

***Climbing & Philosophy***  
***Stephen E. Schmid (ed.)***

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**I. The Project**

As a trade paperback in Wiley-Blackwell’s popular series *Philosophy for Everyone*, *Climbing & Philosophy* will appeal to high-altitude mountaineers, rock climbers, and outdoor enthusiasts with a love of vertical terrain. *Climbing & Philosophy* complements Wiley-Blackwell’s *Running & Philosophy* and *Cycling & Philosophy*, as well as its epicurean and hobbyist titles (*Wine & Philosophy*, *Beer & Philosophy*, *Gardening & Philosophy*, etc.).

I have secured 18 contributors, chosen from 44 submitted abstracts. In addition to philosophers, I have abstracts from scholars in political science and forestry conservation. Equally enticing, I have abstracts from three climbing professionals. And, approximately one third of the contributors reside outside the United States. Each contributor will write an essay that is both philosophically stimulating and inviting to the general reading audience.

The volume is divided into four sections: Tying In: Why Risk Climbing?; Quest for the Summit: Cultivating the Climber; Cutting the Rope: Climbing Ethics; and, Mixed Climbing: Philosophy on Varied Terrain.

**II. Brief Contents**

Foreword: To be determined

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Stephen E. Schmid

Department of Philosophy

University of Wisconsin Rock County

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William Gadd

Professional Climber and Extreme Sport Athlete

“More Than Meets the ‘I’: Values of Dangerous Sport”

Pamela Sailors

Department of Philosophy

Missouri State University

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Heidi Howkins Lockwood

Professional Climber

“Risk and Reward: Is Climbing Worth It?”

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Center for Ethics

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“Ethics and High Altitude Rescue Attempts”

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Department of Philosophy

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“Ethics of Free Soloing”

Marcus Agnafors

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Linköping University (Sweden)

“Chipping Holds: Defining Climbing Ethics”

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“Why All Climbing Isn't The Same”

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Manager

The Castle Climbing Centre (London)

“Making a Mountain Out of a Heap”

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### **Unit 4: Mixed Climbing: Philosophy on Varied Terrain**

“From Route Setting to Redpointing: Climbing Counter-Culture as a Gift Economy”

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Department of Political Science

University of Hawaii Manoa

“The Ethics of Guidebook Production”

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“Are You Experienced?: Shortcomings in Self-Knowledge and Reports of Climbing Experience”

Stephen Downes

Department of Philosophy  
University of Utah

“The Beauty of a Climb”  
Gunnar Karlsen  
Department of Philosophy  
University of Bergen (Norway)

### **III. Expanded Contents (with abstracts)**

Foreword: To be determined

“Introduction: Philosophizing into the Void”  
Stephen E. Schmid  
Department of Philosophy  
University of Wisconsin Rock County

In the introduction, I will use climbing as a metaphor for the practice of philosophy, focusing on the fundamental challenges and insights involved in both activities. I will broadly sketch the main philosophical issues addressed in this volume and provide a brief overview of each section of the book, highlighting the issues and debates arising in each essay and between essayists. (e.g., whether parents who climb are acting immorally). I hope to provide insight into each essay and issue while at the same time provoke further thought about the issues raised in this volume.

#### **Unit 1: Tying In: Why Risk Climbing?**

“Selfish, Useless, and Dangerous: Why I Climb”  
William Gadd  
Professional Climber and Extreme Sport Athlete

I've spent 25 of the last 42 years climbing seriously. By "seriously," I mean at least 100 or more times a year. The other 265 days have been taken up with, in rough order of time spent at each activity, paragliding, kayaking, skiing, caving, and work. For the last 12 years, I've been a full-time sponsored adventure athlete, which is a fancy way of saying, I've been paid to do the sports I love. In short, I've lived an incredibly selfish, dangerous, and likely useless life.

There is little doubt that climbing is selfish, in that it is a high-risk activity that returns little of value to the public. As a result, climbers must find defenses for selfish behavior to justify their actions.

The strongest modern advocate for selfishness was Ayn Rand. Rand argues (i) that one is justified in living one's own life without the socioreligious expectation of self-sacrifice and (ii) that selfishness is a virtue worth pursuing. I will argue that climbers and Rand often share common traits in their shared belief in the virtues of selfishness (self-determinism, a myopic view of reality, and self-reliance among other traits) and that this is justifiable. Further, I will argue that the virtues of selfishness and self-reliance are important, if not essential, traits of the successful climber. As such, violation of the virtues of selfishness and self-reliance explain how many climbers enter into the activity

without fully accepting responsibility, thus placing others at risk.

I also will argue that there is a difference between selfishness and self-indulgence. This distinction will help resolve some issues that arise in the climbing life. For example, as a father, am I violating my moral responsibilities to my family when I participate in my selfish climbing activities? Using this distinction between selfish and self-indulgent activities, I will argue that I am not.

### “More Than Meets the ‘I’: Values of Dangerous Sport”

Pamela Sailors

Department of Philosophy

Missouri State University

Some people go to great expense and effort to engage in a sport that carries great risk to life and limb, eagerly climbing to such altitudes that the human body literally begins to die. What is it about dangerous sports that attract people? J.S. Russell defines dangerous sport as, “sport that involves activity that itself creates a significant risk of loss of, or serious impairment to, some basic capacity for human functioning,” and has argued that its value lies in the opportunity it provides for enhanced self-knowledge and self-affirmation. I don’t question this claim, but I suggest that this is not the whole story.

Utilizing a distinction suggested by Jonathan Simon, I argue that there are two kinds of value derived from dangerous sport; one is self-referential while the other is better characterized as self-transcendent or self-negating. This distinction allows one to distinguish between “summiters” – who focus on the individual quest to reach the summit by whatever means necessary – and “mountaineers” – who draw value from relationships with each other and with the environment.

I present narratives from mountain climbing to show examples of these two types. On the one hand are those individuals (“summiters”) who engage in dangerous sport with eyes locked on the goal of reaching the summit, focused on themselves as individuals locked into combat with their own limits. On the other hand are those individuals (“mountaineers”) who participate in dangerous sport for the less tangible values found in encounters through the process of engaging in the sports themselves. Including both types enriches the discussion of the value of dangerous sport.

### “Gratuitous Risk”

Heidi Howkins Lockwood

Professional Climber

To what extent, under what conditions, and for what reasons should we view unnecessary risk-taking as permissible? Many people believe that gratuitous risk-taking, as exemplified by extreme sports such as climbing, is somehow more problematic than other currently accepted forms of risk-taking. It is commonly held, for example, that while it is acceptable for an astronaut who happens to be a parent to take various extreme but necessary risks in order to further our scientific knowledge, there is something blameworthy about a mountaineer who happens to be a parent taking comparable extreme but unnecessary risks, say, by knowingly climbing on an avalanche-prone slope, in order to further his or her self-knowledge, or perhaps our understanding of the human condition. As Robert Macfarlane succinctly puts it, “People who regularly take big risks in the mountains must be considered either profoundly selfish, or incapable of sympathy for those who love them.” I will call this the asymmetry thesis because its advocates believe that there ought to be a difference between our attitudes toward activities that involve gratuitous risk and our attitudes toward pursuits that entail only necessary or ineliminable forms of risk. Is the asymmetry thesis true? If so, what reasons do we have for arguing

that there is a difference?

My aims in this essay are to examine several common ways of defending the asymmetry thesis, all of which are either flawed or based on contentious assumptions. I will then offer an alternative defense. I believe both that the asymmetry thesis captures strong intuitions that are widely held, and that it provides grounds for questioning the permissibility of gratuitous risks under certain circumstances.

“Risk and Reward: Is Climbing Worth It?”

Paul Charlton

Department of Government

Georgetown University

There is something compelling about climbing, yet something equally horrific in its life-or-death consequences. Venturing to the edge of existence is both dangerous and fascinating. Is it worth it? Do the rewards of climbing justify its costs? Though the situation varies from climber to climber, I argue that the benefits of climbing can legitimately outweigh the costs.

To investigate this question, I use the experience of losing my main climbing partner in an ice climbing accident to outline the unsettling consequences of climbing. I will explore three concepts that can play important roles in understanding how a climbing life might be justified.

First, our engagement with genuine risk in the mountains can lead to a deeper awareness of life. By forcing us to confront our potential mortality, climbing can improve the quality, vitality, and authenticity of our lives.

Second, as a structured activity of managing risk and overcoming challenge, climbing cultivates important psychological growth. Learning how to focus our energies and embrace challenge as a valuable force for personal development not only teaches us how to find contentment in the vertical world, but how to find satisfaction in the rest of our lives as well.

Third, climbing can expand our individual human potential. The resilience and self-empowerment emerging from our experiences surmounting fear, adversity, and our own mental and physical barriers enable climbers to accomplish greater achievements in their activities outside of the mountains than would have been possible otherwise. Through its lessons, climbing can inspire individuals and society to extend the limits of what is possible.

However we choose to integrate climbing into our lives, these ideas can help each of us to reach our own response to, “Is climbing worth it?”

“Why Climb?”

Joe Fitschen

Professional Climber

Climbers are often asked why they climb. Yet, as far as I know, those who engage in other sports are not asked why. Insofar as they are forthcoming, the answers climbers give vary, but they frequently cast climbing and climbers in a noble light. Climbing is an ultimate challenge since it risks death; it develops character; it tests climbers’ capabilities and limits; it puts the climber in intimate touch with the natural world. These reasons, however, seem to function more as justifications than as explanations.

I propose a more fundamental reason for why people climb, namely, evolution, and will develop it along three interrelated lines. First, although somewhere along the way our distant ancestors moved

from the forest to the plain, we still retain physical and psychological traits and tendencies that were formed in the trees. Although many, if not most, adults have no urge to climb, it is clear that children are natural climbers, both in ability and desire. The world they want to explore is vertical as well as horizontal.

Second, pleasure plays a key role in evolutionary development, whether the pleasures of sex or the tastiness of certain foods or the warm feelings of friendship. And climbing, although it has no current social benefit and comes with considerable pain and a risk of elimination in the evolutionary game, certainly offers a variety of pleasures. These pleasures provide a basic explanation for why people climb.

Third, evolution also plays a role in social development, and this can potentially throw light on the behavior of the climbing team and the roots of ethical debates and disputes in climbing. This part of the essay will be descriptive, not prescriptive. If successful, it could clear away some of the underbrush that clogs ethical discussion.

## **Unit 2: Quest for the Summit: Cultivating the Climber**

“Freedom and Individualism On the Rocks”

Dane Scott

Center for Ethics

Department of Society and Conservation

University of Montana

Climbing is a sport that emphasizes individualism and freedom. While these are core values of Western society, they have particular manifestation within climbing culture. For both, people value individualism and freedom because these traits are understood to greatly enhance a person's life and the life of the community.

However, individualism and freedom are difficult and disputed concepts. We use them to understand our practices and self-identity, but rarely in a critical and reflective manner. This can be a mistake, as in some cases pursuing these ideals can lead to authentic forms of individualism, but in others such pursuits are derivative and trivial. There is a rich and varied philosophical tradition that allows for critical reflection on these values.

This essay will use Frederick Nietzsche, John Stuart Mill, and Charles Taylor to examine individualism and freedom in climbing culture. Nietzsche advocates throwing off the constraints of traditional morality and emphasizes creativity and power. Mill is against restricting the creativity and experimentation of individuals because doing so might impede individual and social progress. Taylor affirms individualism and freedom but argues for the importance of tradition. Insights drawn from these philosophers can help climbers better understand their practice and the values they share.

Finally, ethics controversies are a lively part of climbing culture. This essay will finish with insights from Nietzsche, Mill, and Taylor on these controversies and their relationship to freedom and individualism in climbing culture. In particular, the essay will examine ethical controversies taken from three periods in the history of rock climbers: the early generation of Yosemite big wall pioneers, the Stone Masters of the '70s and '80s, and modern sport climbing.

## “High Aspirations: Climbing and Self-Cultivation”

Brian Treanor

Department of Philosophy

Director of Environmental Studies

Loyola Marymount University

Working primarily through the lens of virtue ethics, but supplemented by other philosophical accounts as well as the first-hand reports of climbers, I will argue that climbing helps to cultivate a variety of virtues conducive to flourishing.

Among the virtues cultivated by climbing are courage, endurance, humility, self-sacrifice, discipline, and attunement to nature. Of particular interest, however, are a subset of virtues for which there is no ready outlet in contemporary society. Aristotle is correct in pointing out that we develop moral virtues through habituation rather than by nature or teaching. Therefore, the cultivation of a virtue requires a forum in which to practice and refine that virtue. If we have no way to practice courage, we can never become courageous. This, however, is problematic. Our society is obsessed with comfort, convenience, and control, which gives us little opportunity to develop and practice virtues such as courage, endurance, and perseverance – characteristics that clearly remain virtuous (both in the sense that they are admired and the in the sense that they contribute to flourishing) despite decreased applicability in the workaday world.

In support of this Aristotelian reading, we find in the first-hand accounts of climbers not only the belief that climbing does cultivate certain virtues, but also the attestation that many climbers climb for this very reason. Among the notable climbers who have used the heights as an arena for self-cultivation are Walter Bonatti, David Brower, and Yvon Chouinard.

Climbing is not senseless; it can be a tool for the cultivation of excellence. As such, climbing and similar activities should be strongly encouraged, especially in young people. They offer an arena for developing virtues we sorely need, virtues that are hard to come by in a society that frequently encourages vices that inhibit the flourishing of individuals and communities.

## “Mountaineering and the Virtue of Self-Sufficiency”

Philip Ebert

&

Simon Robertson

Department of Philosophy

Department of Philosophy

Sterling University

University of South Hampton

Why do we think some styles of mountaineering better than others? More pertinently, why *should* we? One ideal by which we do so, and indeed one part of the explanation for why we should, centers around the notion, or virtue, of *self-sufficiency*. Other things equal, the more self-sufficient a mountaineer is in his/her climb, the more admirable the climb. The virtue of self-sufficiency comes in degrees; and there are many qualitatively distinct factors that can contribute to the degree of self-sufficiency a mountaineer manifests.

In this essay, we give an account of this notion of self-sufficiency (as it applies to climbing) and defend the claim that it is indeed both a virtue of mountaineering and part of the explanation for why we do and should evaluate some styles of mountaineering as better than others. In doing so, we compare the relative values of classic ascents (e.g. Hermann Buhl’s solo Naga Parbat climb) with guided expeditions (e.g. the increasingly popular Everest tourist route).



## “Climbing and Zen”

Eric Swan

Professional School Counselor

St. Vrain Valley School District

At the heart of climbing is the essence of Zen – the experience of living fully and freely in the natural world. With its emphasis on the here-and-now and the total engagement of one’s physical and mental capabilities, climbing embodies the principles of Zen and can lead to profound insights into the nature of mind. It can lead to fulfillment. It can lead to loss.

This essay illuminates the illusive experience of Zen and explores its presence in various types of climbing such as free-soloing, bouldering, big wall climbs, and expeditions. Key aspects of Zen are examined in the context of climbing, such as “beginner’s mind,” self-discipline, meditation techniques, mind-body unity, and the concept of liberation. I look at two climbers in particular – Derek Hersey and Chris Sharma – for their manifestations of Zen.

Some specific questions are addressed, including: how do climbers experience Zen? What does it mean to “lose oneself” or “listen to nature” in pursuit of the summit? What is the relationship between the mind and the body in the activity of climbing? To what extent do the intellect and intuition direct the climb? What are the aims of climbing and Zen, and how, if at all, are they similar? I conclude in this essay that it is possible to manifest Zen continuously through climbing and attain a sense of nirvana in the process.

### **Unit 3: Cutting the Rope: Climbing Ethics**

#### “Ethics and High Altitude Rescue Attempts”

Richard Otte

Department of Philosophy

University of California Santa Cruz

High altitude mountaineering rescue attempts, or the lack of attempts, are very controversial. Cases such as David Sharp (Everest 2006), who died after around 40 people ignored him as they went for the summit, and Lincoln Hall (Everest 2006), who was rescued after his own party left him for dead, were widely reported in the media. In this essay, I will discuss reasons to attempt or not attempt rescue of high altitude climbers. I may mention certain legal issues, but most of this essay will focus on the ethics or morality of rescues.

Various reasons have been given against there being a duty to attempt high altitude rescues, including: high altitude climbers know rescue attempts are difficult and dangerous, and by climbing give up any claim upon others for assistance; to attempt a rescue often is costly and involves sacrifice, such as giving up one's own summit attempt, or risking lives.

After discussing these sorts of reasons, I will look at whether a utilitarian argument based on the chance of success and the possibility rescuers may perish show we have an obligation not to attempt dangerous rescues. The actual outcome of a rescue attempt is chancy and unknown beforehand, and Pascal was the first to develop decision methods for practical decisions such as this. I will give a very general account of Pascal's framework applied to high altitude rescues, and will discuss whether climbers often have beliefs that render the Pascalian argument against attempting rescue ineffective (beliefs about their own abilities or chance of success).

Given that rescues are not ruled out on utilitarian or decision-theoretic grounds, I will then discuss why we might want to undertake rescue attempts. I will conclude by briefly looking at different

attitudes towards the climbing life, the role of guides, and the consequences for high altitude rescues.

### “Ethics of Free Soloing”

Marcus Agnafors  
Department of Philosophy  
Linköping University (Sweden)

Free soloing is usually considered to be an exclusive game, only played by a few daredevils. As (with few exceptions) a lonely and infrequent activity, the question of the moral legitimacy of free soloing is often perceived to be of little interest. Nonetheless, the game of free soloing – as do every form of climbing which involves a high degree of risk taking – involves considerable ethical issues.

In this essay, I will discuss the moral permissibility of free soloing and the questions concerning responsibility from various normative perspectives. I will begin by providing a brief account of free soloing and the morally relevant questions involved in its practice. This account will include, among other things, common descriptions of what free soloing really is – descriptions which will have bearing on how we are to morally assess the activity. Next, I will approach the question of the moral permissibility of free soloing from various normative perspectives (such as consequentialism, virtue ethics, duty ethics, ethical egoism, and so on). I will also examine ways to argue about the issues of responsibility associated with free soloing. Such issues will include discussions concerning various types of moral responsibilities and different distributions of the various types of moral responsibilities.

The outcome of my discussion will show that free soloing can't be dismissed merely as an act of a morally irresponsible individual, nor simply accepted as an activity the performance of which falls well within our individual freedom. Rather, being a multifaceted activity, free soloing must be carefully assessed from several different aspects of normative theory.

### “Chipping Holds: Defining Climbing Ethics”

William Ramsey  
Department of Philosophy  
University of Nevada Las Vegas

An important area of philosophical work is practical (or as it is sometimes called, “applied”) ethics. Rather than construct theories about what makes different types of acts morally right or wrong, practical ethicists use ethical reasoning to address specific moral dilemmas, like the moral status of abortion, assisted suicide or our obligations to the needy. Practical ethicists often try to show that popular attitudes about the morality of certain acts are confused, unjustified or incompatible with other things believed. Practical ethicists thereby play the role of social critics, frequently challenging conventional norms and attitudes.

For specific activities like climbing, it is possible to develop a modified form of practical ethics that is tailored to the specific normative dimensions and problems that are associated with that pursuit. Because all forms of climbing present distinctive ethical challenges, this is one area where there can and should be greater overlap between philosophical reasoning and climbing. In this essay, I'll develop a preliminary framework for climbing practical ethics, illustrating how it would work with a specific example whereby popular attitudes about the morality of a certain practice (chipping holds) are shown to be out of sync with other common attitudes and practices.

### “Why All Climbing Isn't The Same”

Benjamin Levey

Manager

The Castle Climbing Centre (London)

With the recent boom in the indoor climbing wall industry, and the International Federation of Sport Climbing campaign to have indoor competition climbing included in the Olympics, climbing has never experienced such growth or enjoyed as much exposure as it has in recent times. While climbing may be blossoming as a sport, debate continues amongst its participants over the question of just what constitutes the essential nature of climbing, with many arguing that indoor competition climbing (an offshoot of sport climbing) is nothing but a poor simulacrum of the real deal, or traditional climbing.

I locate the source of this debate in the ethical codes that are typically taken to define different styles of climbing. By applying lessons learned from Hegel and surveying the ethical codes of traditional and sport climbing, we can see that these styles embody essentially different experiences, which offer fundamentally different insights for the participant into the self and the relation of the self to the world. It is the diversity of these insights that perpetually fuel debate about different styles of climbing, and which must in part be viewed as responsible for the current popularity of indoor climbing.

### “Making a Mountain Out of a Heap”

Dale Murray

Department of Philosophy

University of Wisconsin Baraboo

As with any other recreational activity in the outdoors, climbing is sure to leave longstanding marks on rock faces, bringing to bear the question of environmental damage done by this activity. The cumulative effect of bolting, climber's trails and pollution are just a few examples of the kind of environmental destruction and aesthetic deterioration to mountains that can occur over time due to the cumulative effects of several expeditions.

However, these types of environmentally degrading activities are not plausibly caused by any sole climber or even a single team. With that said, it is rational to say for any individual climber that his/her effects on mountain are negligible. Hence, he/she needn't refrain from climbing. But this isn't merely a case of a collective action problem, but the difficulty also stems from “environmental degradation” being a vague term that may admit of degrees.

I will investigate this free-rider problem as it applies to climbing using the latest work on collective action problems and show how it relates to sorites paradoxes and vagueness. I conclude that while we can't know precisely where the activity of climbing leads to environmental degradation, we may have available to us a pragmatic solution to the paradox that calls for some climbers to refrain from climbing on some mountains. I propose a system of climbing permits that reduce the number of climbers on certain mountains.

#### Unit 4: Mixed Climbing: Philosophy on Varied Terrain

“From Route Setting to Redpointing: Climbing Counter-Culture as a Gift Economy”

Debora Halbert

Department of Political Science

University of Hawaii Manoa

What makes a high paid fashion designer quit her job, buy a Volkswagen Euro van and move to Kentucky to serve pizza and climb every day? What possesses a college-educated engineer to quit his lucrative career to be a climbing guide? Why would a professional pilot spend thousands of dollars and hours establishing climbing routes for no reward except getting the honor of the first ascent and the ability to name the route? Why indeed, would anyone sacrifice what most Americans understand as the “American Dream” of a career, a house, and lots of material possessions, to live in a tent or car, spend money only on climbing gear, and have no permanent employment or discernable future goals?

In this essay, I would like to investigate the counter-cultural elements of climbing and what draws people to live outside the norm in order to pursue a passion. First, from route setting to redpointing, climbing culture functions as a gift economy that defies the economic logic of a capitalist system. The entire foundation of the sport itself exists because of the voluntary time and labor donated by those who establish routes. Second, the most avid participants within climbing culture have followed their passion to such a degree that they have simply opted out of mainstream life, traveling the country and often eschewing real jobs to pursue a passion for the sport. Finally, the commodification of climbing has become a possibility only because of the gift culture created and perpetuated by those who are passionate about the sport. However, as many who love the sport seek to make a living at climbing, there are implications for the sport and for our attitudes towards the wilderness in general. Ultimately, this essay will investigate how climbing culture functions as a gift economy that undermines classic economic models premised upon monetary incentive structures. The world of climbing demonstrates the possibility of an alternative to the mainstream – an alternative where the gift makes everything else possible.

“The Ethics of Guidebook Production”

Selina Chen

&

Stephen Golley

Global Ethics

Director

Kings College London

Software Anvil

Earlier this year local climbers in the Pyrenees spoke out against an initiative by some German climbers to produce a guidebook to a certain area. A major debate about the ethics of guidebook production, particularly by non-local, commercial guidebook producers, ensued in climbing magazines and internet forums in Spain, France and the UK.

Non-local guidebook producers tend to make use of locally available information about crags and their routes, and in the controversial cases, this is done without the consent of local climbers. While a UK court has ruled that the dissemination of route information does not constitute plagiarism, ethical questions remain over the moral ownership of topographic information and its use for commercial purposes, and over whether the preferences of local climbers in relation to their local crags and the use of local information claim any priority against the interests of non-local climbers.

With the growing popularity and globalization of sport climbing these issues are likely to continue. Are guidebook producers being parasitic on the efforts of local climbing communities or are they serving the wider global climbing community and the local economy by producing accessible and

often superior guidebooks? Do local bolters have prior claim to the use of local crag information and any say over whether visiting climbers should be encouraged? Do guidebook producers have an obligation to contribute financially to local bolting funds for the re-equipping of routes? Lastly, to what extent can increased use of new technology and the internet resolve at least some of these conflicts by making it possible for locals to disseminate topographic information in an accessible, high quality and standardized format?

This essay will detail the different ethical conflicts involved in the debate over the production of non-local guidebooks, and will examine the extent to which the different arguments are justifiable by looking at the principles implicitly invoked in these debates, namely liberty, property rights, utilitarianism, local self-determination, and commodification. It will set out a new ethical code that balances the interests of local and visiting climbers and preserves what it argues is a crucial non-commercial element to climbing. The principles of this code will be reflected in a proposal for a web-based interface that will enable a creative commons approach to the dissemination of topographic information.

“Are You Experienced?: Shortcomings in Self-Knowledge and Reports of Climbing Experience”

Stephen Downes

Department of Philosophy

University of Utah

Recent empirically informed work on self-knowledge shows that we should be far less confident in our self-assessments than we are, as well as less confident in statements about the quality of our own experiences. Climbing is, almost above all else, the pursuit of experience.

Here I use reported shortcomings in self-knowledge as a way into examining some of the frequently occurring inconsistencies between climbers’ own accounts of their experiences and others’ accounts of their behavior. Such inconsistencies range from the benign: “I grabbed the hold” vs. “You were two inches below it,” to the more troubling: “I put up the first free ascent” vs. “You used several points of aid.” Understanding more about the biology and psychology that produces our climbing experiences can help us explain why some of our reports are off base. This understanding also gives fresh insight into how we can organize reports of our experiences and use them both to improve our own climbing and perhaps improve the standard of reporting of climbing achievements.

“The Beauty of a Climb”

Gunnar Karlsen

Department of Philosophy

University of Bergen (Norway)

Climbers often describe routes as “beautiful.” But, what makes a route beautiful? Two lines may look equally beautiful, while only one of them is experienced as a beautiful climb. And some lines may look bad while the climbing is beautiful. In this essay, I will argue that the key to a route’s beauty lies in the experience of bodily movements the climber performs on the route.

Evaluating a climbing route as beautiful is a two-fold process that involves both vision (seeing the line as beautiful) and our sensory experiences of bodily position (experiencing the climbing as beautiful). A discussion of this two-fold process will provide insight into the felt experience of climbing and the role of the bodily senses in aesthetic appreciation. This two-fold approach challenges the traditional philosophical conception of aesthetic appreciation, which has a strong bias against the so-

called “bodily senses” (body position, movement, and touch) emphasizing instead the “intellectual senses” (chiefly sight and hearing).

Climbing is a diverse activity. For purposes of this essay, I will focus these questions to rock climbing. In addition, I will consider the above view in light of how the beauty of longer routes may arise at the intersection of the beauty of the line and the combination of features of the route, like avoiding objective dangers, being exposed, having key passages that solve apparently difficult sections, and so on.

Ultimately, discussion of the two-fold aesthetic of climbing will give insight to aesthetic evaluation, in general, as a process that depends on conceptual development; in particular, how experienced climbers learn to evaluate routes by certain criteria.

#### **IV. Length & Timeline**

The approximate length for this volume is 90,000 words. *Beer & Philosophy* was approximately 85,000 words and *Wine & Philosophy* and *Food & Philosophy* were 92,000 and 98,000 words, respectively.

The above-mentioned essays have been commissioned with a due date of December 31, 2009. The essays will be edited within 10-12 weeks. The final manuscript will be submitted to Wiley-Blackwell by March 31, 2010.

#### **V. The Editor**

Stephen E. Schmid is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at University of Wisconsin Rock County. His current research focuses on motivation in sport and education. In the philosophy of sport, he has published and presented on the role of motivation in the conception of play. Stephen has been rock climbing and mountaineering for more than 20 years.

#### **VI. Call for Abstracts (Issued May 27, 2009)**

Call for Abstracts

##### ***Climbing & Philosophy: Because It's There***

Stephen E. Schmid, Editor  
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Abstracts for a prospective title in the Wiley-Blackwell series *Philosophy for Everyone, Climbing & Philosophy*, are solicited. *Climbing & Philosophy* will unite the insights of philosophers, interdisciplinary academics (psychologists, sociologists, etc.), and climbing insiders. The abstracts and resulting selected essays should be written for an educated but non-specialized audience.

The scope of this volume includes climbing activities on mountains and rocks. Thus, discussions may include aspects of these activities, including but not limited to: climbing mountains/mountaineering (e.g., Everest,

Kilimanjaro, Colorado Fourteeners), rock climbing (e.g., aid, free, and free solo climbing), bouldering, and gym climbing.

**Possible topic areas and issues include, but are not limited to:**

*Metaphysical/Spiritual:* Climbing and the meaning of life; Zen and climbing; Finding religion in the mountains-- Mountains and the sacred; Climbing and the good life

*Sport:* Purity of the sport of climbing; Dangerous sports and self-affirmation; Getting down alive is the only finish line; Speed climbing and the loss of mindfulness; Do climbing competitions pervert the purity of climbing?; Are first ascents true adventure?; Is gym climbing an authentic climbing experience? (In)compatibility of climbing and performance enhancing drugs

*Ethics:* Trust in one's climbing partner – to cut or not cut the rope; Responsibilities of climbing guides – climber safety or successful summit?; Ethical issues of high-risk sports; Is using supplemental oxygen cheating?; Climbing as a means of developing the Cardinal Virtues (prudence, justice, restraint/temperance, and courage)

*Death & Dying:* Living with death; Grief and affirmation in climbing; Motivating oneself after witnessing a climbing fatality; Camus, climbing, and *The Myth of Sisyphus*

*Aesthetic:* Rock climbing and its relationship to the aesthetics of dance; The beauty of a fine line/crack/route; Rock climbing as an aesthetic experience

*Psychological:* Climbing and the concepts of risk, self-hood, and self-knowledge; Climbing and the risk aversion paradox; Climbing and living in the moment; Climbing as the ultimate FLOW experience; Climbing and the expression of Self-reliance; Hardship and character development of the big wall climber; Awareness of the limits of self in nature; Phenomenology and climbing; The intrinsic value of climbing

*Gender:* Gender equality in climbing; Women climb smarter; Lynn Hill-setting the standard for free climbing El Capitan's *The Nose*; Title IX and climbing

*Environmental:* Is climbing green?; Ethics of altering the environment when climbing (e.g., bolting, climber's trails, pollution on Everest); Climbing and the human desire to dominate nature; Climbing and a sense of place

*Cultural:* Climbing and Aristotlean friendship; Base camp culture (e.g., Yosemite's Camp Four, Everest Base Camp); Philosophical discussions of individual climbers (e.g., George Mallory, Lynn Hill, Tom Frost, Reinhold Messner, Yvon Chouinard, Edmund Hillary); Sherpa mountain culture

**Guidelines for Abstracts and Contributions:**

- Abstract of essay (approximately 200-300 words) due by: July 1, 2009
- Accepted authors will receive notification by: August 1, 2009
- The submission deadline for accepted essays: December 31, 2009
- Final essays must be between 4000-5000 words and be aimed at a general, educated audience.

Abstracts should be submitted electronically to Stephen E. Schmid at [stephen.schmid@uwc.edu](mailto:stephen.schmid@uwc.edu). Other proposals for series titles also are welcome; please direct those to Fritz Allhoff at [fritz.allhoff@wmich.edu](mailto:fritz.allhoff@wmich.edu).