

Greek Metaphysics and the Perspectives of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle in the Context of Physical Education

Dr. Shri Krishna Patel¹, Sanjay Srivastava² and Dr. Manoj Kumar Prajapati³

¹Associate Professor, Education Training, Department of Physical Education, D.A.V. Training College, Kanpur, INDIA.

²Assistant Professor, Education Training, D.A.V. Training College, Kanpur, INDIA.

³Associate Professor, Education Training, Department of Physical Education, Prof. H.N. Mishra College of Education, Kanpur, INDIA.

¹Corresponding Author: gooddo.kris@gmail.com



www.ijrah.com || Vol. 2 No. 5 (2022): September Issue

Date of Submission: 02-09-2022

Date of Acceptance: 24-09-2022

Date of Publication: 29-09-2022

ABSTRACT

Plato emphasized the importance of physical education for soul development in his book 'Phaedo', which Socrates shunned for the same reason. Plato emphasized the physical component and the harmonious balance of the material and spiritual in his books 'Republic' and 'Laws'. In his book 'Politics', Aristotle defined three elements of excellent education, the first of which was physical health. In this framework, sports and physical education should take precedence.

Keywords- Greek Metaphysics, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of physical education in Greece, two opposing viewpoints prevailed. These two opposite metaphysical schools of thought are naturalistic and antinaturalistic. The naturalistic view was that man is a balanced creation whose development should include physical and intellectual education because man's nature works in harmony with physical and spiritual forces. This approach believed that achieving a harmonious balance between the academic, spiritual, and physical aspects was essential.

On the other hand, the antinaturalistic approach believed that physical education is subservient to the intellectual process. This approach felt that intellectual development should take precedence, with physical development as a supporting role. Antinaturalistic regarded the mental process (brain) superior to the physical body. Naturalistic valued both the body and the mind. One thing that both techniques had in common was that they were both in favor of brain development. These two perspectives differed on the importance and position

of the body and mind. The naturalistic approach was more popular than the antinaturalistic approach in popularity.

1.1. Dualism Views and Beliefs

A philosophical and theological interpretation of human existentialism leads to dualism. In the Phaedo, Plato discusses the dualistic approach to determining whether a person is a body or a soul. In the fourth century B.C., Socrates and Plato, two of Athens' best philosophers, theoretically explained the state of the body based on philosophical dualism. This dispute substantially affected the purpose and status of physical education at the time. Dualists coined "dualism" because they believed that persons consisted of two components: the mind and the body.

1. The physical pursuit of the truth and reality is impossible.
2. The mind and soul are immortal and have no end, whereas the body is mortal and has a limited lifespan.
3. The body's wicked disposition corrupts the soul and misdirects it off its course. Therefore, it seems unpleasant and futile to attempt to train something that will not exist forever.

4. Thoughts originating from the mind, the self, and the mind are immortal, although the body is mortal.

5. The body is the opponent of the mind and ego, which emerge through the pursuit of truth and reality.

Although the Greeks established and valued physical health, exercise, physical training, and physical education, they did not place much importance on dualistic beliefs and perspectives. On the one hand, the Greeks prized intelligence and valued physical fitness.

1.2. The Rise of New Philosophy in the form of Classical Humanism

The Greeks' main objective was to understand what it meant to be truly human. What are man's position in the natural world and the cosmos? What actions should we take, and what activities should we avoid taking? What components of our social interactions are morally right and wrong? Due to the many issues at its core, a new humanistic philosophy emerged, one that prioritized the welfare of people as a whole. According to this viewpoint, the Greeks saw their gods as ideals and tried to live up to those standards. The evidence of this can be seen in the Greek deity and goddess idols. The artist who sculpted the statues of Zeus, Apollo, and Athena created an unmatched work of art, portraying the gods as ferocious warriors and the goddesses as feminine.

In the eyes of the Greeks, human development heights were physical grace and agility. Greek children received a strong foundation in academics and the arts from an early age. The Greeks held that being physically adept was required to follow their gods. In Greece, physical culture was associated with both exercise and religion.

II. IDEAS OF SOCRATES' AND PLATO REGARDING BODY

Socrates left no written work. He only lectured orally. Plato's dialogues contain all of the information we have about Socrates. In all conversations, Socrates is the main speaker. All sources agree that Socrates and Plato were great philosophers and accomplished athletes.

Socrates and Plato's metaphysical concepts were based on dualism in the nature and reality of human existence. Human existence is divided into two categories: corporal existence and spiritual-ideological existence. This divide ends when the soul departs the body at death. The philosophy's formation and practice that nurtures the spirit has always been deemed more sophisticated than physical training in all of Plato's conversations and publications, such as the *Phaedo* and *Republic*. Socrates and Plato felt that mental exercise is crucial since a person with intellectual abilities can contribute to numerous domains, such as science, literature, architecture, art, poetry, philosophy, and being immortal. Significant contributions and ideas are timeless and unlimited, so they will never disappear.

On the other hand, the degradation of the body is a well-defined phenomenon. The body is constantly

accelerating the acquisition of accurate and authentic knowledge. Through sense-generated information, the body renders us senseless. We should not rely on our senses to reveal the truth but on our souls and minds.

What is the use of developing and nurturing bodily existence when it is sure to deteriorate? As a result, it is prudent to cultivate the spiritual/intellectual side, foster creativity, and inspire individuals and civilizations to contribute forever and ever.

2.1. Socrates' and Plato's perspectives on Physical Education

Plato wrote several dialogues, though it is impossible to say when he first began writing dialogues. Although Socrates is the central figure in all conversations, Plato does not write anything during his lifetime. Plato's allegiance to Socrates as a disciple. He hoped to demonstrate that whatever he said should be based on Socrates' teachings. Plato provided two types of approaches to the body based on his metaphysical dualism (physical education).

2.2. First Approach – Development of Soul and Exclusion of Body

His initial approach to the body forms the basis of Plato's first-class dialogues in the *Phaedo*, which express Socrates' beliefs. There is a dialogue in the *Phaedo* about Socrates' final days in prison and the day of his death. In this dialogue, Socrates talks about how delicate the soul is and how rough the body is.

1. Socrates claimed the only way to obtain genuine knowledge is through the soul.
2. The body contaminates and perplexes the soul because of its primitive state.
3. Only a true philosopher understands that death is the only way for the soul to be free of physical bonds and constraints. Only once the spirit has been freed from the body's sinful nature can it know the truth.

Thus, in the dialogues between Socrates and his disciple Plato detailed in the *Phaedo*, only the soul's formation was discussed, with the physical component primarily ignored. These metaphysical and epistemological notions harm physical education's position in the body's context since the body is given no significance. The body describes as the soul's adversary. Physical education was deemed a vital element of the educational curriculum contributing to personality formation. However, this overarching idea of epistemology was not supported by the educational philosophy of the time.

2.3. Second Approach – Harmonious balance of the Body and Mind/Soul

Socrates was executed in 399 BC at the age of 70. Plato's soul revolted due to his dearest teacher's ruthless murder. Plato thought it was pointless to live in Athens, a city that did not recognize the worth of its master. Plato himself was exiled from his homeland because he disliked the atmosphere in Athens. Plato left the country for ten years when he traveled to various

countries and gained knowledge. During this time, Plato's mind grew, and he could organize his ideas without Socrates' help.

Plato provided his second point of view on the body and physical education in his writings, the *Republic* and *Laws*. *The Republic* was written around 385 BC, while the *Laws* were Plato's final work. This point of view is in the second and third categories of Plato's dialogues, which are where his ideas get more developed.

In the *Republic*, Plato presents his second point of view on physical education in the following ways:

1. According to Plato, citizens' education and training are crucial parts of personality formation. Gymnastics and music were given a prominent place in Plato's curriculum. In Athens, these were already in place. They were also deemed suitable by Plato. The first part of the programme focuses on physical training, while the second focuses on mental development. Gymnastics and sports not only improve physical health and beauty, but they also have a spiritual impact. Plato advocated for music education within traditional academic topics. Plato also emphasized the importance of poetry and dance education. He saw poetry as the foundation of intellectual life. Plato claimed that combining gymnastics and music could lead to complete personality development. Plato recommended the harmonic product of both components because if more focus is placed on gymnastic exercises, the individual will become more ferocious and rigid. In contrast, if more emphasis is placed on music, the person will become more feminine and delicate.
2. Athletes-warriors, according to Plato, are required to protect the Republic against enemies. Warriors must be not only physically strong but also mentally alert. If the intellectual capacity of the athlete-warriors is not improved, a party of warriors will topple the Republic's governing system, which is led by philosopher-kings. So, athlete-warriors should be trained physically and mentally to have enough physical skills to protect their state and enough intelligence to understand how the government system works.
3. Plato felt that outstanding citizens were required for the state to function correctly. Plato referred to athletes who engaged in physical training solely to enhance their physical side while neglecting their intellectual side as languid and drowsy. Plato also said that these people were useless because they only worked on their minds and didn't do anything to improve their bodies.
4. Plato felt that a healthy body looks nice visually and is less susceptible to diseases and ailments. When sports and workouts maintain a person's physical health, the brain is safeguarded from diseases and problems, and its functions are completed more efficiently. A healthy body does not hamper the development of the brain; instead, a healthy body makes the brain more attentive and concentrated. Even though the body doesn't help with learning anything, it must make it harder to know if it is sick or out of order.

In the *Republic*, Plato emphasizes the cohesive symmetry of body and soul. In the *Phaedo*, he emphasizes the development of the spiritual side at the expense of the physical side. The physical side of the body was deemed essential in Plato's second point of view on the body, but this component was not considered equal to the intellectual side. Plato wrote in the *Republic* that intellectual development is more critical than physical development, but without returning to the dualistic perspective. Plato's commitment to dualism is based on how he thinks we can know things and how we can get knowledge

III. IDEAS OF ARISTOTLE REGARDING PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Aristotle was born into a medical family in the Macedonian city of Stagira. Aristotle's father, Nicomachus, was a physician in King Philip's kingdom. Aristotle arrived in Athens at eighteen and began his education at Plato's Academy. He was a student at the Academy for 20 years. Plato's most talented disciple was Aristotle. Plato referred to his protégé Aristotle as the Academy's mind and best reader.

Emperor Philip of Macedon invited Aristotle to read to his son shortly after Plato's death. Aristotle accepted the invitation and spent four years teaching Alexander. This teacher-student interaction was a historical and significant coincidence. Aristotle's teachings highly impacted Alexander.

Alexander had little time to study philosophy when he gained the throne after his father's death. As a result, Aristotle decided that staying in Macedonia was no longer acceptable and returned to Athens in 334 BC. Aristotle established the *Lyceum* school in Athens, commonly known as the *Peripatetic school of philosophy*, in 335 BC. The *Peripatetics* were Aristotle's followers. Aristotle would wander around the *Lyceum* grounds, educating his students and participating in philosophical debates.

3.1. Aristotle views on physical education

Aristotle analysed the existing curriculum and separated the complete educational curriculum into four parts before determining the academic curriculum: 1. read; 2. write; 3. compose music; 4. Painting

Aristotle explained each subject's purpose and scope. Reading and writing instruction, according to Aristotle, should be based on practical utility. Exercise, according to Aristotle, is beneficial for physical development and the advancement of the spirit. Music enriches the soul, while art develops emotions. In his book *Politics*, Aristotle also examined educational degrees. Aristotle defined *ideal education* as having three sides.

1. The first part of an excellent education is body training. We provide exercise and sports education as part of this program.

2. The other side of an ideal education is training the non-intellectual element of the soul, i.e., the emotional side. Music, literature, and moral education are all part of it.

3. Aristotle ranked exercise education as the first degree of education. He stated that the youngster should focus on having a well-formed body and a good education before reading and writing.

It is vital to pay close attention to the physical aspect of the soul to educate both the intellectual and non-intellectual sides of the soul because mental health depends on physical health. Athletics, according to Aristotle, would generate solid and healthy youth who would guard Athens against outside invaders during wartime and serve Athens during peacetime. According to Aristotle, physical education (gymnastics) is essential to ensure the development of the mental/spiritual side, who felt that health depends on physical health.

IV. CONCLUSION

Socrates ignored physical education and spoke only about the growth of the soul, which Plato highlighted in his book *Phaedo* under the first class of dialogues, as can be seen from his, Plato's, and Aristotle's views on physical education. In his books *Republic and Laws*, Plato emphasized the physical component and the harmonic balance of the material and spiritual. Aristotle listed three qualities of high-quality education in his book *Politics*, with physical fitness being the first. Sports and physical education should take precedence in this context

REFERENCES

[1] Demirel, D. H., & Yildiran, I. (2013). The philosophy of physical education and sport from ancient times to the enlightenment. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 2(4), 191–202. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.2.4.191>

[2] Mechikoff, R. A. (2006). *A history and philosophy of sport and physical education: From ancient civilizations to the modern world*.

[3] Meyer, A., Erich, L., Frederic, R., Vázquez, J. Z., Thomas, R., Murray, A., Oskar, N., Arata, S., Roland, L., Chen, T. H.-E., Browning, R., Shimahara, N., Lauwerys, J. A., & Huq, M. Shamsul, Scanlon, David G., Moumouni, Abdou. James Publishing, Chambliss, J.J., Gelpi, Ettore, Riché, Mukerji, S.N., Armove, Robert F., Nakosteen, Mehdi K., Szyliowicz, Joseph S., Ipfling, Heinz-Jürgen, Graham, Hugh F. and Marrou, Henri-Irénée (2021, November 1). *education*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education>.

[4] Kealer, E. (1949). *The Greek philosophy of physical education in ancient Athens as compared with*

the philosophy of physical education in twentieth century United States. Woman's College of the University of North Carolina.

[5] Reid, H. L. (2007). Sport and moral education in Plato's republic. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 34(2), 160–175.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.2007.9714719>

[6] Lynch, J. P. (1972). *Aristotle's school; a study of a Greek Educational Institution*. University of California Press.

[7] Carr, D. (2010). On the moral value of physical activity: Body and soul in Plato's account of virtue. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, 4(1), 3–15.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17511320903264222>

[8] Chryssafis, J. E. (1930). Aristotle on physical education. *Journal of Health and Physical Education*, 1(1), 3–51.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23267240.1930.10623398>

[9] Dombrowski, D. A. (1979). Plato and athletics. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 6(1), 29–38.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.1979.10654148>

[10] Stolz, S. (2014). *The philosophy of physical education: A new perspective* (1st ed). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315762258>. Routledge.

[11] Laertius, D. (1979). *Lives of the eminent philosophers* (D. Hicks (Trans.), 1 and 2. Harvard University Press.

[12] Stonehouse, L. P., Allison, P., & Carr, D. (2011). Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates: Ancient Greek perspectives on experiential learning. In *Sourcebook of experiential education* (pp. 32–39). Routledge.

[13] Han, D. R. (2017). A study on the ancient Greek physical education spirit. *Journal of the Korea Society of Computer and Information*, 22(4), 99–105.

[14] Thorburn, M. (2017). Intelligence, practice and virtue: A critical review of the educational benefits of expertise in physical education and sport. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, 11(4), 453–463. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2017.1334003>

[15] Lynch, J. P. (1972). *Aristotle's school; a study of a Greek Educational Institution*. University of California Press.

[16] Casimir, A. (2013). Plato and Dukor on philosophy of sports, physical education and African philosophy: The role of virtue and value in maintaining body, soul and societal development. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 3(01), 231–239

[17] Devine, J. W., & Lopez Frias, F. J. (fall 2020 Edition). Philosophy of sport. In E.N. Zalta (Ed.). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/sport>, *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*.

[18] <https://sites.psu.edu/rc/perdue/2014/09/19/the-big-three-of-greek-philosophy-socrates-plato-and-aristotle/>.