

*The Mind - Body Relationship as
Related to Theories of
Physical Education: The Islamic
View in Comparison with the
Christian View.**

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Abstract

Views of the nature of man generally and the nature of the mind - body relationship particularly have been central to theories of physical education. The relative importance of the body in relation to the mind has determined the value of physical education compared to intellectual education. This paper compares the general Christian view with the Islamic view concerning their conceptions of man and his mind - body association to determine the ways through which such views affected theories of physical education. The comparison shows that the Christian view conceives the mind and the body of man as separate and distinct entities. Emanating from this dualistic conceptions, the human body is either disparaged and ridiculed, and therefore physical education is non-existent, or, at the best, is made subservient to the mind in a "master- servant" relationship and consequently physical education has lower status and prestige than intellectual education in any hierarchy of education values. In contrast to such view, the Islamic view considers man as absolutely unitary and entire human where the whole body is united with the whole mind. As result, the body, according to Islam, is as important as the mind in the building of human personality. Consequently, in the Islamic view, physical education is harmoniously joined with intellectual education in the fullest development of man's self— actualization. The Uniqueness of the Islamic view of the wholeness of man is found to have important implications to theories of physical education.

I

Introduction

Modern life has departmentalized, specialized, and thereby fragmented the being of man; so we now find ourselves faced with the problem of putting the fragments together into a whole and finding meaning in our existence. If educators in general, and physical educators in particular, are to educate the individual in this setting of stress and strain, they must aim for a heightened awareness of the nature of man and the nature of the individual needs and interests. In this context, Methery (1962: 88) argued that "each physical educator is obligated to identify his views and beliefs about the nature of man, his body, his mind, and the values that give meaning to his human life." In fact, the nature of man, with particular reference to the traditional mind—body question, is central to theories of physical education. In his analysis of the development of physical education in Western culture, Fairs (1968) argued that the history of physical education might best be understood in terms of the history of man's concepts of the body, that is, landmarks in the history of physical education are simply monuments to cultural mentality changes where major changes in the cultural history of physical education have been precipitated by a reversal of the hierarchical order of mind and body or vice versa. If the body and the mind are considered as separate and distinct entities, the body is considered in conflict with the mind as "the enemy of reason." As a result, the body is disparaged and ridiculed, and physical education is non-existent. If the body is only accidentally and coincidentally linked with the mind, the body is made subservient to the mind in a "master servant" relationship, and physical education will be given lower status and prestige than intellectual education in any hierarchy of education values. However, if the body is considered integrated with the mind in a psychosomatic relationship, the body will have value and esteem, and physical education will be harmoniously joined with intellectual education in the fullest development of man's capacities and potentialities.

This paper inquires into the Islamic view of the nature of man, with particular concern to the traditional mind—body question in order to determine the ways through which such view informs our understanding of physical education. The Islamic view is analyzed in comparison to the general Christian view in relation to its conception of the mind-body question.

II

The Mind-Body Relationship as Related to Theories of Physical Education: Introductory Remarks:

As even a cursory glance at the history of philosophy attests, the significant task of elucidating and resolving the problem of the inter dependence of mind and body presents as plethora of intriguing and intricate difficulties. In fact, Hume (1955: 76 - 77) asserted that there is no "principle in all nature more mysterious than the union of soul with body, by which a supposed spiritual substance acquires such an influence over a material one that the most refined thought is able to actuate the

grossest matter." The recent literature in the philosophy of physical education has addressed itself, in part, to anthropological inquiries investigating the nature and structure of man. Specifically, the question of the relationship of mind and body and its applicability to, or manifestation in, physical education actively pursued (see, for example, Abe (1974) ; kaelin (1979) ; Meier (1975) ; O'Neill (1974) ; and Slusher (1967).

For most of history the mind and body have been considered separate entities. In fact for approximately 2500 years the cognitive mind did not think what the senses perceived. Under the influence of Plato and Descartes there arose a strong metaphysical dualistic tendency which divided man into two distinct substances - body and mind. Emanating from this dualistic concept and under the influence of the Church, man of the Middle Ages not only debased the body but considered it to be inherently evil and corrupt. Such severe asceticism was not accepted by counter Reformation educators nor by the Humanists. Often, western scholars assert that it was not until the Renaissance that the concept of the "wholeness of man" was to reappear. In this paper, this assertion will be challenged by arguing that the concept of the "wholeness of man" was put forward in the Islamic view several centuries before the Renaissance. However, before articulating the Islamic view regarding the nature of man and his mind—body relationship, the Christian view concerning the mind—body relationship is analyzed.

III

The Christian View of the Mind—Body Relationship :

The Roman Catholic church came to dominate society in Western Europe from 400 A. D. until the Reformation in the 16th century, and since then Roman Catholicism has shared religious power with protestant groups.

At first opposing Roman sport spectacles, such as chariot racing and gladiatorial shows, because of their paganism and brutality, the Christians eventually came to regard the human body as an instrument of sin. Early Christianity gradually built a foundation based on asceticism, which is a belief that evil exists in the body and, therefore, the body should be subordinate to the pure spirit. As a result, church dogma and education sought to subordinate all desires and demands of the body in order to exalt the spiritual life. In this context, Bernard (1923: 532) argued that "always in a robust and active body the mind lies soft and more lukewarm; and, on the other hand, the spirit flourishes more strongly and more actively in an infirm and weakly body. Accordingly, nothing could have been more damning than the promotion of active recreation and sport.

Until Reformation, spiritual salvation was the dominant feature of the Christian view. As such, the cultivation of the body was to be subordinated to the salvation of the spirit, especially since the body, it was believed, could obstruct the realization of this aim. Erasmus (1930:178) wrote an essay "On the Contempt of the World," Which articulately characterized the Christian view toward body and soul:

"The monks do not choose to become like cattle; they know that there is something sublime and divine within man which they prefer to develop rather than cater for the body... Our body, except for a few details, differs not from an animal's body but our soul reaches out after things divine and eternal. The body is earthly, wild, slow, mortal, diseased, ignoble; the soul on the other hand is heavenly, subtle, divine, immortal, noble. Who is so blind that he cannot tell the difference between body and soul and so the happiness of the soul surpasses that of the body."

The Reformation of the early 16th century signaled the end of the vicelike grip that Roman Catholicism had on the minds and habits of the people of Europe and England. With this religious conversion, one might think that the pejorative view of sports might have perished where the teachings of Martin Luther and John Calvin imported to England, in its Puritan form, became a greater enemy to sport and physical education than Roman Catholicism had been. Puritan influence grew throughout the 16th century, and by early 17th century had come to have considerable influence on English life. Moreover, since Puritans were some of the earliest English immigrants to America, they had considerable influence on the social life in the colonies. Perhaps no Christian group had greater opposition to sports than the Puritans. Brailsford (1969:141) asserted that the Puritans saw their mission to erase all sport and play from "men's lives." They gave England the "English Sunday" and the equivalent in the United States, the blue laws, which, until a few decades ago, managed to debar sports on the Sabbath and severely limit the kinds of sports that were considered appropriate for a Christian. As a means of realizing amusement and unrestrained impulses, sport was suspect for the Puritan, and as it approached more pleasure or involved physical harm to participant or animals, or involved gambling, sport and physical education were, of course, altogether evil. The English historian, Macaulay (1861:162) claimed that "the Puritans opposed bearbaiting not so much because it was painful for the bear but because it gave pleasure to the spectators. There were a number of reasons for protestant prejudice toward play and sport. One prominent objection was that participation would detract attention away from spiritual matters. There was also the belief that play and its resultant pleasure might become addictive because of the inherent weakness of human nature. Churchly opposition to leisure pursuits had been established, and each effort to liberalize attitudes of habits toward leisure pursuits was met with attacks on sport as "sinful."

This Christian view which has departmentalized the human nature into bodily, mental and/or spiritual dimensions has left a tremendous impact on sport activities and, therefore, on theories of physical education. Sport activities during the Middle Ages and up to the 19th century had been severely limited and often considered evil. As major form of organized sport activities, the Olympic Games had to be halted from 394 A. D. Until the 1896,⁽¹⁾ this status has been reflected in the theories of physical education where one often reads that a human is composed of body, mind and

spirit, or that there are physical and mental aspects of human's functioning. Therefore, the early physical educators in America assumed their role to be the fostering of body development to parallel the mental development occurring in academic classes; all activities should have mental and spiritual values, as well as physical benefits. In fact, in the West, despite the influence of the Renaissance on the reappearance of the concept of the "wholeness of man" and despite twentieth century attempts at renouncing dualism, now as earlier, the basic question has been what to do the body to make it stronger, more flexible, resilient, capable of generating more power, running faster and so forth. The lack of unification and harmony in the view of the nature of man, particularly in relation to the mind—body association seems to suggest the need for an alternative view. The remainder of this paper attempts to demonstrate that this alternative view of the nature of man with particular reference to the mind—body association is to be found in the Islamic view which fundamentally eliminates the dissonance and disequilibrium between mind and body viewing man as a unitary and entire human where the whole body is united with the whole mind.

IV

The Islamic View of the Nature of Man and the Mind -Body Relationship:

It is believed that most, if not all, religions of the past crushed the personality of man and compelled him to sacrifice himself to the gods. They forced him to regard his own will as totally powerless when confronted by the will of God. They compelled him always to be seeking something from God by way of prayer, supplication and entreaty: Does Islam differ from religions of the past in its view of the nature of the nature of man, with particular reference to the mind—body relationship in order to determine the applicability of such view to theories of physical education.

The nobility and dignity of man according to Islam are derived from God's view of man as His viceregent upon earth. God addresses the Angels, saying: I wish to create a viceregent for Myself upon earth. "Behold, the Lord said to the Angels: I will create a viceregent on earth" (Quran 2:30).⁽²⁾ This verse from the Holy Quran attests the high value of man in Islamic view. Even the post Renaissance humanism of Europe has never been able to conceive of such exalted sanctity for man.

The Quran mentions on three occasions the substance from which man was fashioned. First it uses the expression "like potter's clay" (Quran 55:14); that is, dry, sedimentary clay. Then the Quran says, "I created man from putrid clay" (Quran 15:26), foul and evil-smelling earth—and finally it uses the term "tin," also meaning clay (Quran 6:2; 23:12). So God set to work, and willed to create a viceregent for Himself; this precious viceregent. He created out of dry clay, and then He breathed some of his own spirit into the clay, and man was created. Thus man is a compound of mud and divine spirit which are interweaved and mixed together in a unitary fashion. According to Islam, other views, such as those reviewed in this paper, are faced with a great tragedy by not recognizing the unitary nature of man.

The exalted view of man in Islam is also seen in the way the Islamic view maintains a balance between men's lives and their hereafter. That is, in Europe, ancient Rome devoted itself to murder and bloodshed, to accumulating all the wealth of Europe and Asia; it immersed itself in enjoyment and pleasure, in gladiator fights and the like. Then came Jesus, who directed society to concentrate on the hereafter, so that Rome changed its orientation from pleasure and worldliness to asceticism and contemplation of the hereafter, the ultimate result to this being the Middle Ages. The medieval world was one of war and bloodshed and military ascendancy on the one hand; and one of monasteries, nunneries and retreats, on the other. Europe was delivered from this orientation only by the Renaissance, which caused the pendulum to swing in the other direction. Today we see that European civilization is so worldly in its orientation, and so exclusively defines the purpose of man's life as pleasure and enjoyment. In contrast, as a way of life, Islam has come to transcend exclusive orientation to this world or the next in order to permit man to maintain a state of equilibrium between the needs of his life and hereafter. The Quran says "But seek with the wealth which God has bestowed on you the Home of the Hereafter not forget thy portion in this life" (Quran 28:77).

As delineated in this paper, compared with other views, the Islamic view of the nature of man is unique, where in Islam: man is highly dignified and noble as he is God's viceregent on earth, man is a compound of mud and divine spirit which are interwoven and mixed together in a unitary fashion, and where man's life is oriented neither toward a state of asceticism nor toward absolute materialism, but rather toward a state of equilibrium⁽³⁾. In fact, the uniqueness of the Islamic view of the nature of man has been reflected on the Islamic view of the body-mind association and its applicability to, or manifestation in, sport and physical education.

First and foremost, the distinctions between soul and body, or mind and body, as they have been formulated in the views of Plato and Descartes and in the Christian traditions are reified and objectified distinctions, foreign to man's experience as it is viewed by Islam. The Islamic objection to such distinction emerges from the Islamic view of nature of man, as delineated in this paper, where man is a compound of mud and divine spirit which are interwoven and mixed together in a unitary fashion and where man's life is oriented neither toward a state of asceticism nor toward absolute materialism, but rather toward a state of equilibrium. The Islamic view maintains that the individual is the center of gravity and is the launching instrument which can put Islam, or any other system for that matter, into full action on a full scale. And this is why Islam always begins with the individual and invariably prefers quality to quantity.

In regard to the mind-body association, the Islamic view conceives man as having two complementary natures, very intimately interrelated and continually interacting upon each other. These are the inner nature and the outer nature. Or one might say that man has one nature only with two bridged sections hardly separable from each other. One is internal and another external. The internal nature of man refers to the soul and mind whereas the external nature refers mainly to the body. In fact, Is-

Islam emphasizes that the soundness of the external nature is greatly dependent upon that of the internal and vice versa, because man's complete nature is made up of both aspects. In fact, it is only for the sake of clarification that Islam classifies man into internal and external natures. But one should always bear in mind that any imbalance in the matter is that both the internal and external natures of man act and interact responsively, and that Islam has extended its divine touch to the internal as well as the external aspects of life.

As such, views that departmentalized man into internal and external natures are challenged by Islam where man is viewed as an incarnate subject, a unity not union of physical, biological and psychological dimensions all participating in dialectical relationships. The motions and activities of the "lived" body are not distinct from consciousness; rather consciousness, is deeply embodied in them. In his latest book, Shagrah (1985: 1-12), argued that physical, mental, psychological and spiritual dimensions must complement each other and focus in one channel to build the human personality, and the human society. Accordingly, from the Islamic point of view, there is no separation whatsoever between the mind and the body of human being. Rather, in Islam man is absolutely unitary and entire human, and the whole body is united with the whole mind.

In contrast to the Christian. View, the Islamic view of the mind-body unity has left a positive impact on the Islamic view of the body and consequently, on theories of physical education.

In Islam, sport is not simply a means of recreation, but it is a social phenomenon possessing important consequences for the individual and society as a whole. As such, the function of physical education through sport, from the Islamic point of view, is to balance the life of human beings by building up the enduring physical and strengthening the moral. In his book *Islam in Focus*, Abdul - Aati (1980:112), writes that "according to Islam, any thing that provokes sound thinking or refreshes the mind and revitalizes the body to keep man in healthy shape is encouraged and invited to by Islam so long as it does not anticipate or involve any sin, or cause any harm or delay and hamper the fulfillment of other obligations." In fact, it is gratifying to notice that most of the Islamic forms of worship, e.g. Prayers, Fasting, Pilgrimage, display some sportive characteristics, although they are basically and by nature meant for spiritual purposes. The author of this paper (Alogleh, 1981: 53-79) has elsewhere, demonstrated the sportive dimensions of the Islamic forms of worship.

The Prophet of Islam, has a rather Positive view of the body of human being and, therefore, of sport and physical education in general. But before considering the Prophet's view of the body, sport and physical education it is instructive to mention that Muslims accept and believe in what the Prophet said, did, and/or approved, because they believe that what he said was from God and whatever he did or approved was in accordance with God's will and pleasure. Therefore, disobedience to him is the disobedience of God. The Holy Quran says in this respect "He who obeys the prophet obeys God" (Quran 4:80). The reporting of the Prophet's

deeds and words was not merely for the sake of curiosity or for historical record, but much more significantly, also as a legal basis for the Islamic practice of Muslims for all time to come. For Muslims, the Prophet is seen as an example to be followed, as a judge, and as an exponent of God's injunctions. This is clearly expressed in the following verse in the Holy Quran: "You have indeed in the messenger of God an excellent example of conduct" (Quran: 33:21). As such, the best way to determine the Prophet's view of the human body and the ways through which such view influences his concept of sport and physical education is to apply the conception of what the Prophet said, did and / or approved in this respect.

As noted earlier, the Islamic view emphasizes the unitary nature of man. In the Prophet's view, the body, as a reflection of the external nature of man, is as important as the mind and soul as a reflection to the internal nature. In building up the human personality, the Prophet believes, that the concern with the soul and mind should not be at the expense of the concern with the body. This is clearly reflected in the Prophet's saying while speaking to Muslims, "To your body upon you a right" (Reported in Shagrah, 1985: 8). Furthermore, the Prophet's positive view of the body is emphasized in the statement in which the Prophet said that "all believers in God have good qualities but the strong one is better than the weak" (Reported in Abdul Aati 1980:112). This rather positive view of the human body as seen in the Prophet's precept is reflected in the ways through which the Prophet views sport and physical education.

The Prophet not only approved of sport which builds up the enduring physique and strengthen the moral but he also practiced it. It has been reported by many who were acquainted and associated with the Prophet during his lifetime that he did practice some of the sport activities that were common in that environment at that time, e.g. horsemanship, marksmanship, swordsmanship, hunting jousting (wrestling), running, and lifting. Saeed Bin Jobar, for example, was quoted as saying that "... The Prophet did practice wrestling and once he participated in a contest of wrestling with famous wrestler (Yazeed Bin Rakanah) and the Prophet defeated him (Reported in Samra, 1977:16). Furthermore, in racing and running, it has been reported that "The Prophet and his wife Aeshah raced other; it has been cited that the Prophet lost the race once with his wife and won at another time (Reported in Samra, 1977:16).

In another context, it has been reported in the tradition of the Prophet that he was asking Muslims to play and recreate themselves and once he said "I hate for your religion to be deemed misconceivably as having some rigidity and roughness (Reported in Samra, 1977:16). In the realm of the Prophet's approving of practicing some sport activities, it has been cited in the tradition of the Prophet that "once the Prophet was walking while some Muslims were practicing the sport of weight lifting, he greeted them by saying peace be upon you and approved and encouraged them to continue their contest (Reported in Samra, 1977:16).

In sum, it should be apparent from the previous discussion that the Islamic view

is unique in its conceptions to the nature of man and his mind-body association. That is, the Islamic view considers man as absolutely unitary and entire human where the whole body is united with the whole mind. This unique view has, as noted, left a profound positive impact on the value of physical education as compared to intellectual education.

V

Summary and Conclusion

Views of the nature of man in general and the nature of the mind-body association in particular are central to theories of physical education. If the body and the mind are considered as separate and distinct entities, the body is considered in conflict with the mind as "the enemy of reason." As a result, the body is disparaged and ridiculed, and physical education is non-existent. If the body is only accidentally and coincidentally linked with the mind, the body is made subservient to the mind in a "master-servant" relationship, and physical education will be given lower status and prestige than intellectual education in any hierarchy of education values. However, if the body is considered integrated with the mind in a psychosomatic relationship, the body will have value and esteem, and physical education will be harmoniously joined with intellectual education in the fullest development of man's unique capacities and potentialities.

This paper has compared the general Christian outlook with the Islamic view in relation to their conceptions of man and his mind-body relationship for the purpose of determining the ways through which such views affected theories of sport and physical education. The comparison shows that the Christian outlook conceives the mind and the body of man as separate and distinct entities. Emanating from this dualistic concept, the human body is either disparaged and ridiculed and, therefore, physical education is nonexistent or, at best, the body is made subservient to the mind in a "master-servant" relationship and consequently intellectual education is at the expense of physical education. In contrast to such outlook, the Islamic view considers man as absolutely unitary and entire human where the whole body is united with whole mind. As a result, the body, according to Islam, is as important as the mind in building the human personality. Consequently, physical education is harmoniously joined with intellectual education in the fullest development of man's self-actualization.

In fact, the uniqueness of the Islamic concept of the "wholeness of man" has important implications to contemporary theories of sport and physical education which attempt to maintain a state of equilibrium between the physical and mental dimensions of the human personality. Finally, the often-made argument that "it was not until the Renaissance that the concept of the wholeness of man was to reappear" is challenged; based on the analyses advanced in this paper which shows that centuries before the Renaissance Islam has put forward an articulated concept of the wholeness of man.

Notes

1. For a detailed analysis of sport and physical education during the Middle Ages, see: Henry (1981) and Gerber and Moragn (1979).
2. The first number refers to the number of chapter (Surah) in the Holy Quran and the second number refers to the number of verse (Ayeh) in that chapter.
3. For a detailed analysis of the Islamic philosophy of the nature of man, see Shariati (1979). Bakker (1955), Alogleh (1981) and Alogleh (1985) among others.

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