CRITIQUE AND RECONSTRUCTION OF SPORT PHILOSOPHY

A Thesis in
Kinesiology
by
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ABSTRACT

In the current cultural climate, philosophy is perceived by many as an irrelevant professional enterprise. Similarly, higher education’s twenty-first century economic mindset marginalizes the value of humanistic disciplines such as philosophy. Sport philosophers must deal with both of these social realities, as well as the fact that kinesiology departments increasingly devalue the study of sport. Sport philosophers are not merely victims, however. The field’s practitioners are also complicit in sport philosophy’s current marginalized and irrelevant status by employing limited critical methods, using impoverished tools for inquiry, and adopting misguided philosophical purposes.

This project seeks to overcome the academic marginalization and lack of public voice that now plagues the field of sport philosophy. This will be accomplished by first using the work of John Dewey to engage in a pragmatic critique and reconstruction of the field of sport philosophy. In particular, I will critique the conceptions of metaphysics, the theories of experience, and the notions of truth and meaning adopted by the field’s dominant paradigms—metaphysical constructionism and metaphysical deconstructionism. Following this critique, I will pragmatically reconstruct sport philosophy by re-conceptualizing lived experience, truth and meaning, as well as philosophy more generally. In the end, I will implore sport philosophers to make four commitments that could enhance the field’s academic standing and social relevance. First, sport philosophy must become radically empirical. Second, sport philosophy must employ a grounded notion of abstract thought. Third, sport philosophers must aim to improve sport. Finally, sport philosophers must function as a community of inquirers—as philosophers and with other sport theorists more generally.
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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER 1
Marginalized and Culturally Insignificant: Sport Philosophy in the 21st Century

Unless philosophies are to be Edens of compensatory refuge, reached through an exercise of dialectical ingenuity, they must face the situation which is there. It is their business to bring intellectual order out of the confusion of beliefs. For the confusion of which we have been speaking, due to lack of adjustment between ideas and ideals inherited from an older culture and the dominating interests and movement of present civilization, while not itself philosophical in origin, is both a datum and an opportunity for philosophy…. Any philosophy which does not accept important facts is in that degree a philosophy of escape. (LW 3:127-128).

Human interest in athletics permeates every corner of the globe. Sport infiltrates a significant portion of the public’s daily life in modern civilizations. From organized and spontaneous youth games to professionalized, highly visible elite athletics, few can deny sport’s worldwide cultural impact. Sport’s reach into culture is clearly evident when looking at recent events in North America. Violent acts in professional hockey occupied media headlines and dominated social dialogue across Canada and, atypically, in the United States during the winter of 2004. The outcry against the usage of performance-enhancing substances in athletic competition grew so fierce that U.S. President George W. Bush addressed the issue in his January 2004 State of the Union speech—followed by Senate Judiciary Committee Hearings in the Spring of 2005. Paul Martin’s decision to not increase the $90 million dollar expenditure on elite sport during an Olympic year in his first budget as Canada’s Prime Minister drew the ire of many.

An abundance of media examples also exist to demonstrate sport’s social popularity. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) men’s basketball tournament dominates the programming of a major American television network. Despite the constant claims of educational hypocrisy rampant in “big-time” intercollegiate athletics, the popularity of “March Madness” prompted CBS to make a six billion dollar
investment in the national championship event and push highly-rated shows—including powerhouses *Survivor* and *CSI*—to alternate time slots or a two-week hiatus in March. The amount of coverage dedicated to sport-related features by the critically acclaimed news program *60 Minutes* led to a recent alliance with the sport cable network ESPN Classic. The ESPN offshoot channel will transform old sport segments, originally aired on the respected journalism television show, into a weekly program.

Within higher education, compelling scholarly work presents sport as a tremendously significant area of study. For instance, several scholars contend that sport historically and potentially plays an important role in the development, deterioration, description, and battle for human social communities (e.g. Mark Dyreson, Paul Hoch, William J. Morgan, Michael Oriard, David Zang). A number of writers also argue that rich transcendent experiential possibilities exist within sports (e.g. Eugen Herrigal, Scott Kretchmar, Craig Lambert, Michael Murphy).

Whether examined from a phenomenological perspective or from a cultural or political standpoint, sport clearly exists as a vital social institution created by humans for humans. According to John Dewey’s conception of social institutions, one can view sport as an activity that forms “attitudes, dispositions, abilities and disabilities that constitute a concrete personality” (LW 11:221). Consequently, sport serves an educational role from a Deweyan perspective, and thus its aim should irreducibly be individual and social growth through the production of culture and democracy (Stuhr, 1997, pp.252-253). So, while theorists may argue about what role sport actually plays in wider society—for instance as an opiate for the masses, a social technology for the growth of democracy, a
fantasy world of escapism, or a forum for moral development—sport occupies an important place in the public conversation.

Yet despite the clear experiential and social significance of sport, as well as the persuasive arguments that sport is worthy of academic inquiry, sport philosophers too often stand outside public conversations about athletic issues. Although exceptions exist, few sport philosophers find themselves actively engaged in publicly visible evaluations and assessments of twenty-first century sport. Instead, members of the media play the central role in critiquing and describing the meanings, values, and significance of sport—often with sensationalism, overly simplistic analyses, prejudice, and inconsistency. Beyond the media, the voices of sport administrators, sport psychologists, athletic medical professionals, biomechanists, chemists, and bioengineers shape sport’s present and future more actively than philosophers of sport.

For example, the Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC)’s cable channel *Newsworld* aired a primetime special in spring 2004 analyzing the issue of performance-enhancing drugs in sports. The interesting, thoughtful, and well-produced CBC *Sports Journal* program included interviews with athletes, coaches, scientists, bureaucrats, and a biomedical ethicist (from New York State no less) on the morality of performance enhancing substances—but no sport philosophers offered opinions (or Canadian philosophers of any kind).

Even within higher education, sport philosophy appears to exist at the margins of academic inquiry. Opportunities to find employment in sport philosophy are rare. Many schools with kinesiology or physical education programs offer at most only a single sport philosophy course taught in ways that demonstrate little academic rigor. Even competent
sport philosophers (or sport humanists in general) working within higher education typically find their contributions devalued by colleagues with large research grants and laboratories designed to quantitatively measure some more academically “esteemed” aspect of movement (c.f. Kretchmar, 1996).

Why are sport philosophers excluded from highly visible conversations about sport’s ethical dilemmas and controversial issues? Particularly in an era of expertise and specialization, it seems strange that a professional field like sport philosophy stands, for the most part, at the social and political margins in the modern sport landscape. If sport is woven into the cultural fabric and engrained in the public psyche, why are professional philosophers of sport marginalized and largely ignored in society and higher education?

This project seeks to answer these questions, and more importantly, to offer a vision of a more powerful place for sport philosophy in public conversations. To assist in my attempt to make progress while taking on this enormous challenge, I will employ the work of classic pragmatism—primarily the writings of John Dewey. Against the backdrop of Dewey’s pragmatism I will critique sport philosophy’s methodological ability to evaluate and offer remedies to alleviate the problems of sport, assess the purposes and tools of inquiry that fuel the methods of most sport philosophers, and finally offer a vision of a reconstructed field that holds the potential to make a substantial difference to sport and culture.

Before commencing a critique and reconstruction of sport philosophy, I must heed John Dewey’s call by first considering, outlining, and defending my claims about the current status of the field. Dewey insists that philosophers recognize the contingencies and context within which they function. On this issue, Dewey advises:
The distinctive office, problems, and subject matter of philosophy grow out of stresses and strains in the community life in which a given form of philosophy arises, and…accordingly, its specific problems vary with the changes in human life that are always going on and that at times constitute a crisis and a turning point in human history (MW 12:256).

Any critical analysis and reconstructive effort requires first an understanding of the cultural context within which the vital problems of a community exist. For this project, sport philosophers comprise the community, and the field’s social insignificance stands as the vital issue under consideration. Consequently, the bulk of this first chapter will examine the external forces that press upon sport philosophy and render the field mostly inconsequential in culture and higher education.

The first chapter will also set the groundwork for a later, more detailed critique and reconstruction of the field by offering a survey of the paradigms and typologies that currently dominate sport philosophy. Sport philosophers, including myself, must understand the obstacles faced by first recognizing “where we are now”—a necessary methodological move forwarded by the father of pragmatism, Charles Peirce. A snapshot of sport philosophy’s current dominant typologies, in concert with an appreciation for the field’s social and academic realities, should offer the contextual information necessary for later critical examinations.

After providing this overview of sport philosophy’s dominant paradigms, I will make a controversial claim early in Chapter 2, namely that sport philosophy’s methods, purposes, and tools of inquiry contribute to the field’s academic marginalization and cultural insignificance. I will defend this assertion by pointing out limitations related to the evaluative and critical power of most sport philosophers’ methodological commitments. My critique of the field will continue in Chapter 3 as I examine the
incomplete theories of experience and misguided purposes that fuel the limited methods of non-pragmatic sport philosophers.

By grasping the cultural and self-imposed limitations facing sport philosophy I can then launch a reconstructive effort aimed at pragmatically re-conceptualizing the field’s methods, purposes, and tools of inquiry. Although sport philosophy contributes to its own marginalization, the notion of a reconstructed field through the insights of Dewey, and classic pragmatism in general, offers hope for a more culturally relevant future by recreating the image of the public philosopher working within a sport context. Thus, in Chapter 4 I will employ pragmatic ideas to engage in a re-envisioning of the backdrop against which sport philosophy must operate—namely full, lived, human experience. At the conclusion of Chapter 4, I will recommend that sport philosophers become radically empirical—the first of four pragmatic commitments I deem necessary to enhance the field’s social impact. In the fifth chapter, I will pick up this reconstruction effort by outlining three additional philosophical commitments—a grounded, entangled notion of abstract thought, a melioristic purpose, and the cultivation of a genuine community of inquirers. In the final sections of Chapter 5 I will sketch out the two interrelated projects for sport philosophers to adopt—disclosure/clarification of the habits of the sport-world (metaphysics) and the creative transformation of the sport-world (cultural instrumentalism/epistemology).

It is important to note that despite my critical assessment and evaluation of the field, I do not intend to portray current philosophers of sport as an insignificant, unskilled, or out-of-touch group of thinkers. Instead, I want to argue that most philosophers successfully conceptualize important fragments of human sport experiences.
Yet, at the same time, most sport philosophers miss other important experiential elements. I will thus echo Jonathan Lear’s (1998) critique of psychoanalysis and philosophy by revealing a sense of “deadness” that infiltrates the profession of sport philosophy. But also like Lear, this criticism emerges from a sincere “love” for the field. “[T]his…is above all a response to a sense of deadness: it is an attempt to bring some life into two activities which lie at the heart of our humanity,” writes Lear (p.3). In Lear’s case, the two activities lying at the heart of our humanity are psychoanalysis and philosophy. In my case, sport philosophy and sport stand as potentially important contributors to the social fabric and ultimately human flourishing.

In sum, this project will seek to analyze both the current status of sport philosophy and possibilities for its future. I intend to offer a pragmatic reconstructive effort to more fully realize sport philosophy’s social, and ultimately, human significance. By reevaluating and re-envisioning sport philosophers’ methodological starting points and assumptions, as well as re-conceptualizing the theories of experience and purposes of philosophy adhered to by the field’s two dominant (yet limited) paradigms, I believe sport philosophy can emerge as an influential practice that stands not at the margins of sport, kinesiology, and wider society, but at their core. Sport philosophers need not be spectators speaking only to one another, but can be significant players merging critical theory with reconstructive efforts to transform and grow sport in novel and meaningful ways. But the task will not be easy, even if our purposes and methods do change. Larger cultural forces press upon philosophical thought—forces to which I now turn my attention.
**External Marginalization of Sport Philosophy**

Although most sport philosophers view their work as important and socially relevant, realistic assessments force us to acknowledge that the field lacks cultural clout. Clearly, sport is not marginalized in wider society. Reactions to Vancouver Canuck star winger Todd Bertuzzi’s vicious attack on the Colorado Avalanche’s Steve Moore during a March 2004 National Hockey League contest support both of these claims. Bertuzzi jumped Moore from behind and drove his head to the ice, leaving the young Colorado forward unconscious and with a broken neck. The near-universally condemned attack, motivated by Moore’s unwillingness to follow hockey’s unwritten rule that one must fight an opponent when challenged, elicited a bevy of media coverage and moral debate in Canada and the United States.

The incident reveals the moral importance and cultural significance of sport in North America. Bertuzzi’s actions, as well as Moore’s refusal to act, dominated public conversations, particularly in Canada, but to a surprising extent in the United States as well. Media columnists and sport personalities served as the “voice” of discussions about such moral and nonmoral issues as the appropriate limits of sanctioned violence in hockey, the reach of the legal system into pro sport, and even the level of responsibility the victim should assume. Missing from the heated banter, non-stop public dialogue, and overwhelming media coverage was the sport philosopher. In a world of experts and despite the public’s insatiable need to “philosophize” about sport violence, no visible social discourse included sport philosophers.

This is the irony embedded in sport philosophy. A significant portion of the world’s population engages in or watches sports at all levels, of all kinds, at all times of
the year. Similarly, most humans also seem to engage in forms of what might be considered philosophical reflection or discourse about various aspects of their lives—whether taking ethical stances or questioning values and meanings. Yet professional sport philosophy seems to stand as an insignificant endeavor to much of the sporting public.

This sense of disregard extends beyond sport philosophy. The humanities as a whole (particularly general philosophy) are increasingly pushed to the social and political sidelines as a professional undertaking. American philosopher John Stuhr (1997) makes this point:

There is little life in most professional philosophy today…philosophy now exists in limbo, alive but comatose. Largely withdrawn and isolated from a significant place in social life, academic philosophy (like theory in the humanities and human sciences more broadly) is sustained by an elaborate life-support system of professional practices, institutions, sanctions, and exclusions (p.45).

Yet the idea that philosophy stands as an insignificant professional discipline is a relatively recent development in Western thought. Beginning with the rise of democracy in Ancient Greece, philosophers once held prominent roles in the political and social life of human cultures. Even today, the work of philosophical giants from the ancient Greek (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle), medieval (Aquinas, Ockham), seventeenth century (Descartes, Hobbes, Locke), eighteenth Century (Berkeley, Hume, Kant), nineteenth century (Hegel, Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche), and early twentieth century (Popper, Quine, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Sartre, Dewey) resonate within Western culture. The ideas cultivated by these philosophers, for better or worse, continue to color our views of humanity, mind and body, morality, religion, science, economics, law, politics, education, and human purposes, to name but a few topics.
Conversely, Stuhr’s image of contemporary philosophy, sustained only by way of professional life-support systems, seems accurate in the twenty-first century—artificially breathing only in classrooms, faculty colloquiums, academic conferences, and professional journals. But even within higher education, philosophy plays an increasingly diminished role. New generations of students and educators alike, I contend, now view education almost exclusively as practical vocational training. A 1997 survey of Penn State undergraduate students regarding what qualified as important for quality classroom instruction supports this claim. “Demonstrates importance of subject matter,” “stimulates intellectual curiosity,” “provides various points of view,” and “has a genuine interest in students” ranked as the bottom four “expectations” identified by the students in the study (Willits, Moore, and Enerson, 1997, p.8).

Furthermore, professional philosophers today are often perceived and portrayed as out-of-touch, unmotivated, and socially irrelevant. Many philosophers, Stuhr (1997) contends, “seem at these times to be nothing more than sophistic pickpockets and tenured thieves, employed by colleges and universities to steal time and squeeze life from anyone who comes too close” (p.64). Undergraduate students, Stuhr continues, “register for philosophy courses to fulfill degree requirements, sit though philosophy lectures like inmates doing time, and plod through philosophy books on the way to nothing more than a final paper or exam” (p.63). Seigfried (1996) and Rorty (1998) make similar charges against academic philosophers retreating to their “ivory towers” and away from active engagement in the pressing problems of society.

How did “professional” philosophy’s force in society and education fall to such unprecedented lowly depths? Certainly this question will not yield simple,
incontrovertible answers. Lear, however, offers a hypothesis that provides a compelling starting point for dialogue about philosophy’s contemporary cultural impotence. In *Open Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul* (1998), Lear argues that a cultural crisis of “knowingness” runs rampant in our society. Rather than live openly with the Socratic question of “what is the good life,” people live as if “already knowing” the answer to life’s ambiguities without ever asking questions. This state of “knowingness”—human existence as straightforward and transparent—gives permission to individuals and cultures to “know nothing.” Already “knowing,” Lear contends, blocks the need and desire for inquiry. Pragmatists, including Peirce, William James, and Dewey, similarly railed against the cultural tendency to avoid inquiry. The modern notion of “scientific method” becomes “scientism”—a blind advocacy of a valueless and “ruthless application of the most efficient means to accomplish predetermined ends” (Seigfried, 1996, p.36). Rather than foster an attitude of living openly, inquiry instead only poses questions to which empirical methods can find quantitative answers. Lear points to the prominence of self-help books, quick-fix diets, and exercise crazes as examples of fixed assumptions about what qualifies as the good life.

Similarly, Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, in *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1991) outlines three additional cultural malaises that seem to support Lear’s criticism of contemporary society. The first malaise Taylor identifies is culture’s “slide to subjectivism”—a notion similarly argued by several other authors, including Allan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) and Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* (1984). While Taylor defends the unique process of “finding one’s own original way of being,” he laments the deviation of this powerful moral ideal into a version
reductively grounded in atomism, the subjective, individualism, and self-defining freedom. Taylor—using arguments similar to those made by Dewey and Lear—contends that culture fails to recognize that individuality is accomplished through dialogue and relationships against the backdrop of a “horizon of significance.”

Emerging from a condition of knowingness and the slide to subjectivity is Taylor’s identification of a second malaise—the primacy of instrumental ends. Taylor argues that we live technology and reason today not in the service of flesh and blood humanity, but for pure instrumentality. Other theorists, including MacIntyre (1984) and Dewey (c.f. LW 5:66), similarly bemoan the amoral, economically driven cultural impulse in modern cultures. Taylor argues that we have lost sight of the moral sources that originally fed our technological society. Modern cultures, Taylor contends, fail to live technology and reason in a “human” way.

Due to the rampant relativism and amoral instrumentality in modern culture, Taylor suggests that a third malaise grips culture—the fragmentation of society. Decades earlier, Dewey made similar claims about society’s failure to build genuine communities (c.f. LW 2:327-350). Taylor argues that within the market and bureaucratic states of most developed nations, citizens feel a sense of helplessness that eventually results in political and communal apathy. Political activism thus survives solely grounded in special interests. The growing divide between fragmented groups and the inability of citizens to engage in meaningful, consensus-seeking dialogue places more emphasis on judicial review. Ultimately this legalistic turn results in all-or-nothing solutions to social dilemmas.
If the hypotheses presented by Lear and Taylor (among others) are persuasive, then professional philosophy’s marginalization is not surprising. Most individuals within cultures busily live in the absence of Socratic, reflective thought about human purposes, meaning, and value. “What is the good life?” no longer stands as a vital question as the condition of knowingness drives away the inquiry altogether. Since the “ends” of life are given, no meaningful dialogue and self-discovery is required. Differences among us become irresolvable. Consequently, philosophy loses its vitality in the face of unadulterated relativism as arguments fail to move beyond opinion when evidence is not quantitatively “significant.” Educational institutions turn away from the development of humanity and democracy and towards vocational preparation. “Useful” academic fields, including business, political science, biology, pedagogy, and engineering, become more valued in society than the ‘wishy washy’ context of the humanities. As human inquiry gives way to given ends, and as people increasingly tolerate relativism, the search for common human truths in experience and attempts to construct meaningful, community-building programs become irrelevant. The idea of philosophical investigation as a social project slips into incoherence as communities increasingly become fragmented.

These cultural malaises that hypothetically contribute to the marginalization of professional philosophy in both culture and academia clearly extend to sport philosophy. Sport philosophers deal with students, other faculty, and a general sporting public that tends to reduce all qualitative and phenomenological investigations to matters of opinion. A focus on instrumental ends places sport philosophers in a basically powerless position. Fragmented sport communities typically resist critical examination and active engagement with fundamental questions. Special interest disputes in sport, perceived as
only resolvable by “winner-take-all” legal action or top-down decrees, replace genuine
democratic dialogue. Undoubtedly, the crisis of knowingness seeps into the sporting
culture as scientism reigns over the examination of human movement.

Sport philosophy’s exclusion from the public dialogue and devalued status within
higher education, however, extends beyond the marginalization of general philosophy.
Within kinesiology departments, sport philosophy’s failure to qualify as even a soft
science devalues its perceived value as a contributor to the larger discipline. Few sport
philosophers generate grant money, make newsworthy discoveries, or reveal the “truth”
as do the hard sciences such as biomechanics and physiology or even quantitatively-
based versions of soft sciences like sociology, psychology, or pedagogy.

Some kinesiology programs now offer only scientifically-oriented classes and hire
only hard science faculty. Even broadly focused kinesiology/physical education programs
(my own undergraduate institution for example), continue to phase out previously
required “Introduction to Sport Philosophy” courses. Few programs in North America
offer multiple sport philosophy classes or hire rigorously trained sport philosophers.
Sport ethics courses seem to stand as the only humanistic area perceived to have
credibility and some utility. However, sport management faculty and sport sociologists
more often teach sport ethics courses than do sport philosophers. In broad, introductory
kinesiology courses that survey a wide range of movement-related disciplines,
philosophy at best may be given preliminary status because of the non-empirical methods
(and thus not “real” subject matter)—but not worth time for dedicated analysis such as
exercise physiology, biomechanics, sociology, and psychology.
In Canada for instance, many kinesiology and physical education programs seek external accreditation from the Canadian Council of University Physical Education and Kinesiology Administrators (CCUPEKA). Originally created for the purpose of sharing information and generating collective support, today CCUPEKA plays a larger role with a mandate that includes lobbying grant agencies to view the field’s faculty as “legitimate researchers rather than simply as ‘ball bouncers’ in the gym,” as well as graduating students from standardized programs. The list of courses required by CCUPEKA for accreditation in both kinesiology and physical education includes five clearly defined hard science courses (human anatomy, human physiology, exercise physiology, motor control/learning, and biomechanics), one specific soft science class (psychology of physical activity), and two ambiguously identified courses from the social sciences and/or humanities areas. Students must take two statistics or research methods courses—typically quantitative in nature. Thus, no philosophical course that would examine human movement or sport is required for kinesiology and physical education programs seeking accreditation.

Not only is the philosophical work of sport philosophers marginalized but so too is the focus of inquiry—sport. Terry Roberts (1995) points to this unfortunate “double whammy,” lamenting, “All philosophers of sport, because they deal with society’s playtime, have long suffered from not being taken seriously” (p.95). Interestingly, a clear example of the disregard of sport as a substantive area of inquiry comes from general philosophy—which tends not to fully support sport philosophy. In a graduate-level philosophy lecture, for instance, the professor in charge extended an invitation to the students to attend the International Association for the Philosophy of Sport (IAPS)
conference held in the local town. The announcement generated snickering and mild 
amusement from the class. Only one member of the philosophy department (an active 
IAPS member) delivered a formal presentation at this conference, and less than a handful 
of generally active students and faculty attended a single session. Interestingly, the 
graduate students’ pre-class conversations often revolved around their sport and fitness 
experiences. Although obviously an important part of these students’ lives, the idea of 
philosophic inquiry into sport strangely failed to meet their notion of academic 
legitimacy.

A second personal example emphasizes the systematic disregard for sport 
philosophy as a professional endeavor. At the recent 2004 IAPS conference in Fort 
Worth, Texas, I ate lunch with a tenured, British philosopher. When I asked this 
professional philosopher how colleagues felt about his involvement in a sport-related 
philosophical organization, he admitted that they were unaware of his participation. The 
new IAPS contributor kept his involvement with the professional organization and a 
publication in the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport (JPS)* secret from fellow 
philosophers and colleagues. The philosophical study of sport, he admitted, holds 
virtually no status within Europe’s professional philosophy circles.

This disregard of sport as a rich and meaningful area of study even infiltrates its 
usual home department—kinesiology. Most faculty members within kinesiology 
departments actively resist the study of sport-related issues. Instead, the majority of 
kinesiology faculty and students focus on “less trivial” phenomenon related to the study 
of human “movement.” Researchers in kinesiology departments are more likely to 
examine the ergonomic impact of workplace conditions, the debilitating physical effects
of diabetes, physiological reactions of rats to invasive procedures, or the effects of alcohol on college-aged students, than the meanings, values, purposes, and democratic force of sport. While all of these listed topics are undoubtedly important areas of inquiry, few kinesiology theorists seem willing to commit to studying sport (in its many forms) directly and in concert with other hard and soft science human movement research paradigms. It becomes apparent that many in kinesiology not only ignore sport research, but also consider it inconsequential and non-academic (c.f. Kretchmar, 1996)—and less likely to generate profitable and status-garnering research funds.

Sport management seems to remain the one field of study that continues to trumpet a sport focus. However these programs increasingly turn to general business and management theory to build curriculums. Sport management students will usually study finance, marketing, accounting, and leadership theory—yet are just as unlikely to study sport from a humanistic perspective. An instrumental, business focus dominates these programs, one that ignores reflective sport inquiry. So even in sport management, examinations of sport play a small role in the overall curriculum.

But the blame cannot be placed solely upon academic sport management programs. After all, within professional sport management a sport background is of little importance in comparison to business theory. For example, a major athletic apparel company once asked me to meet with them regarding their vacant Marketing Director for Canadian Basketball position. While speaking with the head of the marketing department, it became clear that my experiential and educational understanding of basketball and sport in general would take a backseat to someone who understood theoretically how to sell peanut butter. After considering my role in such a generic business environment, I
withdrew my name from consideration. With the exception of highly visible former athletes, professionals in sport-related managerial positions today are more likely to come from legal, business, or journalism backgrounds than from sport study programs. Consequently, sport management programs see an instrumental business focus as the only way to competitively prepare graduates for employment. Humanistic inquiry into sport merely gets in the way of scarce and “valuable” credit hour availability.

Sport philosophy, one can reasonably conclude, exists in a marginalized state in higher education, standing either on the outside of territorial philosophy programs or at the margins of an increasingly rationalized, scientized, and “de-sported” kinesiology field. As Kretchmar (1996) argues, “the academic discipline examining sport and physical activity’s desire for institutional legitimacy results in two problematic strategies: an inordinate focus on “healthy living” or a highly rationalized, scientized, and theoretically-driven “kinesiology” discipline. Within such a cool academic climate, the context, methods, and purposes of sport philosophy all become marginalized.

Sport philosophy typically fares no better beyond the ivory towers. Prior to the Athens Olympics, for instance, a CBC crew interviewed me for part of a larger documentary shown during the network’s primetime Olympic coverage. The show intended to compare changes in the Games from its 1896 revival to the return in 2004 to Greece. After an hour of discussion revolving around Olympic ideologies, commercialism, and social change (among other topics), the interviewer asked me what byline should appear under my name. When I responded, “Sport Philosopher” the interviewer admitted that “the public” would likely find that a strange title and suggested we find an alternative. Eventually, we agreed to use “Tim Elcombe, Sport Ethicist”
(unfortunately when watching the documentary live during the CBC’s Olympic telecast my mom misread the byline as “Sport Elitist”). The point of this story is not to single out the CBC, but to show the depth of professional sport philosophy’s marginalization. The CBC’s important and influential cultural standing in Canadian society and the interviewer’s disregard for sport philosophy stand as telling indicators of the field’s current status.

**Philosophy in the Twenty-First Century**

While professional philosophy in general (and sport philosophy in particular) is rendered increasingly insignificant from a cultural and higher education perspective, people still seem to crave some form of philosophical dialogue. As a result, media columnists engage in sensational and dogmatic moral debate with each other or with outspoken guests. Or those lost in their personal quest to answer Socrates’ fundamental question can scan the bookshelves for inspirational works that offer quick and simple recipes to realize the “good life.” The consequence of philosophical thought reduced to catch phrases and ten-step programs is an overly simplistic portrayal of what counts as “applied philosophy.”

Robert Simon provides an example of how deeply embedded such an oversimplified notion of applied philosophy is in contemporary culture. In his second edition of *Fair Play* (2003), Simon recounts a conversation between a philosopher and an inquisitive seatmate traveling on a domestic flight. After identifying his profession as a philosopher in friendly conversation, the fellow passenger (after several minutes of silence) asked, “What are some of your sayings?” (p.5). Philosophy tends to be reduced
to maxims, fortune cookie sayings, and seven-step programs to enlightenment. At times it appears as though the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* or *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* enterprises fulfill society’s current need for philosophical thought.

In contrast to oversimplified notions of applied philosophy, professional or academic philosophers seem to create a sense of esteem or specialization by increasing the complexity of their philosophical work. Debating overly-abstract concepts, developing inaccessible theories, rejecting “practical matters,” and remaining within the safe confines of the ivory tower (or conference banquet facilities) offers the sanctity of a privileged, though secluded, philosophical environment. Esteem, at times, is granted to the most obscure or technical philosophers, as well as to the few people that can grasp their concepts. Those engaged in professional philosophical dialogue seem more interested, for example, in arguing whether Rousseau was a proto-Kantian or anti-Hobbesian than if the ideas cultivated in *Emile* could impact modern education.

In essence, philosophy seems divorced from the everyday experiences of humans in order to gain some kind of elite status. Within higher education, the disinterest of students in humanities courses grows as they tacitly recognize the divide between academic philosophical theories and lived human experience. Undergraduate students, Stuhr writes, “find large gaps and little connection between the pretend ‘problems of philosophy’ and the actual problems of life” (1997, p.63). John Searle (1998) accuses philosophers of rejecting common sense or “default positions” in favor of revolutionary, although fleeting, theories. Richard Rorty (c.f. 1998) uses the term “philosophy” in a negative manner because of the field’s over-theoretical, “spectatorial,” and academic approach. Rorty suggests the act of “philosophizing” is a habit everyone needs to “kick”
(c.f. p.91). And Lear (1998) argues that the modern trend to standardize and professionalize activities such as philosophy (and kinesiology) results in them becoming “dead”—no longer open to novel forms of inquiry or “alive” to new possibilities. With inquiry blocked and experience ignored, cultural engagement in philosophical dialogue is muted. With philosophical dialogue muted, philosophy is further deadened and inquiry stalled—and a vicious circle is joined.

But, we must ask, what about the field of sport philosophy? Are the criticisms levied by Stuhr, Searle, Rorty, and Lear (among others) relevant to sport philosophers? Do philosophers deal with the real problems of sport, or with old and dated problems of sport philosophers? In Chapter 2, I will argue that critical accounts of general philosophy extend to sport philosophy since the field’s methods are, in fact, partially to blame for the field’s social and political insignificance. However before moving to a critique of sport philosophy (Chapters 2 and 3) and an attempt to reconstruct the field (Chapters 4 and 5), I will try to avoid what Dewey called “the most pervasive fallacy of philosophical thinking” (LW 6:5)—the neglect of context—by offering a snapshot of sport philosophy’s genealogy and current dominant typologies.

**The Current Dominant Typologies in Sport Philosophy**

To fairly consider sport philosophy’s complicity in its own cultural marginalization requires an understanding of the foundational positions that currently and historically dominate the field. In particular, I will outline the categorization effort—based on methodological similarities—initially offered by Robert Simon in his 1999 IAPS presidential address. Following the sketch of Simon’s three methodological
classifications, I will then turn my attention to Nicholas Dixon’s 2003 re-conceptualization of Simon’s typologies in *JPS*. Dixon reorganizes Simon’s categories into two polarized positions, divided by realism/antirealism premises that underlie the methods of most philosophers of sport.

Simon’s 1999 address presents a coherent snapshot of sport philosophy’s dominant methodological camps. In an effort to stake out the typologies most actively employed within contemporary sport philosophy, Simon (2000) identifies formalism, conventionalism, and broad internalism as three main rival theories dominating the field.

A genealogy of the sport philosophy literature must start with the important and groundbreaking work of the group of thinkers Simon refers to as formalists. Formalists, including Suits (c.f. 1988), Meier (c.f. 1988), and the “early” Kretchmar (1975) engage in metaphysical, analytic disputes/clarifications in an attempt to reveal immutable principles governing sport. Creating Venn diagrams, definitions, and laws, the formalists attempt to offer a clear starting point for all analyses of sport. One central idea shared by formalists is the logical incompatibility thesis—the idea that games have immutable “constitutive rules.” If a constitutive rule is broken, formalists contend, the violators are no longer “playing the game.” Formalist notions of sport philosophy dominated the early years of organized sport philosophy. In particular, Bernard Suits seminal work, *The Grasshopper* (1978) stimulated a series of articles in *JPS*. Considered by many as Platonic in nature, few formalists today continue the “archeological” project first started by Suits and Meier—sifting the sands to find the buried, hidden truisms that define sport.

But while the analytic/definitional work of Suits, Meier, and “early” Kretchmar dominated the formative years of the literature, an early strain of “conventionalism”—the
“social ethosists”—emerged to contest what they perceived as the purely logical, Platonic conception of sport developed by the formalists. Theorists, including D’Agostino (1981) and Lehman (1981), claimed that sport must be viewed from the perspective of the social ethos. Rather than adhere to a “logical incompatibility thesis,” the early conventionalists argued that games consist of more than formal rules. The ethos or social context of games must supplement the understanding and moral considerations of games, these theorists contend.

William J. Morgan entered the fray with his important 1987 article, “The Logical Incompatibility Thesis and Rules.” Morgan’s article eventually gave rise to various versions of “broad internalism” or “interpretivism.” In this essay, and more thoroughly in his book *Leftist Theories of Sport* (1994), Morgan partially defends the analytic work of formalists, yet does so while attempting to find a middle position that accounts for the compelling criticisms launched by the “social ethosists.” Combining the influential work of Alasdair MacIntyre with liberal political philosophy, Morgan defends a practice/institution split to deal with sport dilemmas. Simply put, Morgan argues that sport and other practice communities function with autonomy both at a practice and an institutional level. The sport practice community, Morgan contends, should refer to its irreducible need for constitutive rules and commitment to a gratuitous logic earlier forwarded by Suits and Meier (but minus their Platonic, “gods-eye view” tendencies) in all cases. At the same time, Morgan argues that sport practice communities need to avoid the tendencies of institutions to corrupt practices.

Morgan’s modified position initiated a groundswell of work appropriating MacIntyre for sport philosophy—in particular the analyses of sport practice communities
defined by constitutive rules and gratuitous logic responsible for evaluating their own standards and excellences. Others theorists, including Simon (2000, 2003), Schneider and Butcher (1993-1994), and McNamee (1995) directly applied various elements of MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* (1984) to the consideration of sport issues from the perspective of analytic, *a priori* principle-based criteria established by members of sports’ various communities. Still others, including Dixon (c.f. 2003), Russell (c.f. 1999), and Torres (c.f. 2000) adopted the position initially labeled by Simon as “broad internalism” while sometimes appropriating various theorists including Ronald Dworkin and John Rawls to deal with sport’s moral and political dilemmas. Broad internalists, also referred to as interpretivists, attempted to overcome the Platonic quality of formalism while accounting for the variability of games by developing broadly defined principles that opened space for interpretation by community members.

This broad internalist or interpretivist position, however, also ignited fresh debates as a new paradigm emerged from the application of Richard Rorty’s contemporary “neopragmatism” to sport philosophy. Rortyan-inspired sport philosophers, including Roberts (c.f. 1995, 1998) and Burke (c.f. 1997), criticized any conception of sport philosophy that makes use of *a priori* principles as assessment criteria. Roberts and Burke reacted to the Platonism of the formalists, as well as the essentialism of interpretivist sport philosophers including Morgan, Schneider and Butcher, and Simon. The points of disagreement between Roberts (c.f. 1998) and Morgan (c.f. 1998), in particular, articulated the differences between the “subjectivist Rortyans” (whom Simon classified as “conventionalists”) and the interpretivists in their debate over the limits and possibilities of ethnocentrism.
In an attempt to clarify the debate, Nicholas Dixon (2003) reclassifies the three rival typologies that Simon organized around common methodological approaches. Dixon collapses the three typologies into two paradigms defined by what he perceived to be a central premise underlying Simon’s classes—the presence of or rejection of some form of sporting reality. Dixon thus reconfigures the divide into a more clearly definable “antirealist” versus “realist” debate. According to Dixon’s classification, formalists and broad internalists/interpretivists fall under the “realist” rubric and thus commit to a search for and application of universal sporting “reals” to guide philosophic analysis. Sporting realists, Dixon (2003) argues, “believe that relevant moral principles, principles about the nature and purpose of sport, and pertinent background information together determine the most reasonable positions in moral and nonmoral debate about sport” (p.110).

While few sport philosophers today subscribe to formalism, a large portion of the field’s scholars apply some form of a priori principles relevant to sport community. For example, Simon (2003) argues that an “ethic of competition” or an “inner morality of sports” exists to provide objective criteria for considering sport dilemmas. In a similar vein, Dixon himself (among others) contends that examinations of sport begin with the, in his words, “uncontroversial” analytic claim that the purpose of sport is to accurately determine athletic superiority (c.f. 1992, p.3).

Dixon identifies antirealists as an oppositional camp, one that rejects any form of essentialism or “reality.” Dixon places the “conventionalists”—primarily Rortyan-inspired theorist including Roberts and Burke—in the antirealist category. These “conventionalists” adhere to a Rortyan denial of any conception of truth that moves beyond pure contingency and idiosyncratic language development.
Roberts’ *JPS* article “Sport and Strong Poetry” (1995) best captures the ideas promoted by antirealist philosophers in a sporting context. Drawing upon the work of Rorty, Nietzsche, and Harold Bloom, Roberts claims that truth and reality are servants of language. Language is not the servant of some fixed, ahistorical reality called “the truth.” Antirealists reject any theory that begins with premises derived from “old and tired” metaphysical truths. Instead, Roberts uses Rorty to claim that the “chief instrument of cultural change and of intellectual and moral progress is not the discovery of how things really are, but the employment of increasingly useful metaphors” (p.96).

Roberts’ Rortyan-inspired work focuses on contingency and irony. Strong poet-athletes, in Roberts’ view, stand as exemplars to “private perfection” (p.105)—to “giving birth to oneself” (p.103). This strong poet-athlete, continues Roberts, accepts the ongoing and personal struggle with contingency: “More than all others the strong poet-athlete acknowledges, appreciates, and accepts the worthy role of chance in the determination of her fate, of her self. That she is a poet-athlete is no more or less the result of contingency than the determination of any other artist as artist” (p.105).

Other theorists have entered into the categorization debate. Morgan (2004), for instance, believes Simon and Dixon mislabel all Rortyan scholars as “conventionalists.” Morgan argues that Roberts and Burke, for example, represent a fourth category he labels “subjectivism.” A less subjective reading of Rorty, Morgan contends, is possible. Yet Morgan and others continue to accept Dixon’s conceptual move to reduce the field into polarized groups of sporting realists and antirealists. At this point, Dixon’s categorization of sport philosophers around the realism/antirealism divide appears to stand as the field’s clearest and most compelling snapshot.
In sum, Dixon’s recent work establishes a conceptual dualism in the field from a realism/antirealism perspective. These polarized camps begin and end sport debate with widely differing assumptions and attitudes. But has Dixon fully captured the real divide exhibited in the sport philosophy literature?

Reorganizing the Dominant Paradigms in Sport Philosophy

Simon, Morgan, and Dixon’s clean analytic work offers important contributions to the field of sport philosophy. Simon and Morgan’s illumination of methodological typologies provide sport philosophers with a valuable framework for better understanding the field as a whole. Dixon’s categorical collapsing around the realism/antirealism debate sheds further light on the polarization of professional sport philosophy. However, I contend that Dixon’s re-conceptualization of Simon’s typology classification uses language and promotes ideas that fail to offer the clearest picture of the premises that divide contemporary sport philosophy into polarized positions. For the purpose of a pragmatic critique and reconstruction, I believe two more revisions or points of clarification best capture the points of disagreements that polarize the dominant paradigms in sport philosophy.

First, to better grasp the differences between realists and antirealists, the debate’s language must be clarified to emphasize the point that the two paradigms are engaged in a battle over the conception of *truth*. Dixon’s accurate identification of poles is based on observing our field through this lens. However, at times the language used by realists and antirealists (particularly the use of “real” as the conceptual category) muddies this fundamental point of contention. The disagreement is better understood as a relatively
simple divide between sport philosophers who posit some form of general
correspondence theories of truth (realists), and those who reject such notions of truth
correspondence (antirealists). Subsequently, this clarification reveals the radically
different notions of purpose underlying the work of realist and antirealist sport
philosophers. Realist sport philosophers see their primary purpose as the search for and
clarification of sporting “truths” or immutable principles from which moral and nonmoral
claims can be deduced. Antirealist philosophers, in contrast, seek to rid the field of
sporting “truths” and to reject rigid principles and criterion. The antirealist sport
philosopher replaces the quest for truth or deductive criterion with the promotion of a
capricious, poetic, and fluid sporting realm.

This radical opposition leads to a second important conceptual clarification of
Dixon’s realist/antirealist camps. The philosophical purposes implicitly and explicitly
expressed by “truth-seekers” and “truth-rejectors” define the methodological
commitments adopted by these polarized positions—in particular the role metaphysics
plays in the philosophical examination of sport. “Truth-seekers,” I contend, consider
metaphysics “first philosophy” in getting argumentation off the ground. From analytic
metaphysical claims, these sport philosophers deduce everything—from ethical and
aesthetic evaluations, to the clarification of moral and nonmoral values—to the
acceptance or rejection of change in sport.

Contrastingly, “truth rejectors” seek to dispose of all metaphysical dialogue.
Claims such as Burke’s (1997) Rortyan-inspired phrase “there is no deeper foundation to
rationality than solidarity” (p.61) exemplify this antimetaphysical stance.

“Antimetaphysicians” reject any form of deductive methodology—in fact, in theory they
reject all forms of methodology that move beyond language games. When considering
issues such as the use of performance-enhancing substances, “truth-rejectors” deny that
anything independent of idiosyncratic actors or social conventions can establish better or
worse answers. Instead, the most compelling arguments win.

The preceding section’s selective genealogy and analysis of sport philosophy
reveals dualisms within the sport philosophy field from the perspective of both purposes
and methodology. And while my reconfiguration of the realist/antirealist debate to an
analytic metaphysician/antimetaphysician dispute may reshuffle the deck somewhat
(some interpretivists, for example, may now fall on the antimetaphysical side of the
divide), for the most part the metaphysician/antimetaphysican reorientation keeps
Dixon’s camps intact—but I believe with enhanced clarification as to the source of the
chasm.

This reconfiguration of the realism/antirealism debate to disagreements over first
philosophy will be necessary as I move to a critical evaluation of the current status of
sport philosophy presented in Chapter 2. While outliers to these camps exist (primarily
pragmatists and existential phenomenologists), boiling down the fundamental divide
between the analytic metaphysicians and antimetaphysicians re-conceptualizes the debate
over sport philosophy’s purposes, tools of inquiry, and methods. In particular, stemming
from this reconsideration of sport philosophy’s dominant paradigms, I will posit the
following three interrelated criticisms (against the background of Dewey’s pragmatism)
against both camps:

1. Incommensurable theories evolve from disparate conceptions of
   metaphysics—critique of sport philosophy’s critical power (Chapter 2)
2. Practice/theory dualisms emerge from appeals to incomplete theories of experience—critique of sport philosophy’s “tools” for inquiry (Chapter 3)

3. Battles over the narrow notion of truth dominate discourse rather than the more central concern of meaning—critique of sport philosophy’s purposes (Chapter 3)

Dewey’s theories of experience and meaning will serve as the backdrop for the critique of sport philosophy’s purposes, methods, and tools of inquiry. At the end of Chapter 3, I will contend that serious consequences arise from sport philosophy’s two dominant paradigms. Consequently, Dewey’s recommended corrections to the dominant paradigms within sport philosophy—developed in Chapters 4 and 5—will offer a new vision for the field’s future.
CHAPTER 2
The Limits of Sport Philosophy:
A Pragmatic Critique of the Field’s Critical Methods

If basic problems can be settled only where they arise, namely in the cultural conditions of our associated life; if philosophy is fundamentally a criticism which brings to light these problems and gives them the clarity that springs from definite formulation; and if after formulation philosophy can do no more than point the road intelligent action must take,—then the greatest service any particular philosophical theory can render is to sharpen and deepen the sense of these problems (LW 14:89).

In the first chapter I made the following three contextual claims about sport philosophy at the start of the twenty-first century. First, despite the socially recognized and significant subject matter, philosophers of sport find themselves mostly ignored by a culture that engages in little philosophical reflection of any kind. Second, marginalization of sport philosophers in higher education occurs at multiple levels at the hands of multiple parties because of the field’s devalued subject matter (sport) and supposed “non-empirical” nature (so-called “non-scientific” humanistic inquiry). Third, the vast majority of the field’s practitioners fall into one of two dominant camps—either analytic metaphysicians or antimetaphysicians. This division results in a field deeply polarized by seemingly irreconcilable methodological commitments.

Based on this description of sport philosophy and the social climate within which the field’s practitioners now function, a vital question emerges: Are sport philosophers complicit in the field’s academic marginalization and social irrelevance? I believe that sport philosophers must answer “yes” to this important query and accept at least part of the responsibility for the field’s professional marginalization and cultural irrelevance.

To flesh out this controversial claim in the next two chapters, a Deweyan-inspired critique will suggest that philosophers adhering to the two typologies theoretically
dominating sport philosophy (analytic metaphysicians and antimetaphysicians) hold to
philosophical methods, tools of inquiry, and purposes that contribute to the field’s public
impotence and academic trivialization. In particular, I will sketch out three critiques of
sport philosophy that best explain the field’s social and political disregard. Chapter 2
will emphasize the critical limits of sport philosophy’s dominant typologies, while in
Chapter 3 I will turn my attention to the limited theories of experiences and partial
purposes that fuel most sport philosopher’s methods.

In this second chapter, I will first outline Dewey’s notion of philosophy as
“inherently criticism” and summarize a trio of errors that contributes to non-pragmatic
philosophy’s failure to perform this cultural task. Following this section, I will present
my first criticism of the field of sport philosophy—an analysis of the methods of sport
philosophy’s paradigms from the perspective of functioning as “criticism” of sport. In
particular, I will conclude that both the analytic metaphysicians and antimetaphysicians
succumb to the errors of philosophy outlined by Dewey and consequently adhere to
methods that seriously limit their critical force.

Sport Philosophy, Criticism, and Philosophical Errors

William Morgan suggests in his influential work, *Leftist Theories of Sport: A
Critique and Reconstruction* (1994), that the sport philosopher lead critical analyses of
sport in order to “bear practical fruit” (p.5). Dewey would undoubtedly support Morgan’s
claim that philosophers are best suited to lead the critical, reflective analysis required by
social institutions such as sport. Dewey and other classic pragmatists, including Charles
Peirce and William James, would likely add that not *any* philosophical approach is
capable of performing the efficacious assessments and evaluations desired by Morgan. In fact, from the Deweyan pragmatic standpoint—as culturally situated, and historically sensitive—philosophy must be “inherently criticism,” beginning and ending with the problems of everyday life as they arise in human practices like sport. Consequently, only philosophical analysis embodying a *pragmatic spirit* would be deemed capable of performing the critical role promoted by Morgan.

The key to appreciating Dewey’s version of criticism, understood as appraisal or evaluation, is that he engages in this process for the purpose of reconstruction:

Philosophy is criticism; criticism of the influential beliefs that underlie culture; a criticism which traces the beliefs to their generating conditions as far as may be, which tracks them to their results, which considers the mutual compatibility of the elements of the total structure of beliefs. Such an examination terminates, whether so intended or not, in a projection of [beliefs] into a new perspective which leads to new surveys of possibilities” (LW 6:19).

Dewey and his fellow classic pragmatists, particularly Peirce and James, offer a vision of philosophy as criticism developed in response to increasingly disconnected inherited traditions. In particular, Dewey (as well as Peirce and James) believes that philosophers must overcome a trio of pervasive and damaging conceptual ideas—labeled by Boisvert (1998a) the “Plotinian Temptation,” the “Galilean Purification,” and the “Asomatic Attitude”—to realize their full critical potential.

First, Boisvert argues that Dewey and the classic pragmatists disassociate from philosophical notions that fall prey to the “Plotinian Temptation”—the aim to reduce the world to, and unify the complexity of life from, a single source. Rather than strive for a deep, singular *unity*, Dewey embraces the irreducible plurality of lived experience by seeking *harmony* amongst an “analogous set of clusters whose components we must struggle to hold together in a homeostatic balance” (Boisvert, 1998a, p.7). Pluralism, for
Dewey, goes “all the way down” and thus he rejects the reductive “quest for certainty” that plagues most philosophical thought.

A second strand in modern philosophy Dewey rejects is the drive toward the “Galilean Purification”—the substitution of clean, idealized situations for the multi-textured messiness of the everyday world. Philosophers guilty of the Galilean Purification reflect upon utopian, uncontaminated notions of culture. This results in philosophers conducting thought experiments from a perspective akin to sterilized lab environments, rather than from the irreducible complexity of life. In contrast, Dewey refuses to engage in philosophical thought in artificial, make-believe, and unreal worlds. Dewey believes philosophers must find their analysis “at home in the concrete, complex, indeed messy, condition of human life” (Boisvert, 1998a, p.9). Thus, Dewey supports Peirce’s (1992) plea to philosophers to “not pretend to doubt in philosophy what we do not doubt in our hearts.” For example, those familiar with Descartes’ meditations and John Rawls’ “original situation” will recognize that both philosophers begin their philosophical analyses with the rejection and suspension of embodied experience, traditions, and empirical evidence.

Third, Dewey rejects the Asomatic Attitude—the elevation of some form of pure reason (mind) disassociated from the body. This dualistic “bicompartmentalization” of minds and bodies, Boisvert argues, fails to recognize the interactive and embodied existence of humans responding to the environment in which they are enmeshed (p.10). In contrast, Dewey grounds his philosophical commitments in the lived constraints and possibilities shaping and shaped by humans. Pragmatists demand that philosophy be a fully human enterprise—one that accepts humans at once as moving, feeling, biological,
cognitive rather than computers controlling flesh or merely atoms bouncing off each other. The Asomatic Attitude denies the fully embodied quality of human life—a person’s genetic predispositions, history, social environment, natural surroundings and so on.

Modern (and I will argue postmodern) sport theorists subscribe to elements of this trio of errors, thus limiting the critical and reconstructive force of most humanistic inquiry into athletics. Sport philosophers in particular, who adhere to either of the field’s two dominant paradigms, often fall prey to versions of the Plotinian Temptation, the Galilean Purification, and most ironically, the Asomatic Attitude. To more efficaciously engage in reconstructive-minded criticism will require sport philosophers to reconsider their work in light of these erroneous, limiting ideas since each (in concert) permeates the three critiques I levy against the field of sport philosophy in the following two chapters.

In the remainder of Chapter 2 I will launch my first critique of the field of sport philosophy—that sport philosophers employing either an analytic conception of metaphysics or a complete rejection of metaphysics fail to adequately perform the philosophical role of cultural criticism set out by pragmatism. In Chapter 3, I will turn my attention to two additional critiques. First, that most sport philosophers apply incomplete theories of experience that directly limit their critical force. Second, the vast majority of sport philosophers misguidedly focus on issues surrounding truth rather than meaning. Correcting all three of these limitations, I believe, will make pragmatism a more compelling philosophical approach for those interested in making a difference in sport and culture. The two critiques offered in Chapter 3, I will argue, combine to limit most sport philosopher’s critical power—the focus of the first critique.
Critique #1: Conceptions of Metaphysics Lacking Critical Force

Despite the potential for philosophy to positively impact an important cultural practice like sport, few sport philosophers serve such a vital role as the one imagined by Dewey in contemporary culture—a marginalized status for which sport philosophers must accept part of the responsibility. A significant reason, I will argue, for sport philosophy’s cultural irrelevancy is the limited methodological starting point both dominant typologies employ to engage in critical analyses. Since Dewey considers philosophy as “reconstruction through criticism,” (c.f. MW 12) and because the overriding theme of this project is sport philosophy’s potential impact on sport and wider culture, evaluating the field’s critical force requires an assessment of how sport philosophers initiate inquiry. In the case of sport philosophy, limited metaphysical considerations serve as the starting point applied by most sport philosophers to conduct critical examinations of sport issues.

Contributors to sport philosophy’s most respected periodical, JPS, regularly engage in implicit conceptual disagreements between the worth or place of metaphysics in philosophical examinations of sport. As discussed in the concluding section of Chapter 1, I believe a battle over metaphysics in fact establishes the faultline between the dominant typologies of professional sport philosophy. Consequently, I reframed Dixon’s division of the positions polarizing sport philosophy to analytical metaphysicians and antimetaphysicians from realists and antirealists. My divide now serves as the basis for critiquing the critical power for the dominant typologies of sport philosophy.
Constructionists’ Analytic Conceptions of Metaphysics

Falling into a category of philosophical thought referred to by Stuhr (1997) as “metaphysical constructionists” (p.122), analytic metaphysicians carefully delineate clear, rational, and logical *a priori* principles to begin a deductive chain of reasoning that addresses the ills and dilemmas challenging sport. For example, Russell (1999) argues that an athletic practice such as baseball must “generate a coherent and principled account of the point and purposes that underlie the game, attempting to show the game in its best light” (p.35). Sport philosophers subscribing to the metaphysical constructionist paradigm must “seriously” and “methodically” define and defend first principles to get philosophical inquiry off the ground—the “necessary spadework” that must come prior to any other philosophical application.28

Numerous examples of analytic metaphysicians applying fixed, *a priori* principles that drive deductive methodologies exist in the sport philosophy literature. Although analytic metaphysicians of sport adhere to differing first principles, similarities prompt Torres and McLaughlin (2003) to assert, “There seems to be a general consensus in the sport-philosophy literature as to the central purpose of sport” (p.145).29 While some may challenge Torres and McLaughlin’s declaration, what is clear is that a plethora of sport philosophers offer first principles or static metaphysical claims to drive sport inquiry.

Simon (2003) for instance declares, “Competition in sports is ethically defensible…when it is engaged in voluntarily as part of a mutual quest for excellence” (p.27). Fraleigh (1984a) posits “knowledge of relative abilities to move mass in space and time in the ways prescribed by the rules” as the central nonmoral value in all sporting contests (p.28). Dixon (1992) refers to the “determination of athletic superiority” as the
“essential value of sport” (p.3). Other examples exist, including Torres’ (2000) case for maximizing opportunities for comparisons of constitutive skills as a fundamental purpose of sport, Holowchak’s (2000) application of the ancient principle arête to drive sport inquiry, and Butcher and Schneider’s (1998) commitment to “fair play as respect for the game” as a philosophical first principle.

These analytic metaphysicians, beginning with their first principles, then employ deductive reasoning to derive conclusions related to sport dilemmas. As Simon (2003) explains, “without some defensible standards against which actual play can be measured, the valuable aspects of sports cannot be distinguished from the harmful or unfair aspects. Without reasoned standards of evaluation, criticism and acclaim alike would rest on purely emotive reactions rather than upon the results of perhaps the most important quest—the quest for justification through meeting the challenges of open discussion and critical inquiry” (p.39).

John Russell’s article “Are Rules All an Umpire Has to Work With?” (1999) is an oft-cited exemplar of broad internalism or interpretivism—the most popular and thought provoking version of the analytic metaphysician typology in sport. In this article, Russell considers how baseball umpires can justly render decisions in situations not addressed by the formal rules. Applying Dworkin’s “interpretivism” approach to legal issues, Russell argues that principles and theories leading to the best interpretation of a game should serve as the foundation for adjudicating sport actions—in this case umpiring decisions that extend beyond formal rules. Russell’s position supports Simon’s (2000) claim that “certain principles and theories must be presupposed if we are [to] make sense of key
elements of sport, such as the rules, the skills that are tested, and possibly the history, traditions, and central elements of the ethos of particular sports” (pp. 8-9).

It is helpful to consider in more detail the issue Russell raises regarding difficult baseball umpiring decisions. To deal with the dilemma faced by umpires making calls in indeterminate circumstances, Russell posits four “principles of adjudication in sport.” First, Russell contends that “rules should be interpreted in such a manner that the excellences embodied in achieving the lusory goal of the game are not undermined but are maintained and fostered.” Second, he argues, “rules should be interpreted to achieve an appropriate competitive balance.” A third principle outlined by Russell states, “rules should be interpreted according to principles of fair play and sportsmanship.” Finally, Russell asserts that “rules should be interpreted to preserve the good conduct of games” (pp. 35-36).

Russell does not hold all four principles in the same regard. He elevates the first of the aforementioned principles to the status of “the first principle of games adjudication.” By this Russell means that the remaining three principles flow from the more central principle that officials should interpret the rules to “create a context that allows for the realization of [the game’s] obstacles and the related excellences…that are available to overcome them” (p.35). Russell points to the example of umpires disallowing a potential game winning home run by Kansas City Royals third baseman George Brett because the amount of pine tar resin on his bat exceeded the permissible limit. Despite the technical appropriateness of the umpire’s original decision, league officials eventually reinstated the home run since “Brett had…clearly gained no special advantage from having the extra pine tar on the bat” (p.30). The “just” decision to suspend the formal rule
for the sake of rewarding excellence, Russell believes, supports the critical power of his first principle.

Other examples of analytic metaphysicians applying deductive methodology from first principles to deal with sport dilemmas, including steroid use, exist. For example, Simon (2003) supports the banning of certain performance-enhancing substances on the grounds that their usage ultimately violates his foundational claim that competitive sport is a mutual quest for excellence. Holowchak (2000) deduces that the utilization of some ergogenic aids (including steroids) falls short of his first principle—the display of arête in athletics. Butcher and Schneider (1998) start their deductive reasoning against the use of steroids with a version of “fair play as respect for the game.”

Examples beyond performance-enhancing substances also demonstrate the methodology employed by analytic metaphysicians. Dixon (1992), for instance, deduces from his first principle—sport competition’s central purpose as revealing differences in athletic abilities—that purposefully “blowing out” or “running up the score” against a weaker opponent is incontrovertibly ethical because of the accurate knowledge gained about relevant skill. When considering the construction of sports, Torres (2000) concludes that games promoting “non-constitutive skills” more frequently (i.e. throw-ins in soccer) or to decide games (i.e. penalty kicks in soccer) fall short of the requirements for superior sport contests set out by his a priori principle—that “good” games minimize the application of non-constitutive or “regulative” skills (i.e. basketball free throws) and “B Games” (i.e. ice hockey powerplays). Torres and McLaughlin (2003) defend ties as more appropriate or just conclusions to games (in comparison to determining winners or
losers through the use of extra time structures) since they best reflect the “central purpose of sport”—accurate and representative determination of relevant athletic abilities.

To summarize, analytic metaphysicians begin by defining abstract first principles that reveal the nature or essence of sport. When questions about change or moral dilemmas arise, these philosophers then apply first principles in order to engage in deductive reasoning. The appropriateness or ethical status of the issue under examination is thus evaluated against the particular first principle of sport that is championed. So when considering a rule change, Dixon would evaluate its appropriateness on the degree to which it would assist in the determination of athletic superiority. Torres is likely to agree with Dixon’s approach, while additionally considering if the rule change emphasizes the utilization of so-called “constitutive skills” when differentiating between athletic competitors. When reflecting on an ethical dilemma, such as the intentional violation of rules, Simon determines the moral status by the degree to which the participants’ mutual quest for excellence is impacted. But how efficacious is the analytic metaphysicians’ methodology in offering criticism for the everyday issues confronting sport?

**Evaluating Analytic Metaphysicians’ Critical Methods**

Few would likely argue, when considered from an experiential perspective, that the first principles identified by the analytic metaphysicians point to desirable and durable generic qualities we often want to promote in our cherished sports. For instance, competitive cooperation, the notions of quest and excellence, fair play and respect for the many games we play and watch, promoting rules that privilege superior performances
(preferably with more dynamic skills and tactics), and arête are typically considered positive elements of sport.

The analytic metaphysicians believe that critical analysis of sport, by way of applying these principles via deductive methods, arrives at conclusions that ultimately improve sport. From the metaphysical constructionist perspective, better or worse answers exist when considering athletic issues in relation to essences or central purposes of sport. Supporting this methodology from a broad internalist or interpretivist position, Dixon (2003) posits “It is the belief that principles about the nature and purpose of sport…, supplemented where applicable with other factors such as general moral principles and the pertinent rules, dictate the best answer to moral and nonmoral debates about sport” (p.110). This statement by Dixon defines clearly the analytic metaphysicians’ methodological commitment.

At the same time a closer examination of this definition (and the analytic, first principle, deductive method in general) reveals critical limitations. One difficulty with this position lies with the philosophical “quest for certainty” these theorists implicitly seek. Dewey vigorously battles against such attempts to exact neat and clean conclusions stemming from chains of deductive reasoning. “Philosophy, thinking at large, allows itself to be diverted into absurd search for an intellectual philosopher’s stone of absolutely wholesale generalizations, thus isolating that which is permanent in a function and for a purpose, and converting it into the intrinsically eternal, conceived either (as Aristotle conceived it) as that which is the same at all times, or as that which is indifferent to time, out of time,” he argues (LW1:33).
Another related problem arises as Dixon and the other analytic metaphysicians’ commitment to starting sport inquiry with first principles results in logical quagmires that limit the critical force of their deductive methodology. Analytic metaphysicians, including Dixon, Russell, Simon, Torres, Schneider and Butcher, as well as Holowchak, exemplify this deductive methodology in their examination of sport dilemmas by rendering verdicts on contests that violate sport first principles as “unjust,” “unfair,” “bad,” or “poor” to name a few descriptors offered.

Analytic metaphysicians, by appealing to short lists of first principles, essentially fall prey to both the Plotinian Temptation—the search for a single source of unity—as well as the Galilean Purification—replacing the messy conditions of human life with neat and clean starting points for inquiry. When engaging in reflective inquiry the metaphysical constructionists reduce sport to singular purposes and trade the complexity of this human practice for fixed and idealized conditions within which to engage in inquiry. Consequently, the search for atemporal, essential, or transcendent principles to dictate inquiry inevitably leaves analytic metaphysians with no margin for error, or in what Kretchmar (2001a) describes as a “box canyon” (p.164).

For instance, Dixon’s aforementioned first principle indicates that the central purpose of sport is the “determination of athletic superiority.” Yet questions about the sufficiency of his position arise when applying this deductive methodology to an issue like the permissibility or impermissibility of steroid use by athletes. In relationship to Dixon’s central purpose of sport—the determination of athletic superiority—agreed upon steroid use by athletic competitors would seem to be acceptable. There is nothing apparent from his first principle that supports a ban on the use of performance-enhancing
substances, as athletic superiority can be shown with or without any number of performance aids. Similarly, Dixon’s first principle cannot, on its own, conclude that fighting in hockey is immoral. In fact, a vocal and powerful group within the hockey community contends that fighting plays a major role in determining hockey superiority—from protecting star players and discouraging questionable stick use, to physically intimidating and wearing down opponents and raising the level of teammate intensity. Yet Dixon (2001) argues that both steroid use and fighting in hockey are clearly unethical elements sport needs to eradicate (e.g. p.85). To reach such a conclusion Dixon must draw from something in addition to or other than a first principle to defend this position. So while these final positions regarding steroid use and hockey fighting may be agreeable to most, Dixon appears to belie his methodological commitments to reach them.

Deductive applications of Torres’ (2000) first principle—the need for contests to emphasize constitutive skills and limit regulative skills to assess athletic competency—serves as a second example to emphasize the limitations of this methodology. In his analysis, Torres clearly makes the case that certain types of skills applied in game performances fail to “fit the bill” as constitutive skills. Therefore rules should minimize opportunities for their utilization. Examples of less desirable or “regulative skills” from Torres’ perspective would include free throws in basketball, penalty shots in both soccer and hockey, and one could assume field goals in American football. Yet these skills are essential to the fabric of modern versions of these sports and thus Torres’ neat division between constitutive and regulative skills inevitably runs into difficulty. Further, the skills, strategies, and situations created by so-called “regulative” skills provide much of the charm of the sports of basketball, soccer, hockey, and football. The compelling nature
of a last second free throw or field goal to win basketball or football games respectively, powerplays in the late minutes of hockey games, set pieces from soccer corner kicks and many other “B-Game” skills and situations can potentially capture the imagination of participants and spectators alike. This leads Kretchmar (2001a) to argue that once we abandon the utopian idea of games without violations (an example of the Galilean Purification) and dissolve the unnecessary divide between constitutive and regulative rules, Torres’ “regulative skills” should be perceived as less dualistic “convention-dependent” forms of behavior.

In addition to devaluing important skill sets, Torres’ first principle account also runs into logical problems when considering the adoption of skills not yet part of the fabric of a game—as dribbling in basketball and the forward pass in American football once were. Although few would argue against the dramatic positive influence these skills and rule alterations make possible for these games, Torres’ deductive methodology, beginning from his first principle, would fail to permit their inclusion at the time of their adoption. The same can be said about not-yet conceived of skills that will be part of future games—skills, rules, and strategies made possible by some new convention. It seems as though Torres seeks to temporally freeze games in their current state, ignoring the evolutionary process that contributed to their own contemporary form.

Dixon (2003) anticipates criticisms of this kind. Speaking on behalf of all “sporting realists,” Dixon expresses the belief that the fundamental principles dictating the best answers to sport debates “are amenable to rational argument” (p.110). He goes further, offering three delimitations or points of clarification to the sporting realist’s position. First, Dixon argues that sporting realists do not “clumsily impose a single,
universal, unchanging view on sporting issues that ignores vital differences between different places and different eras” (p.113). Second, he states that “sporting realists do not believe in the fiction that applying the relevant moral principles and principles about the nature and purpose of sport will produce a clearly correct answer to all debates about sport” (p.113). Finally, Dixon claims that sporting realists are “often motivated in part by a painful awareness of the fallibility of our views…. Awareness of our past errors tends to instill a sense of humility and the realization that further reflection on moral principles and principles about the nature and purpose of sport might reveal some of our current practices to be unjust or imprudent and some of our current views to be mistaken” (p.114).

Despite these acknowledged delimitations, Dixon’s earlier description of interpretivist methods includes a telling phrase, “Principles about the nature and purpose of sport…dictate the best answer to moral and nonmoral debates about sport” (p.110; emphasis added). Yet when facing logical quandaries or practical application, Dixon and other interpretivists conveniently seem to turn away from rigidly defined first principles. For example, Simon (2000), when considering the ability of rival theories to support a competitive squash player’s decision to lend equipment to a racquet-less opponent, concludes, “Although broad internalists [analytic metaphysicians] might well want to avoid the metaphysical complications attached to the notion of games having their own interests independent of those human agents, perhaps all that internalists need to assert is the metaphysically more minimalist claim that the point of playing competitive squash would be best achieved if the match was played” (p.7).
But how can this dominant typology of sport philosophy, defined by its elevation of metaphysics to first philosophy, critically tend to sport dilemmas with minimalist, tenuous, or widely interpretable a priori principles? A deductive system cannot offer even tentatively generalizable conclusions when the methodological starting point ultimately remains “up for grabs.” Further, on metaphysical constructionist terms, Dixon’s acknowledgment that his methods are compatible with contingency, contextualization, and fallibility greatly reduces the critical force of the analytic metaphysical approach to dealing with sport issues. If Dixon and other analytic metaphysicians must appeal to (or remain open to) something other than a logical, deductive process that begins with a fixed principle, they surrender their assurance that certain starting points offer hope for “real” solutions to human sport problems. Consequently, I suggest that Dixon’s delimitations undermine the methods, although not necessarily the conclusions, he and other interpretivists purport to adhere to.

A return to Russell’s (1999) baseball umpiring example, in which he posits a first principle, similarly demonstrates this limitation. “Rules,” he states, “should be interpreted in such a manner that the excellences embodied in achieving the lusory goal of the game are not undermined but are maintained and fostered” (p.15). In his George Brett example, the rule proscribing the amount of pine tar allowed was not just interpreted, but ignored. Brett’s bat did indeed violate the rule and the umpire correctly called him out. Yet the league later overturned the decision and rescheduled the final innings of the game. What Russell’s principled deductive method cannot account for is what informs the interpretation (or outright rejection of) a rule. Brett’s bat did not meet the specifications of permitted equipment. Yet Russell fails to offer criterion to differentiate between the
appropriate suspension of the pine tar rule and the use of, say, corked bats. Corked bats
can help players achieve the game’s lusory goal, although their use constitutes a serious
rule violation at all levels of baseball.

Room for multiple interpretations of his first principle similarly highlights another
concern with Russell’s interpretivist methods. For instance, if the lusory goal (or
acceptance to overcome obstacles) remains open for revision, simply changing what
“obstacles” are to be “overcome”—a consistent issue facing sport communities—can
radically change the possible interpretations of sport dilemmas. If alterations to the
defined obstacles limiting the type of substances permitted in athletic training programs
opened space for steroid use, Russell’s rational, principled argument would fall short of
fully supporting or rejecting this development. Further, it must be asked which
excellences should be maintained and furthered? What if these too are up for grabs?

In several places, interpretivists including Dixon, Simon, and Russell leave room
for reasoned arguments to alter currently adhered to first principles. But they fail to
provide us with an indication of criteria for adjudicating this process. If the principle that
serves as the linchpin, as the starting point and criterion for analytic metaphysicians’
deductive systems always remains “up for grabs,” and if the generality of first principles
leaves room for multiple interpretations without adjudicative criterion, then what is “up
for grabs” seemingly goes “all the way down.” How can this method then render
conclusions to vital sport problems when they cannot offer assurances that in each
analysis, another approach might not be better? When can one trust the analytic,
deductive methods to provide answers? And when can they not offer something more
than “conventionalists” or “subjectivists?” Yet these theorists strenuously resist any form
of social ethos or conventionalism to deal with sport’s dilemmas. Where does this leave us? Perhaps all we are left with is a seriously limited methodology.

Either these philosophers of sport must defend a rigid metaphysical system or else accept the critical limits of their first philosophy commitments and consider a reconstructed methodology. As Hillary Putnam states (during a 2004 lecture at Penn State University), “a little bit of an exception for a metaphysician is like being a little bit pregnant.” Putnam, emphasizing the pluralistic nature of our existence, continues by declaring, “the burden of proof should always be on the reductivists [traditional metaphysicians]…at some level there must be no vagueness.” If analytic metaphysicians, defined by their deductive methodology, resist fully committing to their first principles when engaged in practically oriented critical work, then they are not really the metaphysical constructionists trading in pure logic and essences of sport they implicitly (and explicitly) claim to be.

In another important way, analytic metaphysicians limit the critical force of the deductive methodology by suggesting that factors other than defined first principles may override or complement their sport inquiry. Dixon (2003), for instance, backs off the critical power of his first principle by adding the phrase “supplemented where applicable with other factors such as general moral principles” (p.110) to his definition of interpretivism. He again fails to clarify when “general moral principles” interact with or supercede the practice-defined first principle. If, for example, Dixon can conclude that blowing out opponents is ethically desirable because it more accurately reveals knowledge about athletic superiority, what prevents him from positing a general moral principle that focuses on something like “caring for others” to alter his position?
Moreover, Dixon provides no indication of what these “general moral principles” are or what informs them.

Simon (2003) similarly posits alternative principles to deal with difficult sport issues, such as violence in contact sports. Simon argues for a “Vulnerability Principle” to assess appropriate levels of force in games such as boxing, football, and hockey. Once again, I turn to hockey fighting to reveal the limitation of the analytic metaphysician’s position. If both teams engaged in a “quest for excellence” agree that this includes “face to face” fighting, how can Simon’s excellence principle, on its own, argue against hockey fisticuffs? And like earlier examples of Dixon’s claims about steroids and hockey violence, one must question if Torres can, and would be willing, to critically analyze all sport issues, including steroid use, from his first principle that prioritizes certain (constitutive) skills in the determination of athletic superiority. Would the expanded physical abilities of athletes training with steroids, for instance, not expand the possibilities of complex constitutive skills more than simple regulative skills? Further, interpretivists ignore the inevitable logical conflict that arises when additional or supplemental principles are added to mix with essential claims about sport, or when they are asked to override the limits of sport-derived first principles.

It seems as though interpretivists, as a representative group of analytic metaphysicians, selectively choose to apply supplemental principles to support their (intuited?) conclusions. Furthermore, they are quick to retrospectively create additional principles when faced with logical quagmires. Yet the methods of analytic metaphysicians rely upon establishing concrete first principles to employ deductive methodologies. Their methods, however, seem to lack the ability to deal with sport
problems prospectively. If this is a fair critique of their position, then the critical force of this methodological camp is weakened as analytic metaphysicians take on merely a retrospective, cold, descriptive function, rather than a powerful, compelling, and prognostic critical task.

Finally, in *Fair Play* Simon (2003) exemplifies the MacIntyrean influence on the interpretivist position by ultimately turning to the “aficionados” or sport governing bodies to adjudicate ethical dilemmas that his principled, deductive method inadequately addresses. When considering the question of technology, for instance, Simon asserts that “In sports, a more desirable solution would be for governing bodies to have control of where the line on technology is set, but to operate in an open manner that takes into account the interests of the constituents of the sporting community, including fans, equipment companies, sports teams, recreational and elite athletes, and the principles of the game itself” (2003, p.195). Since the deductive method of Simon requires a first principle, and the dominant institution is left to determine and interpret this first principle, this seemingly leaves sport in either a closed-loop state or subject to unbounded, special interest, and fragmented politics. The powerful can interpret first principles in any way they see fit. Resistance merely divides sport communities into those making decisions and those standing on the outside looking in. In the end, Simon’s appeal to “governing bodies” while supposedly maintaining his analytic methodology seems to leave us with a limited, elitist version of conventionalism—with a limited number of participants making social agreements that shape the future of sport.

For instance, it is not clear on Simon’s analytic metaphysical terms how reliance upon sport bureaucrats, without clearly delineated principles to work from, avoid the sort
of cruel practices that often privilege the best interests of the status quo or those with the most power. During the late nineteenth century, for example, the gatekeepers of professional baseball chose to exclude black players such as Moses Fleetwood Walker who already demonstrated an ability to compete at the same level as white athletes. However, baseball’s “aficionados” deduced conclusions from assumptions about black athletes that led to the sport’s fifty-year plus color barrier. On the other hand, if the sport governing body seriously takes into account the interests of the various vested parties listed, it is again not clear on interpretivist terms how the analytic metaphysicians differentiate themselves from the social ethos or conventionalist position abhorred by so-called “sporting realists.”

While I agree with Simon that imperfect and debatable lines must be drawn, his deductive method cannot adequately contribute to this process. Based on his stated commitment to broad internalism or interpretivism, Simon’s sport governing bodies would require “reasons” to draw lines when considering sport dilemmas. However, Simon implicitly admits that these “reasons” must come from more than first principles (for instance his addition of the “vulnerability principle” to address the issue of violence). But this additional “vulnerability principle,” Simon must further admit, requires even more “reasons” to defend—and again it must be asked, based on what? Why is a “vulnerability principle” something desirable for sport? At some point, rigid first principles seem insufficient, and subsequently the critical force of their deductive methodologies is seriously weakened.

In the end, analytic metaphysicians must consider surrendering a full-blown, foundational, first principle, deductive methodology if they desire to play an important
critical role in the sport culture. Their clean, logical, and fixed metaphysical commitment to evaluate sport dilemmas undermines their promises of clarity and effectiveness. Analytic metaphysicians, if true to their purported methods, face logical quandaries that limit their critical force. To overcome this obstacle, they acknowledge the need for fluidity in their metaphysical projects, supplement their essential claims about the nature of sport with additional moral and nonmoral principles, and in the end, turn the entire project back to the sporting public often in no better shape than prior to their reflective inquiry.

Deconstructionists’ Rejection of Metaphysics

Antimetaphysicians—theorists identified by Stuhr (1997) as “metaphysical deconstructionists” stand in stark methodological contrast to the analytical metaphysicians (p. 122). Within sport humanities, a host of “social construction” theorists appealing to versions of postmodern “deconstruction” serve as examples of antimetaphysicians, dominating the sport sociology literature and numbering significantly in the sport history domain. Postmodern sociologists of sport comprise a significant number of deconstructionist theorists. However, it is their fragmented, special interest, and “spectatorial” critical projects that a philosophical approach to criticism—endorsed by Dewey, contemporary cultural philosophers Stuhr, Taylor, and Rorty, as well as Morgan in a sport context—seeks to replace.

While the antimetaphysicians of sport in the philosophy literature share the deconstructionist project of their sociological brethren, they tend to avoid the “dark,” “conspiracy” notion of deconstruction. Instead, they employ a literal reading of Rorty’s neopragmatism to open space for a creative, unbounded version of deconstruction.
However, within the sport philosophy field, antimetaphysicians of sport including Terry Roberts and Michael Burke find themselves greatly outnumbered. Despite their limited numbers, antimetaphysicians comprise a forceful group whose visibility and productivity prompts Nickel (2001) to describe their influence as a “veritable ‘Rortyanization’” of the sport philosophy field (p.173).

Standing in sharp contrast to the analytic metaphysicians, Rorty and antimetaphysicians of sport completely reject any conception of metaphysics. Rorty refers to metaphysics as a “bad habit,” a “disease,” “scientism,” the “worst in the tradition,” and the “dregs of old philosophical ideas” (c.f. 1982, pp.54, 85, 87-88, 208). As a result of what he views as philosophers’ misguided yet deeply rooted commitment to metaphysics, Rorty comes to use the term “philosophy” in a negative fashion. Rortyans instead consider their central task the need to find a cure to the “disease” of metaphysics, to help philosophers kick their “bad habit” by deconstructing all metaphysical language and systems. Interestingly, Rorty (1982) appropriates Dewey to help “dissolve” metaphysics. Rortyan-inspired scholars, including Roberts and Burke in the sport philosophy domain, perceive metaphysics as the “infection” of a spirit of seriousness and scientism to escape the world of pure contingency:

For the spirit of seriousness can only exist in an intellectual world in which human life is an attempt to attain an end beyond life, an escape from freedom into the atemporal. The conception of such a world is still built into our education and our common speech, not to mention the attitudes of philosophers toward their work. But Dewey did his best to help us get rid of it… (Rorty, 1982, pp.87-88).

However, from Rorty’s perspective, Dewey fails to escape the clutches of philosophic tradition in order to fully kick the metaphysical habit. But Rorty forgives him, finishing
the previous quote by concluding, “[Dewey] should not be blamed if he occasionally came down with the disease he was trying to cure” (p.88).

In contrast to the analytic metaphysicians’ construction of generalizable \textit{a priori} principles or laws of association to start inquiry, antimetaphysicians attempt to “make things new” (Rorty, 1989, p.13). These metaphysical deconstructionists turn away from foundational claims and rigid deductive systems and toward “playful,” “artistic,” and “poetic” language to reveal the purely fluid, contingent world in which we live. Roberts (1995), for example, “self-relegates” his arguments “to the realm of the metaphorical, to the nonliteral realm, to the realm where language does its dreamwork” (p.95). To generate cultural change, as well as moral or intellectual progress, antimetaphysicians “employ increasingly useful metaphors” rather than set out to discover “how things really are” (Rorty, 1989, p.9). Rorty challenges philosophers to remake the world and its possibilities by redescribing “lots and lots of things in new ways, until you have created a pattern of linguistic behavior which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it” (p.9).

Illuminating the methodological divide between analytic metaphysicians and antimetaphysicians, Roberts (1995) suggests that the deductive methodology from first principles of sport “blindly,” frivolously,” and “cruelly” impoverishes the current, dominant languages of sport (p.105). Therefore strong poet-athletes necessarily carry the burden of remaking the language of sport. An example provided by Roberts includes Dick Fosbury’s intentional rule violations to remake the art of high jumping. Strong poet-athletes, Roberts argues, pursue private perfection in the “web of countless contingencies” in which they find themselves:

The strong poet-athlete exemplifies the intense personal struggle with contingency…to overcome her tradition, her past, her precursors—in short, her
self. And…if she succeeds she will have at least succeeded in doing to the contingent past what it, until then, had always done to her: to define the past itself, including all those causal processes that blindly determined her in terms of herself. She will have given birth to herself and, perchance, will have provided new possibilities for others never before dreamed of (p.105).

In an example of antimetaphysical work applied to sport, Burke argues for a radically different conception of the ethics of performance-enhancing substances. Reacting directly to Schneider and Butcher’s (1993-1994) use of *a priori* principles and the prisoner’s dilemma to condemn steroid use, Burke (1997) contends, “attempts to enforce a ban on drugs may have expanded public space beyond what is acceptable in a liberal society” (p.48). Consequently, Burke, echoing Rorty, calls for a moratorium on attempts to provide “more rational arguments” and instead encourages redescriptions of sport that may include permissible steroid use:

Unfortunately the clarity of the argument is often shrouded by the need to make politically correct sports statements—that is, statements that drugs are, by nature, evil and that this position can be rationally demonstrated. I am concerned that this presumption is also the starting point of many philosophical writings on this issue; that is, that the so-called rational positions on drugs are suggested to be something *deeper* and more foundational than mere social justifications that coincide with what most people of the sports community want to hear (p.61).

Burke concludes that the permissibility of steroid use should remain a radically open question. Strong poet-athletes may eventually redescribe sport in a compelling way that leads to assent amongst the sport public for lifting bans on performance-enhancing substance use. One day, Burke argues, we may remember steroid users in the same way we remember Dick Fosbury.

**Evaluating Antimetaphysicians’ Critical Methods**

Highlighting the contingent environment in which sports function, as well as the provocative (and often rule breaking) creative contributions made by strong poet-athletes
to redefine our games, makes the antimetaphysician position attractive. The
deconstructionist approach to metaphysics opens space for imaginative, emancipatory,
and innovative conceptions of sport. It underlines the contingent nature of the sporting
world. Antimetaphysicians’ insights compel us to perceive of sport as ripe with
possibilities, always with opportunities for change to unleash the new and novel, and
never stuck in the mud of old, tired problems. From a critical perspective,
antimetaphysicians argue that the only thing sport dilemmas require for dissipating
conflict is a redescription attractive enough to produce ungrounded social solidarity in a
sport community.

However, a number of limitations inherent in the deconstructionist approach to
metaphysics also results in limited methods for critically examining sport. In the first
place, antimetaphysicians of sports’ inability (and unwillingness) to adjudicate between
better and worse conclusions when considering sport dilemmas minimizes their critical
only describe what changes occur and lack the resources to evaluate the desirability of
these changes” (p.107). Simon (2000) strikes a similar chord: “Unless we are to
immunize conventions from criticism and in effect always choose to preserve the existing
understandings of sport, challenges to existing conventions cannot be dismissed simply
on the grounds that they counter our present conventional understandings of sporting
practice…arguments for and against the proposed changes, either in the rules or the
conventions, would have to come from somewhere else, but from where” (p.5)?

Antimetaphysicians essentially ignore such criticisms. Roberts, for example,
dismisses Morgan’s critical attempts in *Leftist Theories of Sport* to tell members of a
sport community what “their true and rational interests are” (see Morgan, 1994, p.180). Roberts (1998) believes that Morgan erroneously attempts to differentiate “reflective ethnography”—a situated reflective process that reveals truth and goodness in practice communities—from “vulgar” or unreflective ethnography. A philosopher, Roberts believes, cannot provide anything more than justification to a community and never supplies the “truth.” Consequently, Roberts argues that Morgan, and other “metaphysicians,” engage in flawed and overly ambitious critical projects.

To Roberts and other antimetaphysicians of sport, the most that a critical theorist can do is help “communities maintain consistency amongst their beliefs” (p.77). The critical project for sport philosophers, as conceived by Rortyan sport philosophers, is therefore not to construct a metaphysical system and criterion for adjudication, but to less ambitiously assist sport communities to understand and remake foundational beliefs that stand in conflict with one another: “If a community takes care of justification, then rationality, truth and morality will take care of themselves” (Roberts, 1998, p.78).

This limited conception of criticism occurs because Rortyans claim, theoretically at least, that nothing exists independent of idiosyncratic human agents to assist in the differentiation between better or worse forms of life, practices, values, or decisions. Yet in a sport philosophy context, Morgan (1998), responding to Roberts’ (1998) criticism of his notion of “reflective ethnocentrism” and rejection of “vulgar ethnocentrism,” argues for the need to justify beliefs, albeit not from some god’s-eye-view. Without this critical philosophical activity, practices like sport are left without guidance to deal with vital issues facing athletic communities. Since they are unwilling to offer anything beyond
“just try it” to the sporting public, the meek critical agenda antimetaphysicians purport to follow thus may foster the marginalization of sport philosophy.

Further, the application of false dualisms contributes to the antimetaphysicians’ minimalist critical project. Much of Rorty’s work, for instance, relies on “tidy separations” including fact/value and self/society, leading Stuhr (1997) to label him the “great philosophical dualist of our day” (p.122). Interestingly Rorty again often enlists Dewey—who spent his career attempting to dissolve dualistic thinking—for the purpose of promoting dualisms that grow out of complete rejections of metaphysics. Pragmatists, however, argue that Rorty’s dualisms typically lack cultural evidence and limit his critical power. Two false dualisms promoted by Rorty in particular—philosophy/criticism and public/private—undermine his social and political relevance.

First, Rorty unfortunately drives a wedge between philosophy and criticism. Like many theorists in the humanities, Rorty’s impatience with philosophy’s “metaphilosophical scientism” leads him to call for a “post-Philosophical” future (1991, p.25). Rather than engage in “philosophy-by-argument” or “common sense,” Rorty turns to literary criticism’s “sweeping stories” and “philosophy-by-redescription” (Stuhr, 1997, p.123). Cultural critics, whom Rorty (1989) believes should supplant philosophers, ironically attempt to avoid taking themselves or others “seriously” since they recognize the contingency and fragility of their “final vocabularies” (pp.73-74).

However, as Stuhr points out, Rorty’s “ironist philosophers” do indeed take each other “seriously” as moral advisors since they, in Rorty’s words, “have been around” (cited by Stuhr, 1997, p.123). Consequently, Stuhr contends, Rorty’s literary critics—serving the role as “moral advisors”—become “downright clubby” and “smug
intellectuals” safely confined to their ivory towers, reading each other’s books. Ultimately the elitist closed-loop system championed by Rorty “confines liberalism [political action] to the academy—whether an academy of ironists or metaphysicians” (Stuhr, 1997, p.124). Ironically this is the same criticism levied by Rorty (1998) against New Left and Marxist cultural theorists in Achieving Our Country.

The second, damaging dualism promoted by Rorty is the division between human agents’ private and public life—most fully articulated in Rorty’s Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity (1989). Rorty argues that individuals (as idiosyncratic agents) must privately find their own “final vocabulary” in order to “give birth to oneself.” In their public lives, however, individuals are asked to notice and avoid cruel redescriptions of others. Yet Rorty (1989) contends that no foundational reason can be offered to oppose cruelty: “What matters…is not finding such a reason but making sure that she notices suffering when it occurs. Her hope is that she will not be limited by her own final vocabulary when faced with the possibility of humiliating someone with a quite different vocabulary” (p.93).

The division of humans into public and private agents seriously limits the critical power of Rorty’s “post-philosophical” project. Sport participants, for instance, must define themselves idiosyncratically, yet limit their own “final sport vocabulary” when engaged in public athletic environments. Rorty offers no “reason” for limiting oneself except to notice and oppose cruel practices in his loose version of solidarity. This leads Stuhr (1997) to conclude that “From the standpoint of these important purposes [criticism and inquiry into the conditions at given times and places], Rorty is the Milli Vanilli of liberalism, merely lip-syncing the old Elvis refrain ‘Don’t Be Cruel’” (p.126).
Consequently, Stuhr labels Rorty’s ironist view of liberalism as “timid,” “vague,” “minimalist,” and “distressing” (p.123). Stuhr criticizes Rorty for conceiving of liberalism as solely a belief rather than a form of social action.

Rorty is able only (although confidently) to tell us what he thinks we should do. But he is not able to tell us why to do it or how to do it. To ask liberals why we shouldn’t be cruel need not be to ask for any transcendental proof. It is a request for liberals to support intelligently their commitments…. This request may not be important to like-minded liberal professors who converse principally with one another, but it has been and continues to be important in real struggles and larger cultures (pp.125-126).

I believe, as do other pragmatists, that antimetaphysicians view sport philosophy’s critical project as too overwhelming and, for the sake of simplicity, turn to neat categories. From these tidy dualisms, Rorty and the antimetaphysicians of sport consciously restrain their critical projects and compel others to follow. Thus, antimetaphysicians fall prey to an inverted version of the Plotinian Temptation—the rejection of pluralism for a reduced and simplified, purely random conception of the world. Antimetaphysicians’ redescriptions begin by reducing the messy world to a single, unifying principle—that no criteria can offer better or worse conclusions to sport dilemmas.

Antimetaphysicians essentially ignore such criticisms, contending that no transcendental criteria exist to evaluate arguments beyond community consensus. However, normative claims surface throughout the work of Rorty and his adherents (including Roberts and Burke). Morgan (1998) notes this while defending the power of and need for culturally situated reason. In a rejoinder to Roberts’ (1998) criticism of his notion of reflective ethnography, Morgan dismisses critical assessments of sport lacking
in compelling arguments—and points to Roberts’ and Rorty’s utilization of pro and con arguments as examples of the need for reflective evaluations and assessable conclusions. For instance, Roberts (1995) writes in his summation of Rorty that increasingly useful metaphors stand as “the chief instrument of cultural change and of intellectual and moral progress.” Further, Roberts describes the ability to employ metaphors as “a talent.” Specifically related to sport, Roberts makes the claim, “It is my strong view that the world of elite sport, especially professional sport is in desperate need of re-redescription” (p.96; emphasis added).

How can Roberts make assertions of worth about what is primary, advanced, special, or deficient without any criteria at work in the background? Moreover, Roberts suggests (amidst his lengthy discussion of strong poet-athletes) that poet-athletes “nudge” others to “yet more seemingly inaccessible heights,” that “only the strong poet-athlete can truly appreciate her own contingency,” that “more than all others the strong poet acknowledges, appreciates, and accepts the worthy role of chance in the determination of her fate, of her self”, and “if she succeeds, she will have become as strong as any poet, any human could possibly be, for she will have at last succeeded in doing to the contingent past what it, until then, had always done to her…she will have given birth to herself” (pp. 104-105; emphasis added). And despite this blatant presentation of strong poet-athletes as select, privileged, and capable of positively transforming the athletic world, Roberts defends himself by writing “such strong makers” are merely “useful as exemplars” and not the “archetypal human being” (p.105).

Roberts is not alone. Rorty too makes claims with clear evaluative criteria functioning in the background. Therefore, it becomes obvious that even Rortyans hold
views about how the world works—in other words a sense of durable features of life socially constituted humans function within. Their adamant dismissal of a durable world that provides criteria for adjudicating between better and worse outcomes or choices only results in uncritical, purely random metaphysical conceptions. As Stuhr (1997) writes, “Rorty’s conversations, narratives, redescriptions, and vocabularies are both as speculative and as final as the metaphysics he abhors. As such, they may be clever confessions or hopes, but they are nothing more” (p.125). Consequently, metaphysical deconstructionists, like metaphysical constructionists, seek a neat and clean theoretical methodological starting point—falling prey to an inverted Galilean Purification.

In the end, we are left with two ways to view sport antimetaphysicians’ critical methodology—embodied in John E. Smith’s (1992) differentiation between the personas of “Rorty” and “rorty” (pp.6-13). One version (“Rorty”) takes theorists such as Rorty, Roberts, and Burke at methodological face value as fully committed neopragmatists. As a result, the antimetaphysician position holds that no rational arguments can adjudicate between better or worse forms of sport. The best, they believe, we can do from a critical perspective is to ensure the coherency, consistency, and ability of our “up for grabs” foundational beliefs to bring about consent within the athletic community while avoiding cruelty.

A second, less dogmatic, account of antimetaphysicians (“rorty”) avoids going “all the way” with their espoused commitments. This requires reading Rorty and other antimetaphysicians selectively for the purpose of avoiding the pitfalls encountered by analytic metaphysicians, such as the search for transcendent principles and the neglect of context and contingency. Interpreting Rorty as “rorty” implores us to read between the
lines and account for normative assessments working uncritically and randomly in the background.

Regardless of how one conceptualizes the antimetaphysicians’ methods, (“Rorty” or “rorty”) this dominant typology in sport philosophy lacks critical force. In one case (“Rorty”), the antimetaphysicians themselves deny the critical power of their position. As Simon (2000) contends, “the conventionalists are quite right to emphasize the social and historical setting of sport within a particular cultural context but have remained too much on the surface focusing on specific surface conventions tied to sporting practice rather than looking deeper into the cultural resources available for ethical argument” (p.5). In the second case (“rorty”), antimetaphysicians essentially must turn away from their own methodological commitments to provide an efficacious critical perspective to deal with the many issues facing sport philosophers.

**Conclusion**

A close examination of the field of sport philosophy reveals that many philosophers of sport stand on polarized sides of a methodological divide. Widely divergent conceptions of metaphysics both define each camp’s methodological commitment as well as their points of contention. Sport philosophy’s dominant paradigms exhibit a metaphysical dualism as constructionist and deconstructionist conceptions of first philosophy leave the field’s practitioners with an either/or methodological decision. Consequently, philosophers of sport engage in endless (and, at-times, dogmatic) battles with each other rather than deal openly with the vital problems of sport.
Adding to the field’s distress, when evaluated from the standpoint of serving a social function, the methods of sport philosophy’s dominant paradigms offer limited critical methods for application to sport issues. Both the analytic metaphysicians and antimetaphysicians methods, for instance, succumb to the Plotinian Temptation by seeking a single method and perspective from which to engage in critical analysis. Analytic metaphysicians reduce the sport world to first principles and deductively arrive at singular conclusions. Antimetaphysicians similarly begin with a single premise that idiosyncratic agents should find their own language and refuse to offer generalizable conclusions. As well, both dominant paradigms embody the Galilean Purification by replacing the messy conditions of the lived sport world with simplified, lab-like environments to conduct reflective inquiry. Analytic metaphysicians deny the multifaceted quality of sport to begin with simple logical premises. Antimetaphysicians engage in limited analysis that denies even the hope that better or worse conclusions can be reached. These limitations force metaphysical constructionists and deconstructionists into logical quagmires (on their own terms), methodological inconsistency, and at times, complete disregard for stated methodological commitments.

This is not to conclude that all is lost, or that previous work of sport philosophers is of little value. Despite their widely divergent methods, both the analytic metaphysicians and antimetaphysicians tap into important features of human sport experiences. Analytic metaphysicians invite us to see the durable nature of sports, what so often draws us to them, and seek moral progress. Antimetaphysicians point us to the creative side of sport—both from the perspective of the individual participant as well as the dynamism of games themselves—as well as keep questions about morality in sport
open for discussion. Rather than view sport philosophy from an either/or perspective, it must be recognized that all of these insights will be necessarily recognized in order to provide critical work compelling to philosophers and non-philosophers of sport alike.

However, without significant pragmatic reconstruction, the metaphysical conceptions forwarded by both dominant typologies of sport philosophy will continue to offer sport weakened critical methodologies. At this time, antimetaphysicians and analytic metaphysicians of sport embody Simon’s (2000) description of the interpretivist position as “partially pragmatic” (p.9). To construct a truly powerful critical method requires both poles to “go all the way” and become fully pragmatic.

In important ways, Dewey offers sport philosophers an opportunity to turn metaphysics on its head and move to a thorough going pragmatism without completely rejecting their current methods. Inspired by Peirce’s notion of an “evolutionary” metaphysics described as “third philosophy” or a “worldview” (c.f. 1998, p.147), Dewey refuses to transform this mode of philosophic inquiry to a first philosophy, deductive methodology. Nor does he dismiss the import of metaphysical inquiry. The dissolution of the metaphysical dualism between analytic metaphysicians and antimetaphysicians both captures and rejects the strengths and weaknesses of the dominant conceptions of first philosophy. This conception of metaphysics will be detailed upon in Chapter 5.

The following chapter will outline the remaining two critiques I levy against the field of sport philosophy. In particular, these two additional criticisms help explain how metaphysical constructionists and metaphysical deconstructionists end up with impoverished critical methods (critique #1). In Chapter 3, I will first contend that most sport philosophers adhere to limited (albeit different) theories of experience to inform
their first philosophy commitments. Second, I will argue that sport philosophers apply their methods for misguided purposes—to engage in inquiry that revolves around the discovery or rejection of truth rather than the more important (for philosophers) concept of meaning. The errors emphasized in this chapter—the Plotinian Temptation and the Galilean Purification—will continue to contribute to the second and third critiques. However, the Asomatic Attitude, it will be shown, plays an increasingly central role in revealing the limitations of sport philosophy.
CHAPTER 3

Sources of Sport Philosophy’s Critical Limitations:
Non-Pragmatic Conceptions of Experience and Truth

A philosophy which accepts the denotative or empirical method accepts at full value the fact that reflective thinking transforms confusion, ambiguity and discrepancy into illumination, definiteness and consistency. But it also points to the contextual situation in which thinking occurs. It notes that the starting point is the actually problematic, and that the problematic phase resides in some actual and specifiable situation (LW 1:61).

At the beginning of Chapter 2, when considering the current marginalized status of the field of sport philosophy outlined in the first chapter, I posed the following question: Are sport philosophers complicit in the marginalized status of sport philosophy? In response to this query, I offered a tentative ‘Yes’ with the promise to substantiate my claim through three critiques of the methods, tools of inquiry, and purposes held to by most sport philosophers.

Before beginning the three criticisms of sport philosophy from a pragmatic standpoint, however, I first outlined a trio of ideas most non-pragmatic philosophical traditions fall prey to, limiting their ability to offer social practices (like sport) compelling critical insights. In particular, non-pragmatic philosophers often begin analysis with simplified, sterile starting points (Galilean Purification), seek singular sources to unify conclusions (Plotinian Temptation), and apply dualistic, disconnected mind/body conceptions (Asomatic Attitude). These misleading, incomplete philosophical ideas, I contend, permeate the dominant, polarized paradigms of sport philosophy and collectively contribute to my three critiques of the field.

The remainder of the second chapter focused on the first critique I levy against sport philosophy—first philosophy commitments defined by impartial conceptions of metaphysics limit the critical power of the field’s dominant paradigms. In particular, I
argue that the analytic metaphysicians or metaphysical constructionists theoretically appeal to rigid first principle deductive methods resulting in logical quandaries. Contrastingly, antimetaphysicians or metaphysical deconstructionists in theory reject all metaphysical claims and criterion for assessment. Yet despite their completely polarized accounts of metaphysics and methodology, both camps fall prey to the Galilean Purification (sanitized reflective vantage points) and the Plotinian Temptation (simplified, singular sources and conclusions). It will also be argued in this chapter that both camps fall prey to the Asomatic Attitude (disembodied theories) which underlies both the Galilean Purification and the Plotinian Temptation. Subsequently, the Asomatic Attitude, I contend, persuades both the analytic metaphysicians and the antimetaphysicians to succumb to philosophical errors that result in ineffective methods from a critical perspective.

In this third chapter, I will continue by positing two additional critiques against the dominant paradigms of sport philosophy that I believe offer insights into how sport philosophers arrive at non-pragmatic methodologies that fail to offer compelling criticism. To begin Chapter 3, I will turn my attention to the second critique in which I contend that incomplete theories of experience implicitly fund the philosophical methods of sport philosophers representing both rival typologies. Grasping Dewey’s theory of experience becomes crucial in the comprehension of his conception of metaphysics, and ultimately the purposes and methods of philosophy. Dewey calls the special service of philosophy not the study of philosophy itself, but “a study, by means of philosophy, of life-experience” (LW 1:40). Next, in a final critique I will assert that the philosophical purposes advocated by both analytic metaphysicians and antimetaphysicians result in a
battle that remains at the conceptual level of truth rather than what pragmatists argue is
the deeper and more significant realm of meaning.

**Critique #2: Appeals to Incomplete Theories of Experience**

John E. Smith (1992) calls the reconstruction of experience “in terms sufficiently
broad and rich to provide a matrix for philosophy, science, and ordinary human pursuits”
(p.18) the Pragmatists’ “most important contribution” (p.17). Boisvert (1998) refers to
Dewey’s theory of experience as the “absolutely critical difference” separating him from
alternative philosophical traditions (p.15). In fact, Dewey and the pragmatists believe that
all philosophies ultimately stand as philosophies of experience. On this point, Deweyan
scholar Thomas Alexander (1987) writes, “there is no philosophy which ultimately is not
a philosophy of experience, however it may ignore or abuse its origins” (p. 266).

In the fourth chapter, I will further elaborate on Dewey’s understanding of
experience and its implications for a reconstruction of sport philosophy. However, it is
important in this chapter, for the purpose of assessing the dominant paradigms of sport
philosophy’s theories of experience, to introduce Dewey’s richer and deeper
understanding. Dewey declares:

> Any account of experience must now fit into the consideration that experiencing
means living; and that living goes on in and because of an environing medium,
not in a vacuum. Where there is experience, there is a living being. Where there
is life, there is a double connexion maintained with the environment. In part,
environmental energies constitute organic functions; they enter into them. Life is
not possible without such direct support by the environment (MW 10:7).

Dewey constantly argues that only “genuine empirical methods” grasp the
interconnectedness and “inclusive integrity” of experience (LW 1:19). Consequently,
only by way of a rich theory of experience can sport philosophy accomplish its special
service—to study “sport-experience” in its full, multi-dimensional, complicated, memory-laden, emotional, and qualitative sense (c.f. Boisvert, 1998a, p.17). Adherence to “thin” theories of experience, in contrast, leaves traditional philosophers with limited methods and impotent conclusions. From an athletic perspective, incomplete theories of experience by sport philosophers ultimately serve as a backdrop for the first philosophy commitments of both the analytic metaphysicians and the antimetaphysicians of sport—limiting the ability of sport philosophy’s dominant typologies to serve a critical role in culture.

**Analytic Metaphysicians’ Mechanical Theory of Experience**

In his time, most of Dewey’s concerns resided with British empiricists’ notions of experience. Dewey, as well as Peirce and James, sharply critiqued the conceptions of experience utilized by classical empiricists including John Locke, David Hume, and Bertrand Russell. Modern empiricism relegates experience to the “domain of sense” as humans utilize sensory organs to collect objective data about the external world. Reduced to a sense or first impression eventually leads to a conceptual understanding of experience as simple, “atomic,” and “episodic.” These classical or traditional empiricists regard experience as both “veiled” from the external world and a “tissue of subjectivity.” Consequently, from an empiricists point of view, humans passively experience an external world, standing as spectators recording simple sense data onto a blank mind (Smith, 1992, pp.18-19).

Traditional empiricists, including Hume, Locke, and Russell, thus conceptualize experience as knowledge. Dewey uses the term “intellectualism” to describe the classical empiricists’ cognitive theory of experience. That is, “all experiencing is a mode of
knowing, and that all nature, is, in principle, to be reduced and transformed till it is defined in terms identical with the characteristics presented by refined objects of science as such.” (LW 1:28). A theory that suggests the act of experiencing presents “fundamental givens” about an external world implies a divide between understanding and knowing. Since experiencing or knowing is reductively atomistic and subjective, reason must then be something other or opposed to experience:

On the older view, experience was confined to the deliverances of the senses in atomistic fashion; it was set in opposition to reason and, since what is sensed was taken to be certain and incorrigible, the result was that “experience” came to be a purely private domain standing between us and the so-called external world. The watchword was, What we experience is “experience” and the world is well lost (Smith, 1992, p.4).

Reason or rationalism thus induces first principles from the atomistic products of experience to offer coherence to the external world. Many philosophers, Smith (1992) insists, “laid great stress on the need of experience to conform to antecedent fact or what [Dewey] called antecedent being” (p.29). Isolated and atomistic units result from inductive analysis, which Empiricists then “read back into situations as original existential data” (Boisvert, 1998a, p.15). Philosophy built upon the understanding of experience as a swirling bundle of disorganized sensed facts or data thus requires the positing of “laws of association or powers of synthesis” to provide order and coherence (Alexander, 1987, p.266).

Within the sport philosophy literature, theorists committing to a metaphysical constructionist methodology seemingly share the traditional Empiricists’ limited conceptions of experience. Consequently, a “thin” version of experience ultimately serves as the start and end of analytic metaphysicians of sport’s critical methodology. Turning directly to the sport philosophy literature, a well-known article from the analytic camp—
Nicholas Dixon’s (1992) “On Sportsmanship and ‘Running Up the Score’”—exemplifies traditional empiricism’s experiential theory applied to an athletic issue. In this piece, Dixon defends the action of superior teams pursuing lopsided victories as morally defensible. Anticipating criticism of his position on grounds that he ignores the humiliation often felt by the losing side, Dixon writes, “Those who lose sporting contests by a wide margin may feel humiliated, but, if my argument in the last few paragraphs is sound, they have not in fact been strongly humiliated, either as human beings or as athletes” (1992, p.5). Dixon goes on to describe feelings of humiliation as “groundless” (p.5) and that “those who complain that continuing to score goals long after victory has been achieved is gratuitous and unsportive are guilty of a simplistic reduction of the comparative purpose of competitive sport to the categories of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’” (p.6). Furthermore, Dixon argues that “easing up” on overmatched opponents hinders accurate quantitative comparisons of athletic superiority and may potentially “sabotage” the “integrity of sporting records” (p.6). Dixon sums up his analytic position with the following claim: “If the primary purpose of competitive sport is to determine relative athletic ability, then the pursuit of emphatic victories may be not only compatible with sportsmanship, but even required by it” (p.7; emphasis added).

Dixon’s essentialist position renders the plurality and complexity of feelings, interpretations, purposes, meanings, and values embodied by humans through interactions with the sport-world subservient to accurate measurement of relative athletic abilities. Based on this simplified conclusion one can assume that Dixon tacitly relies on experience in only incomplete and otherwise inadequate ways. Dixon presupposes that the swirling mass of sense data provided by the act of ‘experiencing’ the external world...
of athletics requires a rational, fundamental principle to promote coherence and direct behavior. Only by establishing laws to govern the purpose of sport—i.e. accurate assessment of athletic superiority—can participants make sense of the activity and understand moral and nonmoral choices. Without a first principle, analytic metaphysicians seem to believe that the atomistic, veiled, and subjective ‘experience’ of individuals will lead to relativistic athletic or moral misunderstandings.

Dewey considers this theory of experience employed by analytic metaphysicians (or Empiricists) as reductive, distorted, “thin,” and ultimately “non-empirical.” Philosophy disconnects from how humans really interact with the life-world, Dewey believes, when conceptions of experience are reduced to a purely cognitive endeavor. Dewey describes this philosophic error of conceptualizing experience as merely a form of cognition the “primary fallacy of Western philosophy” and labels it the “intellectualist’s fallacy.” Dewey concludes that the embrace of such a “truncated” empiricism marks the worst form of “selective emphasis” (LW 1:28-29).

Analytic metaphysicians of sport, from a Deweyan perspective, are guilty of the intellectualist’s fallacy. Rather than starting philosophical inquiry with “original material” (LW 1:20) or “affairs of every-day primary experience” (LW 1:36), analytic metaphysicians begin sport inquiry with “second-order activities of analysis and abstraction.” The reductive empiricism of analytic metaphysicians trades “multiple dimensions of fully human experiencing” for isolated, raw, perceptual data apprehended by the sense organs. Although analysis and abstraction in reflection can isolate and clarify elemental units indistinguishable in immediate experience (i.e. air from lungs,
ground from feet, ball from hand), “these results should not, however, be read back into
the situation as original existential data” (Boisvert, 1998a, p.15).

In contrast to the empiricist notion of experience as the collection of data, Dewey
joins Peirce and James in providing a broader conception of experience based on “what
actual experiencing shows itself to be in the course of human life” (Smith, 1992, p.17). Dewey
supplants the “orthodox view” of experience as “primarily a knowledge-affair”
with experience as “an affair of the intercourse of a living being with its physical and
social environment.” Furthermore, he notes “An experience that is an undergoing of an
environment and a striving for its control in new directions is pregnant with connexions”
(MW 10:6). In sum, Dewey rejects any notion of experience that ignores or divides up
the life-world.

This is not to say that analytic metaphysicians working in the sport domain are
entirely wrongheaded from an experiential standpoint. The reflective analysis and
abstraction they engage in often reveals shared elements or durable qualities of sport
experiences. Analytic metaphysicians of sport identify compelling elements of shared
athletic experiences including the determination of athletic superiority (i.e. Dixon, Torres
& McLaughlin), the desire for games to emphasize more complex skill interactions
(Torres), as well as the importance of competitive cooperation and the pursuit of
excellence in athletic environments (Simon).

Analytic metaphysicians fall short, however, by reducing the sport-world to
rational first principles and static metaphysical structures from abstracted elemental units
or “arbitrarily selected simples” (LW 1:374). This mechanical conception of experience
focuses on “highly constrained, determinate moments of conceptual certainty (whether
these be ‘impressions,’ ‘sense data,’ or intuited ‘essences’)” (Alexander, 1987, p.xiv). Examinations of the work of sport philosophy’s analytic metaphysicians demonstrates such limitations—reflection on experience falls prey to “selective emphasis” and results in the “intellectualist’s fallacy.”

Dixon’s (1992) first principle—accurate knowledge of relative athletic ability—exemplifies “selective emphasis” embodied in the “intellectualist’s fallacy” by reductively turning to a cold mechanical view of sport. His analyses rely upon a normative commitment to sport being a true litmus test of “who is better.” Thus Dixon willingly trades the vast array of social and psychological features that human interactions with the sport-world make possible for cold logical assessment and information gathering. However even Dixon’s first principle invites pluralistic experiential accounts. How do we, from an experiential standpoint, determine what counts as athletic ‘superiority’? Is it simply determined by final scores (something Dixon rejects), the sum of individual talents, the triumph of strategy over raw skill, the ability to perform in certain ways, in specific situations, at determined times? Further, Dixon’s schematic diminishes the socially compelling experiences of hope, perseverance, and overcoming the odds—the idea that there is always something more to the story than the comparison of athletic ability. Dixon and other analytic philosophers fail to “rub shoulders” with sport experience—to feel a blowout loss, to engage the emotion of a tense contest, to breathe in the sensuous quality of a possible upset.

Dixon’s selected emphasis and commitment to athletic competition as simply an information gathering exercise implicitly (and even at times explicitly) seeks to rid sport of intangibles related to U.S. Olympic hockey’s “Miracle on Ice,” college basketball’s
“Cinderella” championship teams Villanova and North Carolina State, Jesse Owens’ 1936 Berlin Olympic performance in the face of great oppression, Terry Fox’s heroic run across Canada to raise money for cancer, Lance Armstrong’s epic defeat of cancer and subsequent Tour de France victories. We, as a culture, value these features of the sport fabric to the extent that virtually every movie with an athletic theme, including *Hoosiers*, *Rocky*, *Chariots of Fire*, *The Natural*, and of course, *Kingpin*, features athletes and teams beating the odds and overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Torres (2000), like Dixon, selectively abstracts elements of sport experience—the element of sport experience determining relative ability as well as the more interesting quality of games emphasizing complex “constitutive skills”—for the purpose of constructing a first principle to which future sport experiences must conform. This prioritization of second order analyses of abstraction problematizes Torres’ ability to account for original skill sets that may emerge and present new, compelling ways to interact with the sport world. Examples of new skills emerging as part of the contemporary sport fabric include the Fosbury flop in high jump, dribbling in basketball, and forward passes in football. Each of these now engrained, important, and interesting skills gained acceptance not by qualifying as “constitutive skills,” but by persuasively appealing to the experiences of sport participants.

Historically and experientially, the simplified and reduced first principles of analytic metaphysicians of sport leave them in logical predicaments. And despite Simon and Dixon’s refutations outlined in Chapter 2, Putnam correctly contends that the methods of metaphysicians applying a deductive system cannot, on their own terms, withstand metaphysical variance. The best evidence for Putnam’s conclusion is found in
the analytic metaphysicians of sports’ own suspension of their purported methodologies in order to avoid logical quagmires when offering practical conclusions (c.f. Chapter 2).

Furthermore, the analytic metaphysicians’ theory of experience forces them to ignore additional or alternative (including each others) elements of sport. Smith’s (1992) point that “Dewey maintained that there are numerous ways in which the things and events of experience can be taken or interpreted, many contexts—scientific, moral, social, political, aesthetic, religious—representing different interests and purposes from which these same things and events are viewed” (p.3) also applies to sport. Kretchmar (2001a) makes this same contention in his “Functionalist Account” article, pointing out that gamewrights must consider “rules of physics, chemistry, logic, aesthetics, etiquette, and even effective strategies” when creating or tinkering with games (p.169).

**Antimetaphysicians’ Capricious Theory of Experience**

Certainly anitmetaphysicians, including Rortyan-inspired sport philosophers, adhere to a different theory of experience from the analytic metaphysician (or traditional Empiricists). Pragmatic scholar John E. Smith (1992), in fact, supports “rorty’s” Deweyan-inspired attack on orthodox empiricism’s “natural starting points” (including clear and distinct ideas, sense data, categories of pure understanding, and structures of pre-linguistic consciousness). Smith also backs “rorty’s” recognition that philosophizing can only begin where one is (“in the midst of things”), and rejection of inquiry’s ability to “achieve ‘knowledge *in concreto’” (p.7).

However, sport philosophy’s second dominant typology similarly fails to embody Dewey’s “thick” account of experience (to be further developed in Chapter 4). Despite his expressions of affinity for Dewey’s work, Smith (1992) notes that in Rorty’s book...
Consequences of Pragmatism, the word “experience” does not even qualify for the index despite the “importance of the topic for the Pragmatists” (p.8). In fact, elsewhere Rorty makes the case that ‘language’ offers a better way to understand Dewey’s attempts at reconstructing philosophy than his use of ‘experience:

‘Language’ is a more suitable notion than ‘experience’ for saying the holistic and anti-foundationalist things which James and Dewey had wanted to say. This is not because formulating philosophical problems in terms of sentences rather than in terms of psychological processes is ‘clearer’ or ‘more precise,’ but simply because the malleability of language is less paradoxical notion than the malleability of nature or of objects’ (Rorty, 1985, p.40).

So while “rorty” joins Dewey in critiquing “foundationalism” and the “epistemology industry,” Smith contends that “Rorty” fails to take seriously Dewey’s criticism of empiricism. Throughout many writings Dewey makes it abundantly clear that most important to him is not the total rejection of modern philosophers’ metaphysical projects, as it is Rorty’s main interest, but a reconstruction of the thin conceptions of experience that ultimately inform rigid and critically limited metaphysical and methodological commitments. Rorty thus blatantly ignores Dewey’s reconstruction of experience as the root of his pragmatically based skepticism of traditional philosophical systems (Smith, 1992, p.8). Rorty’s neopragmatic, linguistic turn is very different from Dewey’s pragmatic, experiential turn.

In their rejection of the analytic metaphysical project, Rorty and the antimetaphysicians of sport, such as Roberts and Burke, offer “overcorrections” based on limited experiential accounts. Consequently, the Rortyan notion of experience, best understood as language, ultimately appeals to a conception of experience just as thin as the analytic metaphysicians. For instance, Rorty (1989) describes language as “purposeless” (p.16), “non teleological” (p.17), and a “tissue of contingencies” (p.29).
Thus for Rortyans, experience reconceived as language moves away from the mechanical version of the analytic metaphysician to the other extreme—in principle a purely random and capricious theory of experience.

Furthermore, in contrast to the notion of experience as coming to “know” an external world through senses, Rorty’s conceives of “language” as a private act of poetic “making” by idiosyncratic or “private” agents. Rorty makes the point that the world “cannot propose a language for us to speak” (p.6). Thus Rorty’s language (as experience) similarly disregards the interactive theory of experience Dewey provides. In Rorty’s schematic, private agents come to hold “final vocabularies”—sometimes derived from inherited languages, while in “paradigmatic” cases, through private “will.” Rorty contends, “to change how we talk is to change what, for our own purposes, we are” (p.20). To fail as a poet, as a maker of language and metaphors, Rortyans (via Nietzsche) argue, is to fail as a human and to “live [experience] by someone else’s description of oneself” (p.28).

By contending that each life is a dramatic narrative, and that the great fear of the poet (as the paradigmatic form of human existence) is to live in a world of inherited descriptions, Rorty disconnects experience from the life-world. This capricious notion of experience conceives of a subject interpreting and reinterpreting a world without constraint. Nothing guides or frames experience, and a private agent idiosyncratically “makes” poetic sense of the contingent, fluid world around her. And while this notion of experience stands in contrast to the empiricist notion of ‘experiencing’ the “givens” of the external world, both the analytic metaphysicians and antimetaphysicians reduce experience to a psychic event. As Eldridge (1998) argues, “Rorty’s view…still seems
infected by the psychic interpretation—experience is a person’s thinking-feeling reaction to events” (p.14)

In a sport context, Burke (1997) exemplifies this isolated, private notion of experience while challenging justifications of performance-enhancing substance bans, arguing, “in enforcing a ban on drugs, we may be intruding on a private space for the athlete” (p.48). His argument focuses on making the private, idiosyncratic extension of internal goods primary. Burke further contends, by way of Rorty, “the point of a liberal sport’s society is not to create the virtuous sport’s practice, but to allow practitioners of sport to choose amongst the many descriptions of sport, their most attractive description” (p.54). From Burke’s neopragmatic perspective, attempts by analytic metaphysicians to draw generalizable moral and nonmoral boundaries amounts to an intrusion on the idiosyncratic athlete’s private space.

Essentially, Burke argues for athletes privately and idiosyncratically “making” their own sport experience. Burke’s notion of sport experience as an idiosyncratic language form leads him to reject the durable elements of sport experience abstracted in reflection by the analytic metaphysicians, including knowledge of superiority, widened interest through more complex skill interaction, and the realization of excellences. Consequently, when considering sport dilemmas, Burke turns away from any notion that reflection upon the athletic experience might offer common elements institutions should seek to preserve, widen, or reject.

The conception of experience as an act of “private making” gains support from Roberts in a sport context. Citing Nietzsche, Goodman, Davidson, and Rorty, Roberts (1995) describes the world and the agent as “things made and remade, again and again,
through the words and images we use” (pp. 95-96). Further emphasizing the individual’s sole responsibility for interpreting ‘experience’ or the ‘life-world’ (terms not used by him), Roberts uses phrases such as “one’s ability to make sense of oneself” (p.98), “overcoming one’s self” (p.100), and “having a distinctive self is dependent upon having a coherent and distinctive vocabulary” (p.100). Roberts also applies the famous Rorty phrase “thus I willed it” and Harold Bloom’s “giving birth to oneself” (Rorty, 1989, p.29) in sport contexts to describe the strong-poet athlete.

Roberts’ (1995) conception of the athletic experience as an idiosyncratic language form implies that sport’s rules, notions of excellence, social and psychological benefits, and public nature are merely vestiges of “inherited traditions.” Roberts writes, “Most of our sporting norms of success, achievement, excellence, physical, and psychological health, interpersonal relations and ethical behavior appear to be designed for the vast majority who live merely within traditions and are inappropriate for sports strong makers, those who reshape tradition” (p.101). For the “monumentally strong makers,” idiosyncratically remaking sport experience into a private “final vocabulary” offers them a chance to step out of the “shadows of their respective traditions” to which most athletes indistinctly “resign” themselves.

Antimetaphysicians, based on these examples, thinly conceive of experience when contrasted with Dewey’s richer version. They dismiss the complex interconnectedness of the organism with the life-world in favor of a one-sided idiosyncratic version of experience. Antimetaphysicians of sport, such as Roberts and Burke, ignore the public, transactional nature of human experience within a fluid, but durable, sport context. This causes Rortyan-inspired sport philosophers to retreat to
relativism and subjectivism (despite protestations to the contrary) while at the same time, espousing not-so-well-hidden normative claims about solutions for sport dilemmas.

**Summary**

The theories of experience to which both analytic metaphysicians and antimetaphysicians adhere inform their limited metaphysical conceptions outlined in Chapter 2. Consequently, reconstructing their theories of experience could lead to a reconstructed and shared vision of metaphysics—a pragmatic metaphysics of experience. Nevertheless, as was the case with the conceptions of metaphysics forwarded by the dominant typologies of sport philosophy, each pole would not have to completely jettison their experiential theories. Both the metaphysical constructionists and metaphysical deconstructionists capture something important with the accounts of experience operating in the background of their analysis. Analytic metaphysicians’ theory of experience taps into historically durable elements encountered in the sport-world. Antimetaphysicians adhere to a conception of experience that emphasizes the contingency and fluidity of athletic experiences in the life-world.

However, once again the two poles comprising the dominant paradigms of sport philosophy also miss something. Both analytic metaphysicians and antimetaphysicians succumb to the Galilean Purification—although in very different ways. Analytic metaphysicians trade full, messy, experience for a reductive, atomistic, and selectively cognitive version. Falling prey to the intellectualist’s fallacy, analytic metaphysicians “take” the swirling mass of “experienced givens” and develop first principles to organize the sport-world. Antimetaphysicians similarly trade the constrained messiness of
transactional lived experience for a blank page open to virtually unbounded idiosyncratic, private poetic expression and linguistic reinterpretation.

The Asomatic Attitude stands at the core of these limited conceptions of experience. Empiricists (analytic metaphysicians) conceive of experience as a passive enterprise, with humans “taking in” the external world through sense organs. They divide humans up into receptive bodies and rational minds. Boisvert (1993), using Aristotle’s terminology, labels these dualistic mind-body philosophers “friends of Mathema”—privileging a mathematical approach to get at “the kernel of reality.” Friends of Mathema, in contrast to the friends of Bios,

...are attracted by fixed forms, computational certainties, and the unambiguous clarities associated with numbers. The safest generalization about all branches of this family is that they...prize discrete, individualized, clearly separated elements. Purity is an important family ideal. Messy entanglements are its greatest scandal (p.132).

Rortyans (antimetaphysicians) dismissal of the notion that live organisms irreducibly transact with a life-world similarly embodies the Asomatic Attitude. By conflating experience with the private creation of an idiosyncratic language, antimetaphysicians conceptualize mind as a “poetry-making faculty” (Rorty, 1989, p.36). Rorty’s argument that subjects are fully responsible for “making” their idiosyncratic worlds leads Boisvert (1993) to also label Rortyans as friends of Mathema:

[Rorty] is, despite protestations to the contrary, still drawing upon the capital deposited by modernity: disembodiedness and disembeddedness. The radical redescriptions envisioned and celebrated by Rorty would work only for disembodied intellects envisioning playfully one self-description after another. They do not work so well for concrete human beings who have bodies, are parts of families, make up the fabric of a particular culture, and in general are imbedded in a network of caring relations (p.144).
Dewey, by way of contrast, places the body at the core of philosophy, and thus is considered a “friend of Bios” (Boisvert, 1993). The body for Dewey stands as the “center of life activity,” the “developer of experience,” and “explorer of its world” (Alexander, 1987, p. xviii). Rather than understanding experience as an act of “taking” or “making,” experience for Dewey and the pragmatists is a never-ending and irreducible transaction between organisms (humans) and the environment—“an event within a social or cultural context, a ‘lifeworld’” (Alexander, 1987, p. xviii). Sport philosophy therefore needs to start from and return to genuine, full, lived experience, and consequently must reject the Asomatic Attitude ironically implicit in the work of analytic metaphysicians and antimetaphysicians of sport.

Thus, a Deweyan or pragmatic approach to sport philosophy requires a revised (and irreducibly interrelated) notion of metaphysics and experience. This implies that analytic metaphysicians and antimetaphysicians of sport must reconstruct both their methodologies (first philosophies) and tools of inquiry (theory of experience) in order to more effectively tend to the problems of real-life, everyday sport. Without appealing and returning to full, rich, human experience in sport, philosophers will continue to adhere to limited critical methods offering analyses that fail to resonate with athletic communities.

**Critique #3: Battle Over “Truth” Rather than Meaning**

In addition (and interrelated) to the employment of limited theories of experience, sport philosophers subscribing to the methods of the field’s two dominant typologies also embody misguided purposes. The field’s practitioners must therefore also reconsider the partial purposes they forward as a consequence of disembodied conceptions of
experience. In this section I will argue that both dominant typologies of sport philosophy currently promote deficient purposes that focus on truth rather than Dewey’s richer notion of philosophical purpose that focuses on meaning.

Currently sports’ metaphysical constructionists and deconstructionists launch their critical projects in the service of either finding sporting truths (analytic metaphysicians) or conversely, the rejection of sporting truths (antimetaphysicians). Consequently, I will argue that both poles engage in limited intellectual exercises related to truth rather than fully embodied inquiry into human meaning through sport.

Pragmatically reconstructing the purposes of sport philosophers (by way of reconstructed theories of experience) therefore holds great potential for enhancing the field’s relevance.

**Analytic Metaphysicians: Misguided Search for Sporting Truth**

Dixon, in his compelling *JPS* article “Canadian Figure Skaters, French Judges, and Realism in Sport” (2003) contends “the fact that…scholars [of sport] feel the need to provide arguments to support their positions on…ethical issues in sport indicates that they are moral realists who believe that moral judgments, unlike subjective statements of taste, require justifications” (p.112). He goes on to claim “sporting realism applies to all judgments about sport, moral and nonmoral” (p.112).

Dixon and other analytic metaphysicians of sport perceive their task as the construction of “rational” principles that will (in theory) solve all forms of athletic dilemmas. Through the inductive method, analytic metaphysicians organize the data emerging from “experience” to construct reasoned first principles and metaphysical systems of sport. These scholars of sport then utilize the deductive method to construct “increasingly informed, principled, and defensible positions” (Dixon, 2003, p.113) that
derive conclusions applicable to the entire range of sport issues. This understanding, in fact, informs Dixon’s division between sport realists and sport antirealists.

Dixon (2003) conceptualizes the “sporting realist” as committed to “a theory about the general nature of truth in judgments about sport” (p.114; emphasis added). However Dixon admits that “sporting realists” may construct and defend different first principles since no philosopher of sport can hold a privileged access to sport truths. The purpose of sport philosophy then becomes the “dialectic of debate” that leads to “increasingly informed, principled, and defensible positions” that will “ideally (though in practice rarely)” result in “almost universal allegiance” (p.113).

Boisvert (1998a) likens the purpose of modern analytic philosophical investigations to the detective’s quest to solve a mystery (p.29). From this perspective, the detective collects pieces of evidence (facts or truths), interrogates witnesses, interprets laws, and then withdraws into a quiet room to solve the athletic mystery. The production of knowledge or reason based on pre-existing truth thus stands as the aim of philosophical inquiry for these sport philosophers.

Dewey labels this project of modern philosophy the “quest for certainty” (LW 4). Sport philosophers sharing versions of this method seek the truth for the purpose of constructing fixed, static, rigid, and atemporal metaphysical systems. Stuhr (1997) refers to this quest for certainty (epistemology) or the “search for the immutable” (metaphysics) as the “epistemological and the metaphysical phases or dimensions of the pursuit of order—an essentially normative, critical, moral undertaking” (p.173). Without certainty or order arising from fixed, eternal, antecedently real “objects of knowing,” analytic metaphysicians argue that beliefs enter into the realm of ambiguity. Therefore most
philosophers, Stuhr continues, attempt to achieve “epistemological certainty” for the purpose of guaranteeing moral order and circumventing moral chaos (p.173).

In a sport context, exemplars of analytic metaphysicians of sport, including Dixon, Simon, Schneider and Butcher, as well as Torres and McLaughlin, seek to construct guiding principles and establish ontological permanence. For instance, Torres and McLaughlin (2003) describe the aim of their analysis championing the acceptance of tied scores at the end of matches as the following: “We will establish an enlightened view of ties as meaningful contest resolutions…. This analysis demonstrates that ties are fully compatible with, and are, at times, the most faithful representation of the central purpose of competitive sport…. [W]hen differences in athletic successes are indistinguishable, it is difficult to understand how a victory–defeat outcome could be justified” (p.145; emphasis added).

Clear indications of analytic philosophical purpose arise from these statements. First, Torres and McLaughlin clearly conflate the notion of “meaning” with “truth” as they seek accurate final representations of comparative athletic skill. Torres and McLaughlin make the quest for a “meaningful” conclusion abundantly clear with the phrase “most faithful representation of the central purpose of competitive sport.” They perceive their roles as sport philosophers to defend the central purpose of sport, to ensure that contests “faithfully” assess the relative athletic ability of the competitors, which stands, in their view, as the proper outcome of sport.

But once again, the metaphysical constructionist position embodies only partial or limited intentions in comparison to Dewey’s thicker notion of purpose. Rather than engage in a search for certainty by way of immutable “truth,” Dewey’s pragmatic
philosophy operates in the realm of meanings. In the essay “Philosophy and Civilization” (LW 3), Dewey claims “meaning is...more precious in value than is truth, and philosophy is occupied with meaning rather than with truth” (p.4; emphasis added).

Analytic metaphysicians may argue that their project is in fact about meaning—what sport “means” based on universal principles. Torres and McLaughlin, for example, consider their “apology for ties” an attempt to offer a more “meaningful” understanding of sport contests. However, metaphysical constructionist accounts of philosophical purpose stem from impartial theories of experience that leads to erroneous confluences of the terms “truth” and “meaning.” Torres and McLaughlin, for instance, use the terms “meaning” and “most faithful representation” (truth as correspondence) interchangeably.

Yet meaning, Dewey argues, “is wider in scope” than truth:

Meaning is the wider category; truths are but one class of meanings, namely, those in which a claim to verifiability by their consequences is an intrinsic part of their meaning. Beyond this island of meanings which in their own nature are true or false lies the ocean of meanings to which truth and falsity are irrelevant. We do not inquire whether Greek civilization was true or false, but we are immensely concerned to penetrate its meaning. We may indeed ask for the truth of Shakespeare’s Hamlet or Shelly’s “Skylark,” but by truth we now signify something quite different from that of scientific statement and historical record (LW 3:4-5).

Alexander (2003) argues that philosophy, as “the love of wisdom” stands in a “problematic relationship” with the project of justifying beliefs or accumulating knowledge. Instead, Alexander believes, as does Dewey, that “inquiry into the nature of rational justification and the implications of holding beliefs” should be viewed as a “part of the more complex whole of wisdom than as the sole end that everything else serves” (p.129). Rather than refer to the “quasi-scientific model” of rigorously and technically analyzing discrete problems for the sake of increasing knowledge as “philosophy,”
Alexander labels this form of inquiry “philepistemy” (p.129). Rather than conceiving of philosophy as the search for “wisdom”—the realization of human meaning through transactions with the world—“philepistemists” seek to uncover facts about nature for the purpose of controlling nature (p.131). Consequently, “philepistemists” understanding of meaning as corresponding to some fixed reality renders it (meaning) a mechanical concept.

One apparent problem with reducing the purpose of philosophy to a process of accumulating knowledge is the way analytic philosophers or “philepistemists” problematically conflate the terms “real,” “truth,” and “meaning.” Sport philosophers, including Dixon, Torres, and Simon, use these concepts (“reality,” “truth,” and “meaning”) interchangeably. Dewey, in contrast, demonstrates the experiential differences between reality, “knowing,” and “meaning” with the following example of an individual hearing a startling noise. Being frightened by a sudden sound is “real”—although not necessarily “known.” The immediacy of the situation may lead the individual to engage in an inquiry into the cause of the sudden noise. In this case, the inquiry reveals that a shade tapping against the window caused the frightful noise. The experienced fear may also lead to a number of possible “meanings” that are not the same as “knowing” the cause.

Alexander (1987) offers examples of artistic interest in the fearful feeling taken up by Poe as a sinister “tapping at my chamber door” in his poem “The Raven;” or the feeling of fear may be perceived superstitiously as a sign of wicked spirits (p.77). The experience of investigating the cause of the fearful noise may result in a “truer” meaning of the noise, however this does not “falsify” the reality of immediate experience. As
Dewey writes, “Things are what they are experienced to be, …it is fallacious to say that Reality is just and exclusively what it is or would be to an all-competent all-knower; or even that it is, relatively and piece-meal, what it is to a finite and partial knower” (MW 3:159-160).

In a sport setting, for example, Corlett (1996) points out “athletes look out over the field of play and see looming there the specters of failure, loss of dignity and prestige, and injury. They often perceive their physical, mental, and social survival to be threatened and the fear that results lurks in the shadows of every competition” (p.52). Dixon’s analytic metaphysical conflation of the concepts “real,” “truth,” and “meaning” ends up denying this experiential “reality” from the athlete. Despite the “real” sense of humiliation—weak or strong—experienced in a blowout loss, Dixon contends that this immediacy is not “a fact” and thus refuses to support any arguments containing an anti-blowout thesis.

This does not completely deny the argumentative force of Dixon’s conclusion that athletes dedicated to the competition not feel strongly humiliated in a lopsided loss. It seems fair for him to argue that we do not need to feel strongly humiliated after losing badly in an athletic contest. After all, we constantly espouse the value of participation and the need to accept losses in sport. However, from the rich Deweyan perspective, knowing is only one mode of experiencing. To overcome feelings of strong humiliation following a blowout loss requires cultural and educational transformation on the level of meaning, rather than a cold, logical deductive conclusion. Dixon’s “central purpose” of sport—the quest for a single certainty—denies the many available meanings that can emerge from sport participation. For instance, Corlett (1996) suggests a purpose of sport that differs
from Dixon’s, making the specter of fear more real than in a purely knowledge-based version of sport:

Athletes choose to participate in the circumstances that produce the fear that debilitates them. They actively seek the opportunity to challenge themselves and know beforehand that if the challenge were trivial, there would be no point. The difficulty of achieving is the reason for playing. Sport philosophy, on its own, would focus immediately on such nonempirical matters and try to bring reason to bear on the emotions, to create the conditions in which a state of courage can arise and remain (p.52).

The difference between “real” and “truth” therefore renders Dixon’s use of the categories sporting “realists” and “antirealists” problematic. One cannot escape or deny immediate experience. Thus the realist/antirealist divide on this matter stands as a false dualism. As a result, the more appropriate division emerges from disparate conceptions of first philosophy or metaphysics, and more specifically the role of “truth” in philosophical sport inquiry (c.f. Chapter 1). But not only is the conflation of “real” and “truth” problematic; so too is the reductively cognitive, “truth as correspondence” account held to by the analytic metaphysicians. As Dewey argues:

Because we are afraid of speculative ideas, we do, and do over and over again, an immense amount of dead, specialized work in the region of ‘facts.’ We forget that such facts are only data; that is, are only fragmentary, uncompleted meanings, and unless they are rounded out into complete ideas—a work which can only be done by hypotheses, by a free imagination of intellectual possibilities—they are as helpless as are all maimed things and as repellent as are needlessly thwarted ones” (LW 3:9).

It is helpful to consider Dewey’s example of the various “real” accounts one might offer of a horse—none necessarily “truer” than the other. The jockey may see a potential champion. The zoologist sees an exemplar of the equine species. The horse trader views the horse as a commodity. The difference between each account lies not in
the validity of truth or falsity, but in the real or immediate (although different) ways the jockey, zoologist, and trader experientially interacted with the horse (MW 3:158).

From a sport perspective, the Deweyan idea that “truth” arises through transactions between humans and the athletic environment (immediate experience or “reality”) suggests that many “truths” about sport can emerge from experience. Consequently, there are many ways that we can look at sport to inquire into the best way to deal with athletic dilemmas. For instance, our games, Kretchmar (2001) argues, “can be otherwise” as multiple elements get “baked into the lusory product”—including aesthetics, ethics, and culture (p.167). The quest for a philosopher of sport, therefore, is not the discovery of the “truth” about sports, but an inquiry into the ways athletic experiences may widen and deepen in meaningful ways.

Certainly the quest for certainty or search for order is a simpler, cleaner project for philosophers of sport. As a result, the quest for certainty “goes all the way down” for analytic metaphysicians—from their methodology to the first principles, to the purpose of a social institution such as sport. However, the sport philosopher’s quest for athletic certainty requires ontological permanence. Their search for moral order in sport needs epistemological certainty (Stuhr, 1997, p.173). All of this adds up to what Dewey warns us about—the Plotinian Temptation (reduction to singular conclusions) and the Galilean Purification (the production of simplified analyses). The wide range of possible meanings available through sport is reduced to a single knowledge-based enterprise—for instance, the accurate determination of relative athletic ability.

Reducing philosophy to a search for order seriously undermines the larger project of deepening and widening the meanings available in social practices like sport. Instead,
the quest for certainty by way of the Galilean Purification results in the fusion of the good with “truth” by limited methods. “The goal of classic philosophy,” Dewey writes, is “to show that the realities which are the objects of the highest and most necessary knowledge are also endowed with the values which correspond to our best aspirations, admirations, and approvals” (LW 4: 27).

**Antimetaphysicians: Rash Absolute Dismissals of Sporting Truth**

The partial purposes espoused by the analytic metaphysicians of sport—the search for athletic truths rather than meaning—limits the scope and impact of their project. Metaphysical deconstructionists such as Burke (1997) further contend that “so-called *rational* positions” championed by analytic metaphysicians merely coincide with what a sports community wants to hear—simply social justifications rather than *deep* foundational truths (p.61). Consequently, antimetaphysicians of sport completely reject the project of sport philosophy’s metaphysical constructionist theorists.

Roberts (1995) exemplifies this Rortyan-inspired antimetaphysician position as he rejects the purpose of sport philosophy as the search for sporting truths and application of deductive metaphysical systems. Roberts conceives of the product of such a misguided project as metaphysicians’ “basking in the apparently warm glow of literal truth” (p.95). Critical of the analytic metaphysicians’ project of searching for sporting truths, Roberts concludes,

> I’ve at last realized that the [major leagues of literal truth] aren’t what they’re cracked up to be—they are nothing other than the static place where accomplished, but tired old metaphors go to monotonously play out their literal, final days. While they may have truth on their side, truth here should be understood more as the “kiss of death”—a mixed blessing that renders them powerless to perform new tricks, to right the wrongs, to reduce cruelty, to change the way the game is played, to make new things possible, to remake our world (p.95).
Roberts concludes the metaphor by contending “the future of our world, ourselves, and our truths is being played out in the minors where metaphoric youngsters fight to the death for the right to kill off our old truths and thereby remake our world” (p.95).

Acknowledging that his personal attempts to find final answers or incontrovertible proofs about sport always failed, Roberts instead turns to a conception of truth, the world, and agents “not as things discovered or found, but as things made and remade, again and again, through the words and images we use” (p.96). Roberts agrees with Rorty’s position that “truth cannot be out there—cannot exist independently of the human mind—because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false” (1989, p.5).

This reading of Rorty by his adherents in the sport philosophy literature holds radically divergent notions of “truth” and subsequently different views of the philosopher’s project from the analytic metaphysicians. For instance, Rorty contends that “languages are made rather than found,” and that “truth is a property of linguistic entities, of sentences” (1989, p.7). Humans “triumph” or live “well” when they escape from inherited descriptions. Human redemption occurs by recreating all ‘it was’ to ‘thus I willed it’ (p.29). Rorty argues that no universally shared beliefs or desires ultimately or foundationally unite humans with other humans. Thus the poet stands as the paradigmatic human way to live (p.34).

The “post-philosophical” project for Rortyans or antimetaphysicians of sport is the promotion of a metaphorical battle to deconstruct, re-remake, and re-redescribe the athletic world. Without the “employment of increasingly useful metaphors” (Rorty, 1989, p.9) sport’s dominant language—dependent upon the languages of economics, business,
politics, management, law, and entertainment—cruelly “redescribes” blinded sport participants (Roberts, 1995, pp. 96-97).

Burke also compels sport communities to see redescriptions of virtues and goods that impact the structure of sports as desirable, rather than in violation of the nature of sport. Commenting on some Japanese breaststrokers’ strategy to swim underwater for more than a lap of an Olympic race, Burke (1997) writes: “Why was this outlawed at subsequent swimming meets? What virtue did the Japanese lack? I would suggest that they expanded the practice of breaststrok ing in a novel way. What they lacked was the persuasiveness or wit to convince others of the appropriateness of the expansion” (p.59).

The challenge presented by Roberts and Burke to sport philosophers is to reject the quest for certainty, resist the establishment of rational principles or evaluative criterion, and to “kill off” old sport truths and remake the sport world:

What is required is not the discovery of, or the presentation of, some pre-existent reality behind the appearances, but the invention of some new tools, some new worlds that will make something possible that has never before been dreamed of. This is one of the very few powers we have over this world and those within it—the power to redescribe, to remake. The redescription of sport as poetry, of the strong athlete as the strong maker, may create the new words and tools to get the language of sport working again (Roberts, 1995, p.99; emphasis added).

Antimetaphysicians of sport compel athletic participants to seek a balance between a liberal sport society—one that causes less suffering to other sport agents—and private individuals engaged in sport. Cruelly imposing redescriptions onto other athletic agents impoverishes sport according to this view: “I suggest that a blindness [to the peculiar ideality of others] is the operative result of the impoverished language that determines conventional descriptions of elite sport. It is blind in that it has no words that can tell the stories of a peculiar ideality of elite athletic life, that can sing the songs and
paint the pictures of athletes consistent with how they might choose to be taken in their own terms if they were to have an effective language of their own” (Roberts, 1995, p.98).

Once again antimetaphysicians of sport fail to adequately provide a pragmatic corrective to the limits of the analytic metaphysicians’ project. Rortyans mistakenly believe that by completely jettisoning the notion of truth as anything more than justification, they engage in a project centered on meaning. However, while they avoid the mistake of conflating “literal” truth with meaning, Rorty (1989) reduces meaning to something with “a place in [a] language game” (p.18).

From a Deweyan perspective, however, truth still plays an important role in meaning. Once truth is completely removed by the Rortyans, only a thin conception of meaning remains (as it does for the analytic metaphysicians who conflate meaning with truth). Despite his criticism of the “epistemology industry,” Dewey never considers seeking truth irrelevant to a philosopher trading in the realm of meaning. In fact, he calls truth “infinitely important” (LW 3:4).

Truth for Dewey is always emerging, arising from experience, and referred to as “warranted assertions” (c.f. LW 12:159). This idea that truth is a posteriori rather than a priori importantly differentiates Dewey from the analytic metaphysicians. But, at the same time, the important place Dewey holds for “truth” separates him from the antimetaphysicians. From a critical standpoint, inquiry into “general traits” for Dewey plays a vital role for philosophy as a “higher form” of criticism:

What is revealed in the objects of all reflective experience (“theories”) is nothing less than that they have at each and every moment presupposed the larger world which acts as their ground, their origin, their material, and their true end. Without this very special enterprise, the possibility will always remain that inquiry will forget its origin and its end. It will then become a sterile and parasitic occupation, or, at the least, a mere Rortian “conversation” (Alexander, 1987, p.90).
Rortyans like Burke and Roberts end up with a thin version of meaning—an idiosyncratic act of making sense. This emaciated account ignores the socially shared and interactive quality of meaning. Meaning for the antimetaphysicians exists in a state of pure flux, emerging only in the poetic and solipsistic act of “making” language. However as Alexander (2003) argues, language only works at a “crude” level of grasping full, embodied meaning (p.134). Dewey, in contrast, believes philosophy must “see the real and the ideal, the actual and the possible, as ever hung in a problematic tension, perpetually posing the question of the meaning of human existence” (Alexander, 1987, p.263).

To return to Dewey’s example of describing a horse, the various “truth” claims about the horse are more than idiosyncratic or subjective descriptions. They emerge from socially shared symbol systems. However, in contrast to analytic metaphysicians, the meaning of the horse need not stop at the descriptive or historical accounts offered. The intellectual habits that we bring to the experience with the horse can be challenged, widened, deepened, and/or confirmed. So truths, or the generic traits of existence, are important elements of meaning. But so are the novel elements of experience that reconstruct our intellectual habits.

Summary

In the end, Stuhr (1997) accuses most Western philosophy of “chronophobia”—the “search for the immutable, the quest for certainty, and the pursuit (or invention) of moral order…philosophical formalizations of familiar responses to familiar fears: the fear of time” (p.173). Stuhr suggests that chronophobia arises from a fear that we will never live in a world of permanence and moral stability, and consequently will live a life of
disorder and moral chaos. Dewey similarly recognizes the fear of contingency, and understands the desire for order: “In the absence of actual certainty in the midst of a precarious and hazardous world, men cultivated all sorts of things that would give them the feeling of certainty. And it is possible that, when not carried to an illusory point, the cultivation of the feeling gave man courage and confidence and enabled him to carry the burdens of life more successfully” (LW 4: 26-27).

Ironically, Stuhr charges Rorty with “chronophobia” as well—the fear of time: “at least in one important and distressing respect, ironists and traditional metaphysicians are alike. Although they differ about the reality of contingency, both fear contingency. For Rorty, contingency is dangerous, threatening, humiliating; it suggests that life is futile. As a result, literary criticism does for ironists what the search for universal moral principles aimed to do for metaphysicians” (p.123). Roberts’ (1995) description of the world as “devastatingly contingent and exposed” (p.95; emphasis added) gives weight to Stuhr’s accusation. Consequently, the project of the antimetaphysician gives up on the search for any rich sense of meaning. As Alexander (1987) argues, the problematic tension between the actual and the possible (the real and the ideal) that makes meaning possible “refuses to go away” and thus “may lead some philosophers, like Rorty, to abandon the enterprise altogether.” Alexander concludes this point by writing, “Philosophy then becomes concerned with aesthetics and criticism in a purely formal, negative sense, the pastime of academic intellectual czars and their faddists” (p.263).

The thin conceptions of meaning held to by the analytic metaphysicians and the antimetaphysicians ultimately leave their larger philosophic projects limited. Both dominant typologies, by battling over truth and ignoring the wider notion of meaningful
lived experience, cling to the Asomatic Attitude when establishing sport philosophy’s purpose. Rather than conceive of meaning as arising from a fully embodied, interactive activity, meaning in sport is either conflated with a disembodied “truth as correspondence” notion or as isolated to the disconnected rules of linguistic usage.

Currently, Stuhr (1997) contends, philosophy “means less a sort of love and more a sort of fear.” The challenge then for philosophers is to “tell a different story about philosophy” not grounded in fear, worry, anxiety, or apology. (p.170). To conceive of sport philosophy as an act of love as opposed to fear requires philosophers to turn their attention to battles over widening and deepening meaning—battles in which truth and chance play a significant part.

**Conclusion: Some Consequences of Sport Philosophy**

In the previous two chapters, I launched three critiques against sport philosophy. In Chapter 2, I claimed that the field’s critical methods are lacking due to limited conceptions of metaphysics and first philosophy. In the third chapter, I argued that incomplete theories of experience and misguided philosophical purposes directly impacted the ineffective critical methods of sport philosophy’s dominant methodological paradigms.

I levied these three critiques against sport philosophy’s dominant paradigms with the following question always in mind: Are sport philosophers complicit in the field’s marginalization and social irrelevance? I began Chapter 2 by claiming that sport philosophers do in fact play a role in the field’s lack of social or political power and sport philosophy’s disregard as a worthy academic endeavor. Now, I would like to conclude
my critique of sport philosophy by outlining some consequences that arise from the
dominant typologies’ limited critical methods, tools of inquiry, and partial purposes. In
particular, I want to demonstrate the consequences these limitations have on the academic
marginalization and social insignificance of sport philosophers—a fragmented
community of dogmatic inquirers trading in practice/theory dualisms and arguments that
fail to resonate with the sport public.

**Consequence #1: A Fragmented and Impotent Sport Philosophy Community**

The first consequence of sport philosophy’s limited critical methods, theories of
experience, and partial purposes requires a controversial and strong claim: sport
philosophers working from one of the dominant traditions in the field cannot engage in
fruitful dialogue with the other. Disparate conceptions of metaphysics and methodology
divide the field so deeply that only interminable disputes remain—rendering
communication muted. I believe that this polarization, one that was described in Chapter
1 and more thoroughly critiqued throughout this and the previous chapter, is for the most
part self-imposed and seemingly encouraged by sport philosophers. Virtually every new
issue of *JPS* includes articles redefining the irreconcilable differences between competing
philosophical methodologies. The tendency to “go polemic” is strong in our field. Few
sport philosophers seem willing to seek common ground.

Some may argue that the dialectic between widely disparate positions carves
fruitful new paths, or as Dixon (2003) believes, “permit[s] the emergence of increasingly
defensible views…culminating in arguments so cogent that they win almost universal
allegiance” (p.113). A historical examination of *JPS* would lend some support to Dixon’s
position. I would also agree that philosophers of sport respect the work of most of their
colleagues. However, I contend that critical progress in our field only occurs when sport philosophers working from the dominant traditions (unknowingly or quietly) suspend their first philosophy commitments.

One could construct a hypothetical scenario in which Roberts and Dixon engage in a discussion about a perpetual sport dilemma in need of critical philosophical guidance—the ethical status of banning certain performance-enhancing substances in athletics. Dixon’s first move will require the establishment of clear first principles from which certain conclusions must follow. Immediately Roberts will reject Dixon’s need to establish a first principle and belief that some form of criteria can be established, instead imploring Dixon to rely only on compelling metaphorical redescriptions. Once Dixon refuses and Roberts holds strong to his methodological commitments, the debate about performance-enhancing substances ends—without ever dealing substantially with the issue of performance-enhancing substances.

The field of sport philosophy, like virtually all forms of criticism, stands as a divided collection of theorists rather than a genuine community of inquirers. Speaking in “provincial tongues,” members of the sport philosophy association tenaciously hold onto first philosophy commitments at the expense of genuine, profitable dialogue. Too often, Dewey argues, “instead of being a free messenger of communication [philosophy] has been a diplomatic agent of some special and partial interest” (LW 1:298). Debates between philosophers of sport turn into battles to show the inadequacies of other positions in the name of victory. The dogmatism that emerges is akin to a methodological schoolyard brawl—“my metaphorical dad can beat your deductive father!” An
unwillingness to play by another’s rules leaves philosophers of sport “methodologically estranged” and “mutually dismissive” (Jackson, 2002, p.105).

In the end, rather than engaging in interminable debates in JPS, convention centers, and rented lecture halls, sport philosophers need to build a community (in the Deweyan sense) that moves beyond mere association and ultimately infiltrates the public sphere. Instead of remaining polemic and emphasizing differences, sport philosophers need to seek common ground. This is not to say that philosophers of sport should search for unified conclusions or begin analysis with the same particular aim, but rather to engage in the shared project of making experiences within sport more meaningful rather than fight for methodological victory:

The final task of criticism is none other than the quest for community, for the elucidation of those values and ideals which create and bind a public together through a recognition of its fate and history as well as its inherent choices and possibilities. It is not so much that criticism is a function of “communities of interpreters” as it is the quest for community in which interpretation becomes a meaningful activity (Alexander, 1987, p.276).

**Consequence #2: Practice-Theory Dualisms = Lack of “Cash Value”**

In addition to standing on opposite ends of a methodological spectrum that precludes genuine dialogue, the oft-dogmatic commitment of sport philosophers to either a metaphysical constructionist or metaphysical deconstructionist methodology results in debilitating practice-theory dualisms. The divide between theoretical commitments and practical applications arises from the partial metaphysical conceptions, limited accounts of experience, and deficient purposes—resulting in disconnected theoretical commitments that fail to fully capture human experience. Alexander (1987) makes similar accusations against philosophy in general, writing “If one commences
philosophizing about the world by ignoring the temporal and horizontal nature of experience, the result will be any one of innumerable dualistic renditions” (p.266).

In particular, the failure of most sport philosophers to trade rich, transactional notions of experience for clean and simple theories renders their work dualistic. Analytic metaphysicians trade the messiness of lived experience for disembodied reason. Antimetaphysicians ignore the irreducibly embodied existence of humans and turn to disconnected language. Ignoring William James’ conception of the body as “the storm centre, the origin of co-ordinates, the constant place of stress in all that experience train,” (James, 1976, p.86, fn.8) leave theories of experience incomplete.

Consequently, the work of both the analytic metaphysicians and the antimetaphysicians fall short in critical evaluations of embodied, in-the-world sport problems. The practice-theory divide worsens when sport philosophers react by moving to ever more abstract theoretical conceptions. Human experiences—including everyday sporting experiences—seemingly become irrelevant to the philosopher. As a result, inaccessible philosophical work that fails to resonate with the sporting public becomes irrelevant outside of sport philosophy’s closed circles.

Many philosophers express genuine interest in offering solutions to real, vital sport problems. However as argued in the earlier critiques, this almost always requires the suspension of their own philosophical commitments. Analytic metaphysicians such as Simon and Russell conveniently arrive at conclusions after sneaking wider experiential or evolutionary accounts of metaphysics in the backdoor. Roberts and Burke often make normative claims that belie their hardened antimetaphysical position.
In what might be called a Freudian slip, my mother’s misreading of the byline under my name for a television interview—“sport elitist” instead of sport ethicist—is arguably a perceptive description of the public’s impression of sport philosophy. I believe it is safe to say that all sport philosophers can recall a time when disclosure of their profession led to strange looks and awkward questions. Rather than critically examine our own methods, however, many sport philosophers instead blame the ‘layperson’s’ inability to understand what we do—further disconnecting sport philosophy from the sporting public.

During the discussion period following Angela Schneider’s 2004 keynote address at the IAPS conference, she admitted that, despite teaching a sport philosophy class for several years, her students “hated” and could not understand the reason for talking about metaphysics. Similarly, Rortyan-inspired philosophers of sport often seem to implicitly suggest that virtually all sport participants are dupes or automatons. Rather than clarify issues, many theories offered by sport philosophers make the beliefs and values of sport communities less coherent and practices seem more complex. Dewey considers this process of “casting a cloud over the things of ordinary experience,” as philosophers of sport so often do, “the most serious indictment to be brought against non-empirical [disembodied] philosophies.” Even worse, Dewey believes disembodied philosophers “have not been content to rectify [the things of ordinary experience]. They have discredited them at large” (LW 1:40).

Pappas (2003), by way of Dewey, argues “the worth of a theory is determined not only in terms of its intellectual consistency and coherence or its explanatory power, but also in terms of its instrumental-ameliorative powers in the context of practice” (p.44).
Much of sport philosophy seems to fall short at the level of intellectual consistency, coherence, and explanatory power. Perhaps more disconcerting, however, is that most of the work of sport philosophy seems powerless to make a real difference in the everyday affairs of the sport world. We too often engage in what pragmatists describe as “intellectual gymnastics” or what Charles Peirce calls “pretend doubt” that ultimately limits the cash value of sport philosophy.

Dewey famously implored philosophers to begin and end in the “primacy and ultimacy of the material of ordinary experience” rather than the creation of “artificial problems” distracting their energies and attention (LW 1:26). Practice becomes the central feature for pragmatists, and “the practical consequences of a philosophy constitute the meaning of that philosophy” (Stuhr, 1997, p.68). Thus in Chapters 4 and 5 a reconstruction of sport philosophy will be offered with the help of guidelines provided by Dewey. Offering pragmatic correctives to the shortcomings of sport philosophy’s current methodological paradigms may help overcome the undesired contribution sport philosophers make to the field’s marginalization and irrelevance in higher education and wider society. The task is not easy; sport philosophers must take to heart Dewey’s famous, and most compelling passage and apply it to the sport world: “Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men” (MW 10:46).
 CHAPTER 4  
Re-Envisioning the Backdrop of Sport Philosophy:  
Pragmatism, Experience, Meaning, and Sport  

There is a special service which the study of philosophy may render. Empirically pursued it will not be a study of philosophy, but a study, by means of philosophy, of life-experience (LW 1:40).

An opportunity exists for sport philosophers to play a central role in the future of sport. Current approaches for dealing with the most pressing problems plaguing sport seem to come up short, thereby opening space for new voices. Unfortunately sport philosophers’ current methods, fueled by incomplete theories of experience and misguided purposes, fail to reverberate with the wider sporting public. The dominant paradigms of sport philosophy’s practice/theory divide result in a lack of “cash value,” while the disparate theoretical positions adhered to leave the field polarized.

Dewey and pragmatism, I believe, offer sport philosophy the best hope for overcoming the marginalization and irrelevance that now beleaguer the field and holds it back from leading public conversations about sport. In his own time, Dewey faced similar cultural problems—how to deal with a multitude of issues mostly arising from unbridled enthusiasm for “progress.” In his 92 years Dewey witnessed the emergence of a modern culture that simultaneously offered great advances and horrific destruction, increased opportunities for wealth and widening gaps between rich and poor, a world drawn closer together and further divided at the same time, hope and despair, possibility and bleakness, like few epochs in human history.

Dewey’s life experiences also showed him that modern philosophy was not up to the task of dealing with the rapid changes in contemporary life. It is thus little wonder that Dewey undertook the challenge Ralph Waldo Emerson made to Americans to live
full lives “by breaking free” from “doctrinal inheritance” and opening fully to the experiential possibilities existing in the New World. Greatly impacted by his democratic and contextualized conception of philosophy, Dewey praised Emerson by writing, “Against creed and system, convention and institution, Emerson stands for restoring to the common man that which in the name of religion, of philosophy, of art and of morality, has been embezzled from the common store and appropriated to sectarian and class use” (MW 3:190). In contrast to most modern philosophers, the classic pragmatists like Peirce, James, and Dewey re-conceptualized philosophy as a practical, critical, and reconstructive instrument for ameliorating the genuine everyday problems of life by qualitatively transforming, widening, and deepening human experience.

Applying Dewey’s work to sport philosophy opens space for the field’s cultural and academic possibilities. Through Dewey’s pragmatism and conception of philosophy, antidotes emerge for dealing with the problems of sport and the field of sport philosophy in the twenty-first century. Dewey’s work offers a pragmatic re-envisioning of the ideas, horizon, or backdrop that sport philosophy is set against. In particular, Dewey’s reconstruction of experience radically challenges the methods and purposes of sport philosophers as well as what informs them. Rather than appropriate partial accounts of experience and offer disconnected truth claims or rejections, Dewey squarely posits philosophy in the realm of full, lived experience for the purpose of deepening and widening human meaning. Against this pragmatic backdrop, I believe an opportunity arises for sport philosophy to generate more powerful methods that counter the prevailing sense of irrelevance and marginalization the field faces.
In this chapter, I will outline how a turn away from philosophy centered around the idea of (and rejection of) truth and knowledge and toward a pragmatic quest for meaning offers sport philosophy a new approach for deepening and widening the experiences made available in sport. Next, I will look more closely at Dewey’s theory of experience—particularly three pervasive qualities that in concert move beyond thin accounts of experience that now implicitly dominate the field of sport philosophy. In the final sections, I will call for all sport philosophers to commit to radical versions of empiricism.

_Reconstructing the Purpose of Sport Philosophy: Seeking Meaning and Wisdom_

In several essays, Deweyan scholar Thomas M. Alexander claims that humans live with a natural drive to “exist with a sense of meaning and value” (1993, p.206). This “Human Eros,” as Alexander terms it, compels humanity to seek fulfillment “on a number of levels” (1993, p.206). Finding the “richest and profoundest ways in which we exist” opens space for human flourishing, while life withers when the Human Eros is frustrated. Simply stated, pragmatic philosophers, including Dewey and Alexander, argue that a “life of meaning” constitutes the “meaning of life” or the purpose of human existence. A meaningless life stands as “a human life which has been denied or stripped of love, friendship, happiness, creative work, curiosity, awareness of mystery and beauty, and, above all, hope has been destroyed.” Most literature and many religions take this as their theme, and rightly so. Our lives are projects guided by this most profound human need which truly holds the bonds of community together and constitutes the energy for creative activity of civilization” (Alexander, 1993, p.206).
Echoing Alexander’s notion of the “Human Eros,” Deweyan scholar Michael Eldridge contends that the point of life is to “live well” and that the great challenge for humanity is that “we can learn to live better than we do now” (1998, pp.41, 42). From a sport perspective, we need, in Douglas Anderson’s (2001, 2002) language, to “recover our humanity” in sport. Consequently, the central purpose of sport philosophy must be to deepen and widen the meaning made available in sports—to help humanity live better by enriching our sporting experiences.60

Perhaps more than ever, culture needs to recapture a drive to live meaningful lives. Today, many cultural commentators describe human existence in technically reliant cultures as mostly cold and meaningless. As Shusterman (1997) writes, “there is a growing concern that we are being so thoroughly reshaped by our informational technology that our experiential, affective capacities are wearing thin, so thin that we risk assimilation to the mechanical information processors that are already our most intimate companions in work and play” (p.39). In a similar vein Stuhr (1997) contends that in American culture “marketing trumps thinking” and “to be is to be in business; to be is to have—and, ideally, to have more and more” (p.6). Dewey labels this cultural attitude that he himself observed at the turn of the twentieth century the “business mind” (LW 5).61 From this worldview what counts as “meaningful” in many instances amounts to the accumulation of scarce and quantifiable resources such as money, fame, and power.

Such an accumulation-based, utilitarian outlook turns our attention away from activities that serve the “ultimate enhancement of the human encounter with meaning and value” (Alexander, 1998, p.3). Dewey warns us that humanity’s distinctive need for the “possession and appreciation of the meaning of things…is ignored and unsatisfied in the
traditional notion of the useful” (LW 1:272). This attitude frustrates the purpose of human existence to live meaningful lives. Dewey laments that we engage in activities without examining their ends in terms of meaning and value. “We optimistically call them ‘useful’ and let it go at that,” Dewey writes (LW 1:272). Dewey obliges us to carefully examine this notion of ‘utility,’ warning that problematic, long-term consequences arise from the infiltration of the “business mind” into our everyday activities. The consequences of a utilitarian existence, Dewey concludes, amounts to a “narrowed,” “embittered,” “crippled,” “congested,” “hurried,” “confused,” and “extravagant” life” (LW 1:272).

Despite Dewey’s early twentieth century warnings, the economic systems and political platforms fed by the corporate culture bleed into virtually all of our contemporary endeavors and institutions, including politics, education, art, and even religion. It also seems fair to assert that the “business mind” dominates modern athletics as sport mirrors these larger societal conditions, demonstrating the extremes arising from the corporate culture. As Kretchmar (2001b) argues, “whenever anyone tries to force us to be active…we want, among other things, to know why we should move, what purpose it will serve, what good it will do” (p.319). Consequently, sport adheres to wider society’s corporate culture model, which Dewey concludes “operates to limit individuality, to put burdens on it, to confuse and submerge it” (LW 5:69).

As a result of this cultural condition, philosophers in general, and sport philosophers more specifically, must re-envision their task for the purpose of helping humanity recapture a life of thick meaning and value. Heeding this call, the Deweyan/pragmatic project, Alexander (2003) argues, returns philosophy to its Socratic
roots: “It is paramount to recognize that any endeavor to think in a Deweyan mode is to engage in the practice of philosophy as the love of wisdom” (p.130). However, Alexander continues, this pragmatic reading of Socrates’ project requires philosophers to help humanity seek the “good life” in a way that involves a “fundamental recontextualization of the contemporary practice of philepistemy” (p.130) as well as “post-philosophy.”

From a Deweyan perspective, humanity’s quest to realize the “good life” does not merely arise from knowing more. Instead, knowledge contributes to living better, more meaningful lives. Unfortunately, sport philosophers adhering to an analytic metaphysician methodology seem willing to reductively conflate the search for wisdom with the project of accumulating knowledge for the purpose of gaining certainty about life. Similarly, the rejection of any conception of “seeking wisdom” beyond idiosyncratic redescription confirms the antimetaphysicians of sport stance that reflective thought cannot evaluate better or worse forms of life. Rather than fully commit to dealing with the issues of human meaning in sport, too often sport philosophers focus on analytic truth claims or rejections of certainty offer little of philosophical value when considered from an experiential or cultural perspective.

In contrast, a fully Deweyan or pragmatic understanding of wisdom requires an engagement in the search for what it means to “live a human life…that reflects a qualitative, emotionally nuanced insight into the human condition as it exists in the world, which requires an equally extensive and sensitive awareness of the world itself” (Alexander, 2003, p.130). The emphasis on wisdom—the reconnection of theory to meaning—guides the Human Eros toward fulfillment by securing the conditions that can produce a good life. Thus in important and powerful ways Dewey’s pragmatism stands in
marked contrast to most contemporary philosophers who fall into the polarized categories of “philepistemy” (metaphysical constructionists or analytic metaphysicians) and post-philosophy (metaphysical deconstructionists or antimetaphysicians). Distinguishable from both dominant poles of sport philosophy, pragmatically inclined philosophy begins “with a humanist imperative: it inquires into the meaning of human existence for the sake of wisdom, that is, it puts human experience in relation to a deep existential meaning of the world” (Alexander, 2003, p.131).

In the end, sport philosophy needs to turn to “thicker” versions of pragmatism most fully developed by Peirce and Dewey as a *theory of meaning*—not a theory simply reduced to “whatever works.” This pragmatic turn necessitates a love for the complexity of life in general, and the rich yet messy potential of sport more particularly. It also requires a deep sense of care and concern for the impact of sport on the human condition. In a radical sense, pragmatic sport philosophers take on the Socratic charge to seek wisdom for the purpose of living better. As a result, pragmatism demands that we, as philosophers, turn our attention away from questions focusing on the accumulation of or rejection of truths and toward enhancing the meaning made available and realized in and through sport.

**Pragmatically Re-conceptualizing Experience: Three Pervasive Qualities**

For pragmatists, inquiry into wisdom or meaning requires a turn to a reconstructed notion of lived human experience. Classic pragmatic thinkers such as Peirce, James, and Dewey demand that a deeper and wider conceptualization of experience stands as the first step and aim of philosophy. In short, experience in its

To pragmatically reconstruct sport philosophy—to re-envision the field’s critical force and cultural relevance—requires a turn to a wider theory of experience than implicitly assumed by most sport philosophers. In particular, full engagement in pragmatic inquiry demands the rejection of the Asomatic Attitude by philosophers of sport and alternatively adopts a fully human, embodied, kinesthetic notion of lived experience. To become fully pragmatic, three pervasive generic traits of lived, human experience Dewey identifies must serve as a backdrop for all philosophical sport inquiry. While this list may not be exhaustive, these three selected pervasive traits of all experience (including those in sport)—experience as transactional, habitual, and aesthetic—serve as a general horizon against which all of our ideas must be set.

A) Sport Experience is Transactional (Natural)

The first pervasive quality Dewey forwards emphasizes the dynamism and precariousness of experience. Providing a contrast with the experiential accounts working in the background of non-pragmatic philosophers of sport, Dewey’s notion of experience is based on the interactions, or more accurately, the *transactions* between human organisms and the life-sustaining environment within which they exist. By way of this irreducible transactional conception of experience, Dewey dissolves the experiential dualisms funding the work of many philosophers, including those engaging in reflective inquiry into sport. Dewey and his fellow pragmatists, Peirce and James, do not conceive of experience as the simple recording of episodic and atomistic sense data, as a “registry
of finished facts” (Smith, 1992, p.29) from a fixed but veiled external world. Nor do pragmatists simply conflate experience with the making of language to idiosyncratically interpret a random existence. Instead, Dewey’s theory of experience offers a significantly richer, fuller, and thicker notion that dismisses the “gulf,” separate spheres, or “bifurcation” of experience and nature, human and world, individuals and society, mind and body.

What has been completely divided in philosophical discourse into man and world, inner and outer, self and not-self, subject and object, individual and social, private and public, etc., are in actuality parties in life-transactions. The philosophical ‘problem’ of trying to get them together is artificial. On the basis of fact, it needs to be replaced by consideration of the conditions under which they occur as distinctions, and of the special uses served by the distinctions (LW 16:248).

Dewey succinctly describes experience as “the manifestation of interactions of organism and environment” (LW 14:16). Experience as a fully human activity cannot be separated from human interest and the “living tissue of all that we encounter and undergo” (Smith, 1992, p.2). From a Deweyan perspective, experience thus articulates “the inclusive, multi-faceted, that is to say fully human, modes of prehending, reacting to, and interacting with our surroundings” (Boisvert, 1998a, p.14). Rather than conceive of experience as the product of subjects interacting with external objects that exist as independent entities, Dewey considers experience as the active and irreducible unification of “subject” with “object.” As individuals always already ‘in-transaction,’ distinctions can only exist in the experience of reflection. Dewey vividly describes this transactional notion in Human Nature and Conduct.

Breathing is an affair of the air as truly as of the lungs; digesting an affair of food as truly as of tissues of stomach. Seeing involves light just as certainly as it does the eye and optic nerve. Walking implicates the ground as well as the legs; speech
demands physical air and human companionship and audience as well as vocal organs (MW 14:15).

Understanding experience requires an appreciation that humans are bodies always already actively engaged in transactions, living forward in time and space. Alexander (1998) uses the phrase “engaged in a rhythmic dance with our environment” (p. 8; emphasis added) to describe human experience. Put another way, humans exist temporally and kinesthetically. But the temporality by which we exist is not merely the persistence of singular episodes followed by subsequent moments, but “configured by action into a dramatic process whose coherence is captured through narrative understanding” (Alexander, 1993, p. 204). From our simplest sensori-motor manipulations to extended projects and traditions of whole communities, the structure of action is “rooted in our active bodily comportment to the world around us” (Alexander, 1993, p. 204).

Athletic participants therefore somatically and temporally exist in a “world of interacting, mutually influencing affairs” (Boisvert, 1998a, p. 35). The term “affairs” emphasizes the active, dynamic quality of athletic experience since “‘affairs’ are never frozen, finished, or complete. They form a world characterized by genuine contingency and continual process. A world of affairs is a world of actualities open to a variety of possibilities” (Boisvert, 1998a, p. 24).

Dewey’s theory of experience (and philosophy as a whole) requires the acceptance of humans as, first and foremost, biological animals with native impulses. Humans live not merely in physical space with other static things or beings, but in a life-world—a “world of entities-in-interaction” in which “time matters” (Boisvert, 1998a, p. 22). But humans are not merely animals instinctively functioning within an ecosystem.
For Dewey, experience depicts the mode of human being-in-the-world. “An organism does not live in an environment; it lives by means of an environment as truly as by the organism; for they are an integration,” he writes (LW 12:32). Elsewhere Dewey writes,

The first great consideration is that life goes on in an environment; not merely in it but because of it, through interaction with it. No creature lives merely under its skin; its subcutaneous organs are means of connection with what lies beyond its bodily frame, and to which, in order to live, it must adjust itself, by accommodation defense but also by conquest. At every moment, the living creature is exposed to dangers from its surroundings, and at every moment, it must draw upon something in its surroundings to satisfy its needs. The career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way (LW 10:19).

Thus the transactional trait of experience can also be understood as the natural quality of experience—the “original material” out of which we build our lives (LW 1:36). Nature, Dewey claims, is “an affair of affairs…a scene of incessant beginnings and endings” (LW 1:83).

A close examination of sport clearly reveals the irreducibility and multilayered complexity of Dewey’s transactive and natural notion of experience. As a form of “life”—a certain type of active, temporal interpenetrations between athletes and the sport environment—sport can be best understood in a Deweyan sense as a “sport-world.” Inexhaustible lists of continuous, never-ending transactions between the all-enveloping matrix of the sport-world and human athletes living in and of the sport-world make sport possible. For instance, elements of the game of basketball such as dribbling and shooting exist because of the dynamic and ongoing transactions between athletes, basketballs, gravity, hard surfaces, and other factors. But the transactions include not only physical manipulations. In the immediacy of sport experience, athletes also precariously and
somatically transact with the rules and successful strategies, opponents, the court boundaries, prior experiences, and the significance of the particular game.

In sum, the transactional quality of experience—as kinesthetic, eventful, active, precarious, contingent, hazardous, and continuous—demonstrates the irreducible fluidity and dynamism of sport affairs. Experiences in sport always precariously move forward, are always in process, and lead toward growth, development, and change. “Wherever there is life-activity, entities-in-interaction, there are ‘affairs,’ literally ‘makings.’ ‘Affairs’ are always in process and these processes as temporal, lead to growth, change, and development,” writes Boisvert (1998a, p.23). Thus the continuously moving present—funded by history and projected into the future—reveals the dynamic complexity of lived experience. This stands in contrast to the simplified versions of experience often working in the background of non-pragmatic philosophers.

B) Sport Experience is Habitual (Cultural)

Experience is not simply fluid, as indicated by the second chapter title in Dewey’s *Experience and Nature*: “Existence as Precarious and Stable” (see LW 1:42-68; emphasis added). For pragmatists, in addition to the “firstness” or “impulse” quality of experience, experience also demonstrates a durable quality—a form or “brute ‘isness’” to human affairs (LW 1:75). Dewey identifies this as the establishment of a sense of continuity, explaining that “order itself develops” (LW 10:20). This order, Dewey further explains, is “secondary and acquired” (MW 14:65). As Boisvert (1998a) writes, we “weave together the material of our everyday surroundings” rather than simply accumulate “experiences” like detached spectators in a theatre. Humans-somatically-in-
transactions with the life-world weave a tapestry, a vital harmony, through reflection that “culminates in a set of habits” (p.124).

Dewey’s theory of experience, inspired by Peirce, makes habits a central feature of human existence. Yet, like many of his uses of ordinary terminology, Dewey’s application of “habits” points to a much wider and deeper concept than our typical understanding. Usually we talk about our good habits and bad habits as “things” with a hold over us, such as smoking cigarettes or exercising. Instead, Dewey understands habits as a “generic attitude of response, set up in consequence of experiences” (MW 10:75). Or, in Peirce’s language, habits are the active application of the sum of our “fixed beliefs.”

The inexhaustible list of ongoing transactions between humans and the environment demand the organization of our energies. When we consider the many embodied factors that shape our transactions with the sport environment, including genetic predispositions, physical abilities, family values, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, race, class, economic status, academic background, developed skills, sporting traditions and so on, we can see the expansive role played by habits. Thus, transaction with “the living tissue of all that we encounter and undergo” serves as “the source of habits that structure both thought and action” (Smith, 1992, p.2).

The ability to interact with the life-world (or sport-world) without constant conscious “thought” arises only from the power of habit. Dewey quotes Peirce to draw the link between beliefs, habits, and action. “Beliefs are really rules for action and the whole function of thinking is but one step in the production of habits of action” (LW 2:6). Therefore as active and engaged meaning-seeking creatures, humans form webs of
“beliefs” and “habits” to “direct our actions and shape the course of our lives” (Smith, 1992, p.33). This leads Dewey to conclude that habits constitute the “self.” Habits, for both Peirce and Dewey, are intimate parts of who we are—we are our habits (c.f. MW 14:21): “They form our effective desires and they furnish us with our working capacities. They rule our thoughts, determining which shall appear and be strong and which shall pass from light into obscurity” (MW 14:21).

Habits, required for cooperation between organism and environment, predispose humans to transact with the materials of everyday life in particular ways. Dewey in early writings draws an analogy between habits and “tools”—an analogy he later revises to move beyond the understanding of habits as relevant only in particular situations. “We may think of habits as means, waiting, like tools in a box, to be used by conscious resolve. But they are something more than that. They are active means, means that project themselves, energetic and dominating ways of acting,” Dewey explains (MW 14:21). Smith (1992) argues that habits intimately connect know-how and action-demanding situations. “Our ordinary sense of what it is to be ‘experienced’ conveys the meaning very well. An experienced sailor is not someone who merely knows many facts about boats, sails, and currents, but a person who knows how to respond to a shift in the wind or a brewing storm, and knows what is to be done next. All of this comes to reside, as Peirce said, not only in the head but in the muscles as well,” writes Smith (p.4). Thus ‘experienced’ athletes or ‘experienced’ coaches appropriate embodied habits developed “via practice and involvement, together with study and reflection” to successfully carry out particular functions (c.f. Boisvert, 1998a, p.124).
The use of the idea “habit” serves as a compelling picture for the durability of experience. Habits exercise a control over our thoughts and actions, and their force “is a stronger and deeper part of human nature than is desire for change” (LW 11:133-134). A habit resists alteration “until the environment obstinately rejects it. Habits once formed perpetuate themselves, by acting unremittingly upon the native stock of activities. They stimulate, inhibit, intensify, weaken, select, concentrate and organize the latter into their own likeness. They create out of the formless void of impulses a world made in their own image” (MW 14:88).

Despite their durability, habits are also always malleable. As Dewey writes, “There can always be more development, more to learn, change of old habits, and cultivation of new ones. For Dewey, this continual process of development and awareness is summarized by the term ‘growth.’ Since all entities are entities-in-process, they are continually being influenced and altered by the relationships into which we enter, and struggles which we undergo, help shape who we are” (Boisvert, 1998a, p.23). So while habits are durable and often settled, they also shift, are reinforced, strengthened, or weakened.

The vital harmony that our body itself establishes with the world is tensive through and through. This is the organic root of the very idea of ‘form’ itself. Rather than a static, intellectual structure or drop of frozen Being, form is due to the temporal recovery of action through engagement with the precarious power of the environment. Form is that ‘reconstruction’ arising from doing and undergoing that involves growth and the establishment of continuity” (Alexander, 1998, p.9).

As a result, liberation from habits should not stand as our goal, but rather the transformation of routine or random habits to care-fully cultivated habits (c.f. MW 14:55).
Different people embody different habits, created and transformed by their unique transactions with the environment. But as “creatures of habit,” humans “operate to a great extent on the fund of past actions, both personal and social” and “learn their moral codes from a community” (Campbell, 2003, p.21; c.f. MW: 14:216). Thus in important ways, habits are social. As Jackson (2002) explains, “The meanings we attach to objects and events come to us initially from the thoughts and actions of others. We inhabit from the very beginning a meaningful social world. We do not enter experience from the outside. We are in it from the start” (p.65). Dewey’s inclusive theory of experience thus stresses the “natural” transaction between humans as live organisms and their durable (yet fluid) surrounding environment that includes pre-existing symbol systems and inherited traditions: “‘Environment’ is not something around and about human activities in an external sense; it is their medium, or milieu, in the sense in which a medium is intermediate in the execution or carrying out of human activities, as well as being the channel through which they move and the vehicle by which they go on” (LW 16:244). And in turn, as creatures of habit, we simultaneously inhabit the world—that is to say, we reciprocally organize the life-world we find ourselves organized within.

This ongoing process of habituation and inhabitation is evident in sport. The sport environments that we enter into, play in, reflect upon, and transform, take on habits. Put another way, sport-worlds have habits that humans enter into—they have an organized and durable quality to them. But concurrently, humans transform these habits, making sport both a durable and dynamic form of life. Kretchmar (2001a), in his “functionalist account” of games as both durable and malleable, writes, “Language conventions are honed over time [Searle] argued, to become more effective in carrying out their
functions. So too, we might add, with games. Some have had their constitutive rules honed and refined across the years. They have become cultural jewels that we want to preserve more or less in their current form” (p.170). One can pragmatically read Kretchmar as arguing that games such as basketball, baseball, and soccer have developed habits over the years that make them relatively stable. However, they are never fixed—always open for revisions if warranted to make our games more meaningful.

Dewey captures the link between the transactive or dynamic quality of sport experience and its habitual or durable quality by suggesting that “culture” serve as a sufficient replacement for the notion of experience. Dewey considered using an alternative term since he could not get past the constant misreading of his work, often as a result of a legacy of seemingly inescapable thin conceptions of experience. These obstacles, he felt, always hindered attempts to enrich accounts of experience while maintaining traditional terminology. Eventually Dewey’s frustration spurred him in his later years to consider replacing the term “experience” with an anthropological notion of “culture” to mark “the vast range of things experienced in an indefinite variety of ways” (LW 1:361).

Were I to write (or rewrite) *Experience and Nature* today I would entitle the book *Culture and Nature*…. I would substitute the term ‘culture’…to designate the inclusive subject-matter which characteristically “modern” (post-medieval) philosophy breaks up into dualisms of subject and object, mind and the world, psychological and physical…” (LW 1:361-362).

Dewey further explains his later preference for the term “culture” to best reflect his reconstruction of experience: “It is a prime philosophical consideration that ‘culture’ includes the material and the ideal in their reciprocal interrelationships and (in marked contrast with the prevailing use of ‘experience’) ‘culture’ designates, also in their
reciprocal interconnections, that immense diversity of human affairs, concerns, values which compartmentalists [sic] pigeonhole under ‘religion’ ‘morals’ ‘aesthetics’ ‘politics’ ‘economics’ etc., etc.” (LW 1:363).

Application of the word “culture” also implies a shared quality of our temporal, dynamic, and durable existence. Humans enter “worlds” rather than mere physical environments, surviving only through care. Beginning with birth, we continuously and vitally join new communities (including sport communities) and inherit languages, beliefs, traditions, and values. A much deeper phenomenon than a subjective, cognitive, and atomistic event, experience is rather “a process situated in a natural environment, mediated by a socially shared symbolic system” (Alexander, 1987, p.xiii). Dewey captures both the dynamic quality of experience with its durable, shared quality under the umbrella of “culture” with the following quote:

Philosophy thus sustains the closest connection with the history of culture, with the succession of changes in civilization. It is fed by the streams of tradition, traced at critical moments to their sources in order that the current may receive a new direction; it is fertilized by the ferment of new inventions in industry, new explorations of the globe, new discoveries in science. But philosophy is not just a passive reflex of civilization that persists through changes, and that changes while persisting. It is itself a change; the patterns formed in this junction of the new and the old are prophecies rather than records; they are policies, attempts to forestall subsequent developments (LW 3:7).

Sport counts among the “immense diversity of human affairs” with inherited concerns as shared values. Sport is thus a culture—a world within which humans transact; a world that provides a durable interpretive matrix of habits. Rather than a practice that exists independently of active humans, sport makes certain kinds of human transactions possible. But sport is not merely open for idiosyncratic description—the sport-world is a cultural matrix we enter into. Thus athletes, it can be said, exist in and of
a “sport-world.” Reciprocally, the sport-world exists because of humans’ shaping the transactions with the environment in certain ways.

C) Sport Experience is Aesthetic (Meaningful)

Finally, in addition to Dewey’s understanding of experience as dynamic and durable, he also recognizes that experience is also aesthetic. By “aesthetic” Dewey understands experience as qualitatively charged with meaning or value. Dewey’s pragmatic understanding of aesthetic experience differs greatly from most discussions on aesthetics. Rather than simply a branch of philosophy concerned with the “beautiful” and “ugly” (LW 1:82), Dewey views aesthetics as an irreducibly pervasive quality of all human experience—“for esthetic experience is experience in its integrity” (LW 10:278). As a dedicated scholar of Dewey’s aesthetics, Alexander (1987) explains “Dewey did not approach the subject of aesthetic experience…simply to ‘round out’ his philosophy” (p.184). Dewey explicitly states in Art as Experience that the ability to grasp the aesthetic quality of experience tests a philosopher’s ability to understand experience. “To esthetic experience, then, the philosopher must go to understand what experience is,” he writes (LW 10:278).

Again principally inspired by Peirce, Dewey’s widened notion of aesthetics captures the “felt” or “making sense” quality of our experiences. Human experience, according to Alexander (1993) “is pervaded with a sensed texture of order, possibility, meaning, and anticipation.” This “felt” quality of experience subsequently becomes the “flesh of meaning” for our lives: “Our immediate experience of even the simplest, most mundane objects resonates with memory and expectation which are directly embodied in the world” (pp.205-206). The aesthetic quality differentiates Dewey’s theory of
experience from purely cognitive or linguistic notions of experience. Rather than account for experience asomatically, pragmatists implore us to feel it in an embodied kinesthetic sense. “Through the medium of the living human body, we engage in the active and responsive experience of meaning. Human experience engages world and self primarily in the complexity of a pervasive aesthetic awareness: at each moment we are attuned to the world,” writes Alexander (1993, p.206).67

As a result, meaning or value emerges within and is transformed by experience rather than simply discovered or linguistically created. In a sport or movement context, Anderson (2002) emphasizes this point when defending the significance of active lifestyle education, writing “following the lead of American pragmatist Peirce, that the strongest ‘argument’ for movement’s importance as a discipline is the experiencing of this importance. We feel or have the importance as we acquire the discipline” (p.93). One should not, however, conclude that experience is aesthetically all-or-nothing—either meaningful or utterly meaningless. Instead, all experience qualitatively includes shades of meanings—from the beautiful and vivid to the ugly and boring. Kretchmar (2001b) contends, “We cannot avoid the issue of meaning…. All intentional movement, all activity that takes place when we are awake, everything we do when we are conscious at some threshold level, is accompanied by vague or clear perceptions, understandings, hopes, goals, fears, experiences of boredom, excitement, various motivations—that is, with one sort of meaning or another” (p.319). Even the most mundane of our activities, such as a dull spin on a stationary bike facing a lifeless wall, is aesthetic. As Alexander (1993) writes:

If we encounter the day with boredom...this suffusion of experience in its complexity and totality must be called aesthetic as much as those moments in
which the thrill and beauty of life meets us in a cascade of vibrancy and joy. The pervasive, qualitative horizon of the aesthetic dimension of experience is always present with us. We seek the possibility of fulfillment; action is a pursuit in response to the lure of the world (p.206).

Dewey’s active notion of aesthetics, meaning, and value grasps the complexity of human experience in its fullest sense. However, even our boring or mundane experiences show us that a more meaningful and deeper existence is possible. Thus Alexander (1993) argues, by way of Dewey, that the drive to live a life of rich meaning and value stands as the root of our existence or the telos of humanity. Dewey himself argues, “Nothing but the best, the richest and fullest experience possible, is good enough for man (LW 1:307). Consequently to live life in its fullest sense demands that we seek the most fulfilling, meaningful, and valued experiences possible. This might be called Socratic wisdom from the pragmatic perspective.

The highest form of aesthetic experience, for Dewey, is “an experience.” Dewey’s notion of an experience is not human experience occurring within a unique, special, or “otherworldly” realm. Neither primarily cognitive nor merely ‘practical,’ an experience is a more complete and inclusive human concept. “The existence of this unity is constituted by a single quality that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts. This unity is neither emotional, practical, nor intellectual, for these terms name distinctions that reflection can make within it,” writes Dewey (LW 10:44). Instead, an experience successfully transforms a situation into a temporally meaningful event.

In such experiences, every successive part flows freely, without seam and without unfilled blanks, into what ensues. At the same time there is no sacrifice of the self-identity of the parts. A river, as distinct from a pond, flows. But its flow gives a definiteness and interest to its successive portions greater than exist in the homogeneous portions of a pond. In an experience, flow is from something to
something. As one part leads into another and as one part carries on what went before, each gains distinctness in itself. The enduring whole is diversified by successive phases that are emphases of its varied colors. Because of continuous merging, there are no holes, mechanical junctions, and dead centres when we have an experience. There are pauses, places of rest, but they punctuate and define the quality of movement. They sum up what has been undergone and prevent its dissipation and idle evaporation (LW 10:43).

An experience, Alexander writes, “is one which has been successfully transformed through intelligent action so as to be an inherently complete and dynamically moving whole which realizes the sense of meaning and value as deeply as possible” (p.186). Three important characteristics or phases define ‘an experience’ for Dewey. First, within an experience a sense of completion or closure occurs after profound struggle and control. Second, an experience is emotional—the elements of struggle and conflict render the experience emotionally charged. Finally, an experience exhibits a form or structure—pattern of events and structures of interaction through which the experience develops.68

Dewey himself uses a diverse set of examples to demonstrate the potential of “everyday” affairs to become an experience—dining at a fine restaurant, experiencing a storm while at sea, the trauma of a souring friendship, coming down with an illness, and playing chess, to name a few. In addition to Dewey’s chess illustration, sport examples could include sustaining a serious knee injury, coaching in the final seconds of a championship game, the failure to successfully make a team, or a morning run along a breathtaking oceanfront trail.

To vividly capture the idea of an experience, Dewey points to the moments when a room suddenly goes intensely bright or when a lightning bolt reveals a darkened landscape. These become an experience by standing in contrast to most of our experiences whereby “the unifying qualitative sense of the whole, which ultimately
constitutes the horizon of meaning, is left tacit.” Contrastingly, in an experience what is more often than not implicit becomes “consciously apprehended and realized so that the sense of the experience is the presence of its meaning, felt as a guiding, controlling qualitative unity pervading all the various parts in their variety” (Alexander, 1987, pp.201-202).

We “have an experience” by actively engaging a responsive environment with our bodies. Our descriptions of the unity of experience in these situations manifest verbally as “that meal, that storm, that rupture of friendship” (LW 10:44). In sport, we can all remember that shot, that play, that failure. In fact, these situations reveal a dimension of human meaning so directly that they “enter into life so as to become touchstones of our understanding, foci in terms of which we interpret other experiences” and lead to an inability to describe them beyond the frustrated statement “You had to be there!” (Alexander, 1987, p.200)

In sum, aesthetic experience needs both form (the habitual trait of experience) and dynamism (the natural trait of experience)—two qualities that also serve as the necessary ingredients for growth. Thus, for pragmatists, aesthetic experience is also understandable as experience that grows. Peirce best captures the notion of growth by describing the interplay between stability and fluidity in his “developmental teleology.” And so experience for pragmatists grows, and in turn meaning grows, because it is at once funded and novel, dynamic and stable, continuous and contingent. “Our rhythmic movement with the world also means that at times we fall out of step and then recover…. In short, we grow, we learn,” writes Alexander (1998, p.9). As Dewey observes, “the recovery is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity
and resistance through which it has successfully passed” (LW 10:19).—an ever widening and deepening spiral rather than a simple circularity. Made possible by funded human action within environments, this interplay opens space for experience to be irreducibly aesthetic.

There are two sorts of possible worlds in which aesthetic experience would not occur. In a world of mere flux, change would not be cumulative; it would not move toward a close. Stability and rest would have no being. Equally is it true, however, that a world that is finished, ended, would have no traits of suspense and crisis, and would offer no opportunity for resolution. Where everything is already complete, there is no fulfillment…. Because the actual world, that in which we live, is a combination of movement and culmination, of breaks and re-unions, the experience of the live creature is capable of esthetic quality (LW 10:22).

The actual sport-world, in which we live our sport experiences, embodies habits as well as dynamic contingency. Accordingly, Alexander (1993) describes cultures as webs of highly flexible practices through which we actively and imaginatively encounter a world of meaning (p.207) and enter into one another’s lives (p.212). The sport-world, as a form of culture, secures the conditions within which our “Human Eros” can develop, and thus serves as to fulfill the primary aim of civilization (p.207). In concert, the dynamic and durable qualities of sport open space for the members of communities to be meaningfully present to one another.

Unfortunately, opportunities to expand, widen, and deepen meaning in sport are often violated in today’s sport culture. Rather than create sport cultures that make rich meaning possible, the current conditions of athletics contribute to “anaestheticization.” As Dewey argues, much of human life needs liberation since most experience is, if not totally “anaesthetic,” then far from meaningful or fulfilling (LW 10:46). This anaesthetic quality of our sporting life dominates because we often function either as disengaged and ungrounded individuals, or at the other extreme, as lockstep mechanical humans. “There
exists so much of one and the other of these two kinds of experience,” Dewey writes, “that unconsciously they come to be taken as norms of all experience” (LW 10:47).

Many sport participants similarly experience athletics in the same way that most of humanity experiences the rest of life—that is, either capriciously or mechanically. Athletes often focus on the here-and-now, neglecting the history and traditions of sport, the matrix of meanings they exist within, turning toward the immediacy of external reward. Dewey describes this less thoughtful person as one who “makes the momentary act a measure of value, and ignores the connections of our personal action with the energies of the environment” (MW 9:153).

Other sport participants live athletically as machines. So caught up in the economic mindset of sport, these athletes seek out routine and efficiency to survive and reap the benefits of participation. Coaches and specialists work to produce highly effective instruments of athletic prowess, rendering the participants passionless and numb to the qualitative possibilities in sport. Richard Shusterman (1997) likens this anaesthetic condition to cyborgs who cannot grasp or create enriching phenomenological feeling or pleasure. The capacity to feel, Shusterman continues, remains all that separates us from these cyborgs (pp.38-39). Yet it is this very quality that can lead to “inefficient” athletic experiences that include fear, hope, desire, and disappointment—emotive qualities Dixon (1999) might include in his reasons to describe some contests as “failed.” As a result, our “experts” train and manipulate athletes to survive in the corporate sports world. Dewey argues that in these instances “obstacles are overcome by shrewd skill, but they do not feed experience” (LW 10:45). Consequently, he disparages this routine behavior,
asserting that it “accepts what has been customary as a full measure of possibility and
omits to take into account the connections of the particular things done” (MW 9:153).

Humans are born into pre-existing symbol systems that constantly grow and
reconfigure as we transact with the environment in new and novel ways. In turn, these
always changing interpretive matrixes help humans “marshal materials in a meaningful
way” and embody new habits that “provide meaningful ways of interacting with those
surroundings” (Boisvert, 1998a, p.124). This constant interplay emphasizes the triadic
features of existence as dynamic, durable, and meaningful. As Dewey reveals,
“Experiencing like breathing is a rhythm of intakings and outgivings…William James
aptly compared the course of a conscious experience to the alternate flights and perchings
of a bird.” Dewey continues by stating, “Each resting place in experience is an
undergoing in which is absorbed and taken home the consequences of prior doing, and,
unless the doing is that of utter caprice or sheer routine, each doing carries in itself
meaning that has been extracted and conserved” (LW 10:62).

To best capture his notion of experience (and to contrast with most conceptions),
Dewey turns to the idea of art. As Alexander (1987) explains, “Experience for Dewey is
most fully comprehended from the standpoint of art. Art reveals that experience is
capable of being intelligently and creatively appropriated and transformed. Through art
man is able to realize the potentiality for meaning and value to be directly embodied of
the world” (pp.184-185). Art, from Dewey’s perspective, denotes “any selective activity
by which concrete things are so arranged as to elicit attention to the distinctive values
realizable by them” (LW 2:111). This understanding requires the rejection of modernity’s
disconnected notion of art—as “additions to the real world” or “luxuries.” Rather, art
represents for Dewey “the only ways in which the individualized elements in the world of
nature and man are grasped” (LW 2:111).

Turning to art to understand experience reveals the limitations of most current,
somatically disconnected theories of experience. Art, Dewey contends, is not merely the
“imitation of inert things” (LW 1:77). Unfortunately, the corporate culture contributes to
our conception of art as inert, removed “from the vicissitudes of everyday life” and
sequestered “in the rarefied and privileged sphere of ‘high’ culture”—in a “cold, hard
place safe from the profanities of the world” (Beck, 2001, p.40). Dewey terms this the
“museum conception of art” (LW 10:14), which shuts it off “from that association with
the materials, and aims of every other form of human effort, undergoing, and
achievement” (LW 10:9). Art thus becomes simply an object, ruptured from active
creation. The life-world becomes lifeless.

Dewey instead views art as “a way of experiencing the world as a formal
arrangement of phenomena” (Beck, 2001, p.40). Art serves as “the living and concrete
proof that man is capable of restoring consciously, and thus on the plane of meaning, the
union of sense, need, impulse, and action characteristic of the live creature (LW 10:31).
Our typical conceptions of “fine art,” including paintings, poetry, and symphony, stand
only as emblematic of the potential of artworks to reveal human ideals to us. However the
most important lesson to be learned from Dewey’s use of art when describing experience
is that “when ideals cease to be confined to a realm separated from our daily, practical
experience, they can become powerful forces in teaching us to make the material of our
lives filled with meaning” (Alexander, 1998, p.6).
Dewey’s examples of ‘raw aesthetic experiences’ that demand our attention, compel us, and bring experience and meaning to life include fire engines racing down a street, steel workers dramatically balanced on the high beams of a skyscraper, and the “tense grace of the ball-player” (LW 10:11). Other, more “sedate” activities include gardeners tending to their plants, the quiet viewing of a campfire’s flame and embers, a mechanic intimately working on a car, and a parent caring for a young child (c.f. LW 10:268). To live artfully does not require some special talent for painting or poetry, but a willingness to actively engage the world in ways that reveal to us life in its fullness. As Alexander (1998) writes, “These are moments in which we indeed live; the otherwise dim or submerged potentiality of experience to be deeply meaningful and expressive is consciously realized” (p.7).

Sport has the potential to be a site for humans to live “artfully.” It can serve as a matrix of meaning where we can realize the potential depth of life, allowing us to “restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are worlds of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience” (LW 10:9). Sport can serve as a “reservoir of shared experience” (Alexander, 1987, p.200), as a site of creativity and continuity, and as a world in which humans can flourish.

To help humanity realize the artful possibilities of sport, philosophers must reject the “museum conception” that now “anaestheticizes” athletic participation—a perspective that is disconnected from rich, meaningful experience. Instead, philosophers of sport must help humans to realize the “art of life” (LW 1:272) made possible by the sport-world.
Once again, breathing life into the sport-world requires a rejection of the Asomatic Attitude. Sport philosophers cannot “do philosophy” in a sport-world of pure flux or mechanical finitude. We must realize that sport experience is at once in dynamic transaction with nature (emphasized by antimetaphysicians of sport) and a stable sport-world of durable habits (illuminated by analytic metaphysicians). Furthermore, sport experience is always aesthetic. Put another way, the task of philosophers is to serve as “Socratic midwives” (Seigfried, 1996, p. 101) to help humanity realize deep and rich experiences made possible by sport.

The moral taught by the arts is that when the self-conscious attitude of the artist toward his material has been extended to all experience, to the whole range of human life, then life itself is capable of becoming an art. When such an attitude prevails, the aesthetic dimension of experience will not be regarded as a special, limited, or effete kind of experience. The task of Dewey’s philosophy is to bring this moral home (Alexander, 1987, p. 185).

**Conclusion: Radical Empiricism and Pragmatic Sport Philosophy**

Dewey’s reconstruction of experience points to the necessity of sport philosophers to begin and end analysis with deep and rich lived human experience. As Jackson (2002) and other pragmatic scholars argue, philosophy must be irreducibly and “radically” experientially-based. “Philosophy is an avowedly empirical endeavor; its Deweyan practitioner not only harbors no ambition to transcend experience but explicitly rejects the possibility of anyone’s doing so,” Jackson writes (p. 59). Gavin (2003b) supports Jackson’s strong claim, contending that noncontextual philosophies’ attempts to find certainty “would transcend all contexts and, as such, would be relevant to none” (p. 63).

In the end, Alexander (1987) contends that Dewey believes “there is no philosophy which ultimately is not a philosophy of experience, however it may ignore or
abuse its origins” (p.266). Jackson (2002) supports Alexander’s reading of Dewey, writing, “Thus even those philosophers whom Dewey criticizes for being nonempirical—idealists for example—go about their business empirically. They have no choice but to do so. They may not espouse empiricism ideologically, true enough, which means they are not avowed empiricists, like Dewey, but they still live their lives and dream their dreams in a thoroughly empirical world” (pp.59-60). Jackson (2002) adds to this point, writing,

In his heart of hearts Dewey is convinced that when viewed non-ideologically all philosophies are empirical. They must be. There is nothing else for them to be. They are empirical in the sense of being occurrences within an empirical world, a world of objects and events, physical and ideational, among which they themselves are entities (pp.59-60).

Dewey’s reconstruction of experience makes it clear that not any notion of empiricism will do. Although a messy proposition, philosophers of sport must avoid starting their analyses “in a make-believe situation” (rejection of the Galilean Purification) and begin with the “fullness of lived experience” (Boisvert, 1993, p.141). Sport philosophy thus needs “fat narratives” rather than “thin narratives” (Gavin, 2003b, p.67)—experience in its triadic, kinesthetic richness (dynamic, durable, and meaningful). As Dewey argues, “I would rather take the behavior of the dog of Odysseus upon his master’s return as an example of the sort of thing experience is for the philosopher than to trust [an empiricist description of the chair]. …the actual experience was charged with history and prophecy; full of love, jealousy and villainy, fulfilling past human relationships and moving fatally to tragic destiny” (LW 1:368). For Dewey, genuine empiricism (or phenomenology) grounded in experience in its entirety, is “the only method which can do justice to this inclusive integrity of ‘experience.’”

[Genuine empiricism] alone takes this integrated unity as the starting point for philosophic thought. Other methods begin with results of a reflection that has
already torn in two the subject-matter experienced and the operations and states of experiencing. The problem is then to get together again what has been sundered—which is as if the king’s men started with the fragments of the egg and tried to construct the whole egg out of them (LW 1:19).

Phenomenological accounts of sport experience are not foreign to the sport philosophy literature. In fact, *JPS* dedicated a special issue in 2002 to phenomenological accounts of sport and movement. Unfortunately, the dominant paradigms of sport philosophy tend implicitly to treat most phenomenological accounts of sport as side research—mildly interesting contributions to the sport philosophy literature but of little value to critical methodologies. However, mere appreciation for phenomenological or experiential accounts of sport is not enough. Sport philosophers, by ignoring the temporal and horizontal nature of experience, end up positing “innumerable dualistic renditions” of the world.

One may select as paradigmatic moment of experience that of sudden arousal and alarm. Experience becomes interpreted as a disorganized, overwhelming bundle of impressions in desperate need of order by laws of association or powers of synthesis. Or one may select the moment when one resolves a problem and the latent rationality of the event becomes manifest. One can reside with the moment when one encounters a hard, fixed habit which meets the needs of a situation as a key fits a lock. The temptation here will be to become a realist of one sort or another. One can focus on the moments when the assured fixed habit crumbles away in the face of an overwhelming, pressing problem. If this sort of experience is taken as paradigmatic, one is inclined toward subjectivism of voluntarism (Alexander, 1987, pp.266-267).

Experience cannot therefore be conceptualized as a “container of ideas” that one looks upon “sideways” (Jackson, 2002, p.61). Since all inquiry, from the Deweyan perspective, is always already experientially based, the necessary move for sport philosophers is to acknowledge and embrace the centrality of phenomenology or radical empiricism. Pragmatic inquiry rejects a spectatorial theory of knowledge—embodied by the Asomatic Attitude—and alternatively accepts the idea of inquirers as somatic, active,
and irreducibly engaged. The embodied or kinesthetic quality forwarded by pragmatic inquiry concludes that no “other side” or transcendent realm of experience exists. Somatic, historical, humans necessarily and unavoidably participate in philosophical examinations of sport. As a result, disconnections from the world and retreats to isolated havens or intellectual laboratories in order to “do philosophy” are not even possible for philosophers of sport.

In opposition to the polar accounts of experience that currently impact much of the work in the field, sport philosophers must re-envision their projects against the backdrop of pragmatically reconstructed theory of experience. In sum, the methods of sport philosophers must become radically empirical. To stand as powerful and compelling voices in the everyday world of sport, sport philosophers must intentionally begin with and return to the primary immediacy of lived experience in its full sense. “Reference to the primacy and ultimacy of the material of ordinary experience protects us, in the first place, from creating artificial problems that arise out of actual subject-matter,” writes Dewey (LW 1:26).

Consequently, from the pragmatic perspective, philosophers of sport must always begin inquiry “in the middle of things.” Experience in its fullest, holistic, somatic sense must serve as the foundation and purpose, the means and ends, and the practical beginning for sport philosophy’s critical examinations and reconstructions of sport. The theory of experience I reconstruct for sport philosophers must become primary or “first philosophy” in the pragmatic spirit of Peirce’s phenomenology, James’ radical empiricism, and Dewey’s theory of experience. Sport philosophers must begin and end philosophical inquiry with this reconstructed, widened, and deepened account of sport
experience in order to enter into helpful conversations about everyday sport with the
sporting public. In the end, a re-envisioned sport philosophy field must become “full-
bodied” and “kinesthetic” rather than dualistic and disembodied.

A different philosophy (or its self image) might successfully take as its starting
point: not the eye but the whole body; not sight but all touch, contact, and
motions; not the window of consciousness but the embodied mind. Visionary,
clean, and unpolluted philosophical efforts to disprove the existence of the body
by systematically ignoring it have not escaped contamination through abstraction.
Do you feel what this means? Today a thoroughly re-visioned, revived, full-
bodied philosophy must be a kinesthetic philosophy. Such a philosophy must
embody and must retrieve body, culture, and myth (Stuhr, 1997, p.50).
CHAPTER 5
Making a Difference:
Reconstructing Sport Philosophy’s Pragmatic Tasks

…those who express contempt for the enterprise of philosophy as a sterile and monotonous preoccupation with unsolvable or unreal problems, cannot, without convicting themselves of Philistinism, deny that, however it may stand with philosophy as a revelation of eternal truths, it is tremendously significant as a revelation of the predicaments, protests, and aspirations of humanity (LW 3:4).

Sport philosophy currently stands as an academically marginalized and culturally impotent field—an undesirable state promulgated in sport by sport philosophers themselves. Yet the compelling vision of American pragmatist John Dewey also leads me to believe that sport philosophers can play a tremendously significant role in sport and wider culture. Consequently, I recommend a pragmatic transformation of sport philosophy. In Chapter 4, for instance, I attempted to make a case that sport philosophers should re-conceptualize their purpose as centered on making sport more meaningful, not seeking or rejecting sporting “truths.” An important aspect of this move, I argued, was a certain understanding of humans as meaning-seeking creatures. Further, by outlining three irreducible qualities of lived human experience—dynamism, durability, and meaningfulness—I attempted to show the limits of current theories of experience now dominating sport philosophy.

At the end of Chapter 4, I challenged sport philosophers to become radically empirical. In other words, I implored all philosophers of sport to begin and end all inquiry against the backdrop of full, lived human experience. However the reconstruction of sport philosophy must go beyond the backdrop of experience and need for practitioners to become radical empiricists. A pragmatic reconstruction must also occur with respect to the ‘nitty-gritty’ of how sport philosophers function on a daily basis.
Against the backdrop of Dewey’s theory of experience, sport philosophers must re-conceptualize what, how, and why they “do” sport philosophy.

In this chapter, I will begin by presenting three pragmatic commitments sport philosophers need to make in addition to being “radically empirical.” First, I will argue that sport philosophers must consider their inquiry in light of a grounded or “horizontal” notion of abstract thought. Second, the work of sport philosophers must always be melioristic in intent. Third, sport philosophers need to conceptualize their tasks in concert with other members of a community of inquirers. Throughout the presentation of these three additional philosophical commitments, I will also describe how each requires an understanding of the pragmatic continuities and differences between philosophy and particular sciences. In the concluding sections of this chapter, I will outline the two projects that sport philosophers must undertake—metaphysical inquiry and the creative transformation of the sport-world.

*Practically “Grounding” Sport Philosophy’s Abstractness*

Jackson (2002) argues that philosophy must be “an intellectual activity that traffics in abstractions yet remains inextricably entangled in ordinary affairs” (p.67). Put another way, philosophical inquiry deals *reflectively with abstract or generalizable ideas* and philosophers must begin and end with the *issues arising from everyday human experiences*.

Ordinary affairs of sport should most often serve as the point of departure for the work of sport philosophers. This feature of Deweyan pragmatism, continuous with the need for philosophers to be radically empirical, requires active and kinesthetically
engaged sport philosophers to remain “entangled” in everyday, practical sport affairs rather than focused on special circumstances, utopian visions, immutable ideas, views from “nowhere,” or impractical hypothetical worlds. “The neglect of context,” represented by the non-kinesthetic and disengaged philosophical approaches adopted by the dominant typologies of sport philosophy, results in “the most pervasive fallacy of philosophical thinking,” Dewey argues (LW 6:5). From a pragmatic perspective, attempts to engage in philosophic inquiry of sport in a timeless vacuum rather than from the everyday experiences of humanity lead to antiquated conclusions that fail to resonate with the forward movement of life. Boisvert (1998a) emphasizes the entangled human quality of philosophic inquiry, writing, “to begin properly, the philosopher must become once again an ordinary human being who lives, enjoys, undergoes, suffers, imagines, hopes, struggles, loves, and plans for the future” (p.16).

The notion of philosophers working with a subject-matter underscores the practical vitality of Dewey’s pragmatism. Rather than attempting to find fixed solutions to problems or employing an all-encompassing cynicism, “pragmatic skepticism” demands that philosophers of sport begin with “genuinely problematic situations” (Boisvert, 1998a, p.43). Sport philosophers need to examine ideas that resonate with the sporting public rather than artificial problems or logical puzzles that interest only the inquirers or their professional colleagues. Philosophers of sport, as Dewey demands of all philosophers, must not only deal with the problems of sport philosophy, but methodologically take up the problems of sport communities (c.f. MW 10:46). Philosophical inquiry into sport-related conundrums not arising from the everyday affairs of athletic realms, therefore, should typically merit little attention.
It is true that some sport philosophers heed this pragmatic call to deal with the vital issues of the sporting community. For instance, *JPS* regularly publishes articles dealing with hot button topics such as running up the score against opponents, the ethics of “gamesmanship,” sport spectator identity, the appropriateness of tie-breaking systems, the morality of violent sports, and the place of technology in athletic competition. The issue of using performance-enhancing substances, to pick one example, certainly qualifies as a topic of vital significance to the sport culture as well as wider society. Examples of sport philosophers tackling the performance-enhancement issue in *JPS* and other academic journals since the early 1980s include Brown (c.f. 1980, 1984), Burke (c.f. 1997), Fraleigh (c.f. 1984b), Gardner (c.f. 1989), Holowchak (c.f. 2000), Lavin (c.f. 1987), Roberts (c.f. 1996, 1997), Schneider and Butcher (c.f. 1993-1994), and Simon (c.f. 1984). Moreover, virtually every book published by sport philosophers in recent years tackles the issue of performance-enhancing substances (c.f. Simon, 2003).

How sport philosophers conceptualize philosophic thought needs transformation, however, since pragmatism demands that they reject the notion of abstract inquiry as “higher” thinking. A pragmatic approach to philosophy requires a grounded, “horizon” view of abstract thought. Although fully engaged in the vital issues of culture, this “everyday” character of pragmatism does not deny or alter philosophy’s focus on abstract or generalizable ideas. Understood pragmatically, abstract thinking or generalizable ideas serve as the horizon or backdrop (matrixes of meaning) against which humans live their lives. Transforming the image of abstract thought from a vertical sense to a “grounded” version “humanizes” philosophy while simultaneously dismissing the existential divide between the particulars of everyday life and generalizable ideas.
Dewey, by grounding philosophy in the everydayness of human life, dissolves the traditional dualism between practice and theory. As Pappas (2003) writes, “Dewey took the general character of theory not as a limitation, but as a precondition which rendered individual experiences luminous but was also fructified by them. The capacity for theory to inform practice and be informed by it mark two different but dependent phases of a fruitful on-going relationship” (pp.44-45). Dewey assumes a complementary and dynamic relation between theory and practice, writing, “The former enlarges, releases and gives significance to the latter; while practice supplies theory with its materials and with the test and check which keep it sincere and vital” (LW 2:58).

Unfortunately, the horizontal notion of philosophy renders thought messy, as sport philosophers cannot “rise above” the irreducible complexity and multifaceted quality of human life. Still, Dewey cautions us against falling prey to the Galilean Purification—trading disorderly lived experience for a clean, laboratory-like analysis. “We must,” Dewey writes, “begin with things in their complex entanglements rather than with simplifications made for the purpose of effective judgment and action” (LW 1:387). By grounding inquiry in the ‘here and now’ of lived human experience, sport philosophers avoid the danger of getting caught up in a “seemingly infinite regress of abstraction.” A horizontal notion of philosophical inquiry, in contrast to a vertical or “higher thinking” understanding of philosophy, results in “necessary abstractions” that connect to “the immediate, concrete, and political issues from which they arise” (Stuhr, 1997, p.51).

Rather than search for legitimization amongst academic peers in philosophy, or cultural studies, or kinesiology, sport philosophy must remain entangled in the vital ideas of the everyday affairs of humans living in the sport-world. Jackson (2002) warns philosophers
to avoid their “natural proclivity…to move in the direction of increasingly abstract expression” (p.67).

The danger is that the philosopher so inclined [to traffic in abstraction] may become so habituated to the rarefied discourse of philosophy and so engrossed in its manipulations that she would prefer to continue doing that. She no longer is willing to turn her thoughts back to the harsh complexities of ordinary affairs. Indeed, there are some philosophers, Dewey further points out, who avoid those complexities from the start. Instead of beginning with a problem of concern to the society at large, they plunge at once into the matters of interest solely to a small coterie of their fellow philosophers…” (Jackson, 2002, p.68).

Sport philosophers must therefore avoid trafficking in ideas or manipulating language for the purpose of demonstrating some sort of technical mastery. Disconnecting sport philosophy from the human realm results not in academic prestige, but irrelevance—at least from the public’s perspective.

The “everyday” quality of Dewey’s pragmatism also compels philosophers of sport to spend less time dealing with unique or extreme special circumstances for offering insights into all sport experience and instead focus on the ordinary events of participants in sport communities. As Alexander (1987) writes, “For Dewey, [focusing on instances where the problematic has intruded, where experience has fallen apart or threatens to disintegrate] is much like selecting to study human beings under extreme crisis situations, such as famine or war, and from this making generalizations about what we are ‘really’ like under normal circumstances” (p.186).

From a sport perspective, studying unique or extreme examples of cheating, violence, or inequality are important and merit investigation. However to use these unusual situations to draw conclusions about everyday sport is inappropriate. “Such conditions do exist from time to time, and it is important to study them. But they provide a poor model for understanding human beings as homemakers, parents, friends, teachers,
scientists, or artists. If one selects the principles of a moral theory by how well they deal with absurd life-boat situations one ends up with an ethics that, at best, is useful in a life-boat” (Alexander, 1987, p.186).

Philosophers of sport, therefore, must deal with the vital issues facing the sporting public while avoiding overextension of their general conclusions. Further, sport philosophers need to trade in the realm of horizontal, abstract thought. This point situates philosophy in relationship to the “particular sciences.” This is so because the grounded quality of pragmatic philosophy makes drawing a fine line between the work of philosophers and the investigations of science difficult. In fact, no clear line differentiates philosophy from the particular sciences—where philosophy begins and ends, and where psychology, sociology, physiology, political science, law, and so on begins and end is unclear. However a pragmatic difference exists, as particular scientists can isolate elements for the purpose of analysis (Galilean Purification) while philosophers must avoid getting caught up in this kind of reductive, decontextualized inquiry.

The difference, therefore, between philosophy and “particular sciences” such as biology, psychology, physiology, or history is a blurry line between detailed or highly selective analyses and broad, generalizable ideas. For instance, John E. Smith (1992) lists several prominent ideals (or abstract generals) including freedom, democracy, experience, knowledge, education, and religion regularly reflected upon by classic pragmatists (p.2). Inquiry into these general or abstract ideals differs from the more particular analyses of, for example, the legal precedence for banning athletes from using certain substances, athletic organization management structures and steroid decision-making policies, the impact of amphetamines on an athlete’s ability to attend to various
athletic stimuli, cognitive responses to competitive success stemming from illicit drug use, the impact of steroids on motor skill development, and the historical place of performance-enhancing technology in sport festivals such as the Olympics.

Although philosophers and more traditional scientists differ in the particularity or detail (in contrast to generality) of their examinations, Dewey (as well as Peirce) believes that all worthwhile experimental or “scientific” research—including philosophy—involves active, engaged inquirers working with subject-matters. Philosophers, like all investigators of the life-world, examine “affairs” rather than external objects. Inquiry conceptualized in this Deweyan sense, Boisvert (1998a) argues, makes it less likely that “subject-matter will be confused with a unidimensional ‘object’ to be attained once and for all.” Rather than view steroids, for example, as an external, static object, the notion of inquiring into performance-enhancing substances as a “subject-matter” requires multiple viewpoints from engaged inquirers that account for the durable, dynamic, and aesthetic qualities of human experience. For instance, physiologists, psychologists, marketers, sociologists, and so on, would all have important insights and varying viewpoints from which to examine the steroid issue. “The term ‘subject-matter’ encourages both respect for the multifarious character of affairs, and for the varied perspectives from which they can be examined,” writes Boisvert (p.36). This infers an adaptable rather than static notion of inquiry that arises from the dynamism of life.

In sum, sport philosophy must inquire into the everyday issues vital to sporting cultures. As Dewey argues, “The distinctive office, problems, and subject matter of philosophy grow out of stresses and strains in the community life in which a given form of philosophy arises, and…accordingly, its specific problems vary with the changes in
human life that are always going on and that at times constitute a crisis and a turning point in human history” (MW 12:256). But this philosophic work must be engaged in from a grounded or horizonal perspective rather than disconnected “higher thinking.”

**Sport Philosophy Aiming to Improve Sport**

“Philosophy for Dewey,” Gavin (2003a) argues, “is mimetic; it reflects and perfects the concerns of a community, albeit it in a critical manner. It is ‘formed,’ and then it is ‘formative’ (pp.1-2). This description of philosophy points to another crucial feature of Dewey’s pragmatism—it must be purposeful. Jackson (2002) explains that for Dewey “philosophy is melioristic in intent; it aims to be of value not just to philosophers but to the society at large” (p.65). Subsequently, it is not enough for the subject-matter of sport philosophers to arise from the conditions of everyday life, but their work must be teleological—directly aiming to meliorate (improve) the daily existence of humans participating in sport.

Dewey’s call for philosophers to serve in effect as social activists and reformers revises Plato’s plea for them to “return to the cave.” For Dewey and the pragmatists, philosophers never leave and return from everyday experience. Nor does humanity live in a cave that isolates them from experiencing the “real” world. The underlying moral is the same, however, as Plato demands that philosophers not function in isolation from the rest of humanity. Philosophers have a moral responsibility to engage in inquiry for the purpose of making a difference in human communities like sport. Holding a vested interest in the outcomes of our inquiry into vital sport issues also means, as Morgan
(1998) argues, that philosophers cannot function in morally neutral terms—they cannot “step…out of [their] beliefs and values and feign indifference” (p.99).

Sport philosophy must therefore serve as a source of value for culture rather than stand as an intellectual affair for a select few. As a program of “public philosophy” that seeks to alleviate the problems faced by members of society, we need to reject “guru philosophy” only trafficked in by the “intellectual elite” (Philips, 2001, p.8). This does not deny or prohibit sport philosophers from talking to one another in highly technical language that seems obscure to non-philosophers. It is important that sport philosophers remain in scholarly positions, engage in technical and challenging conversations with one another, write in specialized journals, and disseminate ideas to undergraduate and graduate students. However, it must be with an eye toward social amelioration, and nonspecialists must be addressed directly from time to time (Jackson, 2002, pp.66-67).

In essence, the pragmatic philosopher serves as a “messenger,” “liaison” (Stuhr, 1997), or a “Socratic mid-wife” (Seigfried, 1996, p.101) for the wider public in terms of technical philosophical ideas. And since he deplores the idea of philosophy as inquiry for the sake of inquiry, Dewey is best viewed “as a social reformer” whose notion of philosophy as social criticism “is designed to be passed by, that is, lead to some form of action” (Gavin, 2003a, p.1).

Accepting the horizonal image of philosophy is crucial for sport philosophers if they are to function as social reformers in the pragmatic sense. As inquirers examining subject-matters “in light of a particular objective” (Boisvert, 1998a, p.36), philosophers of sport need to test and apply their ideas where they necessarily arise—in lived human experience in sport. Sport philosophers must purposefully take up the material of the
everyday and speak not only to their colleagues, but also to the sport-world as a whole. This is why Dewey at times refers to his philosophical work as “instrumentalism”—“the awareness that one’s ideas are mental products drawn from life, and also the commitment on the part of the inquirer to return them to everyday experience.” The instrumental philosopher “uses hypotheses, theories, or ideals to inform the problematic situation, making it more satisfying. Instrumentalism is the opposite of the decontextualized thinking that Dewey deplored” (Eldridge, 1998, p.40).78

Thus, sport philosophers are morally obligated to work toward alleviating the most pressing problems captivating the sporting public. Our purposeful inquiry into the vital issues growing out of our human sport experiences needs to aim at making real progress—the enhancement of meaning in sport. If a sport philosopher inquires into whether sport shares qualities with art, offers a new defense of realism or antirealism, or presents a novel interpretation of the “tricky triad”—the relationship between play, games, and sport—it must be done with the ultimate intent to make a difference to the sport world.

As Dewey argues, “social reform is conceived in a Philistine spirit if it is taken to mean anything less than precisely the liberation and expansion of the meanings of which experience is capable” (LW 1:307). Consequently, pragmatically inclined sport philosophers will inquire into the wider realm of meaning rather than the discovery of or rejection of static truth.79 Morgan (1998) shares this pragmatic point in response to Roberts’ criticism of his irreducibly entangled methodology, writing “my distinction [between vulgar and reflective ethnocentrism] and the account of social criticism it gives
rise to neither valorizes stasis for the sake of stasis nor change for the sake of change, but rather truth for the sake of meaningful social progress” (p.98; emphasis added).

Offering clever logical twists or revising definitional categories in the steroid debate, devising new a priori principles to deductively reach conclusions about performance-enhancement, or compelling athletes to shun the conventions of sport and poetically redescribe their idiosyncratic sport existence stands as consummate philosophy only if these insights benefit real sport communities. If sport philosophers need to add caveats and addendums to render their theories practical, as sport philosophers often do, then Dewey rejects their initial projects outright. Dewey dissolves the dualism between practice and theory, instead choosing the messiness of genuine lived experience rather than the simplicity of purified thought experiments to guide teleological analyses. “Better it is for philosophy to err in active participation in the living struggles and issues of its own age and times than to maintain an immune monastic impeccability, without relevancy or bearing in the generating ideas of its contemporary present,” Dewey concludes (MW 4:44).

Currently, I believe much of the work in sport philosophy struggles to meet Dewey’s “first rate test of value.” Optimistic sport philosophers, for instance, hold onto the belief that all problems are solvable for once and for all. Consequently, these analytic metaphysicians search for timeless laws or truths to govern sport. At the other extreme, some philosophers of sport embody a pessimistic approach when dealing with sport issues. Antimetaphysicians of sport argue that philosophers exaggerate their capabilities by offering sport hope for grand solutions to any problem.
One can imagine what would happen if sport philosophers moved outside the conference facility and peer review process to engage in a hypothetical meeting with various theorists dealing with athletic performance, parents of children involved with performance-enhancing substances, athletes considering their usage, and bureaucrats attempting to develop policies regarding these substances. First, Dixon, Russell, Schneider and Butcher, Simon, and Torres might enter the room to present several (and different and potentially irreconcilable) \textit{a priori} claims about the central purpose of sport. These theorists would suggest to the audience that cold, deductive analysis starting from these first principles holds the key to solving the performance-enhancing substance problem once-and-for-all. After these philosophers leave the room Burke and Roberts may enter. They might suggest to the parents their child may in fact be the next “Dick Fosbury.” They tell bureaucrats to relax and stop worrying about rules against performance-enhancing substances. To the athletes and theorists, they “poetically” propose that they idiosyncratically decide on their own the morality of pushing the boundaries of sport through drug and supplement use. Ultimately, they confess to the whole room, philosophers of sport can do no more than encourage “redescriptions” and discourage “cruelty”—without telling the athletes, coaches, parents, and bureaucrats how or why.

Sport philosophers, in this scenario, either seem to promise knockdown conclusions derived from cold, deductive logical analyses, or refuse to enter the ring altogether. Neither approach offers the sport-world compelling, useful, or melioristic conclusions. No utopian world of sport exists; the impossibility of finding final solutions implores philosophers of sport to reject the optimistic project if they are to genuinely
impact the sport-world. And although no final solutions are likely, sport philosophers
abdicate their moral responsibility by adopting a pessimistic view of the sport-world that
leads to philosophical inaction. Philosophers must attempt to offer something to sport
communities without making guarantees or absolute claims.

The inability of most sport philosophers to offer insights that reverberate with
sporting communities results in our exclusion from the conversation. In the example of
performance-enhancement, or more generally technology, most public discussions are led
by specialized scientists such as physiologists and psychologists, often inconsistent and
agenda-driven media members, and sport bureaucrats. These participants produce a
plurality of arguments and conclusions on the place and moral status of technology in
sport (and wider society).

Taylor (1991) catalogues these multiple positions on technology into two
polarized positions, which he labels “knockers” and “boosters.” He describes the
“knockers” of technology as “people who look on the coming of technological
civilization as a kind of unmitigated decline” (p.94). Knockers of technology, Taylor
continues, see a “human race losing touch with the earth, our ancestors, and ultimately,
our true selves.” From a sport perspective, this amounts to the movement away from the
essential core of sport. Boosters believe, in contrast, that “there is a fix for all our human
problems” (p.95). In a sport context, these supporters of unmitigated technological
advance would promote sport as an environment for breaking boundaries and pushing
limits.

The booster/knocker divide appears to render the problems of sport communities,
including finding solid rational grounds to ban or permit performance-enhancing
substance use, unsolvable. MacIntyre (1984) argues that this type of deadlocked and interminable moral discourse leaves us with emotivism—“the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character” (pp.11-12). The lack of assistance provided by sport philosophers leaves sport communities on their own to develop policies to deal with performance-enhancement based only upon shaky and problematic argumentation.

The field of sport philosophy can, however, supply sport communities with something more (if approached pragmatically)—a middle position between the optimism of analytic metaphysicians and the pessimism of antimetaphysicians—and in doing so, sport philosophers can play a vital role in the sport-world. Adopting a melioristic approach to sport philosophy implores the field’s practitioners to strenuously offer hypotheses, carefully drawn lines, ideas that inform, and working conclusions for the purpose of bettering the sport-world without guarantees or grand solutions to difficult problems. The best that philosophers can do is help sport communities get past shallow emotivism and make difficult, but informed choices. Choice, for Dewey “is not the emergence of preference out of indifference. It is the emergence of a unified preference out of competing preferences” (MW 14:134).

Examining the performance-enhancement issue from a pragmatic perspective can be likened to Campbell’s (2003) quick analysis of the abortion issue whereby two competing viewpoints battle for dominance. The problem with the debate, Campbell argues, is that “each of these positions [Pro-Choice and Pro-Life] demonstrates an understanding of abortion so simple in nature that the failure of one side to grasp the
other’s position defies intellectual analysis.” Consequently, each side of the divide condemns the other as “immoral” or “totalitarian.” Yet despite their polarized positions and radically dissimilar conclusions, Campbell contends that Pro-Life and Pro-Choice advocates share a common assumption—the problem has “an answer” (p.19). In a sport context, boosters and knockers of steroid use in athletics similarly adopt a right/wrong approach to the issue, seeking support for their position from “outside of the situation” (p.19).

The oversimplification of the abortion issue, and analogously the performance-enhancement issue, suggests good and evil exist prior to our experience. Contrastingly, Dewey contends, “The worse or evil is a rejected good…. Until it is rejected, it is a competing good” (MW 14:193). Determining the status of steroids in sport is to see it as permissible or impermissible. It is not simply a matter of absolute right or wrong but a preference about how we, as a sport community, want to live our sporting life. As Campbell (2003) contends “moral choice is not the adoption of some inherent good and the rejection of many inherent evils” (p.19). Thus, sporting communities must find a middle ground when examining the steroid issue. However, this middle ground does not imply a simple mean established between two polarized points of contention, but rather the testing of our ideas in experience (somatically or imaginatively) to find better and worse forms of sport.

Social life forms, including sport, require laws in order to take competing interests into account. However, rules will never be based upon final, complete, and perfect moral codes applicable to all people and all actions. Instead, “a law is always questionable” yet necessary since humans “are born and live in social relationships” (LW 7:227). Societies
draw lines all the time, including setting speed limits, legal drinking ages and blood alcohol levels, and public smoking accommodations. Sports set similar limits, including the types of drivers golfers can use, age minimums for professional football players, and the forms of substances athletes may consume for the purpose of preparing for competition. All of these limits, although deemed necessary, in principle must remain malleable. What we consider “good” or “better,” Dewey argues, can only be assessed by the “direction of change in the quality of experience. Growth itself is the only moral ‘end’” (MW 12:181). As Campbell (2003) concludes,

The purpose of morality is to make human life more secure and valuable, not to satisfy some presumed prehuman code; and, if we are honest about recognizing our relationship to a changing environment, we must admit that we can never be sure that we have achieved an answer so secure that we need no longer continue to question. Rather than resting behind moral codes, moralists should look to people’s lives (p.21).

Growth “as the only moral ‘end’” suggests the good life is about more than a shallow or epicurean idea of human existence. As Alexander (1998) explains, “A life of superficial self-satisfaction is not growth. But [negative or disturbing] experiences do reveal the expressive power of experience that is due to the fact that in order to grow we must ‘undergo,’ that is, suffer. Life has depth because we can sense its precariousness” (p.8). Pragmatists such as Dewey believe that although human failure is inevitable, incremental changes or improvements add up over time. Lachs (2003) emphasizes this Deweyan point when writing, “In spite of occasional statements that demand and promise more, Dewey is satisfied with modest progress in the affairs of life. Perhaps no one should hope for more…. Not wishing for utopia, or even for universal improvement, is a sign of maturity” (p.210). Consequently, there will never be an end to inquiry, never a cessation of drawing and redrawing lines around sport. MacIntyre (1977) seems to share
this point with the pragmatists, contending, “We are never in a position to claim that now we possess the truth or now we are fully rational. The most that we can claim is that this is the best account which anyone has been able to give so far, and that our beliefs about what are the marks of ‘a best account so far’ are will themselves change in what are at present unpredictable ways” (p.98).

In sum, Dewey urges philosophers to reject detached spectator approaches to inquiry (Asomatic Attitude), to move away from notions of philosophy as ungrounded “higher thinking,” and to stop analyses that fail to impact wider culture. Essentially, Dewey calls for a “triadic” rather than a “bipolar” understanding of philosophic inquiry. He implores philosophers to apply the “scientific,” or in less loaded language, the “experimental” method—as active and somatically engaged inquirers, dealing with socially vital subject-matter, for some morally responsible purpose.

The pragmatic tridimensional method shares a common approach with the particular sciences. Similarly, Dewey argues that the spirit of science shares a bond with art—dissolving the sharp wedge typically driven between artists imaginatively dealing with the “fanciful and subjective,” and scientists meticulously revealing “reality as it really, objectively, was” (Boisvert, 1998a, p.37). Alexander (1987) states the following:

The quintessence of the scientific attitude for Dewey was not to be found in its results nor in its tendencies toward reductionistic thinking. Rather it was to be found in the cooperative spirit of exploration, creative speculation connected with practical action, which would thereby provide some basis for the further evaluation and understanding of the world. Science becomes most truly intelligent when it exhibits its creative and artistic side rather than its formalistic or materialist side. The ‘experimental spirit’ which Dewey often appeals to is the spirit of tentative exploration rather than technological manipulation (p.276).

Particular sciences, such as biomechanics, exercise physiology, sport psychology, motor learning and so on, are best explored artistically and tentatively. Good science,
from Dewey’s perspective, embodies the triadic paradigm of inquiry—inquirers actively manipulating certain affairs of the world (engaged inquirers), dealing with particular aspects of vital concern to human communities (subject-matter), and with a responsible purpose (aim). Science, when viewed as continuous with art, dissolves the dualism between practice and theory and subsequently, becomes a human activity providing opportunities for humans to realize the conditions for an ever-increasing meaningful existence.

Recognizing the shared methodological quality of science and philosophy should open space for mutual appreciation between the particular sciences of kinesiology and sport humanities. Unfortunately, even a pragmatic reconstruction of sport philosophy will likely leave the field in a marginalized academic state due to the “quasi-scientization” of the field. Kretchmar (2005) supports this claim, arguing that the field of kinesiology seeks academic legitimization by turning to conceptions of movement studies as “intellectually useful” or “theoretical,” or alternately by reducing the understanding of the field to materialistic examinations of movement as “contributing to healthy living” (c.f. pp.48-99).

Consequently, these strategies to engender academic legitimization—particularly in terms of research “productivity” and the scarcity of available resources in higher education—leaves kinesiology in a fragmented state with each subdivision isolated, protective, and even combative. Areas of kinesiological inquiry (but particularly the humanities) fall short as legitimate fields of study in the eyes of high-powered lab technicians by failing to generate substantial research funds. The sport humanities’ response, it seems, reaffirms the divide between science and the humanities by turning to
vertical notions of abstract thought (sport philosophy) or reductive research (psychology, sociology, history), functioning asomatically, and finding solitude in self-enclosed and self-affirming professional associations. It appears as though the practitioners of sport seek professional legitimacy by turning to increasingly specialized methods and vocabulary. Following the model of the special quasi-sciences, it is believed that the fewer number of people capable of understanding the research, the more significant the work must be.

Perhaps it is the quasi-scientific methods of the particular sciences that are wrongheaded. Many practitioners in the fields of exercise physiology, sport psychology, motor learning, biomechanics, for instance, fail to embody the triadic understanding of science. Movement scientists function as disengaged spectators, study “external objects” rather than subject-matters, and/or produce neat and clean publishable results that have no bearing on the daily existence of sport community members. By “playing the game” on these terms, sport philosophy is not continuous with science, as Dewey suggests it could be, but is rather competing with quasi-science for “truth” revelations. Falling prey to the paradigm of quasi-science, sport philosophers become increasingly enthralled by historical scholarship and the technical quality of their work. As Campbell (2003) writes, “If, as non-pragmatists might suggest, the purpose of philosophical inquiry is to uncover truths about ultimate questions, then there is no problem with endless speculation; but, if the purpose of philosophical inquiry is to make the world a better place—a description that would seem to fit pragmatism—then we are led to wonder about the actual value of continuing historical scholarship about pragmatic (or any other) philosophy” (p.9).
Sport philosophers therefore must embody the qualities of the spirit of science by applying the triadic paradigm of inquiry for the purpose of making life in sport better. Even scholars of pragmatism must heed this call.

At some point, it would seem, we have learned enough about the commentaries on [James’] *The Principles of Psychology* and the background to [Dewey’s] *A Common Faith*; now it is time to try to change the world. At some point, we need to move beyond ‘mere philosophizing.’ We philosophers need to stop talking to each other about the concepts of ‘fuller experience’ and ‘moral growth’ and try to do something to expand the range of fuller experience and the likelihood of moral growth in our communities. As pragmatists, we need to resist the temptation to continue to reformulate our ideas until we think that they are in perfect shape. We must fight this temptation, so powerful to individuals of an intellectual bent, because we know that such endless refinement will keep us away from any practical applications. We need to remind ourselves that our philosophical work has an overall purpose… (Campbell, 2003, pp.9-10).

Pragmatists accept that philosophy cannot once and for all time solve the problems of the sport-world. Dewey would instead ask the following question of sport philosophers: “Does [their philosophic method] yield the enrichment and increase of power of ordinary things which the results of physical science afford when applied in every-day affairs? Or does it become a mystery that these ordinary things should be as they are; and are philosophic concepts left to dwell in separation in some technical realm of their own” (LW 1:18)? Consequently, philosophers of sport must start “relinquishing the hope for more decisive and more permanent betterment of our conditions” (Lachs, 2003, p.210). This will require a courageous turn to “thick” versions of pragmatism; courageous because pragmatism is a “hard philosophy. Perhaps too hard” (Stuhr, 1997, p.114). As Dewey recognizes, “life itself is a sequence of trials” (LW 1:326); yet it is all we have, leading James’ in his essay “Is Life Worth Living?” to implore us to, “Be not afraid of life.” Certainty and finitude are not likely possible. However, we can learn to live better. Sport can be a site of human flourishing with the help of philosophy.
Cultivating a Genuine Community of Sport Inquirers

To make a difference in the sport-world, sport philosophers cannot function in isolation—they must work as a “community of inquirers.” “Probably the great need of the present time,” Dewey contends, “is that the traditional barriers between scientific and moral knowledge be broken down, so that there will be organized and consecutive endeavor to use all available scientific knowledge for humane and social ends” (LW 7:283). The continuity between sport philosophy and the particular sciences thus extends beyond sharing a tridimensional method. Philosophers and all relevant scientists need to inquire into the vital issues of sport with one another. No single kind of inquiry, Dewey points out, holds “a monopoly of the honorable title of knowledge” (LW 4:176). Instead, knowledge arises about subject-matters from and flourishes in a plurality of fields engaged in inquiry. “There are as many conceptions of knowledge as there are distinctive operations by which problematic situations are resolved,” Dewey contends (LW 4:176-77). Even the study of something as simple as water, Boisvert (1998a) insists, demonstrates the “many dimensions” of subject-matters and thus serves as “repositories of multiple possibilities” (p.37). Similarly, one can view a vital sport issue such as steroid use in athletics from the perspective of health risks, humanity’s physical boundaries, forms of technology, as well as legal and fairness issues, to name a few. Consequently, sport philosophy must internalize a spirit of pluralism and become fully and regularly “cross-disciplined” and “cross-professional” (Stuhr, 1997, pp.50, 51). It requires engaged inquirers dealing with multiple subject-matters for various purposes.
Trading the image of a jigsaw puzzle for a river, Kretchmar (2005) similarly promotes continuity amongst the various disciplines that study human movement.

While the employment of [the jigsaw puzzle] metaphor over the years has been useful, we may be ready for a new image, one that is both more accurate and inspiring. We can picture ourselves working at different locations along a river bank. Some of us work upstream, near the headwaters, at the molecular and genetic level. Others work on anatomy, physiology, culture, psychological well-being, ethics, and even spirituality—all different places along the shore as we move down the river toward the broad and deep waters by the bay (p.171).

This move demands that scientists (and philosophers) reject a “humpty dumpty” notion of inquiry whereby theorists begin and end their work in isolation and in a final step try to fit the “pieces” back together. The result of this approach is the cultural impotence of a scientized and specialized field. Instead movement researchers must accept that “different types of problems demand different modes of inquiry for their solution” (LW 12:82). The steroid issue, for instance, requires many different viewpoints into which various particular sciences can offer insights. What is the apparent influence of steroid use by elite athletes on youths (sociology)? What impact does steroid use have on the long-term health of an athlete (physiology/epidemiology)? What effect does the presumption of others using steroids have on the self-efficacy of non-steroid users (psychology)? How does the perception of steroid use in athletics bear upon the consumption of sport (sport marketing)? Can steroid use by athletes be legally permitted in a society that makes them illegal for non-rehabilitation related reasons (sport law)?

Philosophy’s role in this community of inquirers is to provide the “criticism of criticisms” (LW 1:298). Sport philosophers illuminate the horizon against which the particular scientists begin and end their analysis. And in turn, the results of inquiry on a micro level can reciprocally transform the ideas that innervate sport cultures. This is not a
simple circularity, however, but rather a deepening and widening spiral. Our reflection upon the particularities of human existence can transform the horizon against which they are set, and vice versa. The reciprocal relationship never ends—the continuity between philosophy and science is irreducible.

The continuity between science and philosophy, as well as the multiple vantage points that subject-matters are viewed from, also protects pragmatism against charges of relativism and subjectivism. Although each individual inquirer will transact with the world in unique, partly idiosyncratic ways, genuine inquiry demands more than tenacious belief and selected emphasis. As Dewey argues, “Our world does not so obviously hang upon any one of [our minor decisions]; but put together they make the world what it is in meaning for each one of us. Crucial decisions can hardly be more than a disclosure of the cumulative force of trivial choices” (MW 14:150). Therefore pragmatism promotes pluralism, not singularity or thoroughgoing relativism.

Not only must sport philosophy establish a sense of collaboration with particular sciences, the field itself must work toward the pragmatic ideal of community. A community, for Dewey, cannot merely be an aggregate of people functioning in close proximity. It is not enough for sport philosophers to meet in banquet halls, obtain membership in IAPS, or read a common journal (i.e. JPS). When humans form communities by engaging in shared projects with vested interests in the consequences, they energetically seek to sustain the project and the realization of its excellences, ultimately sharing in the goods.

An association is a genuine community only to the extent that its members consciously share numerous, varied interests and interact fully and freely with other associations. A society is a community only when its members imaginatively share inclusive ideals and concern for the self-realization of one
another, and actively participate in the direction of those social forces that shape their lives. As such, any future development of community is identical with, rather than opposed to, the future development of genuine individuals—both as individuals and as members of communities. Community and individuality are two sides of the same coin (Stuhr, 1997, p.238).

The idea of a genuine community of inquirers does not suggest that all sport philosophers will share a common method, perform the same task, and always come to agreement. Instead, communities develop like a muscle—growing as it heals from small microfiber tears resulting from the strenuous extension of its potential. However, if the muscle is pushed beyond its limit without having an opportunity to heal, it cannot grow. Instead it will become disabled. Conversely, a muscle cannot grow in a state of stasis. It must be pushed beyond its current limits. Similarly, a community of inquirers must avoid stasis and capriciousness. Instead, a community needs at-once to challenge, revise, and support one another. Consequently, a genuine community of inquirers is neither a collection of brittle, isolated individuals nor an impersonal mass or collectivism that denies the individual.

In short, communities engage in genuine communication. Without communication, the progress, change, or status quo of sport is left to the dominant power structures or at best, divisive judicial review. Taylor (1991) argues that this process leaves society fragmented, individuals disenchanted, and eventually, soft despotism reigns (p.115). Conversely, a Deweyan, genuine community will engage in social intelligence—the embodiment of pluralism. In terms of sport philosophy, this requires the work of both “artists” and “technicians” (Jackson, 2002, p.69).
**Pragmatic Sport Philosophers’ Task: Two Intelligent Projects**

Perhaps the most compelling feature of this pragmatic reconstruction of the field of sport philosophy is the role all philosophers of sport can play without entirely reformulating their projects. This is not to say that all philosophers of sport become “Deweyan” pragmatists. What this project does implore sport philosophers to do is to become more pragmatic. While a difficult task, reconstruction of their methods to fully embody the four commitments (radical empiricism, grounded abstraction, melioristic intent, performed as a community of inquirers) would be an immediate dissolution of the divide that currently plagues the field of sport philosophy. More importantly, such a reconstruction would substantially enhance sport philosophy’s potential to impact society.

By suggesting philosophy needs both artists and technicians, Jackson (2002) implies that two definable, interrelated projects must be taken up by sport philosophers. As Alexander (1987) points out, “In the last analysis…philosophy for Dewey stands for a method of cultural interpretation, evaluation and criticism, a *study and creation* of cultural meanings” (p.22; emphasis added). This account of Dewey’s vision of philosophy outlines the two interrelated intelligent projects. First, sport philosophers must undertake reflective inquiry to disclose and clarify the operative ideals, values, or beliefs that fund contemporary sport experiences. Second, sport philosophers need to creatively engage in the deliberate transformation of the means, ends-in-view, and final ends of sport. The first project can roughly be considered “Deweyan metaphysics” while the second project is akin to a “Deweyan epistemology” or “cultural instrumentalism” (Eldridge, 1998, p.39). It is pivotal to note, however, that these loaded terms
(“metaphysics” and “epistemology”) must be understood in a pragmatic sense rather than their traditional, historical conceptions. As Eldridge (1998) writes, “the former is not your father’s metaphysics and the latter is not his epistemology” (p.39).

1. Critical Disclosure/Clarification of the Habits of the Sport-World (Metaphysics)

The first of two interrelated projects for sport philosophers is the careful and critical examination of the inherited and active beliefs, values, and ideas that shape the affairs of our various sport-worlds. In short, sport philosophy needs “technicians” to engage in the critical disclosure or clarification of the habits of the sport-world: As Smith (1992) points out, “Dewey’s position is quite clear. Metaphysics as essentially the description of a network of pervasive categories provides an indispensable ground plan for the work of philosophy as criticism in the most comprehensive sense” (p.13; emphasis added). This project charges philosophers of sport to “clarify and interpret ideals upon which life [sport]…has been founded” (Smith, 1992, p.1). This, in a sense, is what analytic metaphysicians of sport currently do—identify the durable qualities underlying shared sport experiences. However, analytic metaphysicians currently perform this task without making the pragmatic commitment to radical empiricism, horizontal abstractness, meliorism, and a community of inquirers. Rather than seek fixed “reals” in sport, the “cultural literacy in the worlds of human existence, past and present” (Alexander, 2003, p.131) should be philosophers of sports’ first goal.

In contrast to the theoretical position adhered to by antimetaphysicians of sport, such as Roberts and Burke, Smith (1992) makes the forceful argument that “philosophy cannot get along without metaphysics” (p.13). However not any notion of metaphysics serves sport philosophy well—only a metaphysics akin to Peirce’s evolutionary/emergent
conception of metaphysics or Dewey’s metaphysics of experience. The grounding of metaphysics in human, somatic experience thus differentiates the work of pragmatists like Peirce and Dewey from the analytic, *a priori* conceptions of metaphysics adhered to by sport philosophers such as Dixon, Russell, Simon, and Torres. Dewey thus dissolves yet another dualism. Experience for him irreducibly includes durable, dynamic, and aesthetic features that are at once shaping and being shaped by the life-world.

From this rich, full, transactional theory of experience, Dewey reconstructs a conception of metaphysics that humans embedded in the world (“experience”) “make possible” (Alexander, 1987, p.86). Rather than conceive of metaphysics as “beyond the physical” (Boisvert, 1998b, p.152), Dewey conceptualizes metaphysics as the phenomenological “focus on the fact of experience and attempt to understand it in a very wide sort of way” (Eldridge, 1998, p.38). Dewey’s metaphysics of experience thus embodies both the “detection and description of the generic traits of existence” (LW 1:52) while accounting for the contingent aspects of the never finished life-world.

Dewey’s pragmatic reconstruction of metaphysics—informe by experience in its widest sense—offers sport philosophers hope to overcome the critical limitations inherent in analytic metaphysicians and antimetaphysicians notion of first philosophy, while simultaneously holding on to the experientially compelling elements of each position. By carving a middle ground between the “metaphysics of ultimate simples” (Boisvert, 1993, p.139) and the unbounded metaphysics of idiosyncratic agents, Dewey captures both the sense of ontological durability embodied by the analytic metaphysicians and the fluidity of “being” exhibited by antimetaphysicians.
Consequently, the metaphysical “spadework” required by sport philosophy is not the search for immutable truths, but a phenomenological or radically empirical task to disclose and clarify the habits of the sport-world—“essentially the description of a network of pervasive categories” (Smith, 1992, p.13). As Anderson (2002) contends, “Philosophy both inquires about the ways we live and constitutes for us the worlds in and through which we must understand ourselves. It also exhibits and criticizes our specific situations…” (p.91). For pragmatists, the metaphysical project stands as a “care-ful,” radically empirical task engaged in for the purpose of revealing, clarifying, and criticizing the inherited traditions, values, beliefs, dominant symbol systems, and durable qualities we cherish in sport. As Alexander (2003) explains, “to inhabit the world is not to dominate or renounce it, but to play in it, learn from it, care for it, and realize the beauty of its meaning” (p.149). This makes metaphysics a necessary task for sport philosophy.

Dewey’s description of metaphysics as a “ground-map of the province of criticism” (LW 1:309) engenders the image of sport philosophers involved in metaphysical inquiry as mapmakers (c.f. Boisvert, 1998b, p.150; Jackson, 2002, p.72). Paralleling mapmaking with philosophy, Boisvert (1998b) contends, instructs metaphysics in three ways. First, metaphysics, like mapmaking, is (despite its abstractness) an interested and teleological process. Map construction/metaphysics demands the rejection of disconnected, disinterested standpoints to provide “the snapshot of the world” (p.150). Instead, mapmakers “gaze upon the physical world,” “look out on existing conditions,” “focus on the here and now,” and are “content with describing things as they are” for the purpose of creating abstract but useful maps (Jackson, 2002, p.72). Alexander (2003) describes this as “eco-ontology”—the endeavor to “comprehend
and respond to the ecological aspect of nature” for the purpose of establishing a “house of wisdom” and facilitating “communication between the diversity of the world’s cultures” (p.132). Viewed as analogous to a creator of maps that serve as a “form of social service, a way of helping others,” the philosopher is a “leader, pathfinder, and guide” (Jackson, 2002, p.132). In essence, metaphysics are irreducibly social—they facilitate communication by opening space for dialogue.

Second, the creation of maps, like pragmatic metaphysics, unavoidably involves selectivity and choice (Boisvert, 1998b, p.150). To take full, messy, lived human experience in sport and reflectively translate it into descriptions of the habits of sport-worlds requires philosophers to acknowledge the limits of metaphysical inquiry and the likelihood that “mistakes will no doubt be made” (Campbell, 2003, p.22). The limitless profusion of data that a horizontal or abstract view provides renders absolute, foundational, all-knowing metaphysical claims impossible. Yet despite the multiplicity of inquirers’ various interests, perceived problems, and selection of data, sport philosophers can (as an individual inquirer or as a community of inquirers) employ multiple vantage points and repeated viewings (c.f. Jackson, 2002, p.72). Since human experience in sport, like all experience, is social, metaphysics is necessary to make communication (and therefore community) possible. Pragmatic metaphysicians investigate and articulate concepts that make us “more intelligent inhabitants of the planet who are more capable of communicating with each other...develop concepts that facilitate understanding the world in terms of environmental interactions” (Alexander, 2003, p.137).

This characteristic of metaphysics also accentuates the line between philosophy and the particular sciences. As Alexander (2003) explains, “Metaphysics...keeps
intelligence functioning for the sake of wisdom. It lays the basis for extensive, deep
communication across disciplines” (p.145). To understand the landscape of sport, the
inherited values, beliefs, and moral codes that serve as habits of the sport-world, requires
data from multiple vantage points for the purpose of “establishing base lines to be
employed in more intricate triangulations” (LW 1:309). For instance, to deal with the
issue of steroids, “warranted assertions”—Dewey’s notion of truth—must be provided so
that sport philosophers can disclose or clarify the relevant habits of the sport-world. In
Peirce’s language, many threads from different areas weave together, like a cable, to
establish the “truth” about steroids. The stronger the cable, Peirce argues, the more
justifiable the position (as cited in Boisvert, 1998b, p.150).

Finally, the mapmaker image emphasizes the provisional character of pragmatic
metaphysics. Since our experience exhibits an irreducibly dynamic quality, descriptions
of the sport-world (metaphysics of sport experience) never stand as final or fixed and
always remain open to revision. Boisvert (1998b), in fact, uses the term “prototypes”
rather than Dewey’s “generic traits” to avoid idealistic conceptions of pragmatic
metaphysics. Prototypes, Boisvert explains, “best incorporate” the cluster of traits or
durable qualities associated with various categories of use while avoiding foundational
claims (p.154).

To summarize, in two senses we can refer to Dewey’s metaphysics as “working
metaphysics.” First, in contrast to the metaphysical constructionist, Dewey’s metaphysics
is never fixed and always open for reconstruction. The open-ended nature of this
pragmatic conception of metaphysics can be likened to “working definitions.” As Dewey
argues, “The empirical method points out when and where and how things of a
designated description have been arrived at. It places before others a map of the road that
has been traveled; they may accordingly, if they will, re-travel the road to inspect the
landscape for themselves” (LW1:389).

But while Dewey’s metaphysics never remain static, it accomplishes “work,”
unlike deconstructionist accounts of metaphysics. For Dewey, philosophy cannot
function without metaphysics (Smith, 1992, p.13). Metaphysics opens our eyes to
worldviews that empower or deprive humans of meaningful experience (Alexander,
2003, p.132). We see in sport (as well as movies, literature, paintings) that some habits
are celebrated, while others are considered problematic. Lachs (2003) points out that
there is “no denying that careful attention to the details of things elevates the human
spirit. Intricacy of pattern and richness of involution still the human mind with grateful
amazement at the actual” (p.210). We discover through metaphysical inquiry that

…the materials of our everyday surroundings need to be woven together so that
they do not merely accumulate, but rather culminate in a set of habits that provide
meaningful ways of interacting with those surroundings. Someone who is
experienced no longer confronts a fluid concatenation of data. There are now
“meanings,” events situated in an interpretive matrix. The contingent and multiple
occurrences that befall an experienced pilot or a counselor are not befuddling
surds. These events can now be situated within a wider context and understood
accordingly. They are no longer isolated incomprehensibles. They become
meaningful, that is to say, integrated elements in an overarching whole (Boisvert,

2. Creative Transformation of the Sport-World: Cultural Instrumentalism

In addition to their descriptive, metaphysical project, pragmatic philosophers also
perform an imaginative task. Consequently, sport philosophy requires “artists” to engage
in the creative transformation of the sport-world. As Dewey argues,

…philosophy marks a change of culture. In forming patterns to be conformed to
in future thought and action, it is additive and transforming in its role in the
history of civilization. Man states anything at his peril; once stated, it occupies a
place in a new perspective; it attains a permanence which does not belong to its existence; it enters provocingly into wont and use; it points in a troubling way to need of new endeavors” (LW 3:8).

As the application of “careful creative thinking to meet the needs of society” (Eldridge, 1998, p.33), Dewey refers to this task for philosophers as “cultural instrumentalism” and describes imagination as the “chief instrument of the good” (LW 10:350).

Eldridge (1998) describes the creative task of philosophers as “roughly Deweyan epistemology” (p.39). Dewey transforms our understanding of epistemology, in contrast to traditional notions, from a problem of knowing to a problem of learning—the process of growth. Based on his radical empiricism and commitment to social reform, Dewey emphasizes both the technical and artistic qualities of philosophy. “I do not mean that the creative element in the role of philosophy is necessarily the dominant one; obviously its formulations have been often chiefly conservative, justificatory or selected elements of traditions and received institutions. But even these conservative systems have had a transforming if not exactly a creative effect; they have lent the factors which were selected a power over later human imagination and sentiment which they would otherwise have lacked,” writes Dewey (LW 3:8). Campbell (2003) elaborates upon the reciprocal relationship between metaphysics and creative transformation:

We do not want to do away with habits and customs, only to get more appropriate ones. Precedents should not be followed but studied. The fact that some people once felt a certain mode of valuing life was good is a useful datum for all circumspect moralists; but a datum as such imposes no duty on us beyond encouraging us to take it under advisement when we attempt to evaluate current situations” (p.21).

Cultural instrumentalism, therefore, aims to offer opportunities to deepen and widen human experience by transforming the current or inherited conditions of communities. From a sport perspective, philosophers must creatively consider how ideas
about sport open new vistas and enrich the meanings available—a socially responsible vision of athletic poetry.

Here is the opportunity for that type of reflection which I should call philosophical. Philosophy is criticism; criticism of the influential beliefs that underlie culture; a criticism which traces the beliefs to their generating conditions as far as may be, which tracks them to their results, which renders the mutual compatibility of the elements of the total structure of beliefs. Such an examination terminates, whether so intended or not, in a projection of them into a new perspective which leads to new surveys of possibilities (LW 6:19; emphasis added).

Dewey offers a sport example to demonstrate the relationship between habits, creative transformation, and meaningful human existence:

Men shoot and throw. At first this is done as an “instinctive” or natural reaction to some situation. The result when it is observed gives a new meaning to the activity. Henceforth, men in throwing and shooting think of it in terms of its outcome; they act intelligently or have an end. Liking the activity in its acquired meaning, they not only “take aim” when they throw instead of throwing at random, but they find or make targets at which to aim. This is the origin and nature of “goals” of action. They are ways of defining and deepening the meaning of activity (MW 14:155-56).

Dewey’s example of the simple act of shooting and throwing becoming more complex stands as the foundation for all of our modern games. Kretchmar (1989) offers the example of the realization that diving, and ultimately diving in increasingly difficult ways, offers meaning to humans. But the meanings or habits that arise in the creation of practices like sport often arise accidentally. As Dewey contends, “man is naturally more interested in consummations than he is in preparations; and that consummations have first to be hit upon spontaneously and accidentally—as the baby gets food and all of us are warmed by the sun—before they can be objects of foresight, invention, and industry” (LW 1:71). So rather than leave everything to mechanical routine or capricious happenstance, Dewey calls for the intelligent, or directed, transformation of practices and
cultures for the purpose of transforming experience. Dewey continues his sport example to emphasize this point.

Having an end or aim is thus a characteristic of present activity. It is the means by which an activity becomes adapted when otherwise it would be blind and disorderly, or by which it gets meaning when otherwise it would be mechanical. In a strict sense an end-in-view is a means in present action; present action is not a means to a remote end. Men do not shoot because targets exist, but they set up targets in order that throwing and shooting may be more effective and significant (MW 14:156).

For cultures to ultimately survive and flourish, they need constant reconstruction at the “ontological level” (Alexander, 2003, p.132). This creative transformation “involves integration of the future into the meanings of the present through individuation that becomes open to the world by insight, care, and concern” (p.148). Pragmatists thus view philosophy as a teleological, intelligent, human project engaged in by a community of inquirers. Sport philosophers, if pragmatically oriented, need to develop ideas from their own experiences and traditions, imaginatively project the experiences of others within their cultures, and “investigate the ontologies of other cultures’ philosophies that may be more amenable” (Alexander, 2003, p.137), for the purpose of making sport more meaningful.

Philosophy thus sustains the closest connection with the history of culture, with the succession of changes in civilization. It is fed by the streams of tradition, traced at critical moments to their sources in order that the current may receive a new direction; it is fertilized by the ferment of new inventions in industry, new explorations of the globe, new discoveries in science. But philosophy is not just a passive reflex of civilization that persists through changes, and that changes while persisting. It is itself a change; the patterns formed in this junction of the new and the old are prophecies rather than records; they are policies, attempts to forestall subsequent developments” (LW 3:7).

In sum, Dewey’s mapmaker analogy extends to the creative transformation project as sport philosophers not only trace out the landscape already traversed, but also
serve as “explorers” of new horizons. Sport philosophers engaged in Deweyan epistemology imaginatively consider the effects of transforming means, ends-in-view, ideals, or final ends of sport. But unlike the current approaches of analytic metaphysicians and antimetaphysicians of sport, pragmatism requires both methodological paradigms to exist in a reciprocal relationship—Dewey’s creative project requires the “ground-map” metaphysical inquiry provides. As Alexander (1993) argues, Communities are bound together by hazier ideals and we need to find more definite ends to achieve cooperative activity providing a context for the realization of value and a sense of meaning in our lives. The possibility of community, then, lies as much in the ability to search out and discover integrative ends as it does in the conservative practices of its traditions. Indeed, traditions are highly valued largely because they provide such a stable network for guiding and interpreting future activity (p.213).

Conclusion: The Pragmatic Community of Sport Philosophers

To overcome academic disregard and social marginalization, the field of sport philosophy requires a thoroughgoing pragmatic reconstruction. In particular, sport philosophers must embody four pragmatic commitments. First, sport philosophers must become radically empirical—kinesthetically engaged inquiry that embodies all three dimensions of lived, human experience in sport (dynamic, durable, and aesthetic). Second, against the backdrop of a pragmatically reconstructed theory of experience, sport philosophers must consider their work as a grounded and entangled inquiry into the horizon of sport. Third, the field of sport philosophy must accept a moral responsibility to serve as a source of meliorism for the sport-world. The point of sport philosophy is to transform the ideas that fund the lived experiences of human athletic participants.
Consequently, sport philosophers must serve as messengers or liaisons for humanity to live a richer, fuller, wiser, and more intelligent life in athletics.

Finally, sport philosophers must also make a fourth commitment—one that promotes the development of a genuine community of inquirers. Functioning as the “criticism of criticisms,” sport philosophy must work with, rather than against, the particular sciences. Although functional differences exist between philosophy and science, only through a sense of continuity or community can theoretical inquiry make a difference in the lives of humans engaged in sport. Additionally, sport philosophers must not assume that they stand as a genuine community by virtue of common membership in an association, attendance at similar conferences, or the sharing of reading lists.

Sport philosophers’ projects must be one of social intelligence—working together to offer “a critical and creative technology for bettering our lives” (Eldridge, 1998, p.41; emphasis added). Consequently, sport philosophers need not entirely give up their current projects—but must reformulate them against a pragmatic backdrop. I am, therefore, not merely offering another philosophical method or approach. Instead, I am making an argument for a thorough reconstruction of the field in light of pragmatic ideas working in background. Sport philosophers must approach inquiry pragmatically in order to fill their potentially vital role in sport and wider culture. As Alexander (2003) reveals,

A wise human life is one that necessarily illustrates awareness of what is important in a life that is lived in awareness of the world. Wisdom is manifested in the relation of life to the world in which it is lived. This requires being aware of the possible meanings of the situations in which we find ourselves, in spite of their complexity. To understand a situation is to grasp it in terms of the possibilities it has as well as its immediate actualities (p.130; emphasis added).

Based on this understanding of philosophy, sport philosophers can contribute to the community of inquirers by performing two tasks. First, philosophers of sport must
engage in pragmatically oriented metaphysics—the disclosure and clarification of the habits of the sport-world. Sport philosophy needs technicians such as Dixon, Russell, Simon, and Torres to perform this crucial role. They must continue, albeit in a reconstructed pragmatic sense, to identify the functional continuities and worldviews that fund sport experience (c.f. Alexander, 2003, p.145). Metaphysicians of sport thus set the groundwork for pragmatic skepticism—potentially bringing to light problematic situations in need of transformation, as well as setting the range of possible ideals (Alexander, 2003, p.130). As Morgan (1998) correctly observes, “sometimes…social progress is best served by turning present social arrangements on their head; sometimes it is best served by the continuation of those social arrangements” (p.98).

Building on the work of metaphysics, sport philosophy also needs artists, such as Roberts and Burke, to engage in the imaginative creative transformation of the ideas fueling sport. This transformative task releases new potentialities for human existence in the sport realm. Opening space for new ideas, creative possibilities for the present and future of sport within a universe of significant or symbolic experience, cultural instrumentalism makes a meaningful sport-world possible (c.f. Alexander, 2003, p.133).

Neither the technicians nor the artists of sport philosophy can work in isolation from one another—as I believe too often they currently do. Rather than function in polar opposition, sport philosophers must work together as a community of inquirers, reciprocally contributing to each other’s inquiry. This does not mean, however, that sport philosophers will always agree. As Alexander (1987) emphasizes, “There is always a tension in meaning, then, between the rules of custom and the innovations of creative use” (p.165). But as Dewey argues, artists and technicians need each other. “Meanings
are rules for using and interpreting things; interpretation being always an imputation of potentiality for some consequence,” he writes (LW 1:147).

Consequently, sport philosophers can work together in a reciprocal relationship—technicians establishing the ground-map, artists exploring new horizons that may transform the maps of the present and future. The circle of inquiry widens, the potential for meaning in sport deepens, and the Human Eros flourishes through athletic participation. As sport philosophers pragmatically contribute to the understanding and transformation of an important cultural world—sport—the field’s undesired complicity in its own academic marginalization and cultural impotence melts away.

We need plans and organizations, but these are situational—not for all time. What endures is the need for intelligence. Fortunately, intelligence is for the having. Within almost every situation there are better and worse possibilities. By reflecting on these and the conditions needed to realize the more desirable (or effective) ones, we can choose ends (and means) that remake our lives. We can learn to live better than we do now (Eldridge, 1998, p.42).
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Chapter 1 Notes


4 Barely a week goes by without a sport-related segment 60 Minutes. Recent telecasts have included stories on National Football League (NFL) coaches’ use of technology, baseball player Alex Rodriguez, basketball coach Geno Auriemma, football coach Bill Parcells, American athletic prodigies Freddy Adu (soccer) and Michelle Wie (golf), as well as an in-depth report on the status of Athens’ 2004 Olympic preparedness.

5 These types of experiences can be likened to John Dewey’s notion of an experience (or aesthetic experiences). An experience is “one which has been successfully transformed through intelligent action so as to be an inherently complete and dynamically moving whole which realizes the sense of meaning and value as deeply as possible” (Alexander, 1987, p. 186).

6 The works of John Dewey will cited as EW (Early Works), MW (Middle Works), and LW (Later Works) edited by Jo Ann Boydston at Southern Illinois. For example, a detailed citation of this quote would be John Dewey, “Democracy and Educational Administration,” John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Jo Ann Boydston (Ed.) vol. 11 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987 [1937]), p.221.

7 Norwegian sport philosophers with academic positions—particularly Sigmund Loland and Gunnar Breivik of the Norwegian University for Sports and Physical Activity—seem to play a more active role in public conversations about sports and athletic policy decisions. However, outside of these limited examples, few sport philosophers holding academic positions are highly involved in public or political dialogue.

8 My parenthetical additions here are meant to emphasize the apparent lack of awareness or acknowledgement of the CBC—Canada’s publicly owned media outlet—that philosophical thinkers working within a sport context exist in Canada.

9 Some might argue that sport philosophers can best engage in public and political dialogue from non-academic positions and thus the marginalization of professional sport philosophy should not be of great concern. I must strenuously disagree with this conclusion, however. Higher education and professional philosophy should play a vital role in democratic cultures—and sport philosophy needs to continue to function in this realm. If few rigorously trained sport philosophers remained in academic positions, the field would eventually disappear. Undergraduate classes (if they remained at all) would not be taught by sport philosophers and thus students would no longer be encouraged or find opportunities to pursue graduate work in sport philosophy. Eventually the canon/professional literature would dwindle in terms of both quantity and quality. The impact of a group of professionally trained philosophers turning away from academia because of marginalization is best seen with female philosophers in the late 1800s and early 1900s—particularly women pragmatist scholars. The lack of opportunity for these women and systematic disregard for their work resulted in a void in the literature and their exclusion from the canon. See Seigfried, 1996, pp.17-90.

10 Once again, it is important to note that I recognize some exceptions exist, particularly Loland and Breivik in Norway.

11 Many students seem to engage in higher education from an “X-ist” perspective with subjects and fields of study serving almost exclusively as job training for white collar vocations. This “Generation X-ist” mostly sees value only in courses that can translate into marketable skill sets—privileging, for example, economics for economists, psychology for psychologists, physiology for physiologists, sociology for sociologists. Obviously there are many exceptions to this claim (i.e. management positions, medical field practitioners, engineers) but the central point, I argue, still stands—particularly in kinesiology programs. Humanities graduates in general tend not to move into professions to which ‘ist is affixed to (with the exception of ethicist—perhaps the only vocationally recognized area of philosophy). Undergraduate students, I argue, enter classes to which ‘ist cannot be affixed with an expectation of irrelevance. In my
experience, students in kinesiology for example, make their disinterest in courses (particularly humanities classes such as sport history and sport philosophy) that cannot be converted into an x-ist blatant.

12 This also raises obvious questions about the pedagogical methods employed by many in higher education, including those teaching in the humanities.

13 See Anderson’s (2001, 2003) counterarguments to this idea of humanistic inquiry into movement as less worthy from an academic perspective than positivistic science.

14 See www.ccupeka.ca/underconst,


16 My quick claim here is that sport can be viewed as a general, overarching term that captures the notion that we live sports in various ways. For example, we live sport in contesting forms, testing forms, exercising forms, or even ceremonial forms (among others). Even with this broad use of the term “sport” few in kinesiology now study or teach issues related to sport. When I refer to sport philosophy, I am referring to the philosophical examination of any/all of these ways humans live sport.

17 It must be acknowledged that there is the potential with elevated status and increased public relevance that sport philosophers could succumb to the downside of research funding—most notably the pressure to conform research agendas to engage in inquiry more likely to accumulate prestigious grant money.

18 I was contacted to do this interview by a CBC researcher who attended a lecture I delivered on pragmatic notions of Olympic Ideals at Wilfrid Laurier University (Ontario) for a conference entitled “Onward to the Olympics.”

19 Peirce describes the Special Sciences as investigations into unique/narrow experiences, often with the use of “special tools.” A special tool may be a scientist’s microscope, an astronomer’s telescope, an economist’s model, or even (if narrow and inaccessibly abstract) a philosophical theory.

20 Published in JPS as “Internalism and Internal Values in Sport”

21 Kretchmar’s formalistic tendencies shift to a more pragmatic viewpoint—this “turning” is best exemplified in his “Functionalist Account of Game Acts” (2001a) article. This shift in thinking by Kretchmar will serve as a valuable source later.

22 Morgan’s “Logical Incompatibility Thesis” article offers the best summation of the early debate between formalists and social ethosists.

Chapter 2 Notes

24 Each of the three critiques presented in Chapter 2 and 3 are worthy of special attention that extends beyond the bounds of the current project. Yet while I do not have the luxury to flesh out the critiques in full, exemplars and sketches should serve as a warrant for a reconstruction of the field. My intent is to avoid setting up straw men or presenting unfair readings of work in the sport philosophy literature, and in the end make a compelling case that the tools, methods, and purposes of the field results in its lack of cultural force.

25 These terms are (to the best of my knowledge) Boisvert’s terms used to summarize key concepts adhered to by Dewey.

26 This error of philosophy will be examined more closely in the following chapter’s critique of sport philosophy’s commitment to impartial theories of experience.

27 The reconfigured labels is necessary, I will argue in the third critique, since Dixon and others problematically conflate the terms “real,” “truth,” and “meaning,” and since the notion of “antireal” defies experiential comprehension.

28 This statement is taken from Angela Schneider’s keynote address (September 16) at the 2004 IAPS Conference in Fort Worth, Texas. Schneider credits Scott Kretchmar’s 1983 JPS article “Ethics and Sport: An Overview” (Volume X, pp. 21-32) with the need to philosophical inquiry with the definition of metaphysical systems. Interestingly, Kretchmar turns away from this commitment to metaphysics as “first philosophy” and to more pragmatic notions of philosophical inquiry. Kretchmar, although regularly cited to support analytic metaphysicians’ methods, believes the analytical, first philosophy or definitional focus of sport philosophers is no longer the central interest to him (personal communication).

29 Torres and McLaughlin agree with Dixon that “the determination of athletic superiority” stands as the uncontroversial central purpose of sport.

30 Unless stated otherwise, the emphasis in quotations is original.
As noted in Chapter 1, Dixon rightly joins interpretivist thinkers and rule-governed formalists under the same methodological umbrella since they share an allegiance to essences or “truths” about sport that serve as a starting point for deductive reasoning.

Dixon’s definition of interpretivism indicates his methods are relevant to moral and nonmoral debates. Thus, deductive analysis starting from his first principle should offer clear conclusions to issues such as the appropriateness of steroid bans.

This is not to say that all so-called “B Games” are compelling aspects of athletic contests. Basketball games dominated by free throw shooting and hockey games stopped by a parade of players to the penalty box, for instance, can ruin the charming fluidity of these sporting events. The central point here is that these important aspects of game construction should not a priori be deemed inferior and thus avoided.

These limitations identified by Dixon are important and will be incorporated into the reconstruction of sport philosophy in Chapter 4. The question at hand, however, is the ability of a certain methodology—application of a deductive metaphysical system—to critically deal with sport issues.

Kretchmar and I (in process) for example, argue that in addition to testing excellences, a host of contesting excellences exists. This, I believe, further complicates the interpretive project.


See David W. Zang, Fleet Walker’s Divided Heart: The Life of Baseball’s First Black Major Leaguer. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska.

This is not to say that sport sociologists as a whole fail to offer value to sport reconstruction. As Rorty argues, from a political perspective Marxist and New Left theorists successfully reduce sadism on cultural grounds. Rorty credits these theorists with increasing the tolerance within culture for non-dominant races, sexual orientation, and for women. Certainly the same can be said for the sport environment as well. However, the push for revolution without offering realistic alternative strategies disconnect these postmodernists from what Dewey calls “the problems of men” (MW 10:46). Rorty (1998) suggests that the Marxist and New Left theorist spend most of their energies on “naming the system” and identifying who counts as ‘other’ in “the relevant sense:” “To be other in this sense you must bear an ineradicable stigma, one which makes you a victim of socially accepted sadism rather than merely of economic selfishness” (p.80). Consequently, Rorty suggests that the New Left merely teaches us to recognize otherness—such as homosexuals, women, blacks, Aboriginals—while few examine the conditions that result in the most pervasive problem in American culture—economic disparity. Little interest is shown by those engaged in “cultural” studies, or as Rorty calls “victim studies,” for “trailer-park” or “unemployment” studies. Again, the same can be said for cultural inquiry into sport. Rorty further accuses cultural studies with dogmatic tendencies: “Stories about hegemony and power are to many cultural leftists the only thing they really want to hear. To step into the intellectual world which some of these leftists inhabit is to move out of a world in which the citizens of a democracy can join forces to resist sadism and selfishness into a Gothic world in which democratic politics has become a farce” (p.95). Consequently, for Marxist and New Left theorist, cheerfulness and hope are considered products of the naïve who fail to see the totality of horror in our culture.

Prior to the rise of Rortyan-inspired scholarship in the sport philosophy literature, conventionalists such as D’Agostino (1981) and Lehman (1981) argued against the formalists in favor of a social ethos account of sport. I am mostly excluding their work since the most compelling and forceful arguments for an antimeetaphysical approach to sport philosophy are offered today by Rortyan scholars Roberts and Burke. It is important to note that my critique of the deconstructionists is not a blanket criticism of Rorty. At times, Rorty reads very differently from the classic pragmatists like Peirce, James, and Dewey. Other times, his work is extremely friendly with classic pragmatism. This idea is emphasized by John Smith (1992) and discussed later in the project. In the sport philosophy literature, however, the former (neopragmatic) version of Rorty is generally applied by theorists such as Roberts and Burke—the sport philosophers I view as paradigmatic antimeetaphysicians. Morgan, however, tends to apply a more pragmatic (and less literal) reading of Rorty in his work as a sport philosopher.

Although universally credited with assisting the revitalization of Deweyan scholarship, Rorty stands as a lightning rod for most classic pragmatism/Deweyan scholars. Rorty’s “neopragmatic” reading of Dewey instigates a great swell of opposition when he is taken literally. For instance, Thomas Alexander (1987) challenges Rorty’s view of Dewey’s work as a “high-grade intellectual acid” used to “dissolve” rather than “solve philosophical problems” (p.xii). I, in fact, will use Dewey in Chapter 4 to reconstruct metaphysics.
I am expanding Dixon’s critique to include subjectivists, and in essence, antimetaphysicians as a whole. This point is attributable to Douglas Anderson (personal communication). In Chapter 4, this idea of a “worldview” will be seen as the pragmatic conception of metaphysics. From Vincent Colapietro’s (personal communication) perspective, it is only Rorty’s inability to make “knock down” or “once-and-for-all” arguments that lead him to back away from notions of better or worse arguments.

Chapter 3 Notes

Although I highlight Dixon in this section, he stands as a representative for a broader group of metaphysical constructionists. Fraleigh (1984a) for instance, emphasizes knowledge at the center of what sport is about. The purpose of competitive sport, Fraleigh argues, is “to provide equitable opportunity for mutual contesting of the relative abilities of the participants to move mass in space and time within the confines prescribed by an agreed-upon set of rules” (p.41). Similarly, Keating (1964) contends that “the objective and accurate determination of superior performance, and ultimately, of excellence,” (p.33) is the purpose of athletics (competitive sport). Dixon (1995) cites these two sport philosophers often, and even refers to his notion of the purpose of competitive sport as “the Fraleigh/Keating view” (c.f. p.172).

A closer look at Simon’s (2003) reduction of sport to competitors engaged in a quest for excellence similarly raises questions on experiential grounds. How does he account for competitors engaged in a quest for excellence when each party seeks varying shades and interpretations of excellence?

In Chapter 2, I presented an overview of Smith’s description of Rorty’s two personae—the good (“rorty”) and the bad (“Rorty”)—from pragmatic perspective.

Rorty rejects the notion of “subjective”

Peirce refers to this as Firstness.

Interestingly, not only do most (all?) analytic metaphysicians of sport perceive their philosophical role to be the establishment of order by way of disembodied reason, but they also turn sport into a quasi-cognitive enterprise.

Burke (1989) acknowledges Dewey’s influence on this neopragmatic, Rortyan view of sport philosophy’s purpose (p.62). I believe this is an incorrect reading of Dewey, or in Rortyan terms, a “strong misreading.” Dewey sought to dissolve dualisms, such as private/public, and never would suggest that we must seek a “balance” between what was never separate.

The phrase “tendency to go polemic is so strong…” is attributable to Scott Kretchmar. Personal Communication, December 17, 2004.

Dewey’s notion of community will be expanded upon later in the text.

An analogy can be drawn to the premise of the popular movie The Matrix. To those unfamiliar with The Matrix, the central theme of the film is that humans live in a happy but unreal computer-generated and controlling matrix. From the antimetaphysicians perspective, we are living in someone else’s “Matrix” with only Rorty and his band of literary heroes holding the blue pill that grants clarity about our human situation. Only by taking the blue pill can they escape into the war-torn real world. Once the individual takes the blue pill, they literally break free from an alien created womb—giving birth to themselves.

In fact, Dewey contends that the “first-rate test of the value” of any philosopher’s method will be judged by its ability to impact the ordinary world. “Does it end in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful? Or does it terminate in rendering the things of ordinary experience more opaque than they were before, and in depriving them of having in ‘reality’ even the significance they had previously seemed to have?” writes Dewey (LW 1:18).

Chapter 4 Notes

Few people in human history lived through as much cultural change and social and political upheaval as John Dewey. Born in Burlington, Vermont the year (not insignificantly) Charles Darwin published The Origin of Species (1859), Dewey’s first-hand experiences included the battle over creation/evolution theories, America’s Civil War, the rise of science, technology, and industrialization, World War I, II and the start of the Cold War, exploration of the world’s geographical frontiers, unimaginable advances in
communication and transportation systems, and the United States’ emergence as a world economic and military superpower before his death in New York City in 1952.

56 This quote is taken from Emerson’s essay “American Scholar” (cited in Campbell, 1995, p.6).

57 Also inspired by Emerson while living deeply embedded in the rapidly evolving American culture of the late 1800s, Dewey’s predecessors, teachers, and eventual colleagues Charles Peirce (1839-1914) and William James (1842-1910) challenged inherited notions of modern philosophy. Peirce and James’ versions of a new philosophic method they called “pragmatism” inspired Dewey’s rejection of traditional philosophical categories, languages, conceptions, and issues that no longer remained as vital problems in his time.

58 Focusing on meaning and value, rather than truth or knowledge, is a common theme expounded by philosophers working within the classic or “paleo” pragmatic tradition. Even William James has been accused of focusing on truth rather than meaning, leading Peirce to rename his philosophical method “pragmaticism.”

59 Contrast this statement with Dixon’s defense of blowing out opponents. Although Dixon’s analytic position is well argued, his cold dismissal of hope, creativity, love, and friendship potentially strips the athletic experience of meaning.

60 As Alexander (1987, p.184) argues, if most of life in its current form, including our sporting lives, already tapped into the possible limits of deep meaning, then either philosophers could continue with “business-as-usual” or be deemed superfluous. However reflection upon much of our experience likely lends support to what many cultural critics argue—that from the perspective of deep, rich meaning a wide gap exists between the “actual” and the “possible” in human practices like sport. Consequently, as Anderson (2001, 2002) argues, we have lost the human quality of sport and movement.

61 See Dewey, Individualism: Old and New (LW 5). The “business mind”—the prevalence of value standards resulting from economic success and prosperity—dominates wider culture in developed nations (pp. 66, 67, 69).

62 Obvious examples of sport dangerously falling prey to a utilitarian mindset include the staggering salaries paid to professional athletes and coaches, the unfathomable television revenues generated by sports and athletic festivals from the free market system, as well as the construction of multi-million dollar facilities for limited, elite-only usage (often with public funds). But the emphasis on utility runs deeper through sport. Not only does the corporate culture of professional sport “trickle down” into less visible sports, but the “business mind” also weaves into the very fabric of athletics in general. For instance, youth sport often promotes itself as training ground for the zero-sum, capitalistic, survival-of-the-’fittest’ world. Sports connected with educational institutions often seem to exist more for marketing purposes than educative means. A “win-at-all costs” mentality drives parents, coaches, administrators, and the athletes themselves to circumvent the rules and spirit of sport.

63 As argued in Chapter 3, it appears at times as though sport philosophy’s analytic reductivists and postmodern neopragmatists prize victory over wisdom. American philosopher George Santayana (1913) accused fellow philosophers in the early 1900s of the same misguided priority. “What produces systems [some view about the totality of things] is the interest in maintaining against all comers that some favourite or inherited idea of ours is sufficient and right,” he writes (1913, p.199).

64 While the inquiry into wisdom is not solely the task of philosophers, sport philosophy’s role as cultural criticism and reconstruction plays a vital part. This idea will be expanded in Chapter 5.

65 “Firstness” is one of Peirce’s three categories of perception, while Dewey uses the term “impulse” regularly in Human Nature and Conduct (MW 14).

66 In fact, aesthetics play such a central role in the thinking of Peirce and Dewey that they insist upon deriving ethics and logic from aesthetics.

67 Alexander (1987) on this point makes another important claim: “By grounding the aesthetic in the life of the flesh in the world, Dewey recognized that he was setting himself against a moral tradition which had opposed flesh to spirit” (p.195).

68 For a more detailed discussion on an experience, see Dewey’s third chapter of Art as Experience entitled “Having an Experience” and Alexander’s (1987) summary of the three phases on pages 204-207.

69 Vincent Colapietro (personal communication) uses the analogy of an ever widening and deepening spiral to contrast the idea of returning to the starting point (lived experience) as a simple circularity.

70 C.L.R. James (1993) makes a similar case for sport as art in Beyond A Boundary.
Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, in addition to serving as Guest Editor, contributed to the special issue along with Robert Crease, Kathleen Haney, and David Morris. In the “Introduction,” Sheets-Johnstone (2002) defends the relevance of the essays to sport and movement by writing “the fact that all areas of kinetic invention derive in an originary sense from our basic capacity to move ourselves, and in the fact that movement engenders rich and complex conceptual, psychological, and social meanings, the progressive attainment of which in the course of human development makes participation in sports, dance, games, gymnastics, and play not only possible but enjoyable” (p.103).

Peirce (c.f. 1998) calls phenomenology “first philosophy” in his architectonic.

Chapter 5 Notes

It is important to note that methodological battles remain an important (and necessary) aspect of professional sport philosophy—assuming that the intent is to provide tools to inquire into vital issues impacting everyday sport experience. Those engaged in methodological debates, however, have the potential to get caught up in strictly philosophical battles or issues.

Accusations against several of America’s top athletes continuously thrust the issue of banned substance use into the media headlines. Recent examples include indicted BALCO founder Victor Conte disclosing on North American television star track athlete Marion Jones’ steroid use, Jose Canseco’s tell-all book and CBS 60 Minutes interview, leaked Grand Jury testimony in the case against BALCO that baseball stars Barry Bonds and Jason Giambi admitted to steroid use, accusations against a South Carolina doctor of illegal prescriptions for steroids written for several Carolina Panthers football players (also on 60 Minutes), and Lance Armstrong’s former aid’s assertion that he found a vile of steroids in a home of the champion cyclist. Major League Baseball’s recent steroid scandal, for instance, resulted in highly public Senate Judiciary Committee hearings in which prominent researchers, former and current baseball stars, and Major League Baseball and National Football League officials testified.

Alexander’s (1987) reference to a “horizon of feeling” and Charles Taylor’s (1991) conception of a “horizon of significance” suggest something like a horizontal view of philosophy. I want to make this idea explicit.

See R. Scott Kretchmar, Practical Philosophy of Sport and Physical Activity (2nd ed.) (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics (2005), pp. 9-11 for examples of how philosophical questions differ from those of the particular sciences.

Certainly this entire project may raise charges of hypocrisy since it focuses almost exclusively on philosophic method. However I believe this pragmatic critique and reconstruction of sport philosophy is undertaken with the intent to provide methods by which we, as sport philosophers, can change the sport-world in meaningful ways.

Misunderstanding this idea of instrumentalism in a thin sense leaves us with the current conception of pragmatism and pragmatic thought as “whatever works.” It is crucial to understand the richness of Dewey’s instrumentalism.

This is not to deny (as neopragmatists would) the significance of “truth.” Truth as “warranted assertions” is an important part of our meaning structures. The more confident we are in our warranted assertions, the more justifiable are our beliefs, and the more durable our habits become.

Stuhr (1997) refers to this timeless “search for order” as “chronophobia” (p.**). See Chapter 3.

See Chapter 1 for my discussion on the CBC special looking into steroids in sport. No sport philosophers were part of the piece, although the emphasis of the documentary was on the ethics of performance enhancing substance use. Physiologists and media members offered ethical perspectives, and the only philosopher involved described himself as a bioethicist.

With respect to the steroid in sport issue, knockers of technology argue that fair play ideals and a traditional conception of sport justify bans on steroids. However boosters also argue that careful inquiry into actual conditions of elite sport calls into question the genuine equality available to athletes lacking the access to high-level coaches, training methodologies, facilities, and nutritional options. In fact, boosters may conclude, lifting bans on steroids may afford more equality in elite sport. Knockers also contend that the long-term health of athletes solely validates steroid bans. Again, boosters point to secretive and subsequent ill-monitored, unhealthy abuses of steroids. Further, these supporters of technology also call attention to the inherent danger in sports such as boxing, pole-vaulting, or platform diving. A third counter
to the healthy competitors argument boosters invoke is the life threatening training regiments tolerated and indirectly encouraged by judges and weight classifications in sports including figure skating, gymnastics, weight lifting, or boxing.

83 This is the pragmatic acceptance of "fallibilism."
84 The triadic paradigm of the experimental method helps philosophers of sport avoid the temptation of adopting an Asomatic Attitude—disembodied, spectators launching inquiry—falling prey to the Galilean Purification—ungrounded, purely theoretical analysis—and succumbing to the Plotinian Temptation—"to fasten one meaning as ultimately determinative" (c.f. Boisvert, 1998a, pp.35-39).
85 As a point of clarification Campbell (2003) also writes, "The pragmatic scholar recognizes that well-written intellectual history is a valuable product, but one that does not represent the full range of our potential activities as inheritors of the American tradition. On the other hand, there is merit to the position that extraordinary and valuable insights were achieved by past American philosophers and that these need to be passed on—explicated and made relevant—to the next generations of American thinkers. …To pass on these insights [about issues of great human importance] in the classroom requires instructors who are well grounded in the tradition. It requires, in other words, good intellectual history by scholars who are dedicated to putting their ideas to work to advance social goals" (p.10).
86 Dewey most fully works this conception of metaphysics out in *Experience and Nature* (LW1).
87 Alexander (2003) expands upon this point: "Though the conscious goal of inquiry into wisdom was first articulated by philosophy, all cultures [including sport cultures] have cherished some ideal of wisdom. While all cultures stress the centrality of wisdom in human existence, it is equally clear that wisdom is capable of a plurality of idealizations. Philosophy is the conscious, critical inquiry into the idea of wisdom, but this study must include an exploration of the range of prereflective cultural ideals of wisdom. This is especially important from a pragmatic point of view because these cultures have successfully realized meaningful human lives. The practice of philosophy, then, requires investigations into the pragmatic implementation of the desire for wisdom in the diversity of human cultures past and present. Philosophy needs experience" (p.130).
88 From Peirce’s essay, “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities.”
89 This idea of socially responsible metaphor or poetry is best explored in Rorty’s *Achieving Our Country* (1998).
90 Alexander (HR) argues that games popularity may be traceable to the fact that most other human activities lack their “clearly presented ends.” The “artificial constraints” of games, he continues, “offer clear instances where such simple ends are set forth and can be rather easily embraced and followed, allowing individuals to experience in an aesthetically vivid manner the dynamic but meaningful projections of participatory interpretive activity” (p.213). See also Alexander’s (HR) description of a game of catch, in which individuals enter into the interpretation of an activity together—a “mutual effort to anticipate together” that “creates a dramatic fusion” of each other’s “field of action and interpretation” thus opening up a new “range of possibilities” and “creating new projective lines of action” (pp.212-213).
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