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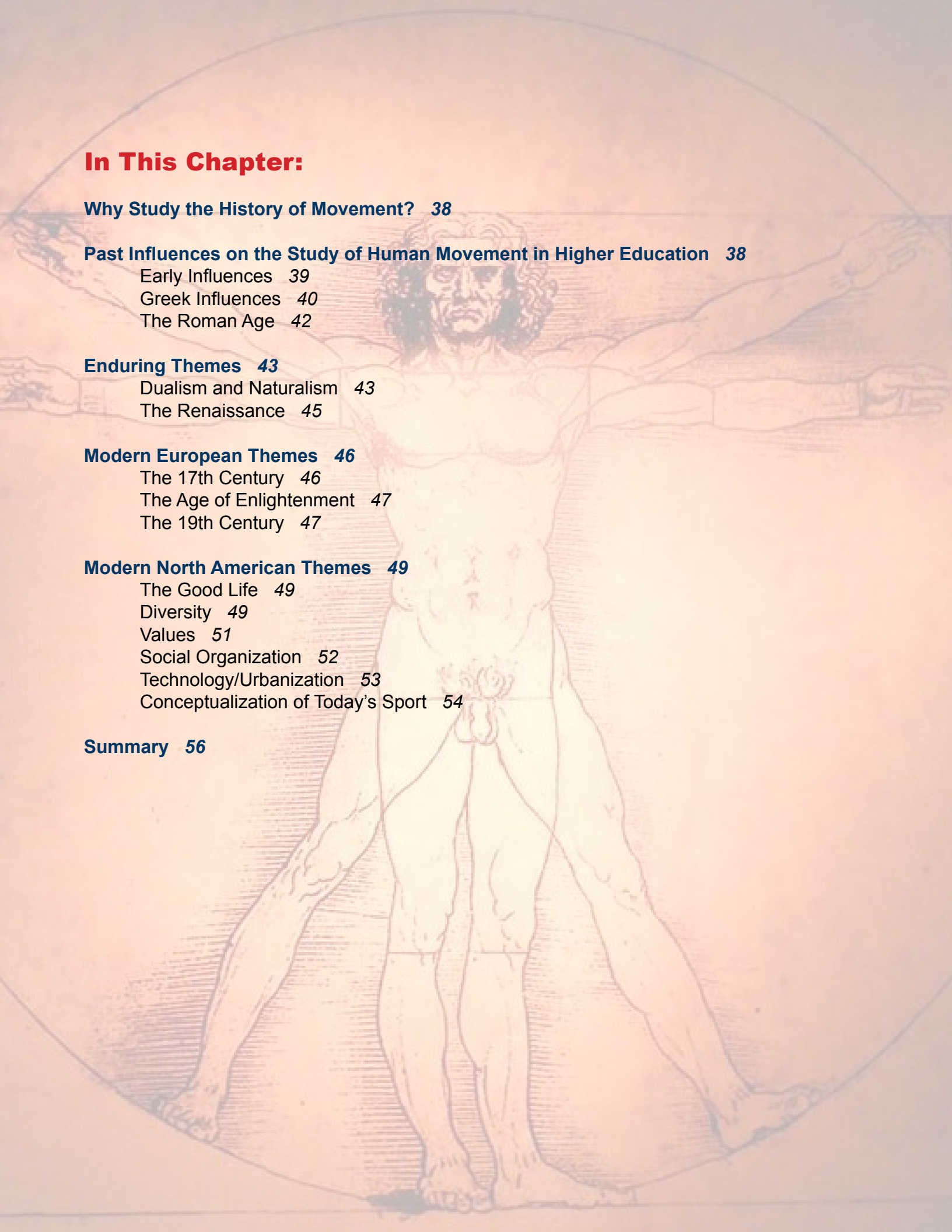
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The History of the Study of Human Movement

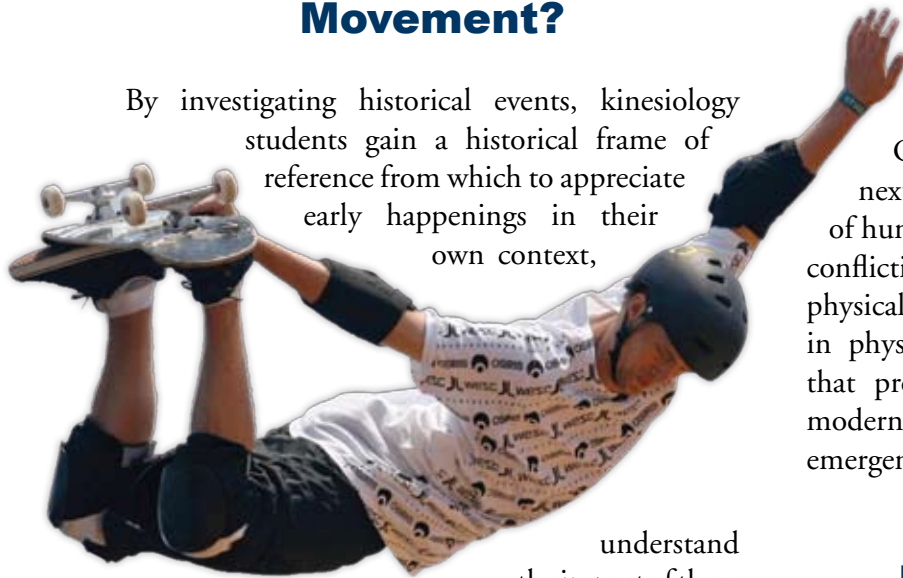
After completing this chapter you should be able to:

- explain why having a historical frame of reference is important for understanding kinesiology;
- describe the major historical landmarks in the evolution of the study of human movement;
- describe the cultural attitudes and practices, the individuals, and the events that have most influenced the study of human movement in higher education throughout the ages.

The study of human movement is an ongoing process. Events that occur now become history immediately hereafter. Ideas, institutions, and cultural movements of the immediate and more distant past have been responsible for shaping the study of human movement into the diverse field of study known today as kinesiology.

Why Study the History of Movement?

By investigating historical events, kinesiology students gain a historical frame of reference from which to appreciate early happenings in their own context,



understand the impact of these events on the current state of affairs, and predict future trends in the field. As part of a liberal education, kinesiology students develop a cultural awareness that spans time, as well as a critical sensitivity to human dilemmas through the ages. Studying history enriches our understanding of our civilization, our nation, and our world and gives us the historical background of today's problems.

The history of physical activity is as long and as varied as the history of humankind. To attempt to study all movement forms, all influential individuals, and every cultural institution and practice that has affected the evolution of movement would be unreasonable and impossible in the time and context of a college or university curriculum. Consequently, each contemporary kinesiology program tends to select the particular aspects of the history of human movement that

reflect its specific mission while at the same time promoting certain educational objectives. In this text, we focus on a select number of major historical landmarks, enduring cultural themes, and recent historical trends for the purpose of gaining a general understanding of the inheritance of the modern world of physical education and sport from the ancient world onward.

Our primary goal in studying the history of kinesiology, then, is to trace the impact of cultural attitudes, practices, and key individuals on the study of human movement. A starting point in this endeavor is the appreciation of our Western heritage, which entails more than a passing acquaintance with ancient Greek society. From these roots emerged a nexus of ideas that have influenced the study of human movement for two millennia, often in conflicting ways. In more recent times, sportive physical activity emerged to dominate scholarship in physical education. The sociocultural forces that produced, and have continued to shape, modern sporting practice are preconditions of the emergence of sport history in higher education.

Past Influences on the Study of Human Movement in Higher Education

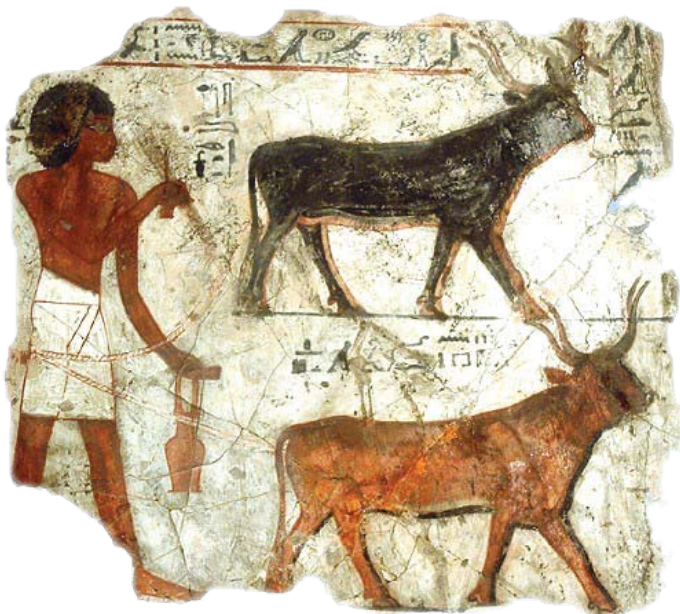
Understanding how the study of human movement has evolved in higher education involves analyzing the attitudes and practices that existed at the time of conception of the first Western universities. Those first programs, based on prevailing notions of what constituted education at the time, formed the basis of higher education curricula. Any attempt to reform physical education/kinesiology since then has been premised on this heritage. The accumulated wisdom of the ancient world fundamentally influenced these initial attitudes and practices, and understanding this influence is one of the important foundations of historical knowledge in kinesiology.

Early Influences

Physical activity has been a significant phenomenon throughout the history of humankind, for it is linked to the unchangeable neurophysiological nature of human existence. However, despite the universality of movement throughout the history of our species, the particular forms of physical activities and the relevance of these movements to everyday life have varied with culture and have changed considerably over time. In *Sports and Games in the Ancient World*, Olivova elaborated on the culturally specific nature of physical activities in the ancient world:

They [physical activities] were influenced by the character and structure of society. They were a significant cultural phenomenon, reflecting contemporary ideas about the world, and moral and aesthetic norms, the degree of social differentiation, and the political evolution of society. All these factors determined the many and changing forms of these activities at different moments in history. (p. 9)

At the earliest moments in history, people learned to use their physical abilities to engage in the useful activities of gathering food, hunting, and doing all forms of physical labor necessary for their survival. When society progressed beyond the stage of a hunting economy, however, new activities began to emerge and previously related activities became more distinct. Hunting and



fighting, for example, became increasingly distinct and complex activities, each requiring training and preparation in the form of game simulation for the young. Rhythmic movement evolved at festivals and communal dances, which generally combined the features of ritualistic natural religion and ecstatic dancing, often to a trancelike state. Olivova noted the relevance of understanding these early movement forms for appreciating movement today:

In these communal dances movement assumed a wide variety of forms, presenting in embryo the many activities that were later, after specific development, to form separate disciplines, ranging from dance itself to drama. (p. 14)

Festivals of this sort also tended to feature trials of strength and combative ability. They were an occasion for tribal leaders to exercise their powers and to demonstrate their prowess in front of spectators, who gradually were appearing on the scene. Simple forms of sporting contests in pastoral and agricultural societies have been identified through ethnographic evidence. These include running races, wrestling, boxing, shooting contests, fencing with various weapons, jumping, throwing, swimming, rowing, riding animals, chariot racing, and various ball games. Although the modern equivalents of these contests and games have changed considerably from their ancient predecessors, it is clear that much of modern sport originated in the activities of these early civilizations.

The Greek Influence

The civilization of Greece absorbed elements from all of these sources to form its own culture. Because the cultural values and physical practices of the ancient Greeks have had an immeasurable impact on contemporary thought and practice, the Greek influence is of particular importance to our understanding of the historical legacy that helped shape the modern field of kinesiology.



The Greek civilization dates back to about 1700 B.C., when the Achaeans (known as the Mycenaean culture) dominated in Greece. From the 6th to the

9th century B.C., daily activities appeared to be balanced, and sport played a large role in everyday life. By the 9th century B.C., political power had become centered in independent city-states such as Corinth, Athens, and Sparta and the classical Greek civilization (Hellenic culture) began to emerge. The survival and security of these city-states depended on their military prowess. Warlike and patriotic people such as the Spartans, characterized as being disciplined, brave, and obedient, were therefore able to thrive in this climate (Figure 3.1).

In the city-state of Athens, however, customs and attitudes regarding physical activity went beyond merely a preoccupation with battle. During the process of establishing a secure city-state, the Athenians were aggressive and territorial, not unlike the Spartans. Through exercise of their intellectual energy, however, they crafted a culture that emphasized a balanced lifestyle between wisdom and exercise, civic responsibility and personal development, military readiness and “the good life.”



Figure 3.1 The survival of early classical Greek civilizations depended largely on their military prowess, so physical activity played an important role in developing disciplined, brave, and obedient citizens.

This concept of balance found its expression in physical activity in the everyday life of the community. Gymnasiums and wrestling schools were built throughout Athens, and these gave impetus to athletic festivals. The buildings further reflected the Athenian concept of balance in that they were multipurpose, often including recreation rooms and lounging rooms for poets, philosophers, and musicians. They provided a place for citizens to meet, talk, and perform various physical activities.

Typical of the harmony between the physical and intellectual dimensions of cultural life in Athens was the fact that individuals famously associated with philosophy also were athletically inclined. Aristotle often taught at the Lyceum, a famous gymnasium located outside Athens' walls. Plato could be found teaching at the Academy and also wrestling (in the Isthmian Games), a sport that Pericles also favored.

Three of the four national (Panhellenic) games – the Isthmian, the Pythian, and the Nemean festivals – were established in the early part of the 6th century B.C. The fourth of these Panhellenic Games had been held many times already at the site of the religious sanctuary of Olympia. The official Olympic register dates back to 776 B.C., when Corebus of Elis, the victor in a running race, had his name inscribed in perpetuity, but evidence indicates that unrecorded games preceded that date.

The athletic emphasis at these games (Figure 3.2) was on events such as

- foot racing,
- the pentathlon (consisting of jumping, discus, javelin, a one-stage foot race, and wrestling),
- heavy events (such as boxing, wrestling, and pankration, which combined boxing and wrestling into a rough-and-tumble event), and
- chariot racing (particularly at Olympia, which had a reputation for horse breeding).

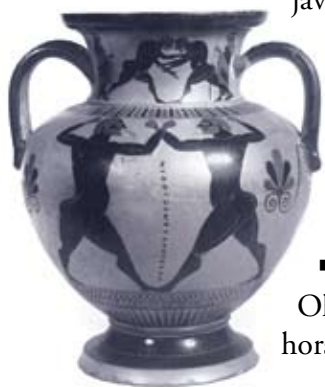


Figure 3.2 The athletic emphasis at the Panhellenic games was on heavy events such as **A.** wrestling and pankration, **B.** foot racing, and **C.** chariot racing.

All the games featured a balance between athletics, music, poetry, and drama.



These games prompted balance in another way, too: by fostering political democracy. Through competition in the Panhellenic Games, citizen athletes could improve their upward mobility, since participating in these games was not exclusively the privilege of the Greek elite.

Competitive activity was accompanied by the rhythm and harmony of the music and dance that permeated the lives of the Athenians. Through their emphasis on beauty and goodness, all-around excellence, and harmony, the Greeks gave the physical dimension:

a respectability that it has never since achieved. They accorded the body equal dignity with the mind. They associated sport with philosophy, music, literature, painting, and particularly with sculpture. They gave to all future civilizations important aesthetic ideals and the ideals of harmonized balance of mind and body, of body symmetry, and of bodily beauty in repose and in action. To these contributions may be added educational gymnastics, the competitive sports of track and field, the classic dance, and the Olympic Games. (Van Dalen & Bennett, 1971, p. 47)

In the later years of the Greek civilization, after the Persian wars, as Athens became a major industrial and commercial center, its citizens became more oriented toward personal success than toward civic service, and consequently the emphasis of education changed from civic and physical training to the life of the mind. Physical activity became the realm of the paid professional, to the detriment of the principles of moderation and all-around physical development.

The Roman Age

The Greek orientation carried into the Roman Age, 500 B.C. to 476 A.D. The early Romans were a conservative people who sought utility in their actions. Their emphasis on the physical centered on strength and hardiness, in contrast to

the holistic approach of the Greeks of Periclean Athens, who in addition valued beauty and grace. In many ways, the Roman system of military training for international dominance resembled that of Sparta, although military training under the Roman system was given at home, not in state-run military barracks.

As the Roman civilization expanded, contact with the outside world through conquest led the Romans to realize the value of intellectual education. Consequently, schools were founded for the ruling and commercial groups. Unlike education in Periclean Athens, however, these Roman schools paid scant attention to physical components. Although many of the Roman emperors were known to promote games and festivals, the purpose of these events was primarily to occupy and appease Roman subjects, not to celebrate personal excellence or the beauty of human movement. In general, the participatory, holistic emphasis of the “golden age” of Greece was replaced by professionalized, often brutal, spectator-oriented contests designed to entertain the masses. After the Roman conquest of Greece, even the Panhellenic Games changed from events of grace and beauty to games characterized by brutality, professionalism, and corruption (Figure 3.3).

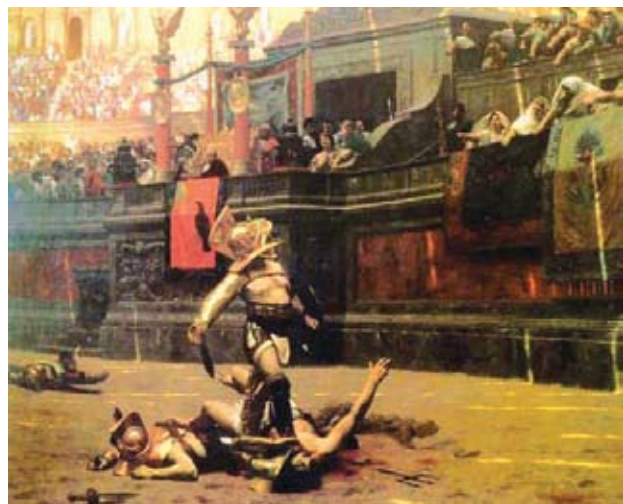


Figure 3.3 In the Roman Age, spectator-oriented contests that were professionalized and often brutal were designed to entertain the masses.

Throughout the later years of the Greek empire and the entire Roman era, a number of intellectuals began to look back admiringly, even wistfully, at how the Athenian Greeks connected their physical existence with all aspects of their cultural life. As an example, Galen of Pergamon (129-210), personal physician to Emperor Marcus Aurelius and one of the great figures in the history of medicine, was critical of the artificial training methods and excesses of professional athletics, which departed from the Greek principles of moderation and balance.

Galen strongly supported a return to the natural movements provided through rowing, jumping, fencing, carrying weights, throwing the javelin, riding on horseback, and particularly ball games that exercised the whole body in a natural way.



He preferred these activities for reasons of health and also because he felt that the balanced program of physical training the Athenian Greeks developed still had philosophical appeal and social benefits.

Enduring Themes

After the collapse of the Roman Empire in 476 A.D., the Teutonic tribes ushered in the so-called Dark Ages of civilization. Throughout this period and until modern times, several enduring themes of great importance to the study of human movement in higher education have been intertwined with Western society's evolving belief systems and cultural institutions. Understanding these themes is the key to appreciating the legacy of human movement.

Dualism and Naturalism

The central theme underlying cultural and educational practice is that the intellectual orientation of Western culture toward the study of human movement and the body emanates from two conflicting approaches to "things physical" generated by Greek society. The first of these is the naturalistic concept of balance and integration (associated with Periclean anthropology and education in Athens during the Athenian "golden age"). The second approach, which originated in the later years of the Greek era, is the dualistic notion of one's physical being as subservient to one's intellectual processes (the concept of "a learning mind and a behaving body"). Both of these have vied for popular acceptance through the ages and have had a tremendous impact on the study of human movement.

The role and status of kinesiology today, and of physical education in the past, in the process of higher education have been determined culturally by how this dilemma of the relationship between body and mind has been resolved. The major landmarks in the history of physical education came about as a result of cultural changes in this mentality. More specifically, key changes in the cultural history of the study of movement have been precipitated by a reversal of the hierarchical order of mind and body. For instance, the shift from the highly commercialized, professionalized spectator sports scene of 3rd- and 4th-century Greco-Roman culture to the ascetic anti-play spirit of medieval culture was the result of the soul's reversing hierarchical position with the body.

Cultural attitudes and practices are not constant. They change in relation to a dominant cultural mentality. This affects the nature of cultural practices, including education, religion, medicine, and sport, as well as individual attitudes, beliefs, and cultural behavior. Pitirim Sorokin, a distinguished Harvard sociologist, suggested that the history of Western culture is one of flux between the extremes of materialism and spiritualism. Only rarely have these extremes been confluent, at which times the materialistic and spiritualistic components of the