

*Sociology as a discipline stream*

Playing whilst injured: more on Phobosophy and Philosophy

Assoc. Prof. Mick Champion

Sociology,  
Murdoch University  
email: M.Campion@murdoch.edu.au  
Phone: 08 9360 6400 Mobile 0437882091  
Fax: 089360 6480  
mail: room 2.10 Social Sciences Building,  
Murdoch University,  
South Street,  
Murdoch  
W.A. 6150

Key words

Injury, History, Phobosophy, Philosophy, Theory,

Word count:

Excluding title, abstract, footnotes references etc. - 2969

Including title, abstract, footnotes references etc. - 3505

## Playing whilst injured: more on Phobosophy and Philosophy

### Abstract

An analysis of injury in sport is used to carry the discussion about phobosophy just a little further. The relevance of the idea of 'playing whilst injured' to scholarly work generally, to philosophy and phobosophy more specifically, and subsequently to ordinary members of society is intimated.

### Background

In my 2007 TASA paper I argued that:

- Nigel Pleasants and Ian Hunter (for example Pleasants 1999 and Hunter 2007) share an opposition to that version of philosophy which involves a priori theorizing, which is about atemporal essences/universals and that therefore they could/should be referred to as phobosophers. (Note: I made up the word phobosopher by synthesizing previously unrelated terms; this was a creative enterprise more akin to sculpting than fishing<sup>(1)</sup>).
- phobosophers argue that to seek universal principles not only misses the point but also, by commending the search for ultimate causes, essences, timeless universals is actually a process that prevents us from learning from specific historical events.
- while on the philosopher's side Husserl's commendation of the transcendental reduction by the bracketing out of all everyday interests exemplifies a purging practice, on the phobosopher's side a different transcendental reduction is commended, that is the bracketing out of all that is transcendent.

- for an ordinary person, such as myself, both of these purging practices appeared to require a leap of faith, and I would add now that they each also appeared to require an extraordinary level of ongoing commitment and a remarkable set of skills.

In my efforts to take that discussion further I came across a piece in which Killick argued that contrary to, or alongside, the dominant rhetoric about sport and its health and social benefits many sportspersons place their physical, psychological, social and moral health at risk. This is because participation may be occurring in a cultural context that 'glorifies risk, normalizes injury, accepts pain and encourages individuals to play whilst injured.' (2007: 51). I am proposing here, amongst other things, that certain scholarly activities be considered in these terms.

### **Discussion**

Killick argues that: "Children appeared to 'trade off' risks involving their body against the risk of damage to their social identity." (2007: 62) and she provides illustrations of children and elite athletes who were prepared to continue playing whilst carrying significant injuries rather than risk the possible damage to their social identity that not playing because of injury might have entailed (Killick 2007: 56). For the scholar the 'trade off' is not between 'body' and 'social identity' but between different occasions for damage to social identity. On the one side there are the psychological, social and moral risks involved in presenting or publishing and on the other the risks involved in not presenting or publishing<sup>(2)(3)</sup>.

Killick adds another significant dimension to this analysis when she goes on to propose that:

“...those athletes who chose to talk openly about their pain and injuries or those who remain on the sidelines for long periods of time risk stigmatization, especially if the pain and injuries have invisible sources...” (2007: 55).

And that “Guilt, shame, uncertainty and frustration are frequently reported in the athletes’ discussions of their periods of inactivity”. (Killick 2007: 57).

It should be clear that there are numerous possible avenues for interesting analogous empirical research within academia, especially given the seemingly ever increasing weight placed upon appraisals of research productivity. A particular example would be publishing which merits examination for it provides, amongst other things, a relatively permanent and very accessible presentation of character, much like the video replay in a cricket match, and as such tends to make individuals’ characters appear substantial, stable. Perhaps this is why publishing is perceived to be a risky activity within the academy: why Diane Zorn (2007) could point out that the fear of being found to be an imposter weighs heavily upon many an academic’s mind.

Lyng’s two interrelated themes on another risky activity, are helpful here.

- the first concerns how the skydivers strive to control a hazardous risky situation by mastering a particular set of technical procedures and knowledge;
- the second concerns how, by risking physical injury (or even death itself), skydivers achieve an emotional or experiential high. In this way skydiving is seen to be a response or reaction to “the routinization or standardization of everyday activities” and consequently to provide participants with ‘meaning in life’ (Sjoberg 2005: 247-248).

One element in the set of technical procedures to control risk for the academic writer is to don a suitable persona, a persona that need not necessarily be consistent with her or his everyday persona. Indeed the persona of the academic writer is one which frequently is expected to display distance from the everyday, specialist expertise, to be authoritative, convincing, consistent, imposing and erudite. Skills, some of which we might note are not at all far removed from those required of the imposter. Remembering also the discomfoting distinction Goffman drew between the sincere and the cynical performer (Goffman 1990: 28) a sense of slippery uncertainty, a sense of being out on the edge, may be why fears of being found out are widespread amongst academics.

However, my more specific contention here is that philosophers and phobosophers seek to engage in edgework (see Lyng 2005) of a scholarly variety for their purging practices are specifically designed to take them beyond the routines of everyday life in order that they might view those everyday activities in a different way; in order that they may, in a sense, provide those activities with meaning.

Pleasant's treatment of the contrast between the work Garfinkel proposes that Agnes, the transsexual does on herself and the work of those Garfinkel referred to as the 'normals' is instructive here. Pleasants (1999: 141-142) argues, counter to Garfinkel, that while Agnes's actions were indeed shown to be produced 'reflexively' in the sense that she was consciously following rules (after discovering and in some senses formulating those rules) this is precisely what the normals do not do. Drawing upon Wittgenstein's distinction between 'following a rule' and 'acting in accordance with a rule', Pleasants argues that while they, the normals, act in accordance with the rules they do not, and do not need to, follow such rules, nor continually engage in interpretive work in order to produce and manage their sexuality.

Pleasants (1999: 142) reinforces this by referring to Garfinkel's account of Agnes's extreme regret at needing to be such an accomplished 'practical methodologist' and his report that despite great efforts, she was unable to 'routinise her daily activities'.

My argument here is that if Agnes found routinising her daily activities as a female difficult how much more difficult, given the dominant cultures of the societies in which we each routinely live, is routinising the activities of being either philosopher or phobosopher. If we, ordinary people, normally act in accordance with rules but we do not and do not need to follow such rules, nor continually engage in interpretive work in order to produce and manage our everyday existence, doesn't this illustrate precisely why effectively purging ourselves in the manner that the philosophical or the phobosophical orientation requires is such a very very demanding task? And couldn't this be why the policy that Pleasants commends (1999: 122), which he says is summed up by Wittgenstein's (1968: #66) commendation "*look and see – don't think, but look!*" sounds oh so simple but is so very very far from that.

Isn't it more probably the case that, paraphrasing Geuss's discussion of an understanding of Adorno's approach to Schonberg's music (2005: 174), the extent that we see without thinking, is because we are a part of a tradition and have built up appropriate habits and expectations, and so, to some extent, are able to react to what we see without needing to have it explained to us? As competent viewers, we recapitulate with our eyes that of which what we view is an 'image'.

Seeing without thinking is not quite as simple as it might have seemed. Humans engage in theorizing, theorizing that varies widely in its degrees of sophistication and in its form, but it is theorizing of one form or another. The conceptual tools may be abstract or concrete,

malleable or brittle, imaginative or unimaginative, consciously or perhaps not consciously invoked, but they are conceptual tools nonetheless. Hence the difficulty I have when Pleasants proposes that we should look and see without thinking. Similarly, when Silverman proposes that ...“things being seen afresh” is the hallmark of good ethnographic description (2007: 18) if by this he means we should see without thinking, then I think he asks us to do what humans cannot do, or at the very least what this human imagines/believes he cannot do. This is why the claim Pleasants (1999: 122) makes - that rather than deciding *a priori*, on the basis of an ontological picture how things *must*, and can only be, he offers a more open minded view - needs to be treated with caution.

I think seeing without using conceptual tools - being ‘open minded’ to use Pleasants’s phrase – is beyond us. The concepts we use may be being used as if on automatic pilot, that is we may not be consciously reflecting upon them when we use them, but I consider there is good reason to believe they are operating nonetheless. Consequently, following Geuss (2005) above I am proposing that you and I are part of a tradition (not necessarily the same tradition) and if this is so, and if being open minded was the desired state, then each of us is always playing on with an injury. Being ‘open minded’ (being purged) being either the philosopher or the phobosopher begins to sound more and more like skydiving.

However, skydivers don’t start or stay in the sky - one way or another they start from and come back to the ground. If in an analogous way we accept that bracketing out all everyday interests or all that is transcendent is not possible for humans then we should be very cautious about the claims of philosophers or phobosophers. One way to begin exercising this caution is to heed Hadot’s advice:

“ One must search not only for what the author wishes to say, but also for what he (*sic*) can or cannot say, what he must or must not say, as a function of the traditions and the circumstances that are imposed upon him. (1995: Introduction: 15))

Advice which is not inconsistent with Foucault’s proposition:

“... the ‘author function’ – is undoubtedly only one of the possible specifications of the subject and, considering past historical transformations, it appears that the form, the complexity, and even the existence of this function are far from immutable...”  
(1977: 138)

Wittgenstein’s reference to his own later work as the legitimate heir to philosophy (Toulmin : “Human Understanding: Volume 1: 146 footnote) illustrates that the philosopher and the phobosopher functions are only possible specifications of the subject and are not immutable. I am suggesting that to avoid unnecessary confusion the later Wittgenstein’s work is better referred to as phobosophy rather than as a new form of philosophy.

However, Wickham, a colleague of mine and an advocate of Hunter’s position, argues, in effect, that a decision not to adopt, or continue using, the phobosopher’s approach is a decision to remain in, or to join, the philosopher’s camp i.e. all are necessarily in one camp or the other. Wickham’s position is analogous to that of George W. Bush ie. in ‘the war against terror’: other nations are either with or against the United States. The effect being that the leap I referred to at the beginning of this paper is not from some neutral territory to either of the two camps but is from one camp to another. The point being that the idea of an ‘ordinary or layperson’ that I have left unattended to so far in this paper is historically and



geographically specific. Consequently, in our current era, the understanding of what it is to be a person may carry some specific and very significant baggage with it. For example, what if the dominant culture in the 'West' is grounded in the historically specific and hence contingent ethical discourse that is the discourse of the philosopher as described by Hunter? What if Hunter was correct in his 1988 piece cited by McHoul (1991: 207) when he wrote that "The classroom is where one finds oneself and finds oneself wanting."? In numerous places Hunter writes along the following lines: "... the desire to philosophise (..) is incited through induction into a particular practice of self-problematization oriented to the cultivation of a certain 'higher' kind of philosophical self." (2007: 586) We are being reminded here that this particular and in many ways peculiar version of the ordinary person has been imposed upon us by certain specific traditions and it is this that injures, this that is the impost.

However, if we accept Hunter's (2007) critique of "philosophical history' and agree that philosophies should be placed in historical context this does not resolve the matter of how history is to be done, to use Pleasants's phrase - in an open minded manner, and it seems that while Hunter, and Wickham acknowledge this they rapidly skate past the key issue it raises.

Consider Hunter's remark (2007: 575)

"If past philosophies share no essential or continuously evolving form, and must be described instead in terms of the diverse cultivation of philosophical arts and personae in particular historical contexts, then histories of philosophy will be similarly plural and tied to interests and objectives arising in particular historical circumstances".

I think this represents Hunter's position as does the reference below to battles regarding ideas.

“In the absence of this criterion (truth), it is only battle that determines the historical success of philosophies, and the intellectual historian has no means of understanding their present in terms of the progress of reason and morality.” (2007: 577)

Consider also Wickham’s remarks:

“As noted, I deal with only a few points from these traditions, taken from only some representatives of them and I deal with these points only in enough detail for them to collectively serve as a vehicle by which I can present and promote the Australian sceptical approach” (2006: 31)

and

“It will be remembered that I am claiming that the Australian sceptical approach is marked as a separate approach by dint of the fact that it is especially vehement in its pursuit of its quarry.” (2006: 33)

and

“Instead I suggest the best that can be done - and this is the best that the Australian sceptical approach can ever do, being, I stress once again, a historical approach rather than a philosophical or theoretical one<sup>(.)</sup> – is to retrieve the details of the achievement, highlighting the differences in its form in different countries and highlighting its fragility and partiality, in a bid to prevent it from being taken for granted”. (2006: 39)

Acknowledging that histories like philosophies are historically contingent, that historians organize their analyses along preconceived conceptual lines and that they are necessarily less

than open-minded is important but, provided we don't jump to conclusions about who is clobbering whom, Toulmin's comment on misology is crucial here:

".. that is, a contempt for rational debate. Failing an impartial forum and procedures, rationality would end by going the same way as justice. Truth would yield to the belief of the loudest-mouthed, soundness to the ideas of the most respectable, validity to the intellectual methods the most persuasive. In the theoretical as in the practical realm, disagreements would be decided by the balance of power rather than principles: and the pursuit of well-founded intellectual positions would be replaced by a verbal clobbering-match..." (1972: 43).

## **Conclusion**

We all bear the marks of the schemes of thought in which our work/lives are grounded, which are historically contingent, but also the marks of our own historically contingent partial groundlessness (Geuss 2005: 246). Perhaps more readily acknowledging this through the way in which we conduct ourselves and our work would be both the courageous and the wise way to proceed.

Killick suggests that doctors, coaches and parents frequently counsel caution in relation to injuries but that athletes often contest such recommendations viewing sports-related risk as an unavoidable part of 'the game' (2007: 62). In the universities, where the generation of research income is increasingly the measure of success, cautions of this kind are now less likely to be offered or to be heard. This suggests that it is more urgent that we carefully redesign the scholarly game so as to at least recognise and perhaps reduce the injuries of those playing, but far more importantly to reduce the injuries to those the game influences. To

pursue a previously raised analogy - the impact of a supposed knowledge of the existence of weapons of mass destruction on the Iraqi population comes to mind. We need to think about readers as well as writers!

Acknowledging that we theorize and/or act in accordance with theories and that we don't just see would be a start for we might then be better placed to grasp what philosophy and phobosophy share. By doing so we might inhibit the tendency grounded in a logic of overdramatic dichotomization ('epochalism' as discussed in du Gay (2007: 137 – 157)) that so frequently informs our games, arguments and more serious disputes where we allow uncertain greys to be transformed into blacks and whites. More positively and importantly it is only when we can move beyond blacks and whites that we can find the colours and shades which can reveal more nuanced options. This is also helpful in enabling us to make more of Guess's (205: 244) reminder that a loss of transcendence may lead to profane texts being read as if they were sacred.

### **Endnotes**

Note 1: following the 2007 conference I came across the term via Google, however, that alters nothing in relation to the core argument here for the point isn't whether I or someone else was first, but that someone created/sculpted it; that it couldn't just be found readymade on the sidewalk of history.

Note 2: I don't choose to try to unpick the differences between the psychological, social and moral health risks in this paper. I simply have left them bundled together as separate from physical injuries.

Note 3: In this paper I am focusing upon risk and injury but this should not blind us to the courage those who take risks display, but neither should the reference to courage blind us to the fact that taking risks is not always the appropriate or the best move.

### Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to colleagues at Murdoch University; especially Gary Wickham but also Farida Fozdar, Trish Harris, Barbara Evers and Dave Palmer and to the anonymous reviewer of the paper for the TASA 2008 conference proceedings.

### References

- Campion (2007) 'Philosophy, Phobosophy and Sociology', *TASA &SAANZ Joint Conference, Public Sociologies: Lessons and Trans-Tasman comparisons*. Auckland
- Du Gay (2007) *Organizing Identity*, London: Sage Publications.
- Foucault (1977) *Language, Countermemory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* by Michel Foucault. edited by Donald Bouchard, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Geuss (2005) *Outside Ethics*. New Jersey: Princetown University Press.
- Goffman, E. (1990) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Hadot, P. (1995) *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd
- Hunter I. (2007) The history of philosophy and the persona of the philosopher, in *Modern Intellectual History*, 4, 3, 571 – 600.
- Killick, L. (2007) "P.E. kits, playgrounds and pain: an exploration of children's experiences of risk, pain and injury in sport" pp. 51-65 in Scott-Jones, J. and Raisborough, J. (ed.) *Risks, Identities and the Everyday*. Ashgate: Aldershot,
- Lyng, S. (2005) *Edgework: the Sociology of Risk-taking*. Routledge: London,

- McHoul, A. (1991) readingS, pp. 191-210 in. Baker, C.C. and Luke, A. (ed.) *Towards a Critical Sociology of Reading Pedagogy*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company,
- Pleasants, N. (1999). *Wittgenstein and the Idea of a Critical Social Theory: A Critique of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar*. London: Routledge
- Silverman, D. (2007) *A very short, fairly interesting and reasonably cheap book about qualitative research*. London: Sage Publications,
- Sjoberg, G. (2005) Intellectual risk taking, organizations, and academic freedom and tenure, pp.247 – 272 in Lyng, S. (ed.) *Edgework: the Sociology of Risk-taking*. London: Routledge.
- Toulmin, S. (1972) *Human Understanding: Volume 1*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Wickham, G. (2006) The law-morality relation revisited: a challenge to established traditions by the Australian skeptical approach, *Griffith Law Review: A Journal of Social and Critical Legal Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1 pp. 27 - 48
- Wittgenstein, L. (1968) *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Zorn, D. <http://www.yorku.ca/zorn/>
- <http://caps.mcgill.ca/services/gradweek/gradweek2007/full-details.php?eid=1201>

