



# Historical Perspectives on Physical Activity & (Mental) Health

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'Greece, Olympia is the common homeland of the entire civilized world' Victor Hugo



- What role did exercise and physical education play in the lives and educational systems of the ancient Greek civilization?
- What were the beliefs of physicians and philosophers?
- How is exercise connected to health and mental well-being?
- What were their goals in pursuing the symmetry among their body, mind, and soul?
- What qualities should a gymnast (trainer/physical educator) possess to be considered suitable in the pursuit of health and well-being?
- Can we discern a message that applies to the modern world?

\*Exercises consist of movements

"Movement is the characteristic feature of life" (Plato)

\*Innate human instinct

\*Applies to all living organisms

\*Drives the pursuit of nourishment

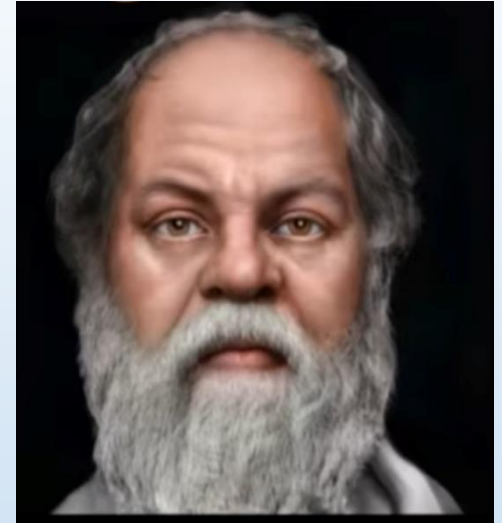
\*Nourishment for both body and spirit

\*Fundamental and instinctive tendency



# GENESIS OF SPORTS

- \***Orchesis** (dance) born from **movement, rhythm, and melody**
- \*Dance essence: Sensation of rhythm
  
- \***Play** results from combining **movements with others**
- \*Play's essence: Instinct for movement and interaction with others
  
- \***Competition and rivalry** introduce **excellence**
- \*Excellence in physical, mental, and spiritual aspects
- \***Winners** emerge, leading to the **creation of sports**





# GENESIS OF COMPETITION/CONTEST

\*Measures introduced for common and equal conditions in the pursuit of victory

\***Competition** evolved from sports with **organized control** for **excellence**

The cultures that consciously cultivated the previous conditions contributed

to the creation of

**athletics**

**gymnastics**

**and (physical) education**

# PLATO (427-347 BC)



\*Proper education: Body (gymnastics) and soul (music)

Gymnastics: exercises, orchesis, play, athletic competitions

Music: any occupation that cultivated the soul and the spirit

\*Physical education linked to psycho-spiritual well-being

\***Lifelong** physical exercise integral to overall education

\*Symmetrical (**balanced-harmonious**) education: balanced physical and mental development: useful thinking and actions

\*The body thrives with healthy habits and suffers from the detrimental, the soul too is influenced by justice and injustice

## Plato & Hippocrates

a) gymnastics, preserves health and physical disposition: nutrition and rules

b) medicine, which operates therapeutically

# Aim of education:

Symmetrical physical and mental development and perfection

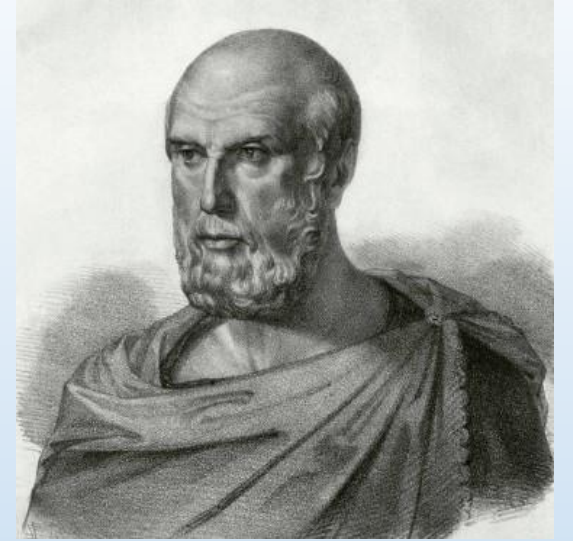
- \*Symmetric exercises preserve physical and mental well-being
- \*Adorned soul: harmony between mental abilities and physical condition
- \*Health and happiness: balanced care for both body and soul: including diet, rules, and exercise

“From a young age, they need to be trained in this (gymnastics), not to turn them into athletes, but to nurture their souls, ensuring their bodies are willing and ready servants”.

Plato



# Hippocrates (460-377 BC) Hippocratic Physicians



- \*Holistic healthcare model
- \*Asclepieion (Kos): general treatment: physical exercise, massage, walks to restore health, well-being of the soul, and the inner peace of man
- \*Health hinges on the equilibrium of diet and exercise
- \*Exercise viewed as an art (=science) for health and fitness preservation
- \*Emphasis on moderation in education, tailored to individual factors
- \*Caution against excessive, exhausting exercise, and advocacy for a balanced exercise-relaxation cycle to prevent illness

# Aristotle (384-323 BC)



- \*The primary life goal is human happiness (eudaimonia), achieved through bodily harmony
- \*Exercise and medicine are equal components of the art of health, securing bodily harmony and happiness
- \*Moderation in both exercise and medicine, warning against excess and deficiency
- \*Happiness: balanced middle path between extremes of action



## Plutarch (46-120 AD)



- \*Symmetric physical exercise for health and military readiness
- \*Caution against exhausting or highly specialized exercises
- \*Exercise: maintain body harmony and strength without hindering intellectual development, emphasizing the importance of balance in life

## Galenus (130-200 AD)



- \*Exercise = active movement with controlled respiration
- \*Moderated exercise + balance without athlete-like dependency = **Health**
- \*"Exercise with a Small Ball" maintains moderation and balance, warning against excessive exercise
- \*Exercise = therapeutic to insomnia, anger, sorrow, excessive consumption

## Philostratus (179-249 AD)

- \*Ancestors' physical training, though primitive, didn't harm athletes' mental and physical health
- \*Hygienic and therapeutic aspects of good physical condition
- \* Endorsement to athletic life and competitions within reasonable limits



# Gymnasts

\*Hippocratic physicians believed a gymnast (trainer) should possess knowledge of anatomy, physiology, exercise types, and their athlete effects

\*Galen expanded this by advocating knowledge in psychology and medical advancements for body development

\*Philostratus stressed the importance of well-educated gymnasts with a profound understanding of their field

\*The role of a gymnast was vital for proper exercise implementation and athlete well-being, requiring a multidisciplinary knowledge base





# Conclusions



- \*Movement is an instinctive state
- \*Ancient Greece emphasized exercise and physical education for holistic development, including gymnastics and music education
- \*Physical well-being was closely linked to mental and spiritual health, with moderated exercise promoting balance
- \*Physicians and philosophers recognized exercise's therapeutic potential
- \*Gymnasts were expected to possess broad knowledge
- \*The timeless message from ancient Greece underscores the pursuit of symmetry (balance and harmony) in life
- \*This holistic approach remains relevant, advocating for a balanced and healthy lifestyle in the modern world



## Homer

One should excel in both works of the intellect (spirit) and the body.  
Therefore, the individual should be in good condition/health as a whole.

### Classical times

"kalos kagathos."

'Kalos': beautiful and harmonious in the body

(K) agathos: noble, developed, and courageous in the soul

### Imperial period

"a healthy mind in a healthy body"

continued to provide the solution for human life



Thank you for your attention  
and  
for your presence here today!

