

Editorial

Soma and Psyche

“ . . . the potential for becoming a human being lies largely in the enrichment and elaboration of the sensory and motor ranges of experience ”

Gardner Murphy, *Human Potentialities*

The contributions contained in this issue are a small reflection of a growing scientific interest in the effects and values of physical activity. Researchers in physical education seek to test the basic tenets of their discipline, to establish facts and obtain insights into interactions that may exist between experiences in physical activities and the biophysical, psychological and social outcomes generally ascribed to them.

Physical educators are faced with the challenge of helping human beings to run faster, jump higher and throw farther, but their ultimate end is the well-being and the betterment of mankind. Often, the only goal of sports seems to be victory; however, other dimensions of active sports participation have been recognized since ancient times. When the Egyptian priest Anaharsis observed the physical activity of the Athenians in the gymnasium, he exclaimed, “Solon, Solon, you Greeks are all children.” Solon replied:

And I shall now tell you why we compel our young men to train their bodies. It is not simply on account of the contests, in order that they may be able to take the prizes — very few out of the entire number have the capacity for that — but because we seek a certain greater good from it for the entire state and for the youngsters themselves.

The Greeks understood very early the interaction between *Soma* and *Psyche* and they used the one to affect the other. They encouraged athletic endeavors where the pressure was not on winning, but on excellence of performance for its own sake. Under these circumstances, pride of effort took precedence and a new pleasure in being alive emerged. The participant experienced a thrill which became part of the fabric of his being — heart, muscles and mind were all deeply involved. Through his muscular effort in sport, he was elevated to a new level of existence so that, win or lose, he was a champion because he had triumphed in the struggle to control his own body.

This process of becoming by means of total body activities is little appreciated in an era where a sharp dichotomy exists between body and mind. Unfortunately, the mechanization of modern life tends to result in neglect and atrophy of the body. Indeed, the condition reminds us of the fate of Anteus in the Greek legend whose strength waned as he lost contact with the ground from which he had emerged but which still nourished him. However, even in this binary, computerized world, the classic harmony of body and mind or unity of strength and spirit is still possible. The papers which follow give some indication on the contemporary interrelation between intellectual research and physical activities. It is hoped these studies will both satisfy the minds of readers and generate greater appreciation of bodily prowess.

Vassilis Klissouras