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Book Review: The Bloomsbury companion to the philosophy of sport

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The Bloomsbury Companion to the Philosophy of Sport, edited by Cesar R. Torres,
London, Bloomsbury Sport, 2015, 470 pp., £25.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-4729-2408-7

This magisterial companion to the philosophy of sport consists of an editorial introduction, 23 chapters and a section comprising 19 key terms and concepts, including such disparate topics as cheating, cybersport, deception and fair play. The substantive chapters are presented in distinct parts covering the history and development of philosophic ideas about sport, research methodology, current research and key issues, future developments, resources and careers, and the sport philosophy literature.

As a prelude to the various other elements of the companion, the editor, Cesar R. Torres, provides an introduction which will be of value to the specialist and the interested lay reader alike. Torres notes that by the late 1960s, the philosophy of sport had become a bona fide subject of philosophical inquiry in its own right. He argues that ‘while the sorts of issues and questions philosophers of sport primarily engage with can be divided along the lines of the major branches of philosophic inquiry, which surely convey a sense of what the discipline is all about, they all fundamentally lead to the interrogation and analysis of what sport means and how it contributes to a good or meaningful life’ (p. 5). The cynic might say that this must inevitably be a thankless task given the range of corrupt practices with which sport has been associated, particularly in the contemporary era. But this is surely unnecessarily defeatist. Sport provides joy to countless people throughout the world and should not simply be dismissed on ethical grounds because of the actions of a few, assuming, that is, that the guilty parties are still in the minority. Towards the end of this introduction, Torres takes the opportunity to muse about the future of the philosophy of sport. He claims that there is room for optimism. But he also suggests that there remain areas where improvement is needed.

First, the decline in the number of sport philosophy courses in undergraduate programmes in kinesiology and sport science needs to be arrested. Second, there should be more graduate programmes in the philosophy of sport. Third, there has to be a revival of the relationship between the philosophy of sport and education. All of these are laudable aims but they will prove difficult to realise in an era in which universities have as their prime concerns student numbers and research funding. The philosophy of sport is not alone in feeling the pressure in such a hostile neo-liberal environment.

Each reader of the companion will be drawn to certain chapters more than to others. For the present reviewer, the notable contributions are Ron Welters' piece on sport and the environment, Stephen Mumford's examination of the aesthetics of sport, and Lamaratine P. Du Costa's chapter on sport and ideology. The highlight of the collection, however, is arguably William J. Morgan's "'Spoiled Sports': markets and the Corruption of Sport" which concludes with the clarion call for sport to be protected from domination by the market.

For readers of this journal, no doubt the chapter which will excite most interest is the one devoted to eastern philosophy and pragmatism, written by Jesús Ilundáin-Agurruza, Koyo Fukasawa and Mizuho Takemura. The authors acknowledge that a thorough overview of their subject matter in a single chapter is unfeasible and it is certainly a cause for some regret that there is only one chapter devoted to Asian thought and no contributions to the companion from scholars in China, Korea, Taiwan, or, indeed the Indian sub-continent. Moreover, the single chapter that does address eastern philosophy does so by coupling it with the American tradition of pragmatism. With this in mind, surely a more focused examination of eastern thought and its implications for the philosophy of sport would have been a welcome addition

to the collection. It would certainly appear that Asian scholars have a fight on their hands if the hegemony of western philosophising about sport is to be challenged. Perhaps a few articles in the *Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science* might be a good way to start mounting the challenge.

It would be wrong though to end on such a partial note. This companion does virtually everything that such a volume should do. It provides a comprehensive account of the history of the philosophy of sport and of its current concerns. It gathers together along host of eminent scholars. It contains brief introductions to significant concepts and terms and it undeniably makes a strong argument for the philosophy of sport to enjoy a far greater presence in our universities than is presently the case. Last but not least, at a price of £25, the book also offers remarkable value for students of philosophy in general and the philosophy of sport in particular.

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