Chapter 5 Philosophy of Physical Activity

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Philosophical Thinking in Physical Activity

- Reflection is the key.
- Various types of reflection are used.
- Decisions are based on good judgment and logic.
- Valid and reliable results are expected (even without controlled experiments as in the physical sciences).
Power of Reflection

• Allows for a broader range of phenomena to be studied (as compared to areas limited to testing, measuring, or examining physical objects)
• Forces us to examine our own beliefs in greater depth and to develop well-reasoned arguments for them
• Helps us become more open-minded: We entertain, examine, and possibly accept ideas, theories, and positions we may previously have ignored or discarded without good reason
Common Issues of Physical Activity Reflection

1. The nature of physical activities such as sport, play, games, exercise, and dance, and the nature of human embodiment (“What is” questions)

2. Knowledge and physical activity (“How do we know” questions)

3. Values connected with physical activities and embodiment (“Should” questions)
Figure 5.1
Goals of Philosophy of Physical Activity

1. To better understand the world and our lives in it
2. To understand the nature and value of physical activity, particularly in the form of exercise, sport, games, play, and dance
3. To understand what a person is and the role that physicality and movement play in how we come to know ourselves and our world
Research Methods in Philosophy of Physical Activity

- **Inductive reasoning** begins with specific cases to develop broad, general principles.
- **Deductive reasoning** begins with broad factual or hypothetical premises in order to determine more specific conclusions that follow from them.
- **Descriptive reasoning** begins with one example of some phenomenon and then varies it to see how dramatically it changes. Change (or its absence) allows a more accurate description of the central characteristics of the item being examined.
- **Speculative reasoning** uses inductive, deductive, descriptive, or imaginative reasoning in making claims that may or may not be true, but that are extremely difficult to demonstrate or otherwise defend.
Overview of Knowledge in the Philosophy of Physical Activity

- Nature of the person (specifically, the mind–body relationship)
- Nature of sport and its relationships to work and play
- Values promoted by physical activity
- Ethical values and sport
The “Person Problem”
(How to Understand the Mind and Body)

• **Materialism**
  The human being is nothing more than a complex machine; subjective experiences are real but have no power.

• **Dualism**
  The mind and body are separate; our thoughts count; priority is given to the mind.

• **Holism**
  The mind and body are interdependent; all behavior is ambiguous; the mind and body work together.
Games and Sport

• Games are artificial problems.
  – Games are created by a set of rules that specify a goal to be achieved and limit the means that participants can use to reach the goal.
  – Rules exist for the sole purpose of creating the game; they would be absurd in ordinary life.

• Sport is a game in which motor skills are required to reach a goal, as well as, tested.
Significance of Rules

• Rules serve as formal types of game cues. What should be accomplished and how we should accomplish it.

• Rules create a problem that is artificial yet intelligible.

• Respecting the rules preserves sport. It makes room for the creation of excellence and the emergence of meaning.

• Rules liberate us. Allow us to explore our capabilities in a protected environment.

• Rules can be changed when the challenge becomes too easy or too difficult. We like our sports to match our ever-changing potential.
Significance of Skills

• The rulebook of each sport indicates the set of motor skills that the game is designed to test.

  Specific motor skills for each sport develop out of the relationship between the goal of the game and the means allowed and prohibited to pursue it (the rules).

• A set of motor skills provides each sport with idiosyncratic characteristics that make it unique.

• Motor skills represent the standards of excellence by which players evaluate their performance.
Significance of Competition

Competition does the following:

- **Determines winners and losers** (how well one person or team achieves the goals of the game)
- **Compares opponents**
  
  Requires two parties to commit to the “same test” to determine athletic superiority. This means that both are competing for the same purpose (test). For example, parents “playing” with their children in a scrimmage is not considered competition if the parents are not truly committed to showcasing their best skills and “beating” their children.

- **Values excellent play**
  
  The process of competing in the game is valued as much as the outcomes that result from the play.

- **Can be organized both competitively and noncompetitively**
Play and Duty in Sport

• Sport is a goal-oriented activity in which we accept rules.

• Sport may be encountered as a chore or as play.
  – Duty-like
  – Play-like
Duty-Like Sport

- Sport participation is justified by the beneficial effects of the sport (utility).
- Sport is viewed as something that we must do because of what it does for us.
- Examples of these effects include improving our health, teaching civil values, fostering national pride, and combating sedentary living and obesity.
Play-Like Sport

- **Sport participation is justified by its intrinsic value.**
  Sport is associated with an autotelic attitude that is in contrast to all forms of instrumental or utilitarian orientations toward the world.

- **Play is focused on what we are doing for its own sake, and nothing more.**
  Even if extrinsic rewards and goals were the initial impetus for participation, a shift toward the intrinsic value of participation produces a play-like focus.
Two Potent Combinations

• The combination of physical activity (sport) and play is a powerful incentive to get us moving.
  – When the doing becomes intrinsically meaningful and sensuously enchanting, we are more likely to continue with the activity.
  – The artificiality of sport seems to be especially attractive. We love to solve problems created for the sole purpose of discovering whether or not they can be solved.

• Physical activity (sport) and play PLUS competition can be even more powerful to get us moving.
  – The uncertainty and tension of discovering our chances in the sport combined with the ambiguity and drama of learning how we will fare in comparison to our opponents is very attractive.
  – The play-like nature allows us to develop friendships with fellow sportspeople, and aim for excellence, not just victories.
Physical Activity Values

• Values are our conceptions about the importance of things that we use to make decisions, both in personal and in professional matters.
  – Moral values refer to our character and how we ought to behave.
  – Nonmoral values refer to objects of desire such as happiness, ice cream cones, and good health.

• Values and physical activity (sport)
  – Ethical
  – Aesthetic
  – Sociopolitical
Values Promoted by the Field of Physical Activity

• Health-related physical *fitness*
• *Knowledge* about the human body, physical activity, and health practices
• Motor *skill*
• Activity-related *pleasure or fun*
• Each of these values supports a different approach to participating in and developing physical activity programs.
• These four values are not mutually exclusive.
Ethics

• Ethics
  – What is right and wrong, and what ought and ought not to be done
  – Helps us to answer the question, How should we behave?

• Sport ethics
  – Formulating defensible standards of behavior
  – Impartial, consistent, and critical
  – Follows a universal moral point of view
    • No one counts more than anyone else (players, fans, coaches, etc.).
    • Rule bending or intentional harm to an opponent is not justifiable.
Basic Behavioral Guidelines for Sport

• Follow the rules of the sport.
  – The rules are the foundations of the artificial problem you find special.
  – Cheating alters and destroys the sport and vitiates the legitimacy of results.

• Respect your opponent.
  – Your opponent is a partner who shares your interests and passion.

• Strive to bring out the best performance in one another.
  – Recognize and celebrate athletic excellence, your own as well as your opponents'.
  – Seek opponents who are close to you in ability.

• Care about your opponent’s well-being as much as your own.
  – Your opponent is integral to the contest, and a victory is fully meaningful when opponents are at their best.

• Remember that how you play says as much about you as an athlete as the scoreboard does.
Reflecting on Ethics

- Consider your own sport participation. Have all of your actions been moral and ethical?
- Think carefully about your own values and how you can make ethical decisions in sport before you begin your next competition.