

Introduction

Doing an interdisciplinary thesis means you often come across conferences, books, and talks that jarringly force together fields of study. This becomes all the more likely when that interdisciplinarity is between an academic area and a pastime (see, for example, the majority of essays found in the ever increasing array of 'Philosophy and' books). Too often these combinations are, 1) a way to simply expound one's love of a hobby whilst masking it in academic pretence, 2) a ruse insofar as the non-academic subject is barely recognised except by name or as a hook for a theory that actually has very little to do with the hobby in itself, or 3) a cheap way of marketing an event or publication. None of these fears were realised in this conference, however, which interestingly and profoundly brought together the worlds of running and philosophy in a variety of ways.

'Really Trying and Merely Trying' – Paul Faulkner

Paul's talk was a thoroughly enjoyable mix of 'philosophy *and* running' and the 'philosophy *of* running'. In terms of the former, he used the example of long-distance running to great effect to aid him in an exploration of the epistemological problems of how we know what we're doing and first-person authority, as well as raise issues in defining what we mean when we say we know that we're trying to do something. However, he did not leave running as a mere example of his philosophical theory, he also brought us back round to what implications his talk had for running itself in terms of how we should go about preparing for a race and what is needed during a race to achieve our optimal performance. He added to the philosophy *of* running.

Download the talk here: <http://philosophyofrunning.co.uk/downloads/>

'The Purposes and the Practice of Running' – Jon Pike

Jon's talk was just as interesting but tackled ethical issues rather than epistemological ones. He wanted to ask the question 'why run?' and to assess whether this is an important question. The problem appears to be that in trying to excel in such a seemingly individual and self-indulgent pursuit as endurance sport, we often require an external justification. For example, we tell people we're running for charity or to raise awareness of ourselves only in aid of another cause, and when we don't offer such an explanation we are considered a little bit odd. Yet, as runners and sportspeople these altruistic ends do not always, or even usually, play the fundamental role in our motivation. It is here that we find what Colin McGinn called the "characteristic phenomenology" of each sport can help us explain why we run. Using this notion Jon built up an argument for evaluating running on running's own terms as it creates its own standards of goodness and worthwhileness. The real value of running is in the ineffable phenomenology and what we establish as a running community, and this is an OK thing.

Roundtable

The day finished with a roundtable discussion. On the main panel Paul and Jon were joined by Tom Williams (co-founder of “Marathon Talk” podcast, main Parkrun co-ordinator, and a running blogger), Mayur Ranchordas (lecturer in Sport and Exercise Nutrition at Sheffield Hallam, sports nutritionist working with Olympic and professional athletes, and blogger), and Rob Baker (local Hallamshire runner who has competed at county, national and international levels). This fantastic mix of panellists made for a vibrant and enjoyable two-hour discussion. Amongst many things, we delved into areas such as what it means to be a good runner as opposed to a good racer or athlete, Lance Armstrong and doping, Victoria Pendleton and racing for the right reasons, the distinction between virtue as habituation as opposed to overcoming, and if you have a responsibility to excel and what you’re good at.

It is good to see that workshops and events that combine hobbies and philosophy can be stimulating, academically rigorous, and still remain true to the nature of love of the hobby itself. I look forward to more such events.