



# Philosophical meanings of physical (body) culture

UDC 130.2 (045)



PhD, Associate Professor **E.R. Rogozina**<sup>1</sup>  
 PhD, Associate Professor **L.V. Batalova**<sup>1</sup>  
 PhD, Associate Professor **E.M. Berestova**<sup>1</sup>  
 Dr. Sc. History, Professor **G.V. Merzlyakova**<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>Udmurt State University, Izhevsk

Corresponding author: elfrogozina@yandex.ru

## Abstract

**Objective of the study** was to analyze the body culture philosophy progress history in the axiological context.

**Methods and structure of the study.** We used the following key research methods: philosophical, ideological and socio-cultural analyses of the corporeality concept, physical/ body culture and physical culture since antiquity through the middle ages to nowadays.

**Results and conclusion.** Our philosophical, ideological and socio-cultural analyses of corporeality and body / physical culture give a historic overview of the concepts of physical education in their evolution.

Ancient philosophers were among the first to analyze human body culture, with the most focused and comprehensive analyses found in the heritage of Plato and Aristotle.

There is a growing need for further development of philosophical conceptions of body culture in view of the traditional and new mass media and blogosphere being increasingly engaged in the body beauty cult for the last decade. The popular interests are not limited by the diets and sporting lifestyles as such; but rather focused on a virtual body shaping up by the mass media toolkit. The efforts to "create" a beautiful (and real) body to present it on Instagram are contributed by the beauty industry experts that offer a range of services to shape up any body; whilst virtual bodies with their presentations are unlimited in fact, with the modern software filters available to make up every drawback and underline every benefit. A real human being in this virtual environment often loses its identity to evolve into a sort of 'ideal carrier' of a set of optional bodily parts including lips, eyes, nose, etc.; with the human body viewed as a kind of investment asset or frame lacking any individuality.

**Keywords:** *physical culture, body culture, physical culture philosophy, motor activity philosophy, body beauty cult.*

**Background.** Physical culture philosophy is a fairly young research discipline. Till recently it has been traditional for the body culture to be of interest for only natural scientific research by biologists, physicians, physiologists and psychologists that were later on joined by humanitarians including cultural scientists, sociologists, teachers and others. Despite the fact that philosophy has always been interested in body/ physical culture (since antiquity as far as we know in fact), it was only in the late 20th century that it became subject to a purely philosophical comprehensive research. Presently the notion of physical culture is commonly interpreted within the philosophical knowledge domain as the body/ somatic/ physical culture and (personality-sensitive) physical education [8],

with both of the definitions comprising a subject field for the modern body culture philosophy.

**Objective of the study** was to analyze the body culture philosophy progress history in the axiological context.

**Methods and structure of the study.** We used the following key research methods: philosophical, ideological and socio-cultural analyses of the corporeality concept, physical/ body culture and physical culture since antiquity through the middle ages to nowadays.

**Results and discussion.** The concept of body culture / physical culture appears multifaceted, with the research community offering a few definitions for the term. For example, body culture is considered an in-



tegral part of a social culture and one of the social activity fields with its health/ physical progress priorities. This interpretation is somewhat academic since fairly common for the reference literature [7]. Physical culture may be defined as the system of values within the whole range of physical activity formats. Some authors interpret physical culture as the motor activity array or set of exercises geared to transform individual body. One more group of the physical culture definitions prioritizes its sporting domain. Having analyzed the above common definitions, we found that the researchers tend to associate physical culture with physical activity in combination with a range of other socio-cultural functions. In this context, it may be beneficial to consider body culture in the context of the general human culture.

Ancient philosophers were among the first to analyze human body culture, with the most focused and comprehensive analyses found in the heritage of Plato and Aristotle. Thus Plato, famous ancient Greek philosopher, emphasizes that health, physical beauty and perfect body shape should be built up and maintained based on a sound artistic and natural scientific background by lifelong physical exercises and gymnastics [5].

The so-called body beauty cult is known to originate in the ancient Greece in B.C. period. The ancient Greek philosophers gave a special priority to individual physical education due to popularity of the Spartan upbringing with its narrow military contexts. The Greeks classified the physical culture practices into physical exercises, i.e. general physical education and agonistics that mean special precompetitive trainings and competitions as such. Gymnastics, in its turn, implied a variety of exercises for multisided physical fitness, including palaestrika i.e. dance elements for movement grace, plasticity, postural shaping and controls, and perfect body shaping practices including orchestrika and outdoor games [4].

Plato promoted the Spartan educational system with a special priority to the intellectual progress facilitating elements, particularly in the preschool educational system dominated by game formats. The games were designed to train children for challenges of the then adult lifestyles. Children were even encouraged to watch warfare from a safe distance. Plato analyzed benefits of consistent governmental educational system to secure harmonious physical and intellectual education conditional on the "young people's commitment for an abstemious lifestyle with compliance

of good hygienic rules" [5]. These ideas may be considered as forming basics of the physical education culture to a degree.

Aristotle, another ancient thinker, also believed in the colossal benefits of good physical education and underlined that the care of body should be preceded by a care of the soul. He was, however, very critical for the Spartan physical education system arguing that the bodily stresses tend to hamper an intellectual progress. He believed that an educational system should give a top priority to beauty rather than animalistic side. This was the prime reason for him to recommend eased gymnastics practices in the body culture agenda [2].

The PBC epoch with its admiration of a beautiful athletic body and physicality was followed by a period of hostility to corporeality. The medieval Christian asceticism preached suppression of natural desires and attractions and condemned sinful earthly corporeality as opposed to the world of divine grace in every Christian doctrine and practice. Pope Gregory the Great called the body "a disgusting capsule for the soul" in the times when monks who mortified their flesh were ranked on top of the social role models. This epoch polarized the spiritual, noble "top" of the human nature nearing the Absolute as opposed to its corporeal, carnal and godless "bottom" [3]. It was common to believe that a sinful human body deserves being mortified by a wide range of flesh killing and punishment practices. No wonder that flagellatism or the movement of the scourged was so widespread in the XIII century. It is worth noting that the medieval philosophy paid a special attention to the unity of soul and body. Thus Thomas Aquinas viewed a human is a soul-and-body creature with its substantial integrity secured by an indissoluble connection of soul (as form) and body (as substance) [1].

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a French thinker, came up with an original and revolutionary concept of natural physical education that was outlined in his treatise "Emil, or On Education" [6]. The physical education success in this concept is determined by the following three key factors: nature (individual qualities and gifts from nature), people (sharing their practical experiences and helping the individual to socialize), and things (that help develop the individual behavioral models when coping with multiple life situations).

Furthermore, Rousseau believed that child's behavior should be controlled unobtrusively, without coercion, to help him arrive at the right solution on own



discretion. This theory offers an age-specific education ranking system with the following four progress periods: (1) birth to speech appearance (0 to 2 years), with a special emphasis on physical education; (2) 2 to 12 years phase, with an emphasis on sensuality; (3) 12 to 15 years time, with a priority to intellectual education; and (4) 15 to 18 year period with a top focus on morality cultivating education; with the educational process of a socially responsible citizen completed by 25 years of age.

Rousseau gave a special importance in the above system to the first and second periods critical for a good health formation, when the child should not be swaddled, nor protected from drafts and cold to temper his body. In the 2 to 12-year period, child should spend as much time as possible outdoors to independently explore and test the outside world when jumping over a fire, climbing trees, running, playing with peers, getting familiar with everything within his reach.

In addition, Rousseau prioritized physical labor among the key intellectual progress facilitating means. He believed that a child should both master every accessible tool and excel in some vocational craft to later on feed himself and his family. In this craftsmanship excellence process the philosopher gave special importance to the intellectual practices; with physical labor recommended to reasonably alternate with intellectual work for active recreation. He also recommended a special focus on the moral education in the 15-18-year phase when the "storms and passions" period comes, as it is the right time for the adolescent to "learn ropes of a human life" [6].

**Conclusion.** Our philosophical, ideological and socio-cultural analyses of corporeality and body / physical culture give a historic overview of the concepts of physical education in their evolution. The ancient Greeks were so much obsessed with the ideas of physical perfection that gave a primary role to the physical education issues, and it was at that period that the body beauty cult emerged; with the physical education formats, in opinions of the Greek philosophers, being still reasonably measured to effectively protect and improve health.

The corporeality and body beauty prioritizing period was followed by the medieval era with its extremely negative attitudes to body, corporeality and physical education. J.-J. Rousseau tried to offer a 'golden mean' in this educational domain with his natural harmonized physical education concept with the ages-specific phases to secure a gradual progress from the regular physical education practices in the childhood

complemented with reasonable labor/ craft mastering trainings and intellectual practices in adolescence ended up with a morality cultivation education. The Rousseau system gave a strong impetus to progress of the global physical education concepts, with some of his provisions forming a basis for the M. Montessori's education method and Soviet pedagogical systems.

There is a growing need for further development of philosophical conceptions of body culture in view of the traditional and new mass media and blogosphere being increasingly engaged in the body beauty cult for the last decade. The popular interests are not limited by the diets and sporting lifestyles as such; but rather focused on a virtual body shaping up by the mass media toolkit. The efforts to "create" a beautiful (and real) body to present it on Instagram are contributed by the beauty industry experts that offer a range of services to shape up any body; whilst virtual bodies with their presentations are unlimited in fact, with the modern software filters available to make up every drawback and underline every benefit. A real human being in this virtual environment often loses its identity to evolve into a sort of 'ideal carrier' of a set of optional bodily parts including lips, eyes, nose, etc.; with the human body viewed as a kind of investment asset or frame lacking any individuality.

## References

1. Akvinskiy F. Teaching about the soul. Moscow: Azbuka-klassika publ., 2004. 480 p.
2. Asmus V.F. [ed.] Aristotle. Works: in 4 volumes. Moscow: Mysl publ., 1976. V. 1. 550 p.
3. Bakhtin M. Creativity of Francois Rabelais and folk culture of Middle Ages and Renaissance. Moscow: Khudozh. lit. publ., 1990. 543 p.
4. Yeger V. Paideia. Upbringing an ancient Greek. Transl. from Germ. By M.N. Botvinnik. Moscow: Shichalin Greco-Latin office, 1997. V. 2. 336 p.
5. Platon. Plato. State. Moscow: AST publ., 2016. 448 p.
6. Russo Zh.-Zh. Selected woks. In 3 vol. Moscow: Knizhny Klub Knigovek publ.. 2018. V. 2. Emil, or on education. 736 p.
7. Russian Dictionary. in 4 volumes. RAS, Institute of linguistic research; A.P. Evgenyeva [ed.]. 4th ed., ster. Moscow: Rus. yaz.; Poligrafresursy publ., 1999. 702 p.
8. Stolyarov V. Philosophy of sports and human physicality. In 2 vol. Kn. 1. Moscow: Universitetskaya kniga publ., 2011. 766 p.