CHAPTER 4
PHILOSOPHY OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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• Examine the nature of philosophical thinking.
• Describe how philosophy fits into the field of kinesiology.
• Review the history of the philosophy of physical activity.
• Describe research methods used in the philosophy of physical activity.
• Provide an overview of knowledge in this domain by focusing on three issues: the nature of the person, the nature and value of play, and the ethics of sport.
Goals of Philosophy of Physical Activity in Kinesiology

• To understand the nature of health and physical activity, particularly in the forms of exercise, sport, games, play, and dance
• To understand our level of confidence in our claims in kinesiology
• To understand the most important values of physical activity as well as its contribution to good living
• To learn how we ought to behave in sport and in our professional lives as kinesiologists
Why Use Philosophical Thinking?

• “Queen of the Sciences”
• Love of wisdom
• Philosophy asks big, meaning-of-life questions and uses research tools that transcend those of other disciplines
• Nature and value of philosophy
  • Reflection is the key.
  • Various types of reflection are used: personal opinion, speculation, probable assertion, truth assertion.
What Do Philosophers Do?

• Philosophy’s goal is to better understand the world and our lives in it.

• In kinesiology, that means to better understand human movement or, as it is identified in this text, physical activity.

• Philosophic thinking is needed in order to address a number of issues that are important for kinesiologists.
  • What is the scope of our field? (metaphysics)
  • How confident are we in our findings? (epistemology)
  • What really matters in kinesiology? (axiology)
  • How should we behave as kinesiologists? (ethics)
History of Philosophy of Physical Activity

• Beginnings: 1960s
  • Distancing from educational philosophy and single profession of physical education
  • Early scholars: Metheny, Slusher, Weiss, Zeigler, Kleinman

• Organizations and the subdisciplines: 1970s
  • Formation of Philosophic Society for the Study of Sport (PSSS), now the International Association for the Philosophy of Sport (IAPS)
  • Formation of the Journal of the Philosophy of Sport (1974)

(continued)
History of Philosophy of Physical Activity (continued)

- Why did the philosophy of physical activity grow slowly?
- What factors are responsible for its greater influence over the past two decades yet still be on unsure footing?
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 (phenomenology). Change (or its absence) allows a more accurate description of the central characteristics of the item being examined.
**Figure 4.2**

Inductive reasoning

- Starts with specific cases...
- and develops general principles.

Deductive reasoning

- Starts with general principles...
- and examines specifics.

Descriptive reasoning

- Looks at one example...
- and describes its essential qualities.
Overview of Knowledge in Philosophy of Physical Activity

• Who our clients are and what a person is
• Nature of the person (specifically, the mind–body relationship)
• Nature of sport and competition and their relationships to work and play
• Values promoted by physical activity
• Ethical values and sport
The “Person Problem”  
(How to Understand 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.
Understanding the popularity of Sport, Competition, and Play

• Sport grounded in artificial problems; built-in inefficiencies create challenges (unlike most of life)
• Sport as showcase for motor skills
• Sport and the creation of excellence and meaning; many sport skills would be meaningless in ordinary life
• Sport and fair competition
• Sport as delightful play (requires autotelic attitude)
• Sport as beneficial duty
• Meaningful combinations of sport, play, and competition
What Values Are Related to Physical Activity?

• Values are our conceptions of 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 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 to *pleasure* or *fun*
- Each of these values supportive of a different approach to participating in and developing physical activity programs
- These four values not mutually exclusive
What Do You Value?

• Generally speaking, in what order do you rank the four values cited in the previous slide – fitness, knowledge, skill, and pleasure – in your physical activity experience?
What Ethical Obligations Do Sportspeople Have?

• Ask what is right and wrong and what ought and ought not be done
• Helps us to answer the question, “How should we behave?”
• Formulating defensible standards of behavior
• Impartial, consistent, and critical
• Follow a universal moral point of view
• No one counts more than anyone else (players, fans, coaches, etc.)
• Rule bending, intentional harm not justifiable
Basic Behavioral Guidelines for Sport

• Follow the rules of the sport.
  • Rules are the foundation of artificial problem you find special.
  • Cheating alters and destroys sport, violates results’ legitimacy.

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

• Strive to bring out the best performance in one another.
  • Recognize and celebrate athletic excellence, yours AND others’.
  • Seek opponents who are close to you in ability.

• Care about your opponent’s well-being as much as yours.
  • Victory is fully meaningful when opponents are at their best.

• How you play says as much about you as the scoreboard does.
Reflecting on Ethics and Sport

• 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.

• Be sure to consider what is good for the sport and the interests of everybody involved.
Wrap-Up

• Philosophy offers not just a body of knowledge but, more important, an intriguing way of thinking about reality.

• Philosophy of physical activity helps us reach new insights about various forms of physical activity and what it means to move and do so skillfully.

• Philosophy is particularly important at a time when many ethical questions need answers and when the values of physical activity are contested.

• No kinesiologist can avoid establishing priorities or making value judgements and ethical decisions.