

The Good Sport: Physical Literacy and a Moral Self

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ABSTRACT

Physical literacy is a theoretical concept defined by Margaret Whitehead as an individual's competence, knowledge and understanding, and motivation to participate in lifelong physical activity. This concept emerged out of concern for the seeming disregard of human embodiment, particularly in the education sector, and is firmly rooted in the philosophical concepts of monism, existentialism, and phenomenology. In accordance with existential philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, who argue human beings are fundamentally beings-in-the-world, physical literacy purports physically literate individuals should have a well-established embodied sense of self. They are to develop as proficient movers capable of exemplary self-expression, self-presentation, and interactions with others. But this conception of 'self' is incomplete absent the recognition that we are not only beings-in-the-world, but rather socially situated embodied beings whose interactions demand more than a sharp sense of kinesthetic awareness. Herein lies my motivation for this thesis. Specifically, the current philosophical foundations of physical literacy are inadequate to account for a conception of self which recognizes humans as both, embodied movers, and moral beings. As such, this thesis critiques the concept of sense of self foundational to physical literacy and its failure to account for a moral self. In response to this gap in the extant literature, the remainder of this thesis is dedicated to expanding the philosophical foundation of physical literacy to include the development of a moral sense of self by drawing upon the concepts of sport-as-play and sportsmanship.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The notion that sport can serve as a form of moral education is not new. Dating back to ancient Greece, *gymnastikê* ('athletics' or 'physical training') was a central part of the education curriculum and essential to training the guardians of Plato's *Republic*. Athletics or physical training served to "harmonize the [soul], to prepare it for rigors of philosophy, and to cultivate the moral strength demanded of public servants."¹ Moreover, the view that 'sport builds character' also "recurs on the educational theory of Rousseau; and [was] revived and elaborated by the 'muscular Christians' of nineteenth century Britain."² Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, modern sport served as the central focus of physical education for its ability to promote the development of virtues such as "leadership, respect, loyalty, courage, honesty, fair play, self-reliance and self-discipline" which are all characteristic of a good sport.³ The view that physical education might include "the notion of sport without sportsmanship [...] would have been inconceivable."⁴

A wider view of physical education emerged globally when the concept of physical literacy was popularized in the early 21st century.⁵ Physical literacy sought to re-structure the physical education curriculum to target individuals and the development of their own unique movement capacities. The central focus of this physical education concept is on individual agency and perpetuates the contemporary belief that physical education should develop an

¹ Heather L. Reid, "Sport and Moral Education in Plato's Republic," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 34, no. 2, (2007): 160.

² Derek C. Meakin, "Physical Education: An Agency of Moral Education?" *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 15, no. 2, (1981): 241.

³ Peter J. Arnold, "Sport as a Valued Human Practice: A Basis for the Consideration of Some Moral Issues in Sport," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 26, no. 2, (1992): 238.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Margaret Whitehead, "The Concept of Physical Literacy," *European Journal of Physical Education* 6, no. 2, (2001): 127-138.

individual's embodied sense of self. Physical literacy shifted the narrative of physical education from group solidarity, team spirit, and sportsmanship to personal embodied development, and the enhancement of one's motile capacities.

Physical literacy has gained widespread attraction since its conception and has seemingly superseded the traditional sport-focused curriculum in physical education.⁶ The curricular shift has been fruitful insofar as it has expanded physical education to include alternate forms of physical activity like yoga, swimming, calisthenics, archery, Zumba and personal fitness programmes. However, physical literacy is limited insofar as it says very little about moral character and the virtues of good sportsmanship. Thus, my research interests lie in elucidating how the theoretical concept of physical literacy might incorporate the moral sense of self.

In this thesis, I offer an outline and introduction to physical literacy, moral character and sportsmanship as the central themes of the study. The thesis unfolds developmentally and begins with an overview of physical literacy as it is currently conceived. Based on some preliminary thoughts regarding the theoretical foundation of physical literacy, I state my motivation for the study by showing a gap exists between physical literacy and the development of a moral self in the literature. Next, I introduce a play conception of sport which serves as my theoretical starting point. I also provide a brief commentary on moral values and virtues, specifically in relation to the concept of sportsmanship. This thesis expands the foundations of physical literacy to include a play conception of sport. In so doing, I demonstrate how physical literacy might have the

⁶ Paul Jurbala, "What is Physical Literacy, Really?" *Quest* 67, no. 4, (2015): 367; Despite the ambiguity of the distinction between physical education and physical literacy in current scholarly literature, this thesis distinguishes physical education as a curricular schema, and physical literacy as a theoretical concept underpinning the content of physical education curricula.

potential to serve not only as a mode of embodied self development, but also as a viable form that accounts for a moral sense of self.

Physical Literacy

Margaret Whitehead, a distinguished physical education specialist, proposed the concept of physical literacy as a suitable re-conceptualization of the physical education curriculum. In response to a growing concern that physical education had become increasingly focused on the development of skills relevant to high-level performative sport, she proposed physical education be extended beyond a sport technique approach to developing physical competence.⁷ As such, Whitehead described physical literacy as the “disposition to capitalize on our human embodied capability, wherein the individual has the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for maintaining purposeful pursuits/activities throughout the lifecourse.”⁸

Physically literate individuals demonstrate six specific attributes (see Table 1). In particular, the first three attributes form the core of movement competence and refer to motile ability, potential, motivation and endowment in relation to cultural specificity; “[...] qualities of competent and confident movement; and “reading” the environment and moving with intelligence and imagination.”⁹ Such attributes clearly demonstrate that the concept of physical literacy is concerned with capitalizing on one’s specific motile capacities by “embracing and expressing our endowment as movers to the best of our ability [...]”¹⁰ Further, the last three

⁷ Margaret Whitehead, “The History and Development of Physical Literacy,” *Journal of Sport Science and Physical Education* 65, no. 1, (2013a): 22.

⁸ _____, “Definition of Physical Literacy and Clarification of Related Issues,” *Journal of Sport Science and Physical Education* 65, no. 1, (2013b): 29.

⁹ Danny Rosenberg, “Antecedents of Physical Literacy: George Herbert Mead and the Genesis of the Self in Play and Games,” *Quest* 71, no. 4, (2019): 467.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 467-468.

attributes emphasize the philosophical underpinning of physical literacy and “characteristically develop as motivation, confidence and competence and fluent interaction grow.”¹¹ Specifically, these attributes refer to the development of a “well-established sense of self,” self-expression, and knowledge and understanding of embodied health.¹²

Table 1. Attributes of a physically literate person.

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1. The motivation and confidence to capitalize on innate movement/ physical potential to make a significant contribution to the quality of life.
All humans exhibit this potential, however its specific expression depends on individual endowment in relation to all capabilities, significantly movement potential, and is particular to the cultural context
 2. Movement with poise, economy and confidence in a wide variety of physically challenging situations.
 3. Sensitive perception in ‘reading’ all aspects of the physical environment, anticipating movement needs or possibilities and responding appropriately to these, with intelligence and imagination.
 4. A well established sense of self as embodied in the world. This together with an articulate interaction with the environment, engenders positive self esteem and self confidence.
 5. Sensitivity to and awareness of embodied capability, leading to fluent self expression through non-verbal communication and to perceptive and empathetic interaction with others.
 6. The ability to identify and articulate the essential qualities that influence the effectiveness of movement performance, and an understanding of the principles of embodied health, with respect to fundamental aspects such as exercise, sleep and nutrition.
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Source: Margaret Whitehead, “Definition of Physical Literacy and Clarification of Related Issues,” *Journal of Sport Science and Physical Education* 65, no. 1, (2013b): 29-30.

Philosophically speaking, “physical education has historically embraced dualism as its underlying basis.”¹³ Presuming a human being is comprised of two distinct substances – mind

¹¹ Margaret Whitehead, “Physical Literacy, the Sense of Self, Relationships with Others and the Place of Knowledge and Understanding in the Concept,” in *Physical Literacy: Throughout the Lifecourse*, ed. Margaret Whitehead, 56-67 (London: Routledge, 2010b), 56.

¹² Whitehead, *Definition of Physical Literacy*, 30.

¹³ Rosenberg, 465.

and body – dualists such as Descartes, believe the individual is an immaterial, thinking mind possessing complete control over a material, unthinking body. In this respect, dualism has been criticized for objectifying and attributing little value to bodily activity. Opposing dualism, Whitehead contends “a belief in monism is fundamental to the appreciation of the concept of physical literacy.”¹⁴ Rather than two separate substances, monist thinkers assert that a human being is a unity of mind and body existing as an “indivisible whole.”¹⁵ Monism emphasizes the existence of one entity “of which mind and body are reduced and are undifferentiated [...], and reveals the richness of lived embodiment and the primacy of the “body-as-lived.”¹⁶ The concept of physical literacy champions embodied capacities as significant in-themselves and as such, dissolves the hierarchy between intellectual and bodily capabilities.

In addition to monistic thought, physical literacy is also rooted in existentialism and phenomenology. As Whitehead states, “fundamental to existentialist belief is that individuals create themselves as they live in and interact with the world.”¹⁷ People’s being is a culmination of their experience with the world and, in this regard, embodied interaction with our surroundings constitutes a significant capability toward actualizing human potential. As beings-in-the-world the interaction “between ourselves and our surroundings” occurs via perception. Whitehead elaborates, “[p]henomenologists are concerned to explain that every individual will perceive the world from the unique perspective of their previous experience,” and consequently each perception will adapt our understanding of the world and influence our future perceptions therein.¹⁸ Our motile capacities, in addition to our senses (e.g., hearing, sight, taste, touch and

¹⁴ Margaret Whitehead, “The Philosophical Underpinning of the Concept of Physical Literacy,” in *Physical Literacy: Throughout the Lifecourse*, ed. Margaret Whitehead, 21-29 (London: Routledge, 2010a), 22.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Rosenberg, 466.

¹⁷ Whitehead, *The Philosophical Underpinning of the Concept of Physical Literacy*, 23.

¹⁸ Ibid., 24.

smell) comprise the ways we perceive the world. To this end, “phenomenologists explain why and how it is that, in existentialist terms, we are as we are, on account of the accumulated experiences we have had in effecting interaction with the world.”¹⁹

Whitehead further maintains, when taken together, monism, existentialism and phenomenology offer a rich and holistic account of human experience. She believes this account contributes to what it means to have a well-established sense of self. The fourth attribute of a physically literate person indicates that the individual will have “a well-established sense of self as embodied in the world. This, together with an articulate interaction with the environment, engenders positive self-esteem and self-confidence.”²⁰

The importance of embodiment in psychology literature, particularly child development and development of self, often defers to the concept of ‘mirror image’. This psychological theory “refers to the recognition by a child of about two years of him or herself as a discrete person.”²¹ The ‘self’ in this context is often intended to be understood by the visual representation of the body – body-as-object.²² Nonetheless, there are some philosophers and psychologists who have proposed infants understand ‘self’ as a ‘proprioceptive self’.²³ The proprioceptive self contains a sense of one’s “own motor possibilities.”²⁴ Rather than perceiving the self as having a body, children understand themselves as embodied via their movement capacities. The awareness of ‘self’ is recognized as an ‘I can’; that is, I can crawl, walk, stand, run, climb, etc. These

¹⁹ Ibid., 25.

²⁰ Whitehead, *Physical Literacy, the Sense of Self, Relationships with Others and the Place of Knowledge and Understanding in the Concept*, 56.

²¹ Whitehead, *Physical Literacy: Philosophical Considerations in Relation to Developing a Sense of Self, Universality and Propositional Knowledge*, 289.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

movements in accordance with our senses contribute to our human experiences and worldly interactions, and shape who we are.

Possessing a robust sense of self often leads to an enriched mode of self-expression, self-presentation and interaction with others.²⁵ The fifth attribute expresses physically literate people have “sensitivity to and awareness of embodied capability, leading to fluent self-expression through non-verbal communication and to perceptive and empathetic interaction with others.”²⁶ This attribute acknowledges human beings are not simply motile beings existing in a world of inanimate objects, rather they are motile beings existing in a world with others. Accepting the social nature of human existence, physically literate people develop “not only a sense of self but an appreciation for the ways others express their sense of self in terms of liberating and limited capacities.”²⁷ Physically literate people can express themselves both verbally and non-verbally (i.e., gestures, posture, eye contact) and can also recognize this mode of communication in others. These individuals and their heightened perceptive awareness are capable of appreciating “how others are feeling [...], can relate to others from a position of sympathetic understanding,” and so, can respond appropriately.²⁸

The development of a sense of self as a central characteristic of physical literacy interprets ‘self’ as not only an embodied mover, but also as a being capable of expressing and recognizing feelings and emotions, in oneself and in others, respectively. A well-established sense of self contributes to enriched interactions with others. Physically literate people are both

²⁵ Whitehead, *Physical Literacy, the Sense of Self, Relationships with Others and the Place of Knowledge and Understanding in the Concept*, 60.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁷ Rosenberg, 467.

²⁸ Margaret Whitehead, “Physical Literacy: Philosophical Considerations in Relation to Developing a Sense of Self, Universality and Propositional Knowledge,” *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 1, no. 3, (2007): 61.

efficient movers within their environment and effective communicators within their social context.

Physical Literacy in Need of a Moral Dimension

As currently conceived, a physical education curriculum designed to produce physically literate individuals offers the foundation for its participants to develop a specific sense of self. The meaning of 'self' in this context is derived from a phenomenological and existentialist background and refers to an embodied self as an agent of affection and action in the world. Physically literate individuals also have the capacity for fluent self-expression and the communicative ability to engage in empathetic interaction with others. In this regard, 'sense of self' refers to the self as a moving being and as a social being. However, my concern is that the phenomenological and existential foundations of physical literacy do not fully account for what it means to be a social being. Whitehead's description of 'sense of self' refers to interacting with others, relations with others, and the ability to empathize with others' feelings and emotions by reading non-verbal gestures. While this account describes *how* people conduct themselves in a social context, it fails to explain how people *should* conduct themselves in social circumstances.

Effective and articulate communication is one component of our interactions with others. Yet, it seems an awareness and knowledge of proper human conduct also comprises another facet of social life. An understanding of the basic principles of morality constitutes a fundamental element in fulfilling one's role as a social being. A more robust sense of self then, ought to include a basic comprehension of a moral self as an individual capable of distinguishing between right and wrong or good and bad behaviour. Moreover, given that social life presumably includes an understanding of how to conduct oneself in a moral way, it is reasonable to suggest that a well-established sense of self should include moral character; that is, the attributes

descriptive of an individual's moral principles. The relationship between physical literacy and a moral sense of self, however, is hardly examined in the extant literature.

Some scholars have hypothesized that physical literacy is an expression of human flourishing – an Aristotelean concept broadly defined as the acquisition of nonmoral and moral goods.²⁹ However, even when human flourishing is discussed – as a concept inclusive of a moral dimension – physical literacy is described as only contributing to the acquisition of *nonmoral* goods like health, rather than moral goods and the development of moral character.³⁰ Additionally, some physical literacy scholarship references the ethical and moral dimension.³¹ These articles acknowledge that the physically literate person applies their knowledge ethically and justly. Yet, such claims lack appropriate theoretical and philosophical justification and, in this regard, remain underdeveloped. Herein lies the motivation for this study. The following investigation expands the concept of physical literacy to encompass the moral dimension and the development of a moral sense of self.

Development of the Study

The argumentative progression of this thesis unfolds from the primary influences that motivated the introduction of physical literacy. The principal concern in this regard is that sport-centered

²⁹ Elizabeth J. Durden-Myers, Margaret E. Whitehead, & Niek Pot, “Physical Literacy and Human Flourishing,” *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* 37, no. 1, (2018): 310.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ James Mandigo, Nancy Francis, Ken Lodewyk & Ron Lopez, *Position Paper: Physical Literacy for Educators* (Ottawa, Ontario: Physical and Health Education Canada, 2009): 6; Cara Shearer, Hannah R. Goss, Lowri C. Edwards, Richard J. Keegan, Zoe R. Knowles, Lynne M. Boddy, Elizabeth J. Durden-Myers & Lawrence Foweather, “How is Physical Literacy Defined? A Contemporary Update” *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* 37, no. 1, (2018): 242; Suzanne Lundvall & Göran Gerdin, “Physical Literacy in Swedish Physical Education and Health (PEH): What is (Im)possible in Becoming and Being Physically Literate (Educated)?” *Curriculum Studies in Health and Physical Education* 12, no. 2, (2021):145.

physical education adopted an elite conception of sport.³² Acknowledging the inadequacy of ‘elitism’, I contend a play conception of sport is more suitable when it comes to meeting the educative demands of physical literacy and the development of a moral sense of self. Moreover, I introduce the play conception of sport by addressing some of its elements; namely, competitive play and risk-taking. This section concludes by establishing sportsmanship – broadly understood as the proper conduct and attitude of the good sport – as an expression of the player’s moral character and that which constitutes the moral self physically literate individuals ought to develop.

Physical Literacy and Conceptions of Sport

Several influences motivated the development of physical literacy. Notably, the significance of the embodied dimension; the observation that the “importance of movement development in early childhood was being forgotten [;]” a widespread loss of appreciation for physical activity; and finally, the concern physical education was exceedingly focused on “high-level performance and elitism.”³³ To the fourth point, Whitehead elaborates:

there was a growing unease with the general direction that physical education in school in many developed countries, including the UK, was taking – this being very much towards high-level performance and elitism. One result of this focus was the tendency to neglect those pupils who did not have outstanding ability. The notion of participation as valuable in itself was becoming less evident in much work in school, with the consequence that the non-gifted were becoming disillusioned with the subject and often looked for opportunities not to take part.³⁴

³² Physical literacy accounts for other activities apart from sport and games such as yoga, Zumba, personal fitness, etc. However, this thesis will be delimited to the sporting dimension of physical literacy as a dimension most conducive to developing a moral self.

³³ Margaret Whitehead, “Introduction,” in *Physical Literacy: Throughout the Lifecourse*, ed. Margaret Whitehead, 3-9 (London: Routledge, 2010c): 3-4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

It is apparent that the fourth factor motivating the development of physical literacy was the concern that sport-centered physical education was far too limited in its scope of influence. Not only did it nurture a select few students who already had a well-developed passion and natural aptitude for sport, but it also discouraged many non-gifted students from participating in physical education. Whitehead observed that a sport focused physical education curriculum – one which emphasized elitism and high-level performance – was deterring many students from willingly pursuing physical activity. As such, it was evident physical education needed to “adopt a new perspective” and “review its priorities[,]” if it was going to promote “the value of physical activity for all, not just the most talented in this area [...]”³⁵

Physical literacy then was to replace the traditional sport-centered construct and would rearrange the priorities of physical education from mere motor-skill development to personal embodied development. This new perspective endorses the actualization of one’s motile capacities not for the sake of becoming a better athlete, but for the sake of improving one’s quality of life as an embodied being. In this regard, physical literacy expanded the interests of physical education by shifting the curricular focus from traditional sport and athletics to all forms of physical activity. Rather than enhancing one’s movement capabilities by simply playing sport, physical literacy recommends a “game-based approach to [...] physical education”³⁶ which teaches physical skill via “games that are derived from sports instead of through skill drilling [...]”³⁷

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Niek Pot, Margaret E. Whitehead & Elizabeth J. Durden-Myers, “Physical Literacy from Philosophy to Practice,” *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* 37, no. 1, (2018): 249.

³⁷ Ibid.

In this thesis I do not offer a comprehensive review and comparison of the specific content of a sport versus physical literacy focused physical education curriculum. However, to comprehend the line of inquiry I will pursue, two theoretical clarifications regarding sports and games are in order.

First, the physical literacy literature reviewed thus far implies a narrow and traditional understanding of sport. For example, sport in the physical literacy context seems to refer to traditional team sports like soccer, basketball, volleyball, football, and hockey. Such sports are often included in school athletic programs, intramurals, the Olympic Games, and professional leagues. Yet, there is a broader definition of sport which, I believe, more appropriately serves the universal interests of physical literacy and physical education. Specifically, sport is defined as a game of physical skill.³⁸ This definition of sport includes not only traditional sports but also games like tag, dodgeball, capture the flag, steal the bacon, soccer-baseball, wallball, and four-square. Moreover, this definition of sport delimits ‘physical skill’ to those motor movements whose “explicit and varied manifestation [...] is essential to the performance of sport ventures.”³⁹ To clarify,

in chess, bridge, and numerous other games, manual dexterity or physical skill has no influence whatsoever on the outcome [of the game]. Indeed, these games can be played without *any* pertinent motor movements demanded of the participants. Assistants or even machines can move the pieces or display the cards; verbal instructions or commands may suffice and, in fact, chess can be played by mail.⁴⁰

³⁸ Klaus V. Meier, “Triad Trickery: Playing with Sport and Games,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 15, no. 1, (1988): 13.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Original emphasis.

Thus, although chess and bridge are games, they lack the physical skill necessary to be categorized as sports.⁴¹

Second, the fourth observation motivating the development of physical literacy is concerned not with sport itself, but with a particular conception of sport; one which emphasizes elitism. To this extent, I agree with Whitehead and other physical literacy scholars who contend this specific conception of sport unnecessarily limits the scope of influence of a physical education curriculum. The elite conception of sport adopts the perspective that “one engages in sport in order to become an athlete” and further, models an “athletic display of bodily excellence.”⁴² The elite conception of sport characterizes the athlete as “the ideal of the physical being.”⁴³ Athletes are those select few individuals who have “trained their bodies to challenge the resistances of space and time with speed, endurance, strength, and accuracy and coordination prescribed by the various particular sports.”⁴⁴ In addition, ‘winning’ is the central goal of the activity; athletes play to win.

The elite conception of sport might serve as a suitable theoretical foundation for a curriculum tailored to produce amateur and professional athletes. However, it fails to account for others who still participate in sport, yet do not possess the physical skill descriptive of an elite ‘athlete’. This conception of sport ignores, for example, “high school or college intramural basketball players who are not excellent enough to make an organized team, players in adult city softball leagues, and middle-aged tennis players who are still addicted to their weekly

⁴¹ Some may consider the definition of sport a contentious issue. Whether sport can be defined by stating necessary and sufficient conditions was a central topic of debate in the early years of sport philosophy. In addition to Klaus V. Meier, scholars like Bernard Suits, Scott R. Kretchmar, Frank McBride, William Morgan, and Robert Osterhoudt were active contributors to the discussion.

⁴² Randolph Feezell, *Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 9-10.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁴ Keith Algozin, “Man and Sport,” *Philosophy Today* 20, no. 3 (1976), 190, quoted in Feezell, 9.

matches.”⁴⁵ The elite conception of sport is neither a conception of sport universal to all those who participate in physical education, nor does it align with the objectives of physical literacy which intends to serve children and adolescents of varying athletic ability. As per physical literacy, participation in sport – within an educational context – should be more concerned with learning and acquiring physical competence, than with exhibiting the advanced physical skill of an elite athlete.

Alternative conceptions of sport do exist. For example, “sport as competition, leisure, instrument of socialization, [and] character builder [...]” to name a few.⁴⁶ However, there is a particular notion of sport which has been praised for its universal nature, namely, the play theory of sport. This view offers “an appeal to the first-person lived experiences of the participants” and is successful in providing an account to which “the athlete might recognize in his own experience a root kinship with the nonathlete.”⁴⁷ Rather than championing “the pursuit of excellence, the struggle of the contest, the development of good health, or the satisfaction of playing well” – important elements in their own right – the play conception of sport (sport-as-play hereafter) converges on the experience of sport as one which almost always “involves engaging in an immensely enjoyable physical activity.”⁴⁸ We participate in sport because it is fun. The following section then will offer a brief introduction to sport-as-play as the theoretical starting point for this thesis.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Feezell, 10.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Play is not limited to sport. Given the universal nature of play, the human experience of this phenomenon can occur across a wide variety of activities. For example, a body-builder lifting weight, a yogi meditating, an artist painting, a singer singing, a philosopher philosophizing, and a carpenter hammering nails can all experience play while engaged in their respective activity. Notwithstanding, this thesis is delimited to a play conception of sport.

Sport-as-Play

There is a common misconception that sport-as-play is the antithesis of competitive athletics. This line of argument follows from a hard distinction between athletic contests and play such that the antagonistic nature of competition and opposition “stand at odds with the freedom, spontaneity and lack of seriousness thought to be characteristic of play.”⁵⁰ Moreover, the ‘win at all costs’, ‘fight to the finish’ and ‘no blood, no foul’ attitude that often accompanies a serious competition view of sport is contrary to the cooperation, pleasure and enjoyment inherent in play. But there is a more sophisticated viewpoint which maintains competition is wholly compatible with a play conception of sport. Specifically, sport-as-play includes an element of serious competition. This is evident in Drew Hyland’s exposition of the ‘dialectic of sport’ and is reinforced in Scott Kretchmar’s description of ‘opposition as play’.

It can be conceived that sport-as-play is spiritual activity; a form of dialectic.⁵¹ Hyland outlines this Hegelian notion as follows:

Spiritual activity, which for Hegel meant activity that is a manifestation of spirit (*Geist*), is dialectical through and through. Dialectic might thus be construed as the logic of spiritual activity, and it has a triadic structure [...]. Its first “moment” is negation. Any spirit in acting “negates” as adequate whatever the situation was in light of which it was moved to act. [...] Its second moment is a lifting up of the truth of the negated situation, and its third a preserving of that lifted-up truth in the ongoing dialectical movement.⁵²

Hyland goes on to explain that the moment of negation in any dialectical movement, despite its negativity, can be benign or violent. It can transpire into alienation and violence, or it can simply

⁵⁰ Scott R. Kretchmar, “Ontological Possibilities: Sport as Play,” *Philosophic Exchange* 3, no. 1, (1972): 113.

⁵¹ Drew A. Hyland, “Opponents, Contestants, and Competitors: The Dialectic of Sport,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 11, no. 1, (1985): 63-70.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 65.

be “the sign for logical negation or the correction of a philosophical error.”⁵³ Nonetheless, negation, as the initial step of the dialectical process, exists to be “transcended into something higher.”⁵⁴ A mere act of negation is the reflection of “radically incomplete, undialectical, and so, unspiritual” activity.⁵⁵ However, when the moment of negation is overcome, the activity can be deemed wholesome, spiritual, and genuinely dialectical.

Sport-as-play can be construed as a form of dialectic insofar as it describes the experience of play – an experience of “fullness or plenitude”⁵⁶ – as a higher *telos* of sport. Although ‘winning the game’ is a goal of sport competition, sport-as-play suggests the player is not engaged in sport activity simply to beat their opponents – or as Hyland describes, to “negate the efforts of the other player or team to win.”⁵⁷ Rather, the player embraces, and subsequently transcends, the oppositional component of sport in favour of the experience of play. Sport-as-play neither denies the competitive element of sport, nor does it deny ‘winning’ as a goal. It does, however, suggest sport is not mere competition but rather, a dialectical activity which champions the experience of play as “something higher” than winning the game.⁵⁸ In other words, the oppositional character of sport competition serves as the starting point for sport-as-play and might be appropriately summarized via the motto ‘one does not play to win; one plays to play.’

Scott Kretchmar echoes the importance of competition in a play conception of sport. Opposition as play is not only a hindrance *from*, but also *for* something.⁵⁹ He contends:

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Kretchmar, 116.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Hyland, 65.

⁵⁹ Kretchmar, 120.

It seems that hinderance from is also a *hinderance for* and that under this notion the compatibility of play and opposition becomes more apparent. I may be hindered from making baskets, but such hinderance allows me to express my testimony. I express myself with hinderance, not through or in spite of hinderance. It is valued for itself.⁶⁰

Moreover, this form of hinderance establishes common ground – or theme – between competitors which is maximally cooperative. A mutual dependence is realized such that “I need the hinderance you can offer for my expression, and you need the hinderance I provide for your testimony.”⁶¹ Opposition as play is a descriptor of the play conception of sport.⁶² Kretchmar summarizes this point as follows:

[...] the play impulse requires a characterization of the other (dichotomy) as fully and essentially cooperative (variation-theme) in the mode of inhibiting me (hinderance) for a certain expression. The hindering other needs to be preserved, for expression ends when a verdict is reached, when the other is “destroyed” or when the other “destroys” me.⁶³

The hinderance inherent in competition is instrumental toward preserving the experience of play as a *telos* of sport and so, in this regard, competition is not only compatible with sport-as-play but is necessary.

The competitive component of sport-as-play – “competitive play” – is fundamental to this thesis insofar as it offers the situational context necessary for the development of moral character.⁶⁴ There is a “co-presence of friendship and alienation in competitive play [...]”: since both do sometimes occur in play, it would seem to follow that our competitive play ever and

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 113.

⁶³ Ibid., 120-121.

⁶⁴ Drew Hyland, “Competition and Friendship,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 5, no. 1, (1978): 28.

again *risks* alienation.”⁶⁵ When players engage in sport, their opponents might be interpreted as co-operators or facilitators and partners, in which case competition may result in friendship; however, opponents might also be perceived as threats and enemies and as such, alienation and violence may transpire. Such possibilities constitute the “risk-taking element” in competitive play.⁶⁶ Indeed, players are readily and voluntarily eager to take such risks because it provides them the opportunity to get to know their opponents and themselves.⁶⁷ In this context, risk-taking serves an educative purpose in developing an awareness of who we are and contributes to one’s sense of self. In other words, “in taking risks, as we sometimes say, we ‘put ourselves on the line’; risk-full situations *individualize* us, they offer occasions in which we find out who we are in the midst of becoming who we are.”⁶⁸

In this thesis, the risk-taking element of competitive play – embedded in sport-as-play – can be interpreted as part of a test of the player’s moral character. The risk inherent in competition offers players the opportunity to ‘test’ the kind of competitor they are and establish an awareness of self in a competitive social context. In one sense, this may be understood as a test of sportsmanship or the trial of the moral self, and further establishes an awareness of what it means to be a good sport both, on the playing field and in life. The following section will address moral character and, more specifically, sportsmanship as its expression.

Sportsmanship as an Expression of Moral Character

The first expositors of sport as a site for moral education in Western history originated in ancient Greece. Philosophers like Socrates and Plato believed participation in sport was foundational to

⁶⁵ Ibid. Original emphasis.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid. Original emphasis, 36.

preparing “children for basic citizenship.”⁶⁹ Valued as a means for cultivating the moral strength necessary for social life, sport was not championed as good in itself, but as instrumental toward achieving *aretê* (virtue, character, excellence). *Aretê* for Plato was not specifically a moral term. Rather, it was used to “refer to the excellence of anything.”⁷⁰ *Aretê* described living beings and inanimate objects and denoted the epitome of what it means to fulfill one’s purpose admirably. Nonetheless, the moral connotations of *aretê* were prominent, especially when discussed as “the quality that made humans both good and happy.”⁷¹ In this regard, Plato believed *aretê* was “the goal of all education.”⁷²

To speak of *aretê* particularly as descriptive of a person’s character, indicates the importance of the relationship between moral virtues and character. The moral virtues as “forms of excellence that individuals come to possess,” contribute to the state of character that is perceived to be good, morally desirable, and definitive of the ideal citizen.⁷³ However, character in itself refers to someone who “has principles and acts with integrity.”⁷⁴ Such people demonstrate the ability to act autonomously and are capable of remaining “true to themselves and act consistently according to independent beliefs and values” when confronted with “social pressures, temptations, [and] difficulties.”⁷⁵ Encompassing some of the most fundamental aspects of human life, character “involves values and evaluation, personal responsibility, practical reasoning, desires, motives, community living, and shared ideals.”⁷⁶ Yet, to simply have character does not imply the individual has virtuous or moral character. Indeed, it is possible a

⁶⁹ Reid, 165.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 162.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Peter J. Arnold, “The Virtues, Moral Education, and the Practice of Sport,” *Quest* 51, no.1, (1999): 40.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

person might exhibit attributes of character in an immoral way.⁷⁷ That is, their actions might be guided by beliefs and values that do not align with the moral good of society and fail to account for harmonious community living. To speak of character development as part of moral education demands the specificity of moral or virtuous character. To have moral character means one demonstrates a disposition “to act, choose, or feel” in a way consistent with virtue.⁷⁸ It implies “knowing the good, desiring the good and doing the good.”⁷⁹

The kind of moral education implied by the development of a moral sense of self is rooted in virtue ethics and places “a premium upon moral agents and their lives rather than discrete actions (e.g., telling a lie), which can sometimes be misconstrued if isolated from the notion of character.”⁸⁰ Moral character emphasizes a dimension of morality that is concerned with “*being* a certain kind of person, [and] having certain dispositions or characteristics that we have always thought to be central to living life in a civilized moral community.”⁸¹

This approach is consistent with sportsmanship literature, which is more concerned with delineating the moral character appropriate to the good sport, rather than categorizing the moral integrity of specific actions in sport. This is evident not only in James Keating’s seminal work “Sportsmanship a Moral Category,” which defines sportsmanship as *attitude* and conduct becoming a sportsman, but also in alternate definitions of sportsmanship which emphasize specific virtues descriptive of the moral character of players.⁸² For example, in addition to

⁷⁷ Leaders of some of the most egregious acts in human history can be described as having strong character. For example, those who have proposed, led, supported, and enacted ideological goals via genocide, demonstrate an enormous amount of character in acting consistently with their beliefs and values despite social pressures and difficulties.

⁷⁸ Arnold, 40.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁸¹ Feezell, original emphasis, 80.

⁸² James W. Keating, “Sportsmanship as a Moral Category,” *Ethics* 75, no. 1, (1964): 27.

Keating who contends sportsmen – in contrast to serious athletes – are those who display a playful attitude characterized by a spirit of moderation, generosity, and magnanimity,⁸³ Randolph Feezell proposes sportsmanship is the mean between excessive seriousness and excessive playfulness – what the author distinguishes as the play-spirit.⁸⁴

Other scholars have also contributed to the sportsmanship discussion. Peter Arnold suggests sportsmanship is a form of altruism; good sportsmen are those who act out of genuine concern for the overall welfare of their teammates and opponents.⁸⁵ William Sessions contends sportsmanship is honour. Broadly construed, the principles of sportsmanship are constitutive of the group's honour code – “a set of principles held in common as matters of honor by all members of the honor group, in a bond of mutual recognition.”⁸⁶ The good sport firmly adheres to the group's honour code and “regards that honor as [...] necessarily connected to her sense of self.” In addition to altruism and honour, Sigmund Loland asserts the moral goal of sport is fair play. His interpretation of fair play is twofold; formal fair play is rooted in deontic logic and refers to an “adherence of the rules”, while informal fair play refers “[...] to the ideal attitudes and virtues with which [players] ought to compete” and expresses language consistent with the moral character of the good sport.⁸⁷ Finally, Diana Abad has proposed sportsmanship is a conglomerate of virtues. Unlike Arnold, Sessions and Loland who have reduced sportsmanship to a singular virtue, Abad proposes sportsmanship is the balance between “fairness, equity, good form and willing to win.”⁸⁸

⁸³ Ibid., 28.

⁸⁴ Randolph Feezell, “Sportsmanship,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 13, no. 1, (1986): 10.

⁸⁵ Peter J. Arnold, “Three Approaches Toward an Understanding of Sportsmanship,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 10, no. 1, (1984): 66.

⁸⁶ William Lad Sessions, “Sportsmanship as Honour,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 31, no. 1, (2004): 50.

⁸⁷ Sigmund Loland, *Fair Play in Sport: A Moral Norm System* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), xiv.

⁸⁸ Diana Abad, “Sportsmanship,” *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 4, no. 1, (2010): 40.

Despite the varying characterizations of sportsmanship, it is evident that such descriptions are wholly concerned with distinguishing the virtues descriptive of the player's moral character. Moreover, it also seems that a moral character approach to sportsmanship is interested in the player's "lived moral experience" and pursues a "[...] moral discourse, and moral education, where we stress the importance of friendliness, compassion, fairness, truthfulness, and reliability" as some of the proponents of virtuous character.⁸⁹ In this regard, sportsmanship need not be specific to sport itself. Rather, it can easily be construed that "being a good sport is simply an extension of being a good person – in one sense, this is an obvious truism [...]."⁹⁰ In this thesis I suggest sportsmanship – as an expression of moral character embedded in sport-as-play – can establish a moral sense of self that can be included in the tenets of physical literacy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to expand the concept of physical literacy to champion, not only the embodied, but also the moral dimension of human life. I argue that sport-as-play and the virtues of sportsmanship offer conducive and appropriate theoretical foundations to be included in physical literacy. More specifically, I propose physical literacy has the capacity to encourage an understanding of self which includes a moral self. This moral sense of self will be rooted in sportsmanship as an expression of one's moral character.

Research Questions

In pursuit of the preceding purpose, this inquiry will be guided by the following research questions:

⁸⁹ Feezell, *Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection*, 80.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

1. What is the sense of self physical literacy claims to develop?
2. What is sport-as-play?
 - a. How does sport-as-play contribute to the development of a sense of self?
3. What is sportsmanship in the context of sport-as-play?
4. What is the relationship between physical literacy, sport-as-play, sportsmanship, and a moral sense of self?

Methodology

This thesis undertakes a philosophical approach and is theoretical and abstract in nature. Like all research that seeks truth, philosophical methods reason back to first principles and foundational assumptions.⁹¹ Throughout the process of assessing previously unquestioned beliefs and opinions, philosophical analyses make use of formal and informal logic. Such methodological tools guide philosophers through a systematic reasoning process to arrive at the foundations of knowledge, values, and principles of action regarding matters related to epistemology, axiology, and metaphysics. Axiology is the philosophical study of value which includes morality and ethics – the study of proper conduct in human affairs. Since this thesis is concerned with conceptual questions regarding physical literacy, sport-as-play, sportsmanship and moral character in a physical education setting, it employs philosophical methods.

More specifically, this thesis employs a descriptive analysis. In the proceeding chapters I explore, describe, and critique the relationship between sport-as-play, sportsmanship and moral character as foundational elements of an enhanced concept of physical literacy. Such descriptions reveal the kind of moral self that emerges from a play conception of sport. I then

⁹¹ Max Black, *Philosophical Analysis: A Collection of Essays* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

describe how this moral self is compatible with existing physical literacy literature regarding a well-established sense of self. This account serves as the basis for a more robust and holistic understanding of self and a rich addition to the theoretical foundations of physical literacy.

Chapter Development

Following this introductory first chapter, the investigation unfolds as follows. Chapter two offers an in-depth examination and critique of Whitehead's concept of physical literacy with a particular focus on the development of a 'sense of self'. It is shown there is a gap in the literature such that physical literacy has not sufficiently addressed the development of moral character as part of the concept of 'sense of self'. Chapter three offers a comprehensive review of the body of literature relevant to a play conception of sport. Specifically, this chapter examines the play phenomenon and its influence on sporting activity. Chapter four analyzes the meaning of sportsmanship as virtuous conduct and moral character. Further, this chapter characterizes the meaning of sportsmanship from a sport-as-play perspective. The proposed characterization of sportsmanship embodies the moral good of sport. Finally, chapter five develops the 'sense of self' present in physical literacy to include an enhanced understanding of what the concept should mean. Physical literacy should account for being-with-others in a moral sense and encourage the development of a moral sense of self and being a good sport.

CHAPTER 2: PHYSICAL LITERACY AND THE EMBODIED SENSE OF SELF

Chapter one introduced physical literacy and its philosophical tenets almost exclusively as first conceived by Margaret Whitehead. The term physical literacy however, originated in the early twentieth century and was initially used by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to describe the movement quality and physicality of an Indigenous culture.¹ Although Whitehead is not the founder of the term ‘physical literacy’, she is often credited for re-envisioning and reviving the concept during a period in time when society was, and continues to be, increasingly concerned with the rapid decrease of physical activity amongst the wider population. Since the publication of Whitehead’s seminal article in 2001, “The Concept of Physical Literacy,” there has been a swift uptake and expanding interest in the concept, especially in the areas of public health, education, sport and leisure, and recreation sectors.² In fact, physical literacy is now recognized in countries across the world as a foundational proponent to bettering the health of their respective population and thus, demonstrates why “this is a critical period for the intellectualization of the construct.”³

Sport and physical education scholars continue to contribute to the ongoing physical literacy discussion, adding breadth and depth to a wide range of topics such as: the definition, the theoretical foundations of the concept, implementing physical literacy from theory to practice, its assessment in the classroom, and the effectiveness of physical literacy centered programmes and curricula. Thus, this chapter will offer an overview of some of the many facets of physical literacy scholarship, including the confusion that has resulted from the enduring discussion and

¹ John Cairney, Tia Kiez, E. Paul Roetert & Dean Kriellaars, “A 20th Century Narrative on the Origins of the Physical Literacy Construct,” *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* 38, no. 1, (2019): 79; Richard Bailey, “Defining Physical Literacy: Making Sense of a Promiscuous Concept,” *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, (2020): 2.

² Ibid.

³ Cairney et al., 79.

underdeveloped areas within the extant literature. I will address the uncertainty surrounding the philosophical tenets of physical literacy with special regard for the development of a sense of self. In addition to Whitehead's own exposition, this chapter will also offer a supplementary descriptive definition of the embodied self of the physically literate person. Following an analysis of 'sense of self', this chapter will conclude with the observation that physical literacy offers an incomplete depiction of the concept insofar as it does not account for a moral self and an understanding of one's moral character.

Defining Physical Literacy

The growing interest in physical literacy within scholarly communities has led to an abundance of literature exploring various dimensions of the concept (i.e., philosophical tenets, practical implications, curriculum development, evaluation criteria and inventories, youth development programmes, etc.). Straying from Whitehead's proposed definition of physical literacy, other scholars and organizations across the globe have defined and operationalized the concept in many ways, some congruent and others divergent with each other (see Table 2 for global definitions of physical literacy).⁴ As a result, there is a particular level of fracturing occurring across the field which some scholars perceive as problematic, whereas others believe it to be a source of innovative debate, especially if physical literacy is to become a mature and established field of study.⁵ Referencing the former, there is reasonable concern that the term physical literacy has adopted a wealth of meanings such that the concept is now becoming lost, confused and

⁴ Joao Martins, Marcos Onofre, Joao Mota, Chris Murphy, Rose-Marie Repond, Helen Vost, Bruno Cremosini, Andjelko Svrđlim, Mojca Markovic & Dean Dudley, "International Approaches to the Definition, Philosophical Tenets, and Core Elements of Physical Literacy: A Scoping Review," *Prospects* 50, no. 13, (2021): 14.

⁵ Bailey, 14.

implemented in ways that are inconsistent with the philosophical tenets of the concept.⁶ It has become gradually more difficult to draw meaningful conclusions and advance the field of study as a whole.⁷ However, others appeal to the long history of physical literacy and insist that we must not limit our understanding to that of Whitehead and her positioning of physical literacy within the philosophical traditions of existentialism, phenomenology and monism.⁸ The multidisciplinary nature of physical literacy has been distinguished as one of its greatest strengths and its “most powerful aspect [...] is that it is a synthesis construct, weaving together many different disciplinary threads.”⁹ Thus, some scholars caution against adopting “a doctrinaire position [which] rejects outright alternative systems of knowing” such as positivism and empiricism and instead, invites a trans-disciplinary approach for the continued progress toward the evolution of physical literacy.¹⁰

Table 2. Global Definitions of Physical Literacy

Group	Country of Origin	Definition of Physical Literacy
International Physical Literacy Association (IPLA), 2017	United Kingdom	Physical literacy can be described as the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life
Sport Wales, 2017	Wales, UK	Physical skills + Confidence + Motivation + Lots of opportunities = Physical literacy
Physical and Health Education (PHE) Canada, 2017	Canada	Individuals who are physically literate move with competence and confidence in a wide variety of physical activities in multiple environments that benefit the healthy development of the whole person

⁶ Cara Shearer, Hannah R. Goss, Lowri C. Edwards, Richard J. Keegan, Zoe R. Knowles, Lynne M. Boddy, Elizabeth J. Durden-Myers & Lawrence Fowweather, “How is Physical Literacy Defined? A Contemporary Update,” *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* 37, no. 1, (2018): 237.

⁷ Bailey, 14.

⁸ Cairney et al., 82.

⁹ Ibid., 83.

¹⁰ Ibid., 82.

Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L), 2017	Canada	Physical literacy is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life
Society of Health and Physical Education (SHAPE), 2012	United States	Physical literacy is the ability to move with competence and confidence in a wide variety of physical activities in multiple environments that benefit the healthy development of the whole person
Sport New Zealand, 2015	New Zealand	The motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding required by participants that allows them to value and take responsibility for engaging in physical activity and sport for life
Australian Sport Commission, 2017	Australia	Four defining statements: 1) Core/process: Physical literacy is lifelong holistic learning acquired and applied in movement and physical activity contexts 2) Components/constructs: It reflects ongoing changes integrating physical, affective (subsequently renamed “psychological”), cognitive, and social capabilities 3) Importance: It is vital in helping us lead healthy and fulfilling lives through movement and physical activity 4) Aspiration/product: A physically literate person is able to draw on their integrated physical, affective, cognitive, and social capacities to support health promoting and fulfilling movement and physical activity – relative to their situation and context

Source: Cara Shearer, Hannah R. Goss, Lowri C. Edwards, Richard J. Keegan, Zoe R. Knowles, Lynne M. Boddy, Elizabeth J. Durden-Myers & Lawrence Foweather, “How is Physical Literacy Defined? A Contemporary Update,” *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* 37, no. 1, (2018): 239.

Three key debates regarding the definition of physical literacy have emerged within the current body of literature: (1) the core elements, (2) process versus product, and (3) holistic versus performance driven. Each of these debates, in one way or another, offers justification for the many reformulations and variations of the concept, yet they also raise the question as to

whether there is an overarching consensus or dissensus surrounding the basic tenets of physical literacy.

First, despite her ongoing modifications to the definition, the four core elements of motivation, confidence, physical competence, and knowledge and understanding have remained a staple in Whitehead's various iterations of the concept. Her earlier works, defined physical literacy as follows:

As appropriate to each individual's endowment, physical literacy can be described as a disposition to capitalize on our human embodied capability, wherein the individual has the *motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding* to value and take responsibility for maintaining purposeful pursuits/activities throughout the lifecourse.¹¹

Her most recent definition is: "as appropriate to each individual, physical literacy can be described as the *motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding* to value and take responsibility for engaging in physical activities for life."¹² Despite some minor modifications, the four core elements have remained unchanged and define how an individual can "value and take responsibility for engaging in physical activities for life;" what Whitehead considers the "fundamental *raison d'être* of physical literacy."¹³ But, global sporting organizations have not embraced all four elements in their own formulation of the concept. For example, both the Society of Health and Physical Education (SHAPE) in the United States and Physical and Health Education Canada (PHE) included only competence and confidence and forewent motivation, and knowledge and understanding. Meanwhile, Sport Wales in the United

¹¹ Margaret Whitehead, "Definition of Physical Literacy and Clarification of Related Issues." *Journal of Sport Science and Physical Education* 65, no. 1, (2013b): 29.

¹² Margaret Whitehead, "Definition of Physical Literacy: Developments and issues," in *Physical Literacy Across the World*, ed. Margaret Whitehead, 8-18 (London & New York: Routledge, 2019): 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Kingdom included confidence and motivation and substituted the term ‘competence’ for ‘skill’ to make Whitehead’s terminology more easily understood. Sport Australia however, failed to mention the elements at all out of concern that such elements may possess different meanings across cultures.¹⁴ Instead, the Australian organization referenced the broader domains of physical, affective/psychological, cognitive, and social capacities (see Table 2 for full definitions).

Second, there is a continuing debate as to whether physical literacy is a process or an end state (product/outcome/goal). Some organizations define physical literacy via the ‘physically literate person’ whereas others conform to a process approach which emphasizes the ongoing potential for individuals to develop and learn through movement.¹⁵ This is evident in Sport Australia’s four defining statements whereby the first states “physical literacy is lifelong holistic learning acquired and applied in movement and physical activity contexts” (physical literacy as a process) and the fourth, which indicates that “a physically literate person is able to draw on their integrated physical, affective, cognitive, and social capacities to support health promoting and fulfilling movement and physical activity – relative to their situation and context” (physical literacy as a product).¹⁶

The product approach has been challenged since it is possible for an individual to lose their physical literacy, resulting in physical illiteracy.¹⁷ Physical literacy is not a one-time achievement, but rather it is something that requires continual maintenance and attention.

¹⁴ Shearer et al., 242.

¹⁵ Ibid., 243.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ The concept of physical illiteracy has been critiqued by Rosenberg (2019) for being a “prejudicial [...] stance because there are many people who lead relatively sedentary, yet healthy, meaningful, flourishing lives.” In this regard, Rosenberg suggests physical literacy ought not to “disparage [...] the physically illiterate among us,” if we are to accept physical literacy as an inclusive and universal construct.

Whitehead explains “[w]hile all can be physically literate, it is the case that, if at any stage of life, individuals lack or lose the motivation, confidence and physical competence to value physical activity and take steps to maintain activity, they can no longer be described as being physically literate, in other words they may become physically illiterate.”¹⁸ Physical literacy then, is best conceptualized as a “cradle to grave journey” that may encounter twists, turns and setbacks, however such encounters almost always offer individuals an opportunity to progress amidst their own physical literacy journey.¹⁹

More recently, Whitehead has responded to the product versus process debate yet again. This time she responds by stating: “[p]hysical literacy is neither a process nor a goal,” but a distinct “disposition or attitude” which demands continual nurturing throughout all phases of life.²⁰ The individual’s commitment to this way of living is often identified as their own physical literacy journey whereby ‘journey’ denotes “a narrative of a life pattern” and expresses “the interface between attitudes, abilities, opportunities and circumstances that together” impact one’s life.²¹ Moreover, ‘process’ is not a direct descriptor of physical literacy, but is closely associated to it. Physical literacy, as a desirable disposition to be fostered, is not itself a process but leading a physically literate life may “generate recommended practices” whereby such practices can be more appropriately interpreted as “being a process.”²²

Whitehead’s response, however, is only *prima facie* satisfactory. Physical literacy may be best described as a disposition or attitude, but it cannot merely be such things because one cannot simply will their physical literacy into existence. For example, development of moral character

¹⁸ Whitehead, *Definition of Physical Literacy and Clarification of Related Issues*, 30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

demands practical action – what Aristotle called *phrónēsis* or practical wisdom. One does not have courage by simply willing to be courageous, rather the development of this virtue demands action. Similarly, one is not physically literate simply because they have willed physical literacy upon themselves – a certain level of action or practice is required. In this regard, perhaps we ought to be content with the fact that the concept of physical literacy is more ambiguous than desired and designates, not only a disposition or attitude, but also a process and product.

Third, physical literacy has commonly been interpreted via two distinct perspectives: the holistic (Whiteheadian) and performance driven.²³ The holistic approach emphasizes the philosophical tenets of physical literacy and celebrates the rich interactions between individuals and their environment. Here, "[s]port serves simply as one context in which embodied capacities are challenged and celebrated."²⁴ In contrast, the performance-driven approach primarily promotes the development of fundamental movement and sport skills, and places little emphasis on other dimensions of physical literacy such as, a well-established sense of self, self-awareness, self-expression, and empathetic interactions with others; all of which are supported by the philosophical foundations of the concept.

The divide between the holistic and performance-driven perspectives may yield questions like: do the performance-oriented definitions of physical literacy still honour the philosophical influences of the concept? Is there consensus across approaches regarding the foundational elements of physical literacy? If both questions are answered in the affirmative, perhaps the holistic and performance-driven perspectives offer nothing more than a cursory distinction. Or are these positions truly distinct? In which case, the diversity of definitions indicates a

²³ Veronica Allan, Jennifer Turnnidge & Jean Côté, "Evaluating Approaches to Physical Literacy Through the Lens of Positive Youth Development," *Quest* 69, no. 4, (2017): 516-517.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 516.

fundamental dissensus and the term physical literacy has incongruent meanings. If the latter is true, then challenging consequences may arise when it comes to both, theoretical and practical uses of the concept. For example, complications could occur when attempting to design and evaluate the effectiveness of assessment instruments across practical uses of physical literacy.²⁵ Additionally, the development of “conceptual silos” amongst theoretical applications of the concept may hinder progress in advancing the field of study.²⁶ Rather than physical literacy scholars engaging in a mutual quest to unpack this multifaceted and complex concept, semantically diverse definitions of physical literacy re-enforce divided uses of the term. The wide range of interpretations of physical literacy then, no longer contribute to the overall progress of the field by offering a multidimensional and complementary illustrations of the concept but instead, hampers the development of the field of study as a whole, via disjointed and conflicting descriptions of the concept.

Whether the holistic and performance-driven perspectives are truly distinct is another point of contention. On the one hand, those who reject the presence of any sense of confusion or dissensus surrounding the core tenets of physical literacy argue definitional differences can be attributed to the specific use of the concept.²⁷ Specifically, whether the definition is used for practical (e.g., Canadian Sport for Life and the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model) or academic purposes (e.g., Whitehead’s six attributes of a physically literate person).²⁸

²⁵ Daniel B. Robinson & Lynn Randall, “Marking Physical Literacy or Missing the Mark on Physical Literacy? A Conceptual Critique of Canada’s Physical Literacy Assessment Instruments,” *Measurement in Physical Education and Exercise Science*, (2016): 4.

²⁶ Bailey, 8.

²⁷ Lowri C. Edwards, Anna S. Bryant, Richard J. Keegan, Keegan Morgan, Stephen-Mark Cooper & Anwen M. Jones, “‘Measuring’ Physical Literacy and Related Constructs: A Systematic Review of Empirical Findings,” *Sports Medicine* 48, no. 1, (2018): 662; Colin Higgs, “Physical Literacy – Two Approaches, One Concept,” in *Physical & Health Education Journal* 76, no. 1, (2010): 6-7.

²⁸ Ibid.

This “substantive distinction” has also been described as an ‘idealist’ versus ‘pragmatic’ approach to operationalizing physical literacy.²⁹ The idealist (academic) perspective remains faithful to the holistic understanding of physical literacy and studies the physical, affective, cognitive and social domains interdependently via qualitative research methods.³⁰ However, those seeking to “measure physical literacy” often adopt the pragmatic (practical) approach and employ both, quantitative and qualitative methods to produce “evidence-based” results to change current physical literacy practices.³¹ Here, “[...] researchers adopt a ‘holistic’ definition, yet recognize the need for an operational (practical) method of measuring physical literacy.”³²

On the other hand, some scholars argue the holistic and performance-driven approaches are at odds with one another and are cause for concern when it comes to the conceptual make-up of physical literacy.³³ This position holds that those who adopt a practical or pragmatic approach are using the term physical literacy to “describe a measurable outcome of a developmental process.”³⁴ Physical literacy is treated like a “stepping-stone to future success rather than as a continually emergent state of being [...]”³⁵ When physical literacy is understood via the performance driven and pragmatic perspective, the philosophical tenets of the concept are often neglected, leading to the use of inconsistent research methodologies and suggested practical implications that make it difficult to distinguish physical literacy from physical activity.³⁶ This is particularly evident when physical literacy is portrayed as “a discrete set of skills to be taught and evaluated by technicians (i.e., teachers and sport coaches), and a social imperative to be

²⁹ Bailey, 3.

³⁰ Edwards et al., 662.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Bailey, 3; Paul Jurbala, “What is Physical Literacy, Really?” *Quest* 67, no. 4, (2015), 373-374.

³⁴ Jurbala, 373.

³⁵ Jurbala, 373-374.

³⁶ Ibid.

advanced by technocrats (i.e., policy and decision makers).”³⁷ Thus, given the philosophical foundations of existentialism, phenomenology and monism that distinguish physical literacy from other concepts such as physical activity and education, it would be inappropriate to strip the metaphysical language from the definition to make it more accessible to practitioners.³⁸

Unfortunately, including and understanding the philosophical tenets of physical literacy are a perceived difficulty for researchers and practitioners alike.³⁹ Some believe Whitehead’s failure to include the philosophical underpinnings in her own definition has been a main source of confusion and misinterpretation for other physical literacy scholars.⁴⁰ In response, Whitehead has made it clear the philosophical roots establish the value of physical literacy and offer a rationale, rather than a description, of the concept.⁴¹ As an amendment to Whitehead’s position, it might be prudent to leave open the possibility that the philosophical tenets of physical literacy provide both, a rationale and a description of the concept.

Although studying this “promiscuous concept”⁴² from the holistic tradition has proven to be a difficult task, this thesis conforms to the definition of physical literacy put forth by Whitehead and endorsed by the International Physical Literacy Association (IPLA). In fact, acknowledging the purpose of this study is heavily rooted in the philosophical foundations of the concept, achieving definitional clarity is imperative and thus, if possible, “ambiguous, contradictory and confused” applications of the term should be avoided when possible.⁴³ The following section then, will elaborate and clarify the role of the three philosophical influences

³⁷ Ibid., 374.

³⁸ Ibid., 374.

³⁹ Martins et al., 26.

⁴⁰ Shearer et al., 242.

⁴¹ Whitehead, *Developments and Issues*, 10.

⁴² Bailey, 13.

⁴³ Ibid., 6.

and demonstrate why an understanding of the concept of ‘sense of self’ is crucial to any Whiteheadian application of physical literacy.

The Philosophical Roots of Physical Literacy

There seems to be a misconception that the philosophical underpinnings of physical literacy are most evident in only a select few of the attributes of the physically literate person (e.g., an established sense of self, positive self-esteem and self-confidence, fluent self-expression, and empathetic interaction with others). The overview of the literature in the previous section revealed performance-driven, pragmatic, and practical definitions of the concept often converged only on elements like, physical competence, confidence, fundamental movement skills, and ability to read and respond to various challenging environments. In this regard, the performance-driven approach has been critiqued by scholars for failing to include the philosophical tenets of physical literacy and thus, is perceived to be at odds with the holistic approach.

This distinction can alternatively be interpreted via the three key domains present in Whitehead’s definition – affective, cognitive, and physical. The holistic approach seeks to develop all three domains, while performance-driven approaches disproportionately emphasize the physical domain and pay little attention to the affective and cognitive. The central problem here is not the disparate focus on the physical domain, but rather on a particular interpretation of it. When this domain is appropriately situated within monist, phenomenological and existential traditions, some literature supports the hypothesis that “confidence in embodied abilities [...] has far-reaching effect on the individual’s total self-esteem and self-confidence. [E]nhanced mastery in the physical domain, even if this is at a modest-level, can have a positive effect on performance and achievement in” the cognitive and affective domains and can lead to “an all-

round blossoming of an individual.”⁴⁴ Although this may seem evident absent an understanding of physical literacy, it is the holistic interpretation of the human being that accompanies the concept that makes this claim obvious. Thus, transcending the distinction between holistic and performance-driven approaches to physical literacy, it is clear, a fundamental understanding of the philosophical tenets and their interrelationship with the definition and attributes of the concept is essential. Absent such knowledge, even holistic approaches can be questioned as to whether they remain consistent with their philosophical roots.

Here, I converge on the physical domain and its intersection with the monist, existential and phenomenological underpinnings of physical literacy. I suggest an equivocal – monistic versus dualistic – understanding of the term ‘physical’ might serve as a main source of confusion in relation to some of the practical applications of the concept. Upon clarification of the physical domain, it is evident “our embodiment is demonstrably a key aspect of our personhood through which we interact with the world, and [...] is continuously responsible for re-enforcement and modification of our self-concept and our attitudes to ourselves.”⁴⁵ Following an analysis of the physical domain, I focus on self realisation and sense of self, as central components of physical literacy.

The Meaning of ‘Physical’ in ‘Physical Domain’

The term ‘physical’ often carries dualistic nuances which are deeply embedded in the “Western psyche.”⁴⁶ Following in the tradition of Cartesian dualism, a human being is the sum of two distinct substances, mind and body, whereby the body is simply a material object controlled by

⁴⁴ Margaret Whitehead, “Physical Literacy: Philosophical Considerations in Relation to Developing a Sense of Self, Universality and Propositional Knowledge,” *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 1, no. 3, (2007): 288.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Whitehead, *The Philosophical Underpinning of the Concept of Physical Literacy*, 22.

an immaterial mind. On this account, the term ‘physical’ in ‘physical domain’ can reasonably be interpreted to correspond with the body and serves primarily instrumental purposes. A dualistic laden understanding of ‘physical’ then, likely views the body as an object to be manipulated and molded to achieve instrumental pursuits such as athletic excellence or health, for example. Yet, a monistic interpretation of ‘physical’ yields drastically different theoretical implications for the physical domain. Here, a human being is not a mind in a body but is reduced to an undifferentiated whole.

Phenomenological and existential philosophers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre expanded the monist conceptualization of a human being by describing our embodied nature as body-subject, lived body, or a being-in-the-world. Unlike the Cartesian notion of distinct substances, “the human body is not a mere thing or object subject to the inclinations of the mind, rather, it is a subject in itself [...], a fundamental unity, a single mode of being.”⁴⁷ Embedded in these terms is the basic idea that “man’s mode of insertion into the world is the body; it is his foundation in existence” and thus, a person’s “consciousness is primordialily embodied [...]”⁴⁸ Through a very brief account of these philosophical traditions, it is not only evident that the physical domain is a significant dimension of life, but also why the lived body is described as being “the locus of a dialectical relationship with the world.”⁴⁹ One’s being-in-the-world “is the centre of expression and meaning-producing acts.”⁵⁰ As Whitehead has described: “[w]e live in a constant state of relating to the world, and thus our existence is played out as an ongoing dialogue between ourselves and our surroundings.”⁵¹ A more consistent understanding

⁴⁷ Klaus V. Meier, “Cartesian and Phenomenological Anthropology: The Radical Shift and its Meaning for Sport,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 2, no. 1, (1975): 59.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Whitehead, *Physical Literacy Throughout the Lifecourse*, 24.

of the physical domain then, in a physical literacy context, emerges. Specifically, the term ‘physical’, regardless of its unfortunate connotations, should denote the whole human being, and thus, offers a perspective which values the physical dimension for its own sake. Accounting for the monistic, existential, and phenomenological influences of physical literacy, the physical domain is all encompassing and includes not only attributes like, ability to move with poise, economy, confidence, intelligence, and imagination in physically demanding situations, but also a well-established sense of self as *embodied* in the world. Absent a basic comprehension of philosophical influences, the preceding description can be misleading.

Despite Whitehead’s insistence that physical literacy is holistic through and through, a critical analysis of the literature suggests scholars and practitioners in this area struggle to shed their dualistic presuppositions.⁵² Often, especially in performance-driven applications of physical literacy, the term ‘physical’ remains heavily rooted in dualism leading to practical manifestations of the concept which unnecessarily overemphasize fundamental movement skills and the development of movement patterns. These attempts to operationalize physical literacy are typically those that are critiqued for being indistinguishable from physical activity.

A variation of this criticism has been expressed by other scholars.⁵³ Specifically, some have doubted whether Whitehead herself has successfully abandoned “all affiliation with dualism”⁵⁴ by questioning the very use of the term ‘physical’ in physical literacy.⁵⁵ In particular, Rosenberg has quoted certain expressions from Whitehead and other physical literacy scholars who use dualistic language like, ‘the body’, ‘the mind’, ‘seat of the intellect’, and ‘a body that is

⁵² Supporting literature was reviewed in the first section of Chapter Two.

⁵³ Margaret Whitehead, “The History and Development of Physical Literacy.” *Journal of Sport Science and Physical Education* 65, no. 1, (2013a): 25-26.

⁵⁴ Rosenberg, 475.

⁵⁵ Whitehead, *The History and Development of Physical Literacy*, 25-26.

connected to the mind’ to advance his criticism. He suggests physical literacy ought to “make greater and more serious efforts to rid itself of dualistic language,” if it aspires to remain conceptually credible.⁵⁶ In the spirit of charitability however, one might consider this specific criticism as a shortcoming of the English language rather than physical literacy itself.

Nonetheless, Whitehead has attempted to defend her stance by stating:

while ‘physical’ does have unfortunate connotations there is no denying that we inhere a physical dimension which is part of our human nature working in orchestrated harmony with all our other capabilities. [...] Other alternatives to ‘physical’ are the philosophical terms ‘embodied’ and ‘motile’. [...] While these might be acceptable terms in the context of philosophy, they were seen as inappropriate for general use, being unfamiliar and somewhat esoteric in nature.⁵⁷

In accordance with Rosenberg’s criticism, one might also question Whitehead’s choice to characterize human life into the cognitive, affective, and physical domains. Here too, she has remained adamant that physical literacy is a monistic concept with her position justified as follows:

[...] the definition sets out a range of domains – the affective, the physical and the cognitive – that need consideration if lifelong participation is to be fostered. This can be read to indicate that there are, in fact, somewhat separate aspects of human being. As a result, the question is asked, ‘Is physical literacy a truly monist concept?’ The answer is in the affirmative. Monism champions the situation that while humans are comprised of a number of domains, these are inextricably related to each other. The definition cites the affective, the physical and the cognitive domains, and in most cases any human endeavour is the outcome of a close-knit relationship between these domains. In fact, it is almost impossible to isolate any of these human potentialities. That having been said, each domain carries its own specific characteristics and is studied using particular approaches. Monism reveals both the complexity of the human condition and the intra-relationship between all human domains.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Rosenberg, 475.

⁵⁷ Whitehead, *The History and Development of Physical Literacy*, 25-26.

⁵⁸ Whitehead, *Definition of Physical Literacy: Developments and issues*, 9.

Although Whitehead's response might be compelling, it depends on an illusive relationship between physical, cognitive, and affective domains. It remains unexplained, just how these domains are inextricably related to each other. Indeed, defining the intra-relationship between these human potentialities has been a philosophically difficult challenge to address and is reminiscent of the classic Cartesian mind-body problem.

Additional objections regarding the philosophical underpinnings of physical literacy arise in putting philosophy into practice. Most notably, a physical education practitioner or coach might ask how they should adjust their teaching to accommodate for this theoretical shift. Can a fundamental motor skill (e.g., running, jumping, skipping) be taught differently from a dualistic, as opposed to non-dualistic, perspective? How does an embodied foul shot, for example, look different from a disembodied foul shot? Of course, both questions are extreme, almost to the point of absurdity, however they do convey an essential point: "[...] it is fine and accurate to describe the self as non-dualistic and embodied, but such descriptions alone do not and cannot fulfill the hard work to genuinely translate these ideas into practice."⁵⁹

Now, one could describe this criticism as misguided. Much like those who questioned Whitehead for not including the philosophical roots of physical literacy in the definition, this judgment may be rooted in a false assumption regarding the role of philosophy in the physical literacy context. Perhaps the monistic influence does not inform the direct way in which we employ physical literacy, but rather serves simply as a justification for *why* we employ it.⁶⁰ As such, philosophy in practice would be described to have bureaucratic rather than pedagogical implications. Specifically, an interpretation of the human condition rooted in monism,

⁵⁹ Rosenberg, 476.

⁶⁰ Niek Pot, Margaret E. Whitehead & Elizabeth J. Durden-Myers, "Physical Literacy from Philosophy to Practice," *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* 37, (2018): 247.

existentialism and phenomenology is disruptive to the hierarchical structure of a traditional education system which regards “the so-called cognitive areas of the curriculum (e.g., mathematics, science, geography)” as more valuable, more important, and more serious than “physical activities (e.g., physical education, school sports).”⁶¹ In particular, an intra-disciplinary understanding of the philosophical origins of physical literacy justifies why physical activities, education and sport are of equal value to, what dualism categorizes as, activities of the mind. Mathematics, science, history, physical education, and sport are more appropriately described as human activities which contribute equally – at least in principle – to the development of a human being.⁶²

Yet, the critic should not be satisfied with this response. A primary issue arises when the practical roles of the philosophical tenets are used to justify the inclusion of physical education within the wider academic curriculum. Specifically, physical literacy adopts an instrumental, rather than an autotelic, role. Physical literacy, in this context, is a means to an end; it is good for something else rather than good in-itself. This is problematic not only because physical literacy is supposed to be an end in-itself⁶³, but because it also demeans philosophy which is a field of study that is often valued for its own sake. Moreover, to credit the philosophical origins of physical literacy for only offering theoretical value, would be premature and perhaps even an oversight on the critic’s behalf. One should have good reasons for aspiring to be physically literate, just like physical education should be valued as much as other academic subjects like

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Scott Kretchmar has argued that monism, despite its efforts, remains highly dualistic by conceptualizing the human being in parts. Alternatively, he suggests focusing on human behaviour and proposes a horizontal model which ranges from unimpressive to impressive intelligence. See, Kretchmar, S. R. *Practical Philosophy of Sport and Physical Activity*, 2nd ed. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2005).

⁶³ Margaret Whitehead, “In Support of Physical Literacy Throughout Life,” in *Physical Literacy Across the World*, ed. Margaret Whitehead, 32-44 (London & New York: Routledge, 2019): 37.

English, history and science. The role of philosophy, however, cannot be limited to only theoretical purposes. The ability *to act* upon one's reasoning is just as essential as one's ability to contemplate respective philosophical positions. In other words, it is not enough for the philosophical origins of physical literacy to serve only bureaucratic or technical purposes. It is important this conceptual or paradigm shift is accompanied by a shift in practice. Here, the 'philosophy to practice' objection resurfaces and thus, we must take seriously the challenge of delineating how monism, existentialism and phenomenology inform the way we not only promote but also engage in physical activity.

At least one response to this objection has been proposed. Pot, Whitehead and Durden-Myers, contend existentialism in practice emphasizes the importance of context in fashioning meaningful experience.⁶⁴ Here, the authors use the example of throwing a ball; "throwing a ball is not meaningful unless it is one with a certain purpose. That purpose can be throwing it as hard and accurately as possible during a game of baseball, or that purpose can be throwing a ball back forth with a friend while enjoying an afternoon with friends in the park."⁶⁵ This example, however, is questionable, especially if 'purpose' is interpreted to mean 'on purpose' or 'with intention'. To state 'throwing a ball *is not* meaningful unless it is one with *a certain purpose*' is perhaps too strong of a claim. Indeed, it infers meaning and purpose are inextricably related (i.e., for an activity to be meaningful, it must be done intentionally). Here, Pot, Whitehead and Durden-Myers leave little room for those activities that may occur spontaneously, such as instances of discovery and exploration. For example, a young child playing with his food at dinner time can be described to be engaged in a meaningful experience, yet his original intention

⁶⁴ Pot, Whitehead & Durden-Myers, 249.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

when sitting at the dinner table was to eat, not necessarily to play. As such, one might reconsider how meaningful experience is fashioned in a physical education setting.

In addition, the authors also suggest physical educators might actualize existentialism in practice by ensuring activities match the subjectively, socially, and culturally defined circumstances of their students. For example, physical educators should be attentive to individuals' differing embodied capabilities, locally available facilities, and students' socio-economic status.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, phenomenology in practice recognizes the experience of the individual learner, and thus the authors make suggestions in accordance with the general rule of catering to students' varying abilities. This might mean, designing and playing games "with different levels of complexity" and, when it comes to assessment, learning objectives should be co-constructed with each individual student, with their physical literacy journey charted accordingly.⁶⁷

From a practical perspective, these suggestions may be questioned in a few ways: Are they feasible? Do they place too much of a burden on the physical educator? What if every student, in a class of 30 students, has different needs? Can one physical education teacher reasonably accommodate all students? What about time, space, and equipment? But this thesis adopts a theoretical perspective and is more concerned with assessing whether the practical implications are consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of the concept. In this regard, the suggestions set forth by Pot, Whitehead and Durden-Myers fall short. What remains unclear is why the existential, phenomenological, and monistic origins are imperative to teaching physical education in the proposed way, nor is it convincing that such practices will be effective

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 250.

in dismantling the dualistic assumptions of practitioners and students alike. In essence, there seems to be a disconnect between the origins of physical literacy and its pedagogical implications such that the structure of learning activities from a non-dualistic and meaningful perspective can also be achieved via a dualistic and instrumental approach. The question remains, how do we ‘teach’ this holistic interpretation of embodiment that is so essential to the development of physical literacy?

With regard for the physical domain, physical competence cannot be reduced to fundamental movement skills because it must also incorporate “movement patterns in context,” and “movement that affords effective interaction with environments and situations in the world.”⁶⁸ Fundamental to achieving proficiency in these areas is a well-established sense of self as an embodied being. One might question then whether it is possible to design a method of emphasizing our embodiment which moves past a theoretical approach and offers practitioners and students an experiential description – experiential ideal – of the embodied self. The following section elaborates on the concept of sense of self and proposes an experiential description therein.

An Experiential Description of the Embodied Sense of Self

Whitehead’s earliest works dedicated to the development of the concept of physical literacy set out some of the foundational tenets and beliefs motivating her thought. One of which is the proposed idea that physical education should aim to develop a sense of bodily awareness in the world and enable meaningful and purposeful self realisation via movement.⁶⁹ It can be inferred that the specific kind of self realisation is a self as an embodied being in the world, or more

⁶⁸ Margaret Whitehead, ed. *Physical Literacy Across the World* (London & New York: Routledge, 2019), 20.

⁶⁹ Margaret Whitehead, “Meaningful Existence, Embodiment and Physical Education,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 24, no. 1, (1990): 5.

concisely, self as a moving being. One reaches a level of proficiency and competence in movement whereby a form of harmony – operative liaison – between self as a moving being and the world is experienced. Whitehead further clarifies that “[t]his experience of self-realisation occurs most intensely, if rather surprisingly, in situations where operative liaison is so fluent that the individual pays less, rather than more, attention to the detailed manipulation of his body. His embodiment is caught up in his total involvement in the situation.”⁷⁰ Movement is “lived pre-reflectively in the mode referred to by Sartre as the body-for-itself” or, as the lived body.⁷¹ Although it may seem counter-intuitive, “the ultimate goal is to enable pupils to disregard the complexities of bodily control and co-ordination in the pursuance of a close and articulate liaison with the world.”⁷² Achieving this state, of course, is no small feat and demands a significant amount of practice.

The liaison between embodied mover and the world is more commonly described in physical activity, sport, and exercise as an experience of being-in-flow. Much like the descriptors of self realisation offered by Whitehead, flow is portrayed as “a state of consciousness where one becomes totally absorbed in what one is doing, to the exclusion of all other thoughts and emotions.”⁷³ In fact, one of the most telling aspects of the flow experience is “the unified consciousness brought about by the merging of action and awareness [...]”⁷⁴

Although not in abundance, there is existing literature supporting the suggestion that the embodied sense of self can be experientially described as being-in-flow.⁷⁵ Briefly, Lloyd has

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Susan A. Jackson & Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow in Sports: The keys to optimal experiences and performances* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1999): 5.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁷⁵ Rebecca J. Lloyd & Stephen J. Smith, “Interactive Flow in Exercise Pedagogy,” *Quest* 58, no. 2, (2006): 223; Rebecca J. Lloyd, “Moving to Learn and Learning to Move: A Phenomenological Exploration of Children’s

drawn upon Simone de Beauvoir, an existential phenomenologist, and her commentary on the sport physical education model of France in the 1940s.⁷⁶ Specifically, the author interprets what de Beauvoir called “an unpremeditated climb” when speaking to the essence of games. She hypothesized that “[b]y unpremeditated, one can infer [...] de Beauvoir was referring to a motile experience indicative of Csikszentmihalyi’s flow [...]”⁷⁷ Lloyd concludes her phenomenological account of movement consciousness in physical education by suggesting educators “might develop an appreciation for a kinetic consciousness, a sense of becoming animate in movement, as well as a kinaesthetic consciousness in feeling not only the emotive possibilities of movements themselves and their various tensions but what it is like to sense motions that are formed in a chiasmic relationship with others as we flow in and with the world.”⁷⁸

Without a doubt, this position is consistent with the philosophical roots of physical literacy. Concepts like kinaesthetic consciousness and chiasms were introduced by two prominent figures in phenomenology – Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Husserl used the term ‘kinaesthetic consciousness’ to refer to our fundamental mode of perception, while Merleau-Ponty employed the term ‘chiasm’ to describe our “fully lived operative intentionality” whereby “the individual no longer has a sense of being ‘over and against’ the world but rather there is an experience of a sort of unity, with the forces of his embodiment and those of the world [...] contributing to a common end.”⁷⁹

Climbing with and Interdisciplinary Movement Consciousness,” *The Humanistic Psychologist* 40, (2012): 31; Raymond Kim-Wai Sum & Margaret Whitehead, “Getting up Close with Taoist: Chinese Perspectives on Physical Literacy,” *Prospects* 50, no. 1, (2021): 145.

⁷⁶ Lloyd, *Moving to Learn and Learning to Move*, 31.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁷⁹ Whitehead, *Meaningful Existence, Embodiment and Physical Education*, 7.

Similarities between the concept of embodied self and being-in-flow arise yet again, except this time from a Chinese perspective on physical literacy. Sum and Whitehead offer a comparative analysis between some of the foundational elements of Taoist philosophy and the basic components of physical literacy.⁸⁰ With regard for ‘interaction with the environment’, these authors liken the physically literate person’s ability to move with poise, competence and confidence across a range of environments and physically challenging situations to the individual’s ability to surrender themselves to the experience of flow – a state which is described on Taoist terms as “an optimum balance of *yin-yang*.”⁸¹ Moreover, the concept of flow translates to ‘*Wuwei*’ and “can be defined as the function of *wu* (nothing) and the ideal level of the achievement of *te* (moral virtue).”⁸² The authors further contend that *wuwei* “is the kind of effortless action that an athlete, musician, craftsman, or artist may experience while “in the zone” or in the state of flow and moving and acting with intelligent and effective spontaneity.”⁸³ Though this state is difficult to achieve and may only occur occasionally, the internalization of these skills translates to an instance in time when an “individual is not only efficacious in terms of skill in the world but also attains *te* (moral virtue) and *kih lo* (perfect enjoyment), [...]”⁸⁴ This is interesting because somehow the two ideas of moral virtue and perfect enjoyment are now entwined in an understanding of flow, self-realisation, and physical literacy.

The latter concept of ‘perfect enjoyment’ is perhaps the least surprising of the two. Whitehead refers to a particular sense of fulfillment that follows from the liaison between embodied mover and the world. Often, physical educators find themselves unsuccessfully trying

⁸⁰ Sum & Whitehead, 141-150.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, original emphasis, 145; The authors clarify that the term ‘yang’ refers to Heaven as the start-up of the universe and ‘yin’ signifies the solidifying nature of the Earth.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

to articulate this metaphysical relationship by deferring to the hedonistic language of ‘supreme satisfaction’, ‘pleasurable experience’ and simply, ‘fun’.⁸⁵ The experience of being-in-flow is one which is “familiar to [physical educators] as able sportspeople” who have “found physical activity profoundly fulfilling and pleasurable, [and] a rich source of self-awareness and self-assurance.”⁸⁶ Although Whitehead acknowledges “that there is a unique satisfaction to be gained from effective participation in physical activity,” she cautions against offering the “impression that pleasure is to be promoted *in itself*,” to do so would trivialize “the enterprise, bringing it down to the level of an amusement.”⁸⁷ Nonetheless, considering the relationship between the flow experience and sentiments of total fulfillment or perfect enjoyment, it would be premature to interpret Whitehead’s cautionary words as an indication to abandon all such descriptors. Rather, it seems more appropriate to suggest that a hedonistic understanding of pleasure and enjoyment is unsatisfactory to describe the essence of this experience.

A more robust understanding of perfect enjoyment can be fulfilled via a play perspective. Here, “‘play’ is not at all synonymous with ‘fun’. This characterization reflects a severe lack of appreciation of its existential significance [...and] tends to trivialize the intrinsic characterization of sport as an opportunity for authentic, embodied modes of free being-in-the-world.”⁸⁸ Moving beyond an egoistic interpretation of total fulfillment, chapter three explicates the relationship between the experience of being-in-flow, and perfect enjoyment by drawing upon a play conception of sport.

⁸⁵ Whitehead, *Meaningful Existence, Embodiment and Physical Education*, 6.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Peggy Gallant, Deborah P. Vossen & Charlene Weaving, “In the Zone: Physical Literacy and the Quest for Certified Coaches,” *Physical & Health Education Journal* 77, no. 2, (2011): 19.

Finally, the concept of moral virtue, especially in relation to physical literacy has not been fully investigated. Monism is a philosophical theory of embodiment, while phenomenology is a philosophical method which inquires into structures of consciousness. As such, we should not expect either of these foundational perspectives to offer a theoretical basis for claims relating to moral virtue or a moral sense of self which have yet to be examined in physical literacy in any great detail. Existentialism, however, is a philosophical school of thought and here, we might have good reason to find a theory of morality. But existentialism is primarily centered upon the notions of authenticity, radical freedom, and choice, and is perhaps best described by some of the famous words of Sartre: ‘existence precedes essence’ and ‘man is condemned to be free’. These axioms express the freedom of a person’s being and why it is that, within a meaningless world, an individual creates meaning through their choices for which they are ultimately responsible. However, to prescribe an ethics within a purposeless world might be considered inauthentic and contrary to the foundations of existentialism. Thus, claims suggesting a physically literate person is morally virtuous because of their physical literacy are unusual considering the philosophical roots of the concept say very little in this regard.

Sum and Whitehead, however, are not the only authors to speak of moral virtue in relation to the physically literate person. Other scholars advocate for the addition of moral character development to the definition of physical literacy and have inductively argued from a positive youth development perspective that “physically literate individuals maintain a self-awareness that encourages moral behavior and meaningful connections with others in physical activity contexts.”⁸⁹ Why and how physically literate individuals develop moral character,

⁸⁹ Allan, Turnnidge & Côté, *Evaluating Approaches to Physical Literacy Through the Lens of Positive Youth Development*, 523.

however, remains underdeveloped. Indeed, these suggestions are only feasible if the foundations of physical literacy are expanded to include a philosophical theory which speaks to the moral development of an individual and a more complete sense of self which embraces the ‘self’ as a moral being. Advancing upon the play conception of sport to be established in chapter three, chapter four explores and describes the concept of sportsmanship – from a virtue ethics perspective – as a concept capable of broadening the philosophical foundations of physical literacy to include a characterization of ‘self’ that accounts for a moral sense of self.

CHAPTER 3: A PLAY CONCEPTION OF SPORT

The previous chapter offered an explanation and critique of physical literacy and concluded with the suggestion that the embodied sense of self physical literacy seeks to develop is experientially described as a sense of self in-flow; a universal experience familiar to skilled and able sports people. This hypothesis has received some support from a few scholars, but has remained underdeveloped, at least philosophically.¹ The present chapter then, appeals to play theory and specifically, a play conception of sport (sport-as-play) to elaborate and support the suggestion that the sense of self we wish to establish is the self in-flow. An analysis of the topic from a play perspective yields an appropriate philosophical explanation to support claims, like those from Sum and Whitehead, who purport that the sense of self in-flow corresponds with the attainment of ‘perfect enjoyment’ and moral virtue, two concepts that contribute to a life well lived.²

There is limited scholarly literature which explores the intersection between physical literacy and play.³ Perhaps this is because the relationship is self explanatory. Play is often thought of as ‘fun’ and thus, one might assume the physically literate individual, whether child or adult, surely must be enjoying themselves while participating in physical activity. However, as noted at the end of the previous chapter, this is precisely the explanation Whitehead and other scholars cautioned against. Specifically, they were clear that play should not be interpreted as synonymous with fun, for such an explanation only trivializes the concept. This is not to say we

¹ See Lloyd & Smith (2006), Gallant et al. (2011), Lloyd (2012), and Sum & Whitehead (2021).

² Raymond K. Sum and Margaret Whitehead, “Getting up Close with Taoist: Chinese Perspectives on Physical Literacy,” *Prospects* 50, no. 1, (2021): 145.

³ Sport New Zealand recognizes play as the foundation of an individual’s physical literacy journey. As per their webpage, ‘play principles’ protect young New Zealander’s right to play, articulate the concepts of intrinsic motivation and self-determination and are intended to guide communities around the value of joy and fun in movement. Beyond Sport New Zealand, very little has been said on the relationship between play and physical literacy.

do not have fun when we play, nor does it mean having fun is unimportant – quite the opposite. Rather, the intent is to draw our attention to the type, or quality, of ‘fun’ – or pleasure – we experience. That is, does the experience yield the immediate satisfaction of desires, as in hedonistic pleasure, or eudemonic pleasure, in the Aristotelean sense as a mode of living in accordance with the good life?

Take for example two activities I consider pleasurable: eating homemade cookies and doing philosophy. I would state with confidence that I enjoy both activities, however there is a difference between the pleasure I experience while engaged in each of them. Eating baked goods offers me an immediate satisfaction that lasts only until I overeat and get a tummy ache; at which point cookies no longer serve as a source of pleasure, but rather diversion. Eating baked goods is a hedonistic pleasure which offers me instant gratification. But when it comes to doing philosophy, lack of pleasure does not stop me from philosophizing. Doing philosophy often causes me much grief and existential discomfort, yet I am continually passionate about it and claim it brings me an immense amount of joy.

Despite the, sometimes excruciating, pain of trying to perfectly capture my thoughts in writing, I wake up most mornings and sit at my desk to work on whichever philosophical problem I might be preoccupied with. Why is it then, that lack of pleasure prevents me from eating cookies, yet it does not divert me from doing philosophy? To be sure, eating cookies is enjoyable (they taste great!) but this hedonistic pleasure is fleeting and short-lived, and offers very little delight after the last bite. Doing philosophy, however, presents me with a more deeply rooted satisfaction; one which comes in the form of delayed, yet sustained, gratification. In contrast to momentary hedonistic pleasures, eudemonic pleasures are distinguished as those activities which provide us with a sense of meaning and purpose; they are our ‘life projects’ in a

sense. Of course, I consider philosophizing to be a pleasurable experience, but it is not merely so. Rather, this kind of pleasure is more appropriately characterized by sentiments of joy and elation and falls within the realm of, what might be meant by total happiness or perfect enjoyment.

Unfortunately, and culturally speaking, play is more readily associated with a hedonistic interpretation of pleasure, like child's play and thus, is sometimes pejoratively perceived as frivolous activity deprived of meaning. In this regard, it may seem unusual to suggest play serves as the conceptual conjunction between perfect enjoyment and the embodied experience of being-in-flow; two concepts which, in the previous chapter, were established as highly meaningful – almost sacred – experiences. Nonetheless, this relationship can be clarified via a revised ontology of play and so, this chapter will offer a brief description of the metaphysics of play prior to demonstrating how the phenomenon can inform a play conception of sport and physical activity.

An Impoverished Ontology of Play

In Western society “the work ethic is proclaimed as the sacred ethic of life.”⁴ This truth is evident in traditional proverbs such as ‘all play and no work makes Jack a mere boy’, as well as fables such as Aesop's *The Grasshopper and the Ant*; a tale depicting the demise of a playful Grasshopper who fails to work hard enough throughout the summer months to survive winter, unlike the ant who toils and works hard to survive. These examples demonstrate the opposing dichotomy between work and play. Work is valued more than play, and is regarded as significant, worthwhile, productive, serious, and real. Meanwhile play typically assumes the respective opposing characteristics and is often described as insignificant, trivial, unproductive,

⁴ Randolph Feezell, *Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 25.

nonserious, and unreal. This is not to say Western culture disapproves of play completely; after all, all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. Rather, Aesop's fable and the above referenced proverbs offer the impression that playtime should only come after the more serious affairs of daily living have been accomplished.

The trajectory of play throughout the lifecourse – as situated within the work ethic where work is privileged over play – can be appropriately summarized via the following narrative: “the child involves himself with play until he grows up or matures. Then the adult is thrust into the “real” world of everyday reality. Now the person must become “serious” about his responsibilities, give up his phantom world of play, and involve himself with the more “important” aspects of living.”⁵ Perhaps this narrative is too simple insofar as it seems to restrict play to childhood and banishes it from adulthood. But this exaggerated excerpt demonstrates a key point: our time engaged in play diminishes throughout the lifecourse as we develop and transition from childhood to adolescence and eventually, into adulthood. Not only does playtime diminish throughout this transition but there is also an added expectation that, in the very least, adults prioritize work over play.

The role and form play assumes in one's life is significantly altered as one develops from childhood and adolescence through to adulthood. Of course, young children across cultures play. This might involve playing make-believe, playing with a ball, playing on a swing-set, or playing with dolls. Play, at this stage, is praised for its contributions to the child's psychosocial and motor development insofar as it affords children the opportunity to interact with others and discover the world in which they live in. Throughout the adolescent years, less time is spent

⁵ Ibid.

engaged in unstructured free play and instead, can unfold in a more structured and organized form. For example, play can be experienced during organized sport, ballet lessons, art class, piano lessons, or even during theatre/drama class. Playtime remains socially acceptable throughout this stage of life and is often encouraged such that these formalized play experiences support the development of virtuous characteristics like dedication, discipline, teamwork, and time-management. Here, the foundations of the work-play dichotomy are introduced and emphasized, with the intent being that adolescents learn how to appropriately balance their time between school and their play activities.

Already, this characterization of play might be misguided as the narrative of the work ethic praises the play phenomenon primarily for its instrumental, rather than its intrinsic value; a fundamental characteristic identified by play scholars.⁶ But, for argument's sake, I shall continue with a summary of the work or labour ethic of the Western world to demonstrate why the orientation of values – work over play – foundational to the work ethos ought to be reconsidered.

The reasoning underpinning the work ethic is rooted in “the logic of necessity within what is often perceived to be an unrelenting condition of scarcity.”⁷ That is, we work to earn enough financial wealth to support ourselves, our loved ones, and even our communal and societal “biological and material survival needs.”⁸ Labour activities are primarily means-ends instrumental pursuits that derive their justification from something else, by some other end in which we wish to achieve. At the most fundamental level, labour activities fulfill a material or

⁶ Although the defining characteristics of play remain a contentious topic, scholars such as Johan Huizinga, Eugene Fink, Roger Caillois, Bernard Suits, Scott R. Kretchmar and Randolph Feezell agree that play is fundamentally an autotelic activity.

⁷ Deborah P. Vossen, “The Play in the Game Utopians are Playing,” *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 13, no. 3-4, (2019): 375.

⁸ Ibid.

biological deficiency and so necessity compels the average adult to remain “duty-bound” to the very important and serious affairs of labour.⁹ More than this, the necessity rooted in the logic of the work ethic illudes labourers into valuing their instrumental efforts over the perceived superfluous, frivolous, irrelevant, unproductive and trivial pursuit of play. Leisurely activities then are embraced only insofar as they offer a temporary escape from the labours of daily living. Here, play is valued as instrumental to warding off the exhaustion caused by overwork and serves as a distraction from the recognition that work is not self-justifying and thus, never ending.

Considering the logic underlying the labour ethic, it is clear the life narrative of the once adolescent who now matures into adulthood, adopts the social value bestowed upon the work-play dichotomy. The intrinsic activity of play is not valued for its self-justifying characteristic and autotelic nature but is rather paradoxically embraced for its instrumental value as a temporary pause or cessation from the exhaustion of everyday life and thus, the labour ethic – “play-to-work labour ethic” – promotes an impoverished, pedestrian, and limited interpretation of play.¹⁰

One might question whether the labour ethic presents a genuine paradox, but this concern seems to be rooted in the observation that there is a disconnect between the theoretical stance of the ethos and the individual’s lived experience of play. Specifically, although it is theoretically accurate to claim the labour ethic embraces play for its instrumental rather than intrinsic value, it is still possible, and perhaps likely, that this theoretical position does not appropriately summarize the individual’s lived play experience. Notwithstanding, the labour ethic is being

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 375-376.

rejected here such that the theoretical tenets of this ethos yield a paradoxical conceptualization of play. This ethos adopts the stance that play activities are valued, not because they are self-justifying activities *quod erat demonstrandum*, but because participating in the autotelic activity of play provides the required rest labourers need, just so they can return to their labour. The labour ethic then values play primarily for its instrumental value, with its autotelic nature being of only secondary importance and so, this ethic presents a paradoxical conceptualization of play as an intrinsic activity that is principally valued for instrumental purposes.

More than this, it is questionable whether conceding to this objection would, in fact, support the labour ethic. Rather than disputing the genuineness of the paradox, another shortcoming of this ethos is revealed via an appeal to our existential experience of play which may provide another reason to reject the labour ethic. Nonetheless, any straightforward logical inquiry would suggest the discovery of a paradox is sufficient grounds for abandoning the quest. In this case, logic would compel us to reject the labour ethic as the sacred ethic of Western culture. But, in life a logical contradiction is sometimes not compelling enough to inform an ideological or practical reversal. After all, many individuals hold contradictory beliefs, and it is often only in the lived consequences of the contradiction when one considers remedying the logic of their belief system. For example, it is commonly known that smoking has negative impacts on one's health, yet despite believing our health is something we should prioritize, many still engage in smoking. Suffering the consequences of a heart attack or pulmonary respiratory conditions might convince some individuals to re-evaluate their lifestyle choices, but here too some may choose to continue smoking despite their deteriorating health condition. Although humans are rational beings, we do not always act in accordance with our rational nature. Nonetheless, we might also consider an experiential analysis of play, in addition to the

abovementioned logical argument, as grounds to reject the labour ethic as an ethos which appropriately characterizes the play phenomenon.

A Revised Ontology of Play

Michael Novak, philosopher, theologian, and author of *The Joy of Sports: Endzones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit*, sheds light on the experience of play in his chapter dedicated to the metaphysics of sport. In his ode to sport, Novak writes:

Play, not work, is the end of life. To participate in the rites of play is to dwell in the Kingdom of Ends. To participate in work, career, and the making of history is to labor in the Kingdom of Means. The modern age, the age of history, nourishes illusions. In a protestant culture, as in Marxist cultures, work is serious, important, adult. Its essential insignificance is overlooked. Work, of course, must be done. But we should be wise enough to distinguish necessity from reality. Play is reality, work is diversion and escape.¹¹

Novak's words draw our focus to the seeming misuse and denial of our own intuition; an intuition which may lead us to believe that play does have important and redeeming qualities, despite the diminished characterization the labour ethic portrays. The labour ethic is built on the assumption that the most important and real affairs of life lie in our instrumental pursuits – in our work– and assumes a metaphysical relationship whereby work corresponds with reality, while play is associated with some form of unreality; sometimes referred to as the illusory world of play. Why then, does Novak suggest otherwise when he says, “play is reality, work is diversion and escape”?¹² The truth of this statement is evident via an appeal to phenomenological descriptions of play, with such descriptors revealing the conflict between our existential experience of play, and the metaphysical relationship foundational to the labour ethic. With this

¹¹ Michael Novak, *The Joy of Sports: Endzones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1994), 41.

¹² Ibid.

recognition, we are brought into alignment with the logic of scholars such as Feezell and Novak who advocate for a conceptual reversal of the values of the work-play dichotomy. Even though our work might remain a necessary component of life, this necessity does not imply the primacy of the activity; nor should we believe it does.

An in-depth phenomenological analysis and critique of play is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, just “some features of play that have been emphasized and analyzed in the expansive literature on the subject” are as follows:

[p]lay is activity characterized by freedom, separateness, nonseriousness, illusion, unreality, delimitation of space and time, isolation, purposelessness, order, make-believe, a play world, superfluousness, suspension of the ordinary, internal or intrinsic meaning, inherent attraction, unalienated participation, internal purposiveness, serious nonseriousness, diminished consciousness of self, unselfing, absorption, responsive openness, attunement, experience of difficulty, overcoming obstacles, risk-taking, finitude, narrative structure, unity, contingency, possibility, uncertainty, spontaneity, improvisation—and fun.¹³

This lengthy, but not exhaustive, list of the characteristics demonstrates why we would be remiss to settle for an interpretation of play that limits the phenomenon to mere “childish irresponsibility.”¹⁴ Instead, such phenomenological descriptions offer a more robust interpretation of play, summarized as “a free activity, a natural outflow of the self, whether child or adult.”¹⁵ On this account, our play experience is expressive of “those times when we *feel* most free, less tense or strained, and most lighthearted [...]”¹⁶ When play is embraced as real and an authentic expression of self, “it becomes apparent that people should play more, not less.”¹⁷

Within the context supplied by this “revised ontology of play,” work is deemed

¹³ Randolph Feezell, “A Pluralist Conception of Play,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 37, no. 2, (2010): 158.

¹⁴ Feezell, *Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection*, 25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, original emphasis.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

subordinate insofar as it suppresses the expression of the “real self.”¹⁸ In existentialist terms, “work, career and the making of history” are unfree¹⁹ and perpetuate a spirit of seriousness which attributes “more reality to the world than to oneself.”²⁰ The individual who adopts the serious attitude – *homo gravis* – “is hiding from himself the consciousness of his own freedom; he is in bad faith [...]”²¹ In other words, *homo gravis* denies one’s freedom such that one attributes greater reality to the world as opposed to oneself. As a result, any reality that is bestowed upon a person is a consequence of one’s belongingness to the world as an object; *homo gravis* conceives of oneself as an object rather than a subject.²² But in contrast, the individual who chooses to adopt the “spirit of play”²³ and live life under its influence – *homo ludens* – is choosing to conceive oneself as a subject; “play, like Kierkegaard’s irony, releases subjectivity.”²⁴ *Homo ludens* is not focused on understanding oneself as a being belonging to the world, but rather a being in the world, and is “bent on discovering himself as free in his very action.”²⁵ One’s “desire to play is fundamentally the desire to be.”²⁶ Herein lies the significance of the metaphysical reversal of work and play. Play, not work, is significant, worthwhile, serious, meaningful, the discovery of our own being, and thus suitably distinguished as the source of reality and ultimate end of life.

Some preliminary truisms follow from this revised ontology of play. Most notably, it is obvious one would be better off to abandon the life of *homo gravis* in favour of *homo ludens*. In

¹⁸ Ibid., 56; Ibid., 25.

¹⁹ Ibid., 26.

²⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: an essay on phenomenological ontology* (London: Routledge, 2005), 601.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Feezell, *Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection*, 57.

²⁴ Sartre, 601.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 602.

other words, it would be prudent to forgo the labour ethic and pursue a life of play; here, “[p]lay [rather than work] becomes the fundamental attitude of life,” and life, as they sometimes say, should most definitely be played.²⁷ But what does it mean, in a practical sense, to live the life of *homo ludens*? Surely, it seems unlikely the average person can escape the necessity of work. Perhaps this revised ontology of play is nothing more than a theoretical stance incapable of coming to fruition. In response to this objection, Feezell concedes our life, *prima facie*, remains unchanged in a material sense.²⁸ But, for individuals who contemplate their way to the life of *homo ludens*, there is an attitudinal shift; one which leaves one’s life “laced with the spirit of play.”²⁹ Although our external living conditions might remain unaltered, “the irony of *homo ludens* adds detachment and lightness to life” since the attitudinal shift is one whereby play, not work, is believed to be the *telos* of life.³⁰ More than this, it is reasonable to suggest the attitudinal shift of the player is precisely that which releases one from the workaday world. *Homo ludens* is no longer a captive of the play-to-work labour ethic, but instead is liberated by a work-at-play ethic.³¹

Arguably, the dichotomous interpretation of work and play might be too simplistic; perhaps even portraying a false dichotomy. It might be reasonable to object that the revised ontology of play, where play has primacy over work, has been overstated. To characterize an activity as work or play (exclusively) solely based on its exotelic or autotelic nature seems inadequate to account for those activities in which “we classify as exotelic [but] are experienced

²⁷ Feezell, *Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection*, 57.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Vossen, 384-388.

as meaningful or otherwise enjoyable[.]”³² Consider professional athletes who thoroughly enjoy playing their sport – so much so that they would continue to play even if it were not their profession – or the professor who very much enjoys teaching and would do so without recompense. Scott Kretchmar, on this topic, suggests the concept of work be definitionally divided into dutiful and enjoyable work.³³ Although both “constitute work because both are exotelic[,]” dutiful work “is done reluctantly, begrudgingly [and], only because it is necessary.”³⁴ Meanwhile, enjoyable work is a “two-for-one kind of activity” that “requires serendipity;” although “we enter the work activity primarily for the external objective [...] something else that is good (or even better) also comes along [...] the doing, the pursuing, the process, turns out to be enjoyable as well.”³⁵ This definitional distinction seems more palatable such that we can now describe the activity of the professional athlete and professor as work, albeit enjoyable work.

Kretchmar’s definitional amendment aligns well, not with the – abovementioned and subsequently rejected – play-*to*-work labour ethic of *homo gravis*, but perhaps with a “play-*at*-work labour ethic.”³⁶ This ethos might be best understood by means of a thought experiment. Imagine, a work-burdened world whereby all exotelic – instrumental – activities are being undertaken willfully rather than out of necessity. To be sure, labourers really are working, but they are genuinely happy in their work. Everyone has been lucky enough to have found passion in their profession and thus, despite the inherent exotelic nature of the pursuit, individuals are joyously working such that they experience a self-justifying element (play) within (at) their instrumental efforts (work). This ethos seems to appropriately encompass what Kretchmar

³² R. Scott Kretchmar, Mark Dyerson, Matthew Llewellyn and John Gleaves, *History and Philosophy of Sport and Physical Activity*, (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2017), 30.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁶ Vossen, 380., emphasis added.

distinguishes as enjoyable work and may be at odds with, and thus opposes the work-at-play ethic of *homo ludens*, since the primacy of play is not overstated, but rather is contextualized in appropriate proportion to the necessity of work.

But recall, the ideological reversal of work and play was advanced based on their respective metaphysical relationship, and, as Novak cautioned, we must not confuse the necessity of work for its function as the *telos* of life. Here, we might consider the relational character of play and how the phenomenon brushes up against necessity. Philosophers Bernard Suits, Eugene Fink, Kenneth Schmitz, and Friedrich Schiller have described play in comparison to our more common experience of life by describing the phenomenon as: “an oasis of happiness (such oases are intelligible only if contrasted with deserts of responsibility)” and suspension of the ordinary “in that it is temporary in relationship to the other things that have first call, as it were, on our time and energy.”³⁷ Play is relational because it is almost always described “as a kind of lovely, temporary, alternative experience that stands forever in contrast to the more mundane, common, normal, secular activities of ‘getting and spending’ [...]”³⁸ Since our “time is always primarily allocated to instrumental activities,”³⁹ it might seem reasonable to assume this allocation of time signifies the ultimate significance of the activity. But this is not necessarily so. Simply because work comprises the normal and mundane activities of everyday life, this everydayness does not necessitate its primacy as a value.

Although the concept of enjoyable work – as situated in the play-at-work labour ethic – is compelling, it is still characterized as work nonetheless; “it is a kind of ‘as if’ play.” If play experience should be valued as the *telos* of life, then ‘as if’ play will not suffice, because even

³⁷ R. Scott Kretchmar et al., 33.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Bernard Suits, “Words on Play,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 4, no. 1, (1977): 125.

though it is “[...] *as if* we freely chose to compete, teach, or read [for example] for the sake of having the experience, [...] we did not, and [thus] the primary objective [of these pursuits] remains operative;” that is, as an activity engaged in primarily for its instrumental value.⁴⁰

Similar to the play-to-work labour ethic, the play-at-work ethic also emphasizes the ultimate significance of work and offers the impression that the necessity of the activity is still of utmost importance. With this re-orientation of values, labourers are satisfied in their work and meet the demands of their work activity, not despairingly, but joyously.

Surely the concept of enjoyable work as embedded in the play-at-work labour ethic might be more settling. However, the propositions established via the metaphysical and axiological relationship of work and play oblige me to reject both conceptions of the labour ethic, as either dutiful or enjoyable, in favor of an ethos definitive of the life of *homo ludens*. Here then, I will uphold the conceptual dichotomy of work and play yet advocate for a work-at-play ethic as one which maintains that play, not work, is the ultimate end or *telos* of life. The following section will continue to examine the concept of play and speculate on what it means to live life devoted to play.

Play and the Life of *Homo Ludens*

The previous section offered phenomenological accounts of play; however, these descriptions do not define what the phenomenon is, in an essentialist type fashion, nor will I attempt such an endeavour. If play scholarship has demonstrated anything, it is that the phenomenon is certainly difficult to define and may even be impossible. Nonetheless, the present body of literature is still

⁴⁰ Kretchmar et al., 31, emphasis added.

helpful in constructing some hypotheses regarding the meaning of play and its influence on life well-lived.

Perhaps one of the most inclusive accounts of play has been set forth by Feezell. Following a sweeping review of the literature, he proposes a pluralist conception of play; that is, a conception which leaves open the possibility the phenomenon can coexist as (i) behaviour or action, (ii) motive, attitude, or state of mind, (iii) form or structure, (iv) meaningful experience, and (v) an ontologically distinctive phenomenon.⁴¹ This tidy framework combines “multiple approaches to play and the varieties of usages, both literal and figurative,” that have been proposed by other leading scholars.⁴² What is intriguing about this multifaceted, yet non-reductionist, framework is not only the complex nature of play, but also the seemingly understated difference between the fifth approach – play as an ontologically distinctive phenomenon – and the remaining four approaches. Specifically, the latter describes the way in which play thrusts itself on human experience, while the former describes the phenomenon in-itself.

To acknowledge play as ontologically distinct is to recognize its qualitatively different nature in the realm of human activities. In other words, the phenomenon possesses some level of independence relative to other activities and thus, its existence is not contingent on any specific game or sport, for example, in which we may come to experience it. Play “has its own mode of being,”⁴³ or as Eugene Fink once described, play is determined by its own end possessing only “internal finalities which do not transcend it.”⁴⁴ By accepting the discrete nature of the

⁴¹ Feezell, *A Pluralist Conception of Play*, 151-165.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴³ Feezell, *A Pluralist Conception of Play*, 160.

⁴⁴ Eugene Fink, “The Ontology of Play,” *Philosophy Today* 4, no. 2 (1960): 100.

phenomenon, it is not surprising play is not easy to define, nor is it surprising that an all encompassing knowledge of play defies the limits of the human psyche.⁴⁵ At best, we should be content with metaphorical, rather than figurative descriptions of our human experience of play – human play – as described by the fourth approach in Feezell’s framework.

A focus on meaningful experience does not neglect the other approaches to play, but instead unifies them. By demonstrating the juncture between action, attitude and form, an enriched understanding of the phenomenon speaks “to the lived experience of the player interacting with her environment or becoming experientially involved with something other than herself.”⁴⁶ Absent such an approach, we are left with three disparate, yet interrelated descriptions of the phenomenon which unnecessarily limits play to merely an activity, an attitude, or a form or structure, sometimes recognized as game or sport. Acknowledging there is truth in each of these approaches, meaningful experience of play is descriptive of the delicate interplay between activity, attitude, and form with this balancing act serving as the very foundation of experience itself. As Feezell explains,

when we attend to the experience of play, parsimonious descriptions are impossible because of the experiential richness of these activities. The freedom of play is both attitudinal, in which the player deeply enjoys engaging in such activities, and experiential, in which involvements with a wholly conventional playworld separates a player from the cares of ordinary life. The experience of “secludedness,” “isolation,” or even “tension” is the experience of *structure* and it is attitudinally significant. “Experience” describes the abundant unity of meaningful *activity* (movement) and valuable intentional *attitudes*.⁴⁷

Human play, as Feezell describes, is meaningful experience whereby such experience is the product of embodied movement (activity or behaviour), engaged in for its own sake (motive

⁴⁵ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), 1.

⁴⁶ Feezell, *A Pluralist Conception of Play*, 158.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

or attitude), unfolding within a specific context (form or structure). This description of human play, however, still seems quite broad and leaves us to question ‘what qualifies as meaningful experience?’ Here then, we might further Feezell’s account by delimiting meaningful experience to the embodied state of being-in-flow.⁴⁸ This state is commonly understood as those universal peak experiences – or ‘peak performances’ in sport – whereby thought no longer precedes embodied action, rather the individual in-flow experiences “a sort of unity, with the forces of his embodiment and those of the world.”⁴⁹ For example, point guards in basketball who somehow manage to skillfully and creatively dribble past their opponents to the basket – movements that sometimes look impossible to spectators and athletes on the court.

This account of play demonstrates how activity, attitude and form come together to produce human experience, but it remains unclear why such experience is significant. In other words, why do we regard our in-flow experiences as meaningful? We could defer to the secular existentialist explanation which privileges our freedom of choice. As free agents existing in a perpetually purposeless and thus, meaningless world, we create our own meaning by exercising our freedom to choose. Here, meaning is not contingent on a predetermined essence dictated by the universe or God, but instead, on ourselves as radically free beings condemned to determine our own purpose. If Feezell’s analysis concludes meaningful experience is the approach most suitable to describe the totality of play, then surely, we would be content with the existentialist response. But recall, human play and play are not synonymous. Instead, human play – or being-in-flow as we will now conceive – is regarded as only a “derivative notion” of the ontologically

⁴⁸ Vossen, 384.

⁴⁹ Margaret Whitehead, “Meaningful Existence, Embodiment and Physical Education,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 24, no. 1, 1990: 7.

distinct phenomenon of play.”⁵⁰ Herein lies a more appropriate explanation regarding the origin of ‘meaning’. Since Feezell’s framework accounts for play and human play, it can be reasonably implied that play acts as a teleological structure imparting meaning to our human experiences of it.

Considering this reasoning, it is clear the existentialist explanation is unsatisfactory, not because it fails to account for play, but because its internal logic cannot account for it. A foundation of existentialist thought is ‘existence precedes essence’ which means the *de facto* nature of a thing’s or human being’s existence is established prior to the givenness of its purpose or value. Although God or some other divine supernatural being may have created the world, existentialist philosophers – at least the atheistic ones – believe life has no specific purpose and thus, this school of thought denies any sort of teleology or *telos* therein. For this reason, it seems the more fitting interpretation of Feezell’s pluralist conception of play is a consequentialist one. Play itself is an ontologically distinct phenomenon whose essence evades us; yet is embedded with a teleological structure which imbues our in-flow experience with meaning. This phenomenon is experienced as a fundamental source of truth, joy, and reality, and thus, as the *telos* of life.

So far, this chapter has established that play is not merely fun, but rather a complex phenomenon with the potential to offer us an enriched ethos of life. A comprehensive understanding of play emerges when the phenomenon is broken down into two constituent parts: play and human play. Play is an ontologically distinct phenomenon qualitatively separate from other activities and possesses a somewhat independent nature from any specific manifestation of

⁵⁰ Ibid., 159. Play also describes, even anthropomorphically, activities of nonhumans and is therefore a more all-encompassing concept.

where it might be present. Human play, as conceived in this thesis, is far more familiar to us and is recognized as the embodied experience of being-in-flow. With the establishment of these ideas, we are now able to draw some conditional hypotheses regarding the life of *homo ludens*. First, *homo ludens* embraces play as the source of reality and the ultimate end of life. Also, *homo ludens* does not trivialize play, but instead prioritizes in-flow experiences making play a guiding principle throughout embodied existence. To live under the influence of play then, is to redirect “all striving, seeking, struggling, reaching, trying and questing [...] towards” our in-flow experiences with such happenings cherished as the most worthwhile, significant, sacred, serious, and real affairs of life.⁵¹

Play also offers an appropriate theoretical foundation in which we can interpret physical literacy claims which speak to the relationship between in-flow experiences and perfect enjoyment. Recall, chapter two identified that the sense of self physical literacy seeks to establish can be experientially described by the embodied experience of being-in-flow, and that this enriched sense of self contributes to perfect enjoyment. At the time, it was unclear why such a relationship existed, however, play theory seems to have clarified this ambiguity. Specifically, if play is embraced as the *telos* of life and source of reality, truth, and joy, then the embodied experience of being-in-flow – rightfully distinguished as human play and thus, a derivative notion of the larger phenomenon – serves as the source of ‘perfect enjoyment’ throughout embodied life.⁵²

⁵¹ Ibid., 389, original emphasis.

⁵² I place ‘perfect enjoyment’ in scare quotes because it could be argued perfect enjoyment in play may not be a monolithic concept that captures the diversity of human experience. In this regard, we should consider interpreting the joy experienced while in-flow in multiple ways and as a metaphor for perfect enjoyment.

Now, it may appear I have strayed far from the topics of sport and physical activity – as important concepts of physical literacy and the main interest of this thesis – throughout this extensive discussion on “the fecundity of play” and the “connection between play and a good human life.”⁵³ However, “sport [and physical activity are] found within the neighbourhood of play.”⁵⁴ While the preceding discussion may create the impression that play is limited to the realm of sport, this is not the case. Indeed, an interpretation of play which contextualizes the phenomenon as an internal *telos* of sport and physical activity severely limits its scope of influence. Instead, “enchanting possibilities of sport, play, and life itself” emerge when we recognize play always has, always is, and always will be, somewhat external to whichever activity it may come to be a part.⁵⁵ In the discussion that follows, I will speak to a particular conception of sport – sport-as-play – whereby play is interpreted as an external *telos* of the activity. This discussion will establish a foundation for the later chapters in which sport and physical activity act as a means to establish a moral sense of self.

Sport-as-Play

I introduced sport-as-play in the first chapter without clarifying what was meant by play experience. I suggested this specific conception of sport embraced play as an ultimate end and included competitive elements, but at the time, the play phenomenon remained ambiguous. Now, having established a revised ontology of play, I am in a position to return to the topic and offer a more developed account of the sport-as-play concept. In accordance with the work-at-play ethic of *homo ludens* and the suggestion that human play is experientially described as the embodied experience of being-in-flow, it follows that sport-as-play is a conception of sport whereby all

⁵³ Feezell, *A Pluralist Conception of Play*, 163.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

seeking and striving efforts central to the activity are reallocated to the in-flow experience. Sport, in this regard, offers individuals the opportunity to play – that is, an occasion for being-in-flow. Moreover, this conception of sport aligns well with some of the philosophical tenets of physical literacy such that the concept of a well-established sense of self – the self in-flow – is the principal goal or *telos* of sporting activity.

At first glance, we might be skeptical of sport-as-play insofar as it might appear to be a reductionist concept. Much like the elite or competitive conception of sport – an approach which arguably posits winning as a central goal of the activity – is criticized for undermining the significance of play, we too might criticize the play conception of sport for belittling the importance of competition and the ideal of winning. Take the description from the introductory chapter, for example. Chapter one converged on these two conceptions of sport: competition and play. It was established that sport as competition – competitive athletics or elitism – dismissed experiences of play by first, assuming competition and play are mutually exclusive concepts, and subsequently overstating the significance of brute competition over frivolous play. Here, sport is reduced to competition; nothing more, nothing less. Like the elite conception then, is sport-as-play also guilty of the same reductionist charge?⁵⁶

On the one hand, it should be conceded that any effort to offer a conception of sport, whether it be sport as competition, bodily excellence, aesthetic appreciation, or even play, is reductionist in nature. Etymologically, to *reduce* something, is to diminish, lessen, narrow, or

⁵⁶ There is another version of this objection. Specifically, human play has been reduced to the embodied experience of being-in-flow and thus, negates some of the other phenomenological descriptors such as angst, alienation, or torment. Although underdeveloped, one response might lie in the recognition that such feelings are descriptive of the out-of-flow experience. Much like Hyland's dialectic of sport, play experience might also be interpreted in a similar fashion. Here, alienation, angst, and torment – the out-of-flow experience – may serve as the first moment of negation and obstacles to be overcome in favour of the embodied experience of being-in-flow.

establish boundaries around what a thing denotes. Philosophers can be wary of this charge since the accusation of reductionism often means one has unnecessarily excluded or overlooked, something from their philosophical musings. However, although the play conception of sport advocated for here is reductionist in nature, it does not negate competition as an element essential to sport. Instead, recall the dialectical nature of sport-as-play – one which is triadic in structure – regards competition or opposition as an important first moment in the dialectical process. As Hyland explained, the oppositional character of competition is not rejected as wholly incompatible with play, but rather deemed a necessary element – obstacle – to be overcome within the sporting situation. The element of competition and the value of winning are not neglected on this account but are instead decentered. The hindrance afforded by opposition makes possible the opportunity for sport to be dialectical – a form of spiritual activity – such that competition is embraced not as merely a chance to ‘win’, but as an opportunity to enrich the play experience. On this account, although sport-as-play might be reductionist because it makes play experience the central goal of sporting activity, it does not fully deny elements like competition and winning, for example. Rather there is a categorization and prioritization of internal and external goals and values taking place. Here we might say the goal of ‘winning’ is necessary in competitive sport but is a less significant value than the appropriation of play experience. Moreover, the moment of negation in the dialectical process is intended to be transcended into something higher. We might consider the ‘something higher’ to be an end not defined by sport itself. Play, in relation to sport, is an external, as opposed to internal, *telos* of the activity, and for this reason, seems to be a viable candidate for the goal of sporting activity.

I will continue with the examples of ‘winning’ and ‘play’ as two possible goals or values of sport. Here, the former should be characterized as an internal *telos*, whereas the latter is

external. Victory is characterized as an internal *telos* such that this goal can only be understood within the context of the specific game. For example, in golf ‘winning’ is defined by having the lowest stroke score after playing a set number of holes, in basketball it is defined by scoring the most points by the end of the set length of the game, and in wrestling the victor is the first athlete to either pin their opponent or accumulate the most points by the end of the match. In each of these examples, ‘winning’ can only be understood within the form/structure of the game itself. In other words, a basketball game can only be won by participating in basketball, a golf match can only be won by participating in golf, and a wrestling contest can only be won by engaging in wrestling; the *telos* of ‘winning’ does not exist independently of the specific sporting context.

The embodied experience of being-in-flow, however, is distinct from ‘winning’ such that this goal and its value can be understood independent of the specific situation. Here, ‘winning’ is identified as an internal *telos* of sport because it “can be described only in terms of the game in which it figures [...]”⁵⁷ But, this description contrasts the external *telos* of ‘being-in-flow’ as “a specific achievable state of affairs” able to be known or experienced “before, or independently of, any game of which it may be, or come to be, a part.”⁵⁸ Given this distinction, a play conception of sport which characterizes the in-flow experience as an external *telos* (an experience not exclusive to sport but instead prevalent in other human practices like medicine or education), makes possible the co-existence of victory and play since the former, along with other possible ends such as aesthetic appreciation or bodily excellence, are characterized as internal *teloi* (ends defined by the sporting situation) of the game. More than this, when we consider the metaphysics and ontology of play – play as the discovery of our own being and *telos*

⁵⁷ Bernard Suits, “The Elements of Sport,” in *The Philosophy of Sport: A Collection of Original Essays*, ed. Robert G. Osterhoudt, 48-64 (Springfield, Illinois: Thomas, 1973), 50.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

of life – an unusual and almost ironic consequence of reducing sport to play experience arises. Specifically, in the process of delimiting sport to play experience, we have consequently unleashed the sporting situation to all reality and thus, an abundance of possibilities (e.g., sport for peace and development, sport as character development, etc.) – most notably, those of sport, play and life itself. Indeed, this thesis is grounded in a play conception of sport specifically for this reason.

By positing our in-flow experience as external to sport, or any activity in which it may come to be a part, we have identified a “common-root experience” in which all beings can relate to, in which we can all distinguish as meaningful, and thus, we can all cherish as supreme.⁵⁹ A logical consequence of the universality and conceptual locatedness of play is that this embodied state can be achieved – experienced – through other activities apart from sport. In other words, when it comes to experiencing play, sport is not unique. The embodied experience of being-in-flow can serve as an external *telos*, not only for the athlete, but also for the musician, artist, carpenter, philosopher, mathematician, lawyer, or doctor, for example. While each of these professions are distinct in many ways, including their internal *teloi*, these professionals can uniformly have in-flow experiences because of their participation in their given practice.

Here, it should be noted that the in-flow experience has a spontaneous and ineffable element. Indeed, it would be presumptuous to assume this experience is premeditated. The perplexing nature of the in-flow experience is due in part to its unpredictability, expansiveness, and openness to numerous possibilities. The spontaneity of the in-flow experience is

⁵⁹ Joseph L. Esposito, “Play and Possibility,” in *Sport and the Body: A Philosophical Symposium*, ed. Ellen W. Gerber and William J. Morgan, 2nd ed., 102-107 (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1979): 103.

demonstrated in instances, for example, when mathematicians troubled with a particular problem suddenly ‘see’ the solution but are at a loss to offer any explanation as to how the answer came to them. Or a basketball team who at first struggles to overcome their opponents, but unexpectedly can ‘see’ the court in a new light – they know where to be, and when to be there and their coordination, skillfulness and ingenuity unites into a harmonious whole like a symphony orchestra. In other words, we should not expect or plan to be in-flow all the time, rather the sport-as-play experience of athletes, much like the problem-solving processes of mathematicians, might be an experience whereby they fluctuate in and out of flow, with the out-of-flow experience continuously serving as an obstacle to be overcome, just so the serendipitous in-flow experience may appear once more. Now, perhaps the nature of the in-flow experience might be cause for concern, since it implies the external *telos* of being-in-flow is somewhat elusive. But this element speaks directly to the “possibility” of play experience:

to the player, the game [sport], if properly constructed, presents not so much a challenge – in the usual sense of the word – as an opportunity to experience possibility. Games [sports], in other words, are contrived situations, the purpose of which is to heighten and bring into focus the interplay between possibility and actuality. Each form of play [...] should contain within it a moment when possibility can be acutely felt by the player.⁶⁰

This accurately reflects the autotelic nature of play activity and a play conception of sport. Here, “the player [...] realizes that even beyond the success of winning the game, there is the interest he takes in the very act of playing itself.”⁶¹ That is, the interest of standing at the edge of possibility, just so the athlete might be in-flow yet again – an experience valued in-itself.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 141.

⁶¹ Ibid.

So far, there has been very little discussion on intersubjectivity and involvement of the other when it comes to play experience. Although the philosopher, mathematician and artist can philosophize, solve equations, and create works of art with others, they can just as well engage in these activities on their own. But sport – or at least some sport – seems to be an exception. Sporting activity serves as a remarkable context for shared instances of play when it lives up to its ideal; that is, when sport embraces play as the highest *telos* (sport-as-play). While the individual athlete at play is described as being-in-flow, we have certainly witnessed instances when a team, as they sometimes say, is ‘in-sync’. This is obvious in expressions from basketball commentators, for example, who are in ‘awe’ of a particular play and describe it as ‘executed flawlessly’ or by spectators of synchronized diving who witness the special moment when two divers move as if they are one. This is like the way in which “the body as object is transcended toward the body as pure activity” during individual in-flow experiences, “awareness of the other as co-player becomes transcended toward the awareness of coexistence of all players into a team [...]” during the shared in-sync experience.⁶² Notwithstanding the descriptors of ‘in-flow’ and ‘in-sync’, the central point is this: although human play is experienced individually, it can also be shared, and this shared experience is best exemplified in many competitive sports.

The intersubjectivity of the play experience has been described by Hyland as an encounter; a concept comparable to, what existentialist philosophers like Heidegger termed, ‘being-with’.⁶³ But rather than conforming to the existentialist doctrine which overly emphasizes individuality, “and the accompanying conviction that the most fundamental stance that man takes

⁶² Ibid., 107.

⁶³ Drew A. Hyland, “Athletics and Angst: Reflections on the Philosophical Relevance of Play,” in *Sport and the Body: A Philosophical Symposium*, ed. Ellen W. Gerber and William J. Morgan, 2nd ed., 94-101 (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1979): 99.

toward the other is one of *alienation*[,]” Hyland accentuates the positive modes of ‘being-with’.⁶⁴ Here our in-flow experiences reveal discovery of self, positive modes of encounter, in-sync experiences, and interactions of self-amongst-others. Moreover, the positive mode of encounter is not limited to “the close kinship with [...] teammates [,]” but can also transpire with opponents in the form of “sportsmanlike competition [...]”⁶⁵

Acknowledging the positive mode of ‘encounter’ suggested by Hyland – and its negative counterpart – the dialectic of sport accounts for the initial moment of negation followed by an overcoming of opposition that can result in possibilities that transpire into positive modes of encounter. Activity becomes dialectical when the negative and positive modes of encounter are transcended into something new – something higher. Positive modes of encounter characterize opponents as cooperative participants in the quest toward engendering play experience, whereas negative encounters fail to transcend the hinderance posed by their competitors, often resulting in feelings of alienation or hostility. Moreover, positive encounters, as foundational to a dialectical understanding of sport, expresses a certain value-laden ideal of the activity whereas sport which ends in negative modes of encounter exemplify a deficient mode of the activity.⁶⁶ This often occurs when a lower valued *telos* (e.g., winning) is mistaken for the central and highest goal of sport, sometimes characterizing opponents as mere objects to be beat. A dialectical understanding of sport, however, recognizes the initial moment of negation as an opportunity for positive encounter, embracing play as the highest *telos* to be achieved. When players and opponents mutually value their in-flow experiences as ultimate, “all games [offer] a variety of

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Although Hyland argues the dialectic of sport exemplifies sport in its ideal form, athletes would have a very sheltered and impoverished sporting experience if they did not experience some negative aspects of sport.

encounters which [are] revelatory of the kind of encounter possible in life, and so revelatory of one of the primary modes of human being.”⁶⁷ This is not to say all sport *always* expresses this ideal, but rather that it is possible. More than this, the possibilities of encounter – both positive and negative – make sports ‘riskful’. Just as we wish for our encounters to develop into cooperative, enriched play experience, we simultaneously risk the possibility that negative experiences may also transpire.

Nonetheless, as any “good teleologist” would, we should “hold the *highest* possibility to be the truly *natural situation*” and therefore, “all competitive play which fails to attain its highest possibility, [...] must be understood as a ‘deficient mode’ of play.”⁶⁸ In other words, if the in-flow experience is the highest form of play, then any form of sport which does not embrace this experience as the primary goal of the activity is deficient. Or, expressed in the positive, if the in-flow experience is the highest form of play, then a conception of sport which posits the in-flow experience as the primary *telos* – sport-as-play – constitutes the ideal of sporting activity. More than this, by hypothesizing sport-as-play embodies the highest ideal of the activity, we might even go as far as deriving an ethical injunction. Specifically, since sport-as-play reveals the ideal of the activity, “we *ought* to strive at all times to let our competitive play be” dialectical;⁶⁹ an environment whereby play experience is pursued as a mutual quest between opponents.

This chapter began with an introduction and critique of the work-play dichotomy which served as a transition to develop a revised ontology of play. As a consequence of this effort, play, not work, became the *telos* of life. This entails that our embodied in-flow experiences be

⁶⁷ Ibid., 100.

⁶⁸ Drew A. Hyland, “Competition and Friendship,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 5, no. 1, (1978): 35, original emphasis.

⁶⁹ Ibid., original emphasis.

regarded as significant happenings imparting meaning to our lives. Moreover, in accordance with the universal nature of play experience, it was established that play, in relation to sport, is always an external goal or *telos* of the activity. This is because play experience is not conditional exclusively on sport but can encompass many activities and practices that yield in-flow experiences. Following this elucidation, the final section of this chapter focused on establishing a play conception of sport. Here it was argued that sport-as-play posits in-flow experience as the primary goal of the activity. Even though it cannot be forced or planned, the peak experience of flow, is the highest *telos* of sport, and so sport-as-play can be reasonably distinguished as the ideal of sport. In the next chapter, the normative ramifications of sport-as-play, as implicated in the tenets of sportsmanship, will be examined.

CHAPTER 4: THE GOOD SPORT – AN ANALYSIS OF SPORTSMANSHIP¹

So far, this thesis has established three central points regarding the concept of sense of self as embedded in physical literacy: first, the sense of self physical literacy seeks to develop is the embodied self in-flow. Second, the self in-flow qualifies as play experience or what it means to embrace the life of *homo ludens*. And third, sport-as-play – that is, sport engaged in primarily for the purpose of being-in-flow – exemplifies the ideal of sporting activity. By distinguishing the ideal of sport, chapter three concluded with a moral imperative, namely, we ought to always strive to let our sport experiences be guided in the mode of human play as the external and supreme *telos* of sport.

Following the prescriptive implications of this moral injunction, the present chapter will explore sportsmanship – a concept which speaks directly to the proper behaviour and attitude of the sportsman or player. Prior to advancing a description of sportsmanship in accordance with a play conception of sport, this chapter will first, introduce some of the common virtues distinguished by sport philosophers to describe the moral character of players (e.g., courage, honour, respect, discipline, dedication, and teamwork). The conception of sportsmanship – sportsmanship as playmanship – advanced in this chapter will later be discussed in chapter five within the context of physical literacy as that which constitutes the moral sense of self to be included in the concept of physical literacy.

¹ To some, ‘sportsmanship’ might be a gender biased term. However, I agree with authors like Danny Rosenberg, William Sessions, Diana Abad, Leslie Howe, Randolph Feezell and William Stephens who purport that the use of a gender-neutral term like sportpersonship for example, would introduce not only a certain level of awkwardness in language, but also a disruption to the historical meaning and positive connotations associated with being a good sport. So, remaining consistent with past literature on the subject, this thesis employs the term ‘sportsmanship’ as a term intended to include male, female, and non-binary individuals. And thus, as Howe eloquently put it, the ‘man’ in ‘sportsmanship’ should be interpreted “to have the same gender-indifferent marker quality that it has in a directive such as ‘cover your man’ to which an entirely appropriate response might be ‘I’ve got her’.” See, Leslie Howe, “Gamesmanship,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 31, no. 2, (2004): 223.

Virtues of Sportsmanship

Perhaps one of the most influential contributions to the sportsmanship literature is that of James Keating in his article “Sportsmanship as a Moral Category.” Keating begins his moral inquiry by first, broadly defining sportsmanship as “conduct becoming a sportsman” and second, deriving a logical formula in which we might use to narrow our definition of the concept – what he termed a ‘common-sense deduction’.² This deduction takes the following form: before defining the conduct becoming a good sport, we must acknowledge that a sportsman is one who participates in sport, and thus a clear account of the activity is foundational to any description of the appropriate attitude and behaviour therein. In other words, Keating’s philosophical efforts are directed toward describing the context of sport prior to discerning the core virtues characteristic of the player.

A central component of Keating’s argument is the sharp distinction he draws between sport and athletics – concepts which refer to two “radically different types of human activity.”³ Athletics, he contends, is a demonstration of superior performance and the agonistic struggle for excellence as expressed in high level amateur, elite, and professional sports. The primary purpose of those persons who participate in athletics is rooted in achieving victory and so, the appropriate attitude accompanying the athlete is one of seriousness. This attitude is “characterized by a spirit of dedication, sacrifice and intensity.”⁴ Since the central goal of athletics is an honourable victory, the activity has a strong emphasis on fair play or fairness in competition with this moral imperative classified as a “moral minimum,” as opposed to a maximum (i.e., going above and beyond the dictates of fairness).⁵ Virtuous acts in athletics are

² James W. Keating, “Sportsmanship a Moral Category,” *Ethics* 75, no. 1, (1964): 27.

³ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

those actions that simply meet the demands of fair play, both in the formal – rule abiding – and informal – upholding the spirit of the activity – sense. In fact, Keating maintains that athletes who strive to exceed the demands of fair play, perhaps via supererogatory acts of kindness and generosity, have severely mistaken their purpose, and risk insulting their opponents.⁶ Good or virtuous athletes then, are those who value the primary goal of fair victory in competition and act in appropriate proportion.

Keating's classification of athletics and the attitude becoming of the virtuous athlete, is at odds with sport and the appropriate attitude of the good sport. Rather than activity that emphasizes honest victory in competition, sport is "a co-operative endeavor [which seeks] to maximize pleasure or joy."⁷ Sport posits fun, pleasure, and delight as its immediate ends. Good sportsmen then, are those who "always conduct [themselves] in such a manner that [they] will increase rather than detract from the pleasure to be found in the activity, both [their] own and that of [their] fellow participants."⁸ They strive, not merely for some kind of moral minimum like athletes, but instead for the "pinnacle of moral perfection."⁹ Good sports, according to Keating, go out of their way to maximize the pleasure of the activity for both themselves and their opponents and teammates. For example, the physical education student who continues to play the shuttle during a badminton game even though its trajectory looked like it would have just nearly landed outside the boundary line or the pick-up basketball player who volunteers to play for the opposing team who might need an extra player for the game to proceed. Sportsmanship, characteristic of the attitude and conduct becoming the good sport, is

⁶ Ibid., 31.

⁷ Ibid., 29.

⁸ Ibid., 29-30.

⁹ Ibid., 27.

characterized by a spirit of moderation, generosity, and magnanimity, and is often displayed in supererogatory and altruistic acts of kindness.¹⁰

Keating's contribution to sportsmanship literature, although influential, is not without its flaws. Most notably, many scholars have criticized Keating's sharp distinction between athletics and sport, as too simplistic and narrow to account for sport activities that include athletic elements, like serious competition, and athletic contests that include sport like elements, such as playful activity.¹¹ More than this,

[s]ometimes it isn't easy to distinguish between sport and athletics, and therefore decide whether sportsmanship or fair play is applicable or not. Are sports played in physical education classes recreational or serious? What about those played in community centres and leagues? Moreover, do participants identify with one or the other attitude exclusively in different sport settings?¹²

In other words, Keating has offered the impression that athletics and sport are mutually exclusive concepts whose defining attributes and corresponding attitudes – serious competition and pleasant diversion – cannot co-exist in a singular activity. Consider the counter example of sport-as-play – the conception of sport outlined in the previous chapter. It was demonstrated that sport-as-play accounts for both play and serious competition. However, the kind of play advocated for in chapter three was more than simply fun and pleasurable experience. Instead, the revised ontology of play demonstrated that our human play experience is a kind of deep play that sometimes include angst, alienation, and torment, as some of the feelings that arise in the face of our competitive play endeavours. Here, it is clear the etymological definition of sport which

¹⁰ Ibid., 28.

¹¹ Tamba Nlandu, Randolph Feezell, Robert Butcher and Angela Schneider, Peter Arnold, Robert Simon, Danny Rosenberg, and Diana Abad have all included a variation of this criticism in their own works on sportsmanship.

¹² Danny Rosenberg, "Sportsmanship Reconsidered," *International Journal of Physical Education*, 30, no. 4, (1993): 18.

Keating based his analysis, adopted a pedestrian, rather than authentic and more developed, interpretation of play which falsely implies serious competition and play are at odds with one another, and so constitute radically different kinds of activity.¹³

Beyond the integrity of Keating's distinction between athletics and sport, the author draws our attention to two points of significance. First, Keating distinguishes the play spirit as foundational to any understanding of sportsmanship. And second, there is a difference between adhering to game rules – both formal and informal – and something more. Abiding by the letter of the law of the game, he describes, is consistent with virtues of fairness and the establishment of equality of opportunity which appropriately demands a spirit of dedication, sacrifice and intensity on the player's behalf. Sportsmanship, however, demands something more – whatever that may be – and aligns with a spirit of generosity and magnanimity. This distinction has been further supported by scholars Robert Butcher and Angela Schneider, who “feel that fair play as respect for the game captures the attitude of the sportsman,” but does not account for the totality of the concept.¹⁴ Fair play and sportsmanship, the authors contend, are intimately related to be sure, but they are not synonymous; “there is more to the concept of the sportsman than mere fair play and conduct within games.”¹⁵ Sportsmen commit themselves to “the highest possible standards of play” and so, we might say “the attitude of the sportsman is one that subsumes personal interest under the interests of fair and excellent play.”¹⁶ Philosopher Peter Arnold adopts a similar position, reasoning that the legalistic and contractual nature assumed by fairness

¹³ Randolph Feezell, “Sportsmanship,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 13, no. 1, (1986): 5.

¹⁴ Robert Butcher and Angela Schneider, “Fair Play as Respect for the Game,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 25, (1998): 18.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

means that fair play “can only be regarded as a necessary condition of sportsmanship, but by no means a sufficient one.”¹⁷

In accordance with these suggestions, this chapter interprets sportsmanship as something more than mere fair play and will review some of the prominent descriptions of the concept – sportsmanship as personal honour, a form of altruism, and as a conglomerate of virtues – proposed by other scholars. Dissatisfied with these descriptions of sportsmanship, the remainder of the chapter is dedicated to advancing a description of the concept that adheres to the spirit of play and thus, follows from the play conception of sport established in chapter three.

Sportsmanship as Honour

William Sessions offers a conception of sportsmanship from the perspective of honour; that is, “as a matter of honor among competitors in a given sport (the basic honor group).”¹⁸ The author identifies three forms of honour – conferred, positional, and personal honour – the latter of which is central to his account of sportsmanship. Conferred honour is something that is bestowed upon the individual from another. This might be a gift, token of appreciation or reward from others to the honoree as a reflection of their reputation. Meanwhile, positional honour is that which is bestowed upon the victor in competition. It is the kind of honour that regards an individual as ‘better than’ or ‘above’ another (e.g., winners in competitive games, record setters, etc.). Sessions makes clear that neither of the latter forms of honour appropriately encompass the core character of sportsmanship. Instead, he suggests personal honour is indicative of the virtue held by the good sport. Personal honour, Sessions construes, is a

¹⁷ Peter J. Arnold, “Three Approaches Toward an Understanding of Sportsmanship,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 10, (1984): 62.

¹⁸ William Lad Sessions, “Sportsmanship as Honor,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 31, (2004): 50.

virtue of an individual in a certain social context – as having *an effective sense of honor*. An effective sense of honor means adhering firmly to the honor code of some honor group, understanding what that honor code requires, prohibits, and permits; being able to act according to the code; being motivated to do so; and effectively willing it. Moreover, this commitment goes deep; a person with an effective sense of honor regards that honor as being one of the more important features of herself, almost necessarily connected to her sense of self. Without her honor, she is diminished, reduced, defiled, ruined, perhaps even to the point of being unable to face the prospect of living in dishonor, so that exile or even suicide can seem preferable to living a dishonorable life.¹⁹

The deeply rooted sense of honour advocated for here, is perhaps best described in accordance with virtues such as trustworthiness or loyalty. It reflects a player’s unquestionable commitment to a particular code and community, for example, a sports team, work colleagues, a street gang, and other social groups of these sorts.

Personal honour, on this account, is only intelligible as understood within a specific social context. After all, the honour code is dictated by members of a particular honour group. The expectations are that individuals have the capacity to be honourable – they are “honor-capable” – they have a mutually shared sense of honour such that they are committed to the same honour code, and they unanimously recognize “one another as members of the same honor group.”²⁰ Within this context, personal honour is not necessarily descriptive of one’s dedication to some thing, like a game, profession, or even broadly, a practice, but instead to people. Specifically in the context of competitive sport, and descriptive of the good sport, Sessions advances the following description of sportsmanship:

Sportsmanship is part or all of [a] group’s honor code of competition, the rules or principles—not all of them explicit or even capable of being made explicit—that govern the behavior of those who participate in and recognize others as participating in the competition. On this view, good sports are personally honorable in competition; they are honorable competitors. Moreover, sportsmanship matters [...]

¹⁹ Ibid., original emphasis, 50-51.

²⁰ Ibid., 51.

deeply. Commitment to the game is a natural by product of commitment to other members of the honor community [...]. It is not so much the intrinsic delights of fair play that attracts honorable competitors as it is respecting and being respected by those competitors who play fairly.²¹

There are at least two corollaries to Sessions' view of sportsmanship. First, honour is relative – or relational – and second, sportsmanship is not necessarily a moral concept – a concept inextricably tied to the moral dimension of life. These two points make this conception of sportsmanship unsuitable for the inquiry at hand. Because the honour code is dictated by the members of the honour group, it necessarily follows that not all honour codes are the same. This is not only true in the most obvious sense, for example the honour code foundational to a street gang differs from the honour code of a sports team, but also across different sports teams and sometimes even within the same sport, inclusive of their various age-groups and levels of competition. This is troublesome, because it seems to imply that only members of the honour group can truly identify acts of good sportsmanship, which might consist, in the narrowest sense, “of only peer players”²² on one's specific team. Although in some instances the honour group might extend to include fellow opponents and coaches, Sessions is clear in stating that spectators of the game “definitely do not belong to the honor group.”²³ On this account, Sessions' conception of sportsmanship makes it difficult to explain how others who do not necessarily belong to the honour group can identify acts of sportsmanship. More than this, the ability to identify acts of sportsmanship would appear to be increasingly difficult if, as Sessions states, personal honour really is, not only relative to different honour groups and their corresponding codes, but also if these “honour codes change over time.”²⁴

²¹ Ibid., 52.

²² Ibid., 53.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 52.

In addition, Sessions is also explicit in expressing “sportsmanship is not the same as morality in sports.”²⁵ Specifically, he states: “the honor code of an honor group may command or prohibit acts that are morally indifferent (e.g., dress codes or rules of hospitality in the Balkans) or even contrary to morality (e.g., the honor codes of street gangs and the Mafia).”²⁶ Here, the author is not implying honour codes cannot include moral principles or that moral principles are not applicable to sport, but rather “those moral principles are not the whole, nor even the epicenter, of sportsmanship.”²⁷ Although this does seem to be a logical conclusion of a personal honour conception of sportsmanship, such a conclusion is problematic for the thesis at hand. Specifically, since our primary interest is in delineating a conception of sportsmanship expressive of one’s moral sense of self and thus, as a pedagogical tool for the development of a moral self, sportsmanship as personal honour presents a less than consistent description of the concept. In contrast to Sessions’ morally ambiguous conception of sportsmanship, Peter Arnold advances a description of the concept which is inextricably tied to morality, and one’s moral character.

Sportsmanship as a Form of Altruism

Sportsmanship, for Arnold, is best conceptualized as a form of altruism. His analysis of the concept is advanced in contrast to a “Kantian view of morality” which, he contends, aligns well with a “justice theory of sport.”²⁸ The Kantian view defines morality primarily in accordance with reason and rationality and places a premium on one’s moral ‘duty’. Broadly construed, Kant’s categorical imperative prescribes that one’s actions strictly reflect “principles which are universalizable, impartial, consistent, and obligatory” with a particular emphasis on “choice,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Arnold, 67.

decision, will and thoughtful deliberation.”²⁹ This deontological ethic is one commonly applied when strict adherence to rules is of the essence. The justice theory of sport, as one which emphasizes fairness and fair play via an unwavering devotion to the rules of the game, is exemplary in this regard. Arnold argues, however, that despite its ability to describe fair play, the Kantian view of morality is inadequate to account for sportsmanship because it “seems to overlook or disregard some aspects of interpersonal relations which are as morally important in sport as in other spheres of life.”³⁰ Here, Arnold has in mind “such virtues as sympathy, compassion, concern, and friendship.”³¹

Arnold’s conception of sportsmanship then, is concerned with demonstrating that the moral point of view, although “connected with the impartial and obligatory,” is not limited to these principles.³² In other words, the altruistic view of sportsmanship accounts for the impartial and obligatory such that the player is *minimally* expected to adhere to the rules that govern play, but it also provides the moral landscape “to go beyond them.”³³ Altruism, however, should not be mistaken for “acts of supererogation.”³⁴ The latter, Arnold insists, is more in keeping with a deontological ethic because such acts entail ‘going beyond the call of duty’, and still maintain a central focus on principles of duty and obligation. Altruistic acts, however, are distinguished from supererogatory acts, because they are engaged in out of genuine care and concern for the well-being of the other, not out of the “force of duty.”³⁵ Kantian ethics leaves little room for the consideration of emotion. Emotions, a Kantian would maintain, “are considered unreliable moral

²⁹ Ibid., 66.

³⁰ Ibid., 67.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 68.

motives because they are too transitory, changeable [...] and not sufficiently detached, impartial, and consistent.”³⁶ Sportsmanship as a form of altruism, however, does take into consideration the “states which prompted them [the acts];” one’s intent matters. The altruistic sportsman as Arnold describes,

not only thinks about and is affected by the plight of the other, but acts in such a way that is directed to bring help or comfort in some way. Altruistic acts of sportsmanship stem from a desire for the other’s good. This sometimes leads to impulsive or spontaneous forms of conduct that arise from the sporting contest as when, for example, Karpati, the Hungarian fencer, reached out and tried to console a defeated and disappointed opponent. Such acts, it will be seen, are not motivated by such Kantian virtues as obligation and duty so much as by a perceptive and human response to another’s plight.³⁷

Sportsmanship as a form of altruism for Arnold, is reserved for those acts in sport that are engaged in out of complete and total regard for the opponent’s welfare; these acts exceed what is reasonably expected of the player and are done exclusively “out of concern for another’s good.”³⁸

Arnold’s stance on sportsmanship, however, is reductionist in nature. It implies the concept can be wholly understood through the singular virtue of altruism. This objection has been applied to other attempts to define sportsmanship, including Sessions’ personal honour. To concede sportsmanship is best exemplified by altruism, leaves little room for those acts which we are inclined to classify as sportsmanlike but are not necessarily altruistic. Consider the classic example of racquetless Josie, a squash player:

Josie is your opponent in an important match and has arrived (not to her fault) without a racquet. She will forfeit the game. You use the same kind of racquet and grip as she, and you have a back-up racquet. She is the only competitor at this event

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

who could seriously challenge you and without her, you would almost certainly win the championship. The game against her will be tough, and you are far from certain you can win. What should you do?³⁹

Let us suppose you are an athlete who values the spirit of play over the accolades of winning, and without hesitation you decide lending your racquet to Josie is the right thing to do. This act seems to be a blatant and hard case of sportsmanlike conduct, but your decision to act in this regard could have been motivated by more than a perceptive response to Josie's plight. As an athlete that genuinely enjoys the challenge of the game, perhaps your primary motivation to act was not necessarily out of concern for Josie's psychological state (arriving to a match without your racquet would surely incite psychological distress), but instead lending your spare racquet to Josie means the match can take place. Arnold's altruistic view of sportsmanship does not seem to account for situations like these, in which the choice to act is inspired by more than a concern for the others' well-being. In other words, sportsmanship as a form of altruism offers a very narrow description of the concept and so, fails to consider some of the more complex motivations for action.

A similar objection could be advanced in relation to Sessions' proposal that sportsmanship is personal honour, and other scholars like Keating, for example, who attribute sportsmanlike conduct to a singular virtue. Diana Abad, advances this critique in her own work on sportsmanship, and thus proposes the concept is better defined as a conglomerate of four different virtues.⁴⁰

³⁹ Butcher and Schneider, 6.

⁴⁰ Diana Abad, "Sportsmanship," *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 4, no. 1, (2010): 29.

Sportsmanship as a Conglomerate of Virtues

Abad adopts Keating's common-sense deduction formula to arrive at her own description of sportsmanship. However, rather than relying on the etymological definition of sport to inform her description of the concept, she defers to four elements descriptive of "what sport is about"⁴¹ and from these, suggests "sport is a rule-governed activity [...] about excellence, winning and how to play the game."⁴² Abad then considers four instances – or hard cases – of unsportsmanlike behaviour. The idea here, is that in isolating some examples of flagrant unsporting conduct, we can first identify the virtue being violated and subsequently assume the positive counterpart of the virtue will tell us something about sportsmanlike conduct.

An obvious sense of unsportsmanlike conduct is breaking a rule which Abad contends violates the rule-governed element of sporting activity. Here the primary virtue of fairness is undermined. She is careful to point out that 'fairness' should not be confused for inequity. Regarding the former, the author explains we would still qualify inequitable conduct as unsportsmanlike, but this refers to a breach of the spirit of the game or 'how to play'. For example, there are some acts in sport which are not necessarily a violation of the formal rules (e.g., Alex Rodriguez yelling 'I got it!' when running between second and third base on a routine pop fly that froze infield opponents who did not attempt to catch the ball) but still qualify as a tactic providing an unacceptable advantage to one's team. This is commonly referred to as gamesmanship in the literature.⁴³ Nonetheless, Abad states these acts violate the spirit of the game and the virtue of equity.

⁴¹ Ibid., 29.

⁴² Ibid., 30.

⁴³ Howe, 212-225.

Other instances of unsporting behaviour, Abad describes, are acts like “not shaking hands after a match; constant complaining; lack of generosity and grace; humiliating the opponent; badmouthing the opponent at press conferences; being a poor loser; or being a poor winner.”⁴⁴ These behaviours are not necessarily described as unfair or inequitable, but rather as “bad form or dishonourable” and are contingent on the fact that “sport is not only about winning, but also about how you play the game.”⁴⁵ On the other hand, Abad also regards winning and displaying excellence as essential components of sport, and so we would also consider one’s lack of effort as unsporting. Specifically, “in contests, it is unsporting to give up, not to give one’s all, not to fight, not to live up to the occasion to the best of one’s ability, or to be indifferent, to treat the contest as a joke [...]; it is essentially “unsporting not to try to win as best as one can.”⁴⁶ This willingness to win involves both, a test of the player’s excellence and “providing a test of excellence for one’s opponent, both of which are impossible unless one gives one’s best.”⁴⁷

Abad concludes from her analysis of unsporting conduct, that fairness, equity, good form or honour and a will to win – as those virtues which are violated in the unsportsmanlike examples – comprise the four positive counterparts in which we can assume contribute to good sporting conduct. These virtues of sportsmanship, she maintains, demand balance, and are not reducible to one another. With respect to balance, Abad emphasizes we must understand each virtue in relation to the others. For example, it would be inappropriate to interpret the ‘will to win’ as a ‘will to win at all costs’ (e.g., employing tactics of gamesmanship, engaging in substance abuse, etc.), since this would be in conflict with the virtue of good form which has a central focus on upholding the spirit of the game (e.g., being generous in competition, adhering

⁴⁴ Abad, 31.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

to the formal and informal rules of the game). Moreover, even though there is an affinity across some of the virtues of fairness, good form, equity, and the will to win, these elements are distinct and “cannot be reduced to one another.”⁴⁸ Each virtue is necessary, but none of them are sufficient on their own to account for an all-encompassing view of sportsmanship. Therefore, Abad ends her inquiry by stating the following:

There is not a unified account of sportsmanship, insofar as none of the elements of sportsmanship can be derived from or reduced to any of the others, and none of which is more important than any of the others, so that none of them can be classified as the ‘essence’ of sportsmanship. [...] We can say that sportsmanship is about different things, that it is a conglomerate of different virtues, that is, it is about fairness, equity, good form, willing to win, and moreover, about holding the balance between them.⁴⁹

Recall however, that sportsmanship as a conglomerate of virtues is rooted in an understanding of sport whereby such activity is understood to be rule-governed with a particular focus on excellence, winning and ‘how to play the game’. These defining elements, Abad maintains, do not take primacy over one another, they are all significant in their own right, and play a foundational role in outlining what sport is all about – again, winning, excellence and ‘how to play’. This stance on sport, however, opposes the play conception of sport advanced in the previous chapter since sport-as-play suggests human play experience does reign supreme over other elements of sport. Indeed, it was discussed that winning, although an important feature, should not be the central concern of sporting activity but, instead, the pursuit of play experience should be a priority. In the face of competitive play, the embodied experience of being-in-flow is regarded as the highest *telos* of the activity. Thus, Abad’s conception of sportsmanship does not align with the sport-as-play conception advocated in this thesis because

⁴⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 40.

her description of ‘what sport is about’ is contingent on the equality of the defining elements of sport with no hierarchical relationship among these components. As such, the following section will elaborate on a description of sportsmanship that follows from a play conception of sport.

Playmanship⁵⁰

So, what is sport? In contrast to Keating who suggests sport is pleasant diversion, or Abad who roughly outlines sport as rule-governed activity having to do with winning, excellence and ‘how to play’, Feezell’s recommendation that “we view sport as an extension of human play,” is better aligned with the play conception of sport described in chapter three which is the view of sport advocated in this thesis.⁵¹ However, since Feezell’s description of sportsmanship as play-spirit has been criticized for being far too vague, the remainder of this chapter focuses on Feezell’s position and expands his play-spirit thesis in accordance with the previously established suggestion that the embodied experience of being-in-flow constitutes an experiential description of human play; a position I will term playmanship.

Sportsmanship as Play-Spirit

Feezell, like many other sport philosophers, takes issue with Keating’s radical distinction between sport and athletics. Specifically, he objects: “Keating’s analysis, [...] fails to describe adequately the nature of play so as to understand how sport could be seen as an extension of play [...] and probably because of his limited clarification of play, he incorrectly ascribes a false exclusivity to the psychology of the player and the athlete.”⁵² In response, Feezell advances his concept of the “player-athlete,” as a representation of the mixed attitudes and purposes that arise

⁵⁰ The term ‘playmanship’ might also be criticized for being a gender biased term like ‘sportsmanship’. I do not intend it to be interpreted as such. Playmanship is applicable to males, females, and nonbinary individuals. See the first footnote in this chapter for an extended explanation.

⁵¹ Feezell, *Sportsmanship*, 9.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 5.

in one person.⁵³ Instead of the polarizing representation of player and athlete, advocated by Keating, the player-athlete Feezell describes, is one whose

attitudes and purposes are extraordinarily complex. He is simultaneously player and athlete. His purpose is to win the contest and to experience the playful and aesthetic delights of the experience. His attitudes are at once both playful and competitive, and these color his relationship with his fellow participants. He sees his opponent as both competitor and friend, competing and cooperating at the same time. These are the attitudes that guide his conduct.⁵⁴

More than this, one of “the most accurate and inclusive phenomenological accounts of experience in sport are those which focus on the nature of play, and which show – either explicitly or implicitly – that sport is a formal, competitive variety of human play.”⁵⁵ This was precisely what chapter three sought to demonstrate via a discussion regarding the significance of play and a conception of sport which recognizes human play experience as the highest *telos* of the activity. Similarly, this also seems to be what Feezell means when he borrows from Kenneth Schmitz who purports that, “sport is primarily an extension of play” deriving its central value from the phenomenon.⁵⁶ In agreement with Feezell, Schmitz, and other scholars who advocate for a play conception of sport, sport-as-play – or sport as an extension of play – “is the understanding of the activity that gives rise to a more adequate understanding of sportsmanship.”⁵⁷

Unfolding as a logical consequence of the play theory of sport, sportsmanship is defined by what Feezell terms, the play-spirit. In particular, “[i]f sport is understood as an extension of play,

⁵³ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 9.

then the key to sportsmanship is the sprit of play.”⁵⁸ The distinction Keating draws our attention to – sport and athletics – is not a distinction between two radically different forms of activity, but rather the extremes of the attitude some players adopt in sport – that of excessive seriousness and excessive playfulness – both of which are inappropriate to adequately describe the complex attitude of the good sport. Instead, the play-spirit or attitude of the good sport is better understood as the mean between these two extremes. Here, Feezell likens his approach to that of Aristotle and his concept of the golden mean. When speaking of virtue, we should understand this condition as an intermediate state between the extremes of excess and deficiency.⁵⁹ For example, to describe the virtue of courage, we would say a courageous individual displays conduct which appropriately falls in between the extremes of excessive rashness and cowardice. Likewise, sportsmanship as play-spirit is “a mean between excessive seriousness, which misunderstands the importance of the play-spirit, and an excessive sense of playfulness, which might be called frivolity and which misunderstands the importance of victory and achievement when play is competitive.”⁶⁰ In other words, play-spirit acts as a moderator between two opposing extremes. Feezell elaborates,

[t]he play-spirit will moderate, not negate, the intensity in which we pursue victory, and will introduce a spirit of friendship and cooperation in what would otherwise be a ‘naked power struggle.’ Thus, the good sport doesn’t cheat, attempt to hurt the opponent, or taunt another. A certain lightness of spirit prohibits uncivil displays of temper, constant complaints to officials, and the like. Throughout the activity, self-control and kinship with others are necessary to maximize the possible values of the play-world.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁹ Louis Groarke, *Moral Reasoning: Rediscovering the ethical tradition* (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2011), 167.

⁶⁰ Feezell, *Sportsmanship*, 10.

⁶¹ Ibid., 11.

Now, there is a corollary to Feezell's position which he "recognises and describes" as wholly appropriate and in fact, consistent with the Aristotelean undertones of his sportsmanship thesis.⁶² Specifically, I am speaking to the fact, as Feezell acknowledges himself, that sportsmanship as play-spirit is "more satisfying intellectually" but it does "not always generate easily purchased moral recommendations."⁶³ This is a point Abad took issue with in her own analysis of sportsmanship. Specifically, she is troubled by the golden mean interpretation of the play-spirit because, as she explains, "playfulness, for Feezell, is just a negation of 'seriousness', and the mere negation of a notion does not provide enough content for the opposite notion."⁶⁴ Now reserving judgement as to whether Abad has appropriately understood Feezell's position, she is essentially dissatisfied with the ambiguity surrounding the play-spirit – what 'being playful' means and how playful one should be – and how such acts are distinguished.

It should be noted, as Abad did, that Feezell was clear that his conception of sportsmanship would not lend easily to a clear and concise list of unsporting and sporting behaviours. Consistent with the Aristotelean nuances of Feezell's position, "it would be misguided to expect an extreme degree of exactness, clarity, or precision in our present moral inquiry;" something we might more reasonably expect from a Kantian or deontological ethic.⁶⁵ Instead, we should be satisfied "if we can indicate the truth roughly and in outline."⁶⁶

I agree with Feezell then, when he says, "[t]o see the virtue of sportsmanship as a mean between extremes, is not to be given a precise moral formula for interpreting acts as sportsmanlike or not, but to be given an explanatory and experiential context within which we

⁶² Abad, 38.

⁶³ Feezell, *Sportsmanship*, 10.

⁶⁴ Abad, 39.

⁶⁵ Feezell, *Sportsmanship*, 11.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

can learn and teach how we ought to conduct ourselves in sport.”⁶⁷ However, I also agree with Abad, to some degree, that we can further clarify what is meant by ‘being playful’. As such, the concluding section of this chapter expands upon the playful attitude – what I will distinguish as sportsmanship as playmanship – as understood within the context of Feezell’s play-spirit. The following conception of sportsmanship should not be interpreted as a rejection of Feezell’s position, but rather an expansion of his thought.

Sportsmanship as Playmanship

So again, we might ask what is sport? I would respond – in accordance with Feezell – sport in part, is an extension of play. In chapter three it was established that sport-as-play is dialectical activity. It is a conception of sport that recognizes, and allows for the possibility that, characteristics like competition and play are not mutually exclusive; both can co-exist in a singular activity and so, the attitude of the player can be both competitive and playful – encompassing what Feezell terms the play-spirit. More than this, upholding the play-spirit does not mean players, or player-athletes as Feezell conceives of them, have a *laissez-faire* approach toward honest victory in competition. Rather, they recognize that it is a necessary condition, a prerequisite, and mutual understanding amongst players, that serious pursuit of victory is imperative if play experience is to unfold within the sporting context. Players acknowledge competition as more than mere opposition or negation, but as a negative first moment meant to be overcome. The dialectic of sport is a playing out of the mutual recognition that the pursuit of victory – an end which only one team can acquire – is accepted so play can be experienced – an end which both teams can acquire. Therefore winning, although a necessary internal goal of

⁶⁷ Ibid.

sport, is not distinguished as sport's highest *telos*; this position is reserved for being-in-flow or play experience.

Play experience, as the highest *telos* of sport, proved to be a more complex phenomenon than its more common pedestrian interpretation of mere amusement and frivolous activity. The lived play experience, as phenomenologically described by Feezell, is an experience of separateness, unalienated participation, internal purposiveness, absorption, responsive openness, serious nonseriousness, overcoming obstacles, risk-taking, unity, possibility, uncertainty, and spontaneity. These descriptors offer more meaning to 'being playful' than simply the negation of seriousness. Even though it seems reasonable to imply these descriptors are precisely what Feezell is referring to when he endorses the play-spirit – or being playful – as the attitude befitting the good sport, our play analysis in chapter three allows us to advance his position.

Recall, it was proposed that human play is experientially described as the embodied experience of being-in-flow. We might clarify Feezell's description of play-spirit then, and thus his characterization of sportsmanship, by claiming that being-in-flow also experientially describes what 'being playful' – or play-spirit – means. In other words, if sport is conceived to be an extension of play, then the key to sportsmanship is the play-spirit whereby being-in-flow experientially describes what this spirit connotes. Specifically, the attitude and conduct becoming a good sport is an attitude and conduct directed toward and following from the embodied experience of being-in-flow; what we will term playmanship. And this, I would conclude, offers enough content to describe the attitude of the good sport since it offers players a tangible experience to serve as their point of reference; one which is universal to all athletes, across all sports, and all levels of competition. Playmanship, I argue, provides players a more

definitive experiential context where they can learn and express how to conduct themselves ethically in sport.

The normative implications of playmanship and the virtues that emerge from the concept will be addressed at length in the following chapter. However, it will here be noted that playmanship, much like Feezell's play-spirit, might also fall victim to the deontological objection that this depiction of sportsmanship does not prescribe rigid and precise guidelines that lend well to a clear-cut list of sporting and unsporting behaviours. For example, a compilation of categorical imperatives all sportsmen must adhere to (e.g., all players must shake hands at the beginning and end of a game). However, much like the play phenomenon, sportsmanship "is dispersed in our experience in innumerable particular instances," and so, "[w]e ought to be hesitant about attributing to this notion an abstract unity that is not found in experience."⁶⁸ I take this to mean that there are innumerable ways sportsmanlike conduct might unfold in action and thus, we ought to be hesitant to speak directly to some kind uniformity in conduct. For example, injuring an opponent is not always an act of unsportsmanlike conduct, just as being generous in competition is not always appropriate sportsmanlike behaviour. For example, in a National Basketball Association championship game, it would be stunning if players voluntarily tried to overturn the calls of officials and relinquish points or possession of the ball. This contrasts with the ethos of golf where professional golfers in championship tournaments are expected to call penalties on themselves. However, in good Aristotelean fashion, our efforts are better directed toward advancing a conception of sportsmanship, roughly and in outline, that promotes self-

⁶⁸ Ibid., 9.

governed development of moral conduct, and not simply a moral formula for distinguishing such acts.

Playmanship as attitude and conduct directed toward and following from the embodied experience of being-in-flow, offers a fuzzy yet clear enough conception of sportsmanship. It is clear enough to offer players some direction so they – at least experientially – know what sportsmanship is about, yet loose enough to accommodate for the “peculiar instances of sport” that make sportsmanship “an ideal whose instances of realization might vary from sport to sport, time to time, and culture to culture.”⁶⁹

Similar to the triadic structure of Hyland’s dialectic of sport, Tamba Nlandu offers an account of sportsmanship as an outcome of thirdness. Thirdness, the author explains, “refers to the fact that each participant in a particular game brings into the game her own understanding of the activity, which must be reconciled with that of all other participants for the activity to turn into shared experience.”⁷⁰ This process is comparable to the dialectic of sport and unfolds in three steps. Recall, the dialectic of sport called for an initial moment of negation (e.g., hinderance or opposition), a secondary moment in which there is a mutual recognition oppositional challenges require concomitant responses, and a final moment in which negation once overcome results in a higher *telos* (e.g., opponents are perceived as facilitators and possibly friends in pursuit of play experience). Similarly, the process of thirdness perceives “each individual participant’s experience of each particular instance of a particular game [...] to be a *first*, which must be followed by a *second* (i.e., the confrontation with other participants’ experience), which in turn must be elevated to a *third* (i.e., to a generalized experience

⁶⁹ Tamba Nlandu, “Play Until the Whistle Blows: Sportsmanship as the Outcome of *Thirdness*,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 35, (2008): 77-78.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

reconcilable with past, present, and future experiences of the game).⁷¹ In other words, sportsmanship as an outcome of thirdness, implies the concept is about one's ability to "reach a certain level of *shared meaning* consistent with that reached by *all* other participants."⁷² Herein lies the significance of playmanship as a conception of sportsmanship which champions the universality of play and the common-root experience of being-in-flow.

Nlandu acknowledges that shared meaning in sport is contingent on a certain level of objectivity able to be seen by all players. And further, that "[t]his objectivity stems from the fact that sport at the bottom involves play [...]."⁷³ The universality of play experience is that which makes a conception of sportsmanship rooted in sport-as-play (sport as an extension of play) so appealing. When sport is conceived of as an extension of play, we at once have an outline of what sportsmanship is about because we have identified a common *telos* all players can share. Yet, we have not gone as far as to script the exact conduct expected of players; a task likely impossible to achieve when we take into consideration varying sports, cultures and skill levels. Of course, this means sportsmanship is a dynamic concept, "and its totality, though highly desirable, might never be captured by an abstract and simplistic definition."⁷⁴ Nonetheless here is what we can say about sportsmanship.

Sportsmanship as playmanship is rooted in a play conception of sport that champions human play and the common-root experience of being-in-flow to be the highest *telos* of sporting activity. The universality of this *telos* complements an interpretation of sport that is dialectical, as Hyland described, or as a process of thirdness, as Nlandu proposed. Both approaches, emphasize the process of reaching a kind of mutual recognition among competitors and their

⁷¹ Ibid., original emphasis.

⁷² Ibid., added emphasis.

⁷³ Ibid., 76-77.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 88.

quest toward a common end. In this regard, “sport is all about striving together” and so, the good sport – or the playman⁷⁵ – is a willing and active participant in the quest to turn the “subjective experience of each participant into an objective, shared experience enjoyable to all participants.”⁷⁶ The playman displays genuine care and concern for the “achievement of excellence and the pursuit of victory”⁷⁷ just so shared play experience can unfold. Moreover, playmanship is broad enough to accommodate for the possibility that an act of sportsmanship might display the virtues of altruism, honour, dedication, courage, and the like, without reducing the concept to a single virtue.

In part this thesis focuses on physical literacy which is not wholly concerned with sport and athletes per se, but with all forms of physical activity. The universal character of sport-as-play and sportsmanship as playmanship are appropriate concepts consistent with the tenets of physical literacy where the development of a moral sense of self – the good sport – can and should exist and be encouraged. The common-root experience of being-in-flow is one that can be experienced by all individuals in all types of physical activity, notwithstanding their age or proficiency level. More than this, the dialectical or thirdness interpretation of sport makes such activity an exemplary training ground for the development of a moral sense of self and becoming a good sport such that it places players in a position where they must make deliberate ethical choices in action. The concluding chapter of this thesis will bring our extended discussion on play, sport-as-play, sportsmanship and playmanship and align it with physical literacy and how such philosophical concepts contribute to the development of the moral sense of self.

⁷⁵ The term ‘playman’ is intended to denote a play-oriented individual or someone who holds play experience to be the ultimate *telos* of life.

⁷⁶ Nlandu., 78.

⁷⁷ William O. Stephens and Randolph Feezell, “The Ideal of the Stoic Sportsman,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 31, no. 2 (2004): 205.

CHAPTER 5: PLAYMANSHIP, PHYSICAL LITERACY AND A MORAL SELF

The preceding chapter concluded with a conception of sportsmanship rooted in sport-as-play. It developed the notion of playmanship as an attitude and behaviour directed toward and following from the embodied experience of being-in-flow and appropriately encompasses what it means to be a good sport. Within the realm of sport, play-oriented athletes are those who embrace the in-flow experience as the ultimate *telos* of sporting activity and act accordingly. Such athletes will likely subscribe to a cooperative interpretation of competition. This was made clear in both Hyland's dialectic of sport and the process of thirdness described by Nlandu. Both interpretations emphasize the mutual recognition of a shared and common end in which athletic opponents should strive for and can successfully achieve in victory and defeat.

In this chapter similar cooperative nuances will arise when considering Robert Simon's ethic of competition known as the "mutual quest for excellence through challenge" and his corresponding "inner morality of sport."¹ By now, it should be clear that sport-as-play – a conception of sport whereby competition is primarily a cooperative endeavour – and playmanship are intimately related concepts. This chapter will further elaborate on this relationship. Specifically, when taken together, sport-as-play and playmanship are conducive to the development of a moral sense of self such that the context of sport demands players engage in the process of making deliberate ethical decisions during competition. In this regard, the present chapter argues for the inclusion of sport-as-play in physical literacy since this conception of sport is an ideal moral training ground for the development of a moral sense of self.

¹ Robert L. Simon, Cesar R. Torres and Peter F. Hager, *Fair Play: The Ethics of Sport*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018): 221-222.

The first section of this chapter borrows from Aristotle's virtue ethics and his concept of practical wisdom to demonstrate why sport-as-play is an ideal environment for the development of a moral sense of self. In addition, this section will also introduce Simon's 'inner morality of sport' as a theoretical stance that supports the moral influence of sport-as-play and the impact its corresponding values have on moral character. Finally, to align the concepts of sport-as-play and playmanship within the physical literacy literature and the development of the moral sense of self, the remainder of the chapter is dedicated to enumerating several normative implications that follow from these concepts, including some possible issues and controversies that might arise from these ramifications.

Sport-as-play: A Suitable Moral Training Ground

Chapter four briefly referred to Aristotle's golden mean as an underlying approach to comprehend Feezell's play-spirit conception of sportsmanship. Recall, the golden mean is a heuristic device intended to further our understanding of virtue as the mean between extremes. In chapter four the virtue of courage was presented as an example – courage is the mean between cowardice and rashness. Moreover, the virtue of temperance can be described as the mean between humility and vanity, and justice might be described as the mean between the extremes of lawlessness and lawfulness. The golden mean is a prominent feature of Aristotle's virtue ethics and is exemplary of one of the ways this moral theory differs from other ethical theories like deontology or utilitarianism, for example. Specifically, rather than prescribing precise categorical imperatives or some kind of moral mathematical equation to calculate and distinguish virtuous from immoral behaviour, virtue ethics emphasizes the moral development of individuals and their ability to adapt their behaviour to various circumstances. Aristotle's mean is intended

to serve as a device to develop morally virtuous character and apply acquired virtues to the more “narrow circumstances of our unique lives.”²

This approach is fitting for the sporting context and the development of the good sport. Since sportsmanship is a concept that accounts for something more than simply playing by the rules, a moral theory rooted in deontic logic would be inappropriate to describe the moral character of players because rules only partially define games (i.e., game rules do not account for the spirit of the game). Virtue ethics, however, accounts for the totality of sport such that it implies it is in players’ best interest to adhere to the constitutive and regulative rules of the game (i.e., the virtue of trustworthiness would imply players can be trusted to adhere to game rules), while also accounting for the game spirit – play-spirit – an element of sport that can never be fully encompassed by a set of formal rules and categorical imperatives.

Good moral and virtuous conduct for Aristotle, is a product of good habit.³ Only through continuous engagement in virtuous acts is moral character developed. This behaviour stems, not only from a virtuous way of thinking or feeling – this would not be enough – but also from ‘doing’. This is why Aristotle contends that those who are morally good possess practical wisdom (*phronēsis*).⁴ Virtuous people demonstrate a propensity to act appropriately, at the right time and for the right reason. These individuals prove to have goodwill and “*choose to do good over evil [...]*.”⁵ To exhibit these characteristics, is an indication that one thinks, feels, and acts in accordance with the tenets of virtue and is not necessarily evidence of intelligence-in-thought,

² Louis Groarke, *Moral Reasoning: Rediscovering the ethical tradition* (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2011), 168.

³ Aristotle, *On Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics 10*, trans. James Wilberding (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2019), 1178a16-23.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1178a35-b1

⁵ Groarke, original emphasis, 166.

but a kind of intelligence-in-action. Virtuous individuals then, have a kind of moral *phrónēsis* whereby such wisdom is demonstrated via the “successful exercise of intelligence-in-action.”⁶

The following example illustrates the difference between theoretical and practical wisdom:

[g]ood basketball players know how to position themselves effectively, how to feint and jump, when to pass and when to shoot, and so on. A sports commentator or a coach might be able to explain in words what they are doing, but it is the athletes who act. In the heat of a basketball game, they make the right move quickly, in a split-second, without verbalizing what they are doing. They possess, we might say, basketball *phrónēsis*. Their play-making is a form of practical intelligence; it is intelligence expressed in and through action. This is what a moral person is able to do in the moral arena. They are able to respond – in a superior manner – to whatever befalls them.⁷

To simply apply a moral formula to distinguish sportsmanlike conduct, would merely be a demonstration of intelligence-in-thought and the grasp of a specific moral theory, not a reflection of moral character. The example of basketball players, as those who demonstrate practical intelligence or basketball *phrónēsis*, versus sport commentators or coaches who exhibit theoretical knowledge, can be likened to ethics professors or moral philosophers.

An ethics professor lecturing to students demonstrates her intelligence-in-thought which is not necessarily an indication of her moral character. However, a demonstration of a professor’s practical wisdom – intelligence-in-action – unfolds in her interactions with her students. In other words, it is one thing for an ethics professor to lecture on the moral theories of notable philosophers, to evaluate the behaviour of others in accordance with such theories, or perhaps to serve as an ethics consultant on a medical board, for example. However, these acts only speak to the professor’s theoretical knowledge. A testament to her moral character is observed in her interactions with others. Perhaps she exhibits patience and generosity by spending time with a

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 157.

struggling student. Moreover, she might also demonstrate virtues of dedication and dependability by staying committed to the office hours listed on the course syllabus. And she might be just insofar as her exams accurately reflect lecture content. Notwithstanding, these examples are intended to demonstrate that virtuous conduct is “more than skin-deep,” it is the product of a “deep transformation, a real change of *character*,”⁸ one which entails a uniformity across thought, feeling and action. The development of moral character then, calls for more than a kind theoretical knowledge or intelligence-in-thought, but instead a practical intelligence which demands engagement, a ‘doing’ of sorts, and continual practice. Herein lies Aristotle’s account of virtue as a product of habit.

Sport-as-play, I contend, is an exemplary moral training ground because it is a dynamic social activity that demands the execution of technical performance and skills as well as responses to value and fair play issues. To simply participate in sport, no matter the precise conception, demands practical wisdom to be sure. But, when sport is perceived as an extension of play, competitive play and the dialectic or triadic structure of the activity introduces the possibility that players might also develop *phrónēsis* within the moral dimension of life and thus, develop their moral sense of self.

Recall, in chapter three sport-as-play was described as unfolding in three moments: one in which opponents are perceived as hinderances from achieving certain goals of sport like winning; a second in which hinderances *from* are recognized as hinderances *for*; and a third moment in which opponents are associated as partners – sometimes friends – in a mutual quest for play experience. Here, sport-as-play is a conception of sport whereby competition and one’s

⁸ Ibid., original emphasis, 167.

willingness to win are necessary elements toward the achievement of play experience – what was distinguished to be the highest *telos* of sporting activity. Moreover, since play experience is posited as the highest *telos* and pinnacle of sport experience, sport-as-play constitutes the ideal conception of the activity. In accordance with this conception, a moral imperative followed; one which prescribed players ought to always strive to make their sport experience playful. This ethical injunction led to a play centered description of sportsmanship in chapter four. Specifically, the good sport is one who exhibits playmanship – attitude and conduct directed toward and following from the embodied experience of being-in-flow.

Now, provided the spontaneous and variable nature of the embodied experience of being-in-flow has remained historically difficult to define, it is not surprising that this conception of sportsmanship is one which cannot be fully encompassed by a set of rules or guidelines, nor can it be attributed to a specific virtue like honour or altruism. Much like the play-spirit, playmanship can manifest itself in numerous ways. A playman is dedicated, loyal, trustworthy, honourable, disciplined, and courageous individuals who exhibit concern for excellence and have high regard to abide by the constitutive and regulative rules of the game. Moreover, they are also good team players, and have a natural instinct to distinguish when it is appropriate to be generous and act magnanimously in competition and when not to behave in these ways. Acts that express these characteristics and other virtues can all qualify as acts of sportsmanship, but not always. Acts of sportsmanship demand practical wisdom such that they entail knowing when, and to what extent it is appropriate to act in accordance with the virtues. For example, it might be unsporting of a pick-up basketball player to play with the same intensity and willingness to win as a professional athlete. Or conversely, it might be unsporting of a professional athlete to display the same level of generosity expected from a recreational player.

Sport-as-play associated with the tenets of practical wisdom offers a rich understanding of sportsmanship that accommodates for the complexity and nuances of social interactions and relationships in sport. The play conception of sport is an exemplary moral training ground since a certain level of practical wisdom is demanded of players. This means engagement in sport refers to being thrown in the midst of competition and responding appropriately to ever changing social situations where competitive play includes performance and ethical responses. With every encounter in sport, whether it be on the court, field or ice, players are repeatedly confronted with choices in the face of competition. Morally speaking, such choices within competitive encounters can transpire between alienation and shared play experience. In one sense, these choices might be reasonably construed as a test of character or a trial of the moral self. In alignment with the argument of this thesis, the development of a moral sense of self progresses when players choose to act in ways that allow competitive encounters to transpire into shared play experience. Since play is distinguished as the highest *telos* and so, constitutes the ideal of sporting activity, the display of attitudes and actions consistent with the ideal are morally commendable.

Now, simply because it is being argued that sport-as-play is an exceptional training ground for the development of a moral sense of self, it should not be mistaken or assumed that this character is unique to sport. Stated otherwise, moral character developed in sport does not differ from the kind of moral character expected of individuals in other domains of life like in education. Rather, virtues like discipline, dedication, honesty, loyalty, and the like, are those virtues which are universally recognized. They are those characteristics of an individual which are highly regarded somewhat independent of any sociocultural context.

This position reflects what Robert Simon called the “inner morality of sport.”⁹ In contrast to a reductionist thesis which might argue the values of sport are a mere reflection of societal values, Simon adopts an internalist approach which purports the values of sport are in some ways separate from those of any specific culture. For example, sport-as-play embraces competition or competitive play as a value in sport, yet this might conflict with the values of a particular society in which popular opinion might hold that “competitive values are bad, wrong, or always to be abjured [...]”¹⁰ The internalist approach entertains the possibility that certain independent values of sport, like discipline or dedication, “may be more or less in harmony with the ethics of some cultures or subgroups within cultures, but they can conflict with the moral codes of others and may promote change in existing moralities.”¹¹ Again, this does not mean moral character developed through sport is unique to the sport context.

For example, achievement in many areas, including medicine, scholarship, and teaching, requires dedication and commitment. An artist may value excellence at least as much as an athlete. Moreover, the internal morality of sport may cohere with major philosophical ethical systems. Kantianism, with its emphasis on respect for persons, as well as ‘perfectionism,’ which in some forms emphasizes excellence through achievement, are examples of such systems.¹²

The inner morality of sport emphasizes those virtues which people have good reason to maintain and value to fulfill a best version of sporting practice. In other words, the kind of moral development advocated for here does not emphasize a kind of social morality, but instead it focuses on the moral character of individuals and the development of virtues that are almost, arguably so, unanimously recognized as admirable.

⁹ Simon et al., 222.

¹⁰ Ibid., 223.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

This point might be better understood from the broader perspective of actualizing one's potential – developing excellence – in a practice. For example, whether one takes interest in the practice of sport, medicine, carpentry, academia, music or fine art, there are certain characteristics and virtues common to developing excellence in general. Virtues like dedication, discipline, respect for tradition, loyalty, compassion, sympathy, empathy, teamwork, and cooperation are universally admirable in the pursuit for excellence. And so, regardless of if one wants to become an excellent medical practitioner, or an excellent carpenter, engineer, musician, actor, poet, philosopher, police officer, firefighter, coach, or trainer, a certain level of uniformity exists across character traits. Just as excellent basketball or field hockey players must demonstrate virtues like commitment and courage, for example, so too do excellent doctors, lawyers, and artists. Here, we might add that virtues constitute general principles common to the development of excellence, and so universal to practices in general, whereas subtleties like where and when it is appropriate to demonstrate such virtues are unique to individual disciplines and even specific contexts. Herein lies the significance of the practical wisdom that accompanies moral character. The morally virtuous sufficiently know how to read people and social contexts such that they are aware of when it is appropriate to act charitably for example, or even when it is commendable to act with sympathy or compassion.

From this broader perspective, it should be clear that the context in which moral character is developed (e.g., sport-as-play context) does not somehow lend to a context specific moral character (e.g., the virtue of dedication does not adopt a different meaning in sport than in music). Virtues, we might say, are static whereas social contexts are dynamic. Thus, practical wisdom demands one has an acute awareness of social contexts and the people in them to

appropriately execute moral actions in specific situations without pre-determined formulaic prescriptions.

Much like competitive play, Simon maintains character development occurs through a conception of sport whereby competition is conceived of as a “mutual quest for excellence through challenge.”¹³ Specifically, “the experience of meeting challenges is one in which we learn about ourselves and others [...]”¹⁴ Challenge in the sporting context and as Simon distinguishes, is the negation or hinderance opponents present to each other. Good competition, Simon writes, “presupposes a cooperative effort by competitors to generate the best possible challenge to each other.”¹⁵ And further, “[a]lthough one wins the contest and the other loses, each gains by trying to meet the challenge.”¹⁶ Presumably, insofar as competitors wish to achieve excellence (i.e., a performance based excellence) in their sport, they are mutually dedicated to trying their best, exhibiting a strong will to win and so, posing the best challenge possible to each other. Simon elaborates,

competitive athletics is best conceived as a mutual quest for excellence, an activity that is significantly cooperative in that all the participants consent to be tested in the crucible of competition for both the intrinsic value of meeting challenges and for what we can learn about ourselves and others through the attempt to meet the competitive test.¹⁷

The author’s account of competitive athletics parallels competitive play and the play conception of sport central to this thesis. His mutual quest for excellence through challenge posits excellence as the ultimate end or *telos* competitors are seeking. In pursuit of this end,

¹³ Ibid., 230.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 46.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 47.

‘meeting challenges’ is intrinsically valuable – a significant means – since it tests opponents’ athletic skills and affective dispositions. Much like the sport-as-play motif and its openness to friendship, Simon’s mutual quest for excellence through challenge recognizes competitors as facilitators in pursuit of performance-based excellence.¹⁸

The cooperative conception of competition central to the mutual quest for excellence through challenge and sport-as-play are not surprising. After all, “the original meaning of *competition* [...] is to ‘strive together.’”¹⁹ On both accounts – the mutual quest for excellence and sport-as-play – athletes recognize in themselves and in others a shared and common end which is unattainable without competitors. In accordance with Simon’s conception of sport, this end is excellence – presumably a kind of performance and skill-based excellence – whereas sport-as-play recognizes shared play experience – shared in-flow experience – as the common *telos* competitors wish to experience. Although the preceding ends differ, these conceptions of sport are not mutually exclusive. For example, it is possible for competitors to successfully meet the demands of challenge, perform well under pressure, respond appropriately with skillful ingenuity, and also demonstrate sporting excellence while achieving shared in-flow experience. It might even be argued, as it is in sport psychology literature, that in-flow experiences are an indication of excellence and outcome of peak performance.²⁰

¹⁸ It should be noted that sport-as-play and the mutual quest for excellence through challenge are two of many conceptions of sport. Scott Kretchmar and colleagues address this topic and refer to pluralistic internalism that describes several best versions of sport. These include models that emphasize achievement, serendipity, epistemology, the aesthetic, existential or communitarian aspects of sport. Each best version of sport conveys certain presuppositions associated with culture and biology and has the potential to be a suitable sport setting. This thesis advocates for sport-as-play as the most suitable in the context of physical literacy as opposed to an elite best version of sport. See R. Scott Kretchmar, Mark Dyreson, Matthew P. Llewellyn and John Gleaves, *History and Philosophy of Sport and Physical Activity* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2017), 207-209.

¹⁹ Kenneth Aggerholm, Øyvind Førland Standal and Mats Melvold Hordvik, “Competition in Physical Education: Avoid, Ask, Adapt or Accept,” *Quest* 70, no. 3 (2018): 385

²⁰ Susan A. Jackson & Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow in Sports: The keys to optimal experiences and performances* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1999): 4.

In addition, both conceptions of sport acknowledge the importance of seriously pursuing victory but are not wholly dependent on achieving it. Winning does not necessarily dictate athletes' successful demonstration of excellence nor does it indicate play experience necessarily took place. The mutual quest for excellence through challenge recognizes it would be difficult to outline an excellence-centered conception of sport without acknowledging the comparative element inherent to competition. Specifically, it is difficult to deny "that winning often, perhaps generally, is the major criterion for meeting the test of the contest. Exhibiting better strategic skills than the opposition [...] is crucial to meeting the test the opposition presents."²¹ But, as Simon explains,

winning normally is a major criterion of competitive success but hardly the only one. In a hard-fought contest between worthy opponents, both can meet the challenge of competition through exhibiting excellence even though only one can win. Of course, it is justifiable in such a case for the losers to be deeply disappointed, as they may rightly believe victory could have been achieved through the use of different tactics or better execution, but surely if they played a nearly flawless game, it is too harsh to regard their effort as a *failure*.²²

The same might be true even in the face of success. Here, I mean an athlete or team might win the contest, but such victory may not have been the result of successfully meeting the challenge of the contest and so an expression of excellence. For example, in a situation where "an athletically superior team plays sloppily and commits many careless errors but narrowly defeats an overmatched opponent," or even "a team who wins only because of a series of bad calls."²³ The point to be made is as follows: winning is not always an indication of success or superiority, especially when excellence is posited as the ultimate end of sporting activity. This is

²¹ Simon et al., 50.

²² Ibid., original emphasis, 51.

²³ Ibid.

because we would be hard pressed to try and argue “that a win achieved by aesthetically ugly play, such as frequent body checking in an ice hockey game by a team of inferior skaters for the sole purpose of preventing the team of better skaters from employing their skills, is less meaningful than one achieved through primary skills of hockey, such as excellent skating and puck handling.”²⁴

Much like Simon’s mutual quest for excellence through challenge, chapter three emphasized play experience or the embodied experience of being-in-flow – the *telos* of sport-as-play – is not contingent on the outcome of the contest (e.g., whether a team or athlete has won the contest). Rather this *telos* can be achieved in both victory and defeat. Perhaps it is best to conceive of play experience, not as an end achieved or awarded once the competition has concluded, but rather as one that unfolds experientially during gameplay. In contrast to the end of winning, for example, an end which results once the game clock runs out, play experience unfolds in moments throughout the contest. Recall the spontaneous nature of play and the embodied experience of being-in-flow. Sport-as-play is better understood as a process, a fluctuation between in- and out-of-flow experience. Here, play experience transpires throughout contests, perhaps multiple times and across a series of moments. For example, each possession during a basketball game can be an opportunity for play experience. Of course, winning as a goal in sport must be taken seriously enough such that it allows competition to unfold, however players also recognize there is more to sport beyond fulfilling the goal of winning. For Simon this is the achievement of excellence, and for sport-as-play it is embodied in-flow experience.

²⁴ Ibid.

Finally, these conceptions of sport are also similar insofar as they both characterize the challenges competitors offer each other as a rich source of self-discovery. The challenges worthy opponents present or “moments of testing,” Simon writes, “are the source of the value of competition in sport.”²⁵ The challenges internal to competitive athletics and the mutual quest for excellence are not only significant as a means to achieve excellence but also because tests provide players the opportunity to learn about themselves and fellow athletes. Although Simon does not specify the kind of self-discovery that takes place, it is reasonable to suggest such challenges make way for discovery and knowledge of oneself and others. Outstanding athletes not only rise and exceed sport challenges in exemplary fashion and demonstrate skill-centered excellence, but they also discover the strength or lack of character of themselves and others. Notwithstanding the mutual quest for excellence through challenge conception of sport or sport-as-play, the central point here is that competition, competitive play and competitive athletics as conceived by Simon is a valuable source of self-discovery. In accordance with the tenets of this thesis, this discovery includes both the discovery of self as an embodied being in-flow, the development of moral character and thus, discovery of one’s moral sense of self.

The following section returns to the topic of physical literacy and the concept of a sense of self foundational to this concept. This section will speak directly to the purpose of this thesis and reconcile the comprehensive account of sport-as-play, sportsmanship as playmanship and a moral sense of self presented in chapters three and four, with the philosophical roots of physical literacy and the sense of self discussed in chapter two.

²⁵ Ibid., 46.

Physical Literacy, Playmanship and the Moral Self

Physical literacy remains a prominent concept in physical education, formally defined by the International Physical Literacy Association (IPLA) as the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life. As demonstrated in the second chapter of this thesis, several scholars have questioned the definition through empirical studies and have noted sporting organizations and physical education councils worldwide have adapted and operationalized their own definition of the concept; some of which are congruent and others in conflict with its philosophical foundations. This thesis, however, adopts the definition endorsed by the IPLA and physical education specialist Margaret Whitehead.

Recall, physical literacy is a holistic concept that is universal to all people and seeks to encourage individuals to participate in physical activity throughout the lifecourse. There are two central philosophical themes inherent to Whitehead's conception of physical literacy. First, she is adamant about the universality of the concept – physical literacy accounts for all people despite their varying physical abilities. And second, physical literacy is, in part, about developing a well-established sense of self as an embodied mover. Chapter two examined the latter claim and clarified the sense of self in physical literacy refers to the development of one's awareness of self as a moving being. This entails achieving a level of proficiency and competence in movement which transpires into an experience of harmony between self as a proficient mover and the world. Further to Whitehead's explanation of self, chapter two concluded with the recommendation that this concept can be experientially described via the embodied experience of being-in-flow.

As currently conceived, the concept of sense of self is compatible with the philosophical underpinnings of physical literacy, namely, monism, phenomenology, and existentialism. When taken together, these schools of thought offer a rich metaphysical foundation that declare we are a unity of mind and body whose understanding is heavily influenced by our worldly experiences. These experiences shape who we are and our relationships with others and the world in which we live. What it does not account for, neither in its philosophical foundations nor in the concept of sense of self, however, is the moral dimension of life and an awareness of self as a moral agent. Indeed, existentialism revolves around the axiom that our existence precedes any essence we might establish where the notions of authenticity and radical freedom are central. Without a predetermined essence, we are free to choose our unique identity and purpose in life and so, meaning in our lives is subject to our individual choices. This all leads to a philosophical position that makes it difficult to prescribe any kind of ethic or moral theory all humans ought to live by.

In this capacity, the existentialist roots of physical literacy are inadequate to account for moral claims, like that of Whitehead, Durden-Myers, and other scholars who argue that physical literacy contributes to human flourishing and further, that physically literate individuals possess good moral character. Thus, the motivation for this thesis took root first, in the observation that Whitehead's account of self, does not account for all dimensions of life (e.g., the moral aspect) and second, that later attempts to reconcile morality with physical literacy lack appropriate philosophical support and rigor. Accordingly, the purpose of this thesis was to expand the philosophical roots of physical literacy to include not only the embodied holistic moving self, but also the moral sense of self.

As such, I argue for the inclusion of sport-as-play as a philosophical basis of physical literacy as a conception that centralizes play – a universal phenomenon experientially described as being-in-flow. Those who advocate for physical literacy might reconsider the influence sport can have on the development of self. Specifically, the inclusion of sport-as-play in a physical literacy centered curriculum holds the potential for good moral character to unfold. As argued in the preceding chapters, the competitive element of sport – competitive play – and its accompanying cooperative nuances make way for the development of intelligence-in-action and the discovery and expression of one’s character. The competitive social context facilitates self-discovery as not only a proficient mover in-flow, but also as a moral agent capable of reading and responding to a range of social situations and the actions of others in a virtuous manner. In what follows, some normative implications will be drawn from this position that may include a centralized focus on competition as a cooperative endeavour and the values and virtues of playmanship.

Following from the above argument, competition should be introduced and framed within the context of play and its significance toward bringing about play experience and an embodied state of being-in-flow. Here, the established tenets of physical literacy and the sense of self it seeks to develop converge with the central *telos* of sporting activity as advocated in this thesis. Much like physical literacy aspires to familiarize people with the embodied in-flow experience via the development of motor ability, sport-as-play encourages people to achieve this embodied state in a competitive context and so, encourages people to discover play as not only an individual state, but a shared one. For example, physical literacy includes a range of activities beyond traditional sports, such as yoga, calisthenics, hiking, snowshoeing and other lifelong activities. Although these activities can be performed in a group setting, the focus is primarily on

individuals and their ability to establish a harmony between themselves and the inanimate world around them. In other words, these activities remain quite individualistic despite the group setting and so they might reasonably be construed as bringing about individual play experiences.

Competitive sport, however, is different because the activity cannot occur without immediate, direct and sometimes indirect interactions with others. Indeed, we can only imagine the difficulty – if not impossibility – of trying to play a tennis match for example, without an opponent. The social context of competitive play encourages a shared, rather than individual play experience. Sport-as-play provides people a unique social context whereby they must seriously pursue the internal and immediate end of sport – winning – while also pursuing the external or higher goal of shared play experience. To engage in sport-as-play then demands not only that one has an acute sense of self as a proficient mover in-flow, but also requires an acuity toward reading the dynamic social context of sport, determining the action demanded of the situation, and acting accordingly. In other words, sport-as-play and the *telos* of shared play experience, calls upon more than knowledge of self as a physically skilled and competent athlete, but as a moral being possessing the practical wisdom and virtuous character necessary to achieve the mutual goal of shared play experience. The Cory Weissman story is exemplary in this regard.

Weissman was a talented basketball player who suffered a stroke in this freshman year playing for Gettysburg College which left him paralyzed on his left side. Finally able to return to the court in 2012,

head coach George Petrie decided to give Weissman the start as the Bullets took on Washington College in Bream Gymnasium. After being introduced to a rousing ovation, Weissman left the court immediately after tip-off. He had achieved his goal of returning to the court, but his story was far from over. With less than a minute remaining and the Bullets holding a 19-point advantage, Petrie inserted Weissman back into the game. After the Shoremen scored on [a] lay-up with 19 seconds left, Washington head coach Rob Nugent called a timeout and instructed his team to foul

Weissman, who had not scored a point in any of the three games he had played for the Bullets as a freshman. With 17 seconds showing, Weissman toed the foul line for the first time in his career and missed the first shot. But his second attempt found nothing but net, igniting the crowd into a frenzy. Weissman was in the record books as having scored a point for Gettysburg College men's basketball team.²⁶

This example is undoubtedly a demonstration of sportsmanship and a testament to coach Nugent's moral character. From a virtue ethics perspective, coach Nugent saw an opportunity for the strategic foul to serve not as a tactic of gamesmanship as we might typically observe, but as an opportunity for sportsmanship. Despite his team being down on the scoreboard, Nugent instructed his team to foul Weissman, not to try and give his team an advantage, but to give Weissman the chance to shoot and another opportunity to be involved in the play experience. Coach Nugent's act could be evaluated as a demonstration of generosity, compassion, and sympathy – virtues that might not always be appropriate to demonstrate in college level basketball. Notwithstanding, Nugent read the social context, took into consideration Weissman's disability, and determined there was an opportunity to include Weissman in the play experience unfolding on the court. Virtue ethics, as a moral theory primarily concerned with the behaviour and attitude of individuals, is difficult to prescribe. Instead, it is highly dependent on the practical wisdom of the individual and so its practical implications, might be best exemplified in cases like the Cory Weissman Story as a testament to Coach Nugent's moral character.

Additionally, a play conception of sport is not only relevant to more traditional team sports like basketball, badminton, ball hockey, handball and the like, but can be applied to some of the common competitive games played in physical education class such as, capture the flag,

²⁶ "The Cory Weissman Story," Gettysburg College Athletics, February 29, 2012, https://gettysburgsports.com/sports/212/2/29/MBB_0229125743.aspx?id=1206.

dodgeball, steal the bacon, soccer-baseball, or even sharks and dolphins. This is because, in the broadest sense, sport-as-play simply means one values the competitive context of sport as a means to generate play experience. Dodgeball, for example, facilitates a competitive environment such that a class is divided into two teams, assigned to their respective side of the gymnasium, and then set free to pursue the immediate internal objective of the game (i.e., win by hitting all the opponents with a ball before all players on one's own team are hit). However, what must be made clear within the classroom and physical education context is that the goal of winning must be taken seriously but not overemphasized, and that the primary purpose for engaging in the activity is to bring about shared play experience – an experience brought about through serious engagement in competitive play. Even though students must try to win in a game of dodgeball, their efforts to win should be coupled with and directed toward the higher *telos* of achieving a state of shared play experience with their classmates.

Sport-as-play does not necessarily prescribe some alternate way of playing the game. Dodgeball from a play conception of sport does not differ structurally from dodgeball played from an elite competitive conception. Rather, the practical implication here lies in the player's attitude. Competitive games (i.e., inclusive of traditional sports and games commonly played in physical education class) appropriately conceived of as an extension of play, demand practical wisdom and virtuous character. Within the context of sport-as-play, this virtuous character – attitude and conduct characteristic of the good sport – is playmanship.

The latter notion was examined in chapter four which focused on the meanings of sportsmanship, a concept wholly concerned with the attitude and actions of players. Playmanship emerged from the analysis of sportsmanship as attitude and conduct directed toward and following from the embodied experience of being-in-flow and appropriately encompassed what

it means to be a good sport when sport is understood as an extension of play. Thus, in addition to a significant emphasis on a cooperative interpretation of competition as means for shared play experience, I introduced playmanship as an addendum to the concept of physical literacy. Recall, this thesis argues sport-as-play is a suitable addition to the philosophical foundations of physical literacy, if the concept is to include a moral sense of self and the development of moral character. Toward this end, the inclusion of sport-as-play in a physical literacy centered curriculum suggests “[s]port is serious insofar as seriousness is a condition for the possibility of the development of virtue, nonserious insofar as the outcome doesn’t really matter, and the important things in life, virtuous states of character, are not minimized by athletic victory and defeat.”²⁷ Students, players or participants then, participate in sport with this in mind and thus, “embrace opportunities to train [their] character in the face of difficulty and hardship.”²⁸ The competitive element of sport-as-play is an exemplary moral training ground in this regard because it provides the necessary amount of adversity for “[c]ourage, endurance, perseverance, and other such virtues [...]” to be developed.²⁹

Moreover, a focus on playmanship in an educational setting might entail discussing the various ways virtue can be expressed. This includes, but is not limited to players’ ability,

to respect the worth and dignity of others; to not intentionally harm, harass or intimidate others; to be honest; to adhere to the letter and spirit of the rules; to develop a sense of duty and obligation to others and to the game; to accept the judgements of officials; to maintain self-control; not to cheat; to be a gracious winner and good loser; to assume a moderate posture between extreme seriousness and nonseriousness; to exert at least a reasonable and often best effort to try to win; to cooperate; to be responsible for one’s actions; to display goodwill toward others; to sometimes express sympathy and empathy for the efforts of others; to appreciate the

²⁷ William O. Stephens and Randolph Feezell, “The Ideal of the Stoic Sportsman,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 31, no. 2 (2004): 204.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

performances of others; to exhibit loyalty, dedication, commitment and courage; and to pursue sport in a just and fair manner.³⁰

These examples embody the virtues and kinds of behaviour that should reasonably be expected of play-oriented individuals and, in this regard, can be discussed in an educational context. However, moral character also demands intelligence-in-action, and so it is imperative that students, players and participants – in order to develop their moral sense of self – are given opportunities to engage in sport and competitive games. Only in this practical setting will students learn – often via trial and error – when it is appropriate to act in accordance with some of the above-mentioned virtues.

For example, students in a physical education class should recognize the varying physical abilities of their peers and so, understand that it might be inappropriate to triple-team an opponent whose physical competence might not be as developed as their own. Instead, students should interpret the situation as one that calls for the display of sympathy and empathy by backing off, for example. Practical wisdom here entails first recognizing the ultimate *telos* of the activity is shared play experience, second an awareness of the social context (e.g., sport played in physical education class as opposed to sport played at an elite level) and third, an awareness of the physical ability and emotional state of opponents. Here we might consider the following scenario: perhaps one's opponent is not very athletically skilled, but they are still giving their best effort and participating in the game. Despite all their efforts, the opponent still feels defeated, lacks confidence and perhaps is getting frustrated. The good sport – playman – would be able to synthesize that

³⁰ Danny Rosenberg, "Sportsmanship Reconsidered," *International Journal of Physical Education*, 30, no. 4, (1993): 19-20.

given the physical education context, the ultimate *telos* and their opponent's emotional state, the situation calls for a demonstration of sympathy or compassion rather than intensity and an unrelenting willingness to win. This might contrast a game played at an extra-curricular, club, elite amateur or professional level of sport where it might be inappropriate for competitors to ease off on their opponents simply because they are less skilled and become frustrated.

What should be clear by now is that the normative implications of this position cannot be prescribed specifically and in detail. But perhaps this should be expected since moral character is just as much about possessing virtuous character traits as it is about knowing when and how to express them. We should be satisfied then, with examples of how virtues might be expressed, while understanding that such examples are highly dependent on the social context. Of course, this may point to some of the shortcomings of virtue ethics as a moral theory. One of the major criticisms indicates its failure to offer in-depth prescriptions as to how one should act in a given situation. This concern also can lead to questions regarding whether there is a general consensus on what characteristics are virtuous and whether there is an objectively proper way these virtues should be expressed. Notwithstanding, virtue ethics is centered on the individual and one's ability to develop one's sense of practical wisdom when it comes to making ethical decisions and is compatible with themes of self-discovery and the development of a sense of self. In this regard, we might graciously consider the inclusion of competition and the values of playmanship as normative implications that follow from the theoretical tenets of sport-as-play. The play conception of sport is conducive to the development of moral character and thus, a fruitful addition to the philosophical foundation of physical literacy.

Sport and Moral Education: Possible Issues and Controversies

The purpose of this thesis was to expand the philosophical tenets of physical literacy to accommodate for the moral dimension of life. In this capacity, I recommend that physical literacy adopt a play conception of sport – sport-as-play – as a notion that values the embodied experience of being-in-flow as the highest *telos* of the activity. This conception of sport places a substantial emphasis on competition – competitive play – playmanship, and the practical wisdom developed in the face of adversity. However, in no way is this an all-encompassing account of the inclusion of sport-as-play in physical literacy.

This thesis remained highly theoretical – primarily concerned with the compatibility of various philosophical concepts – and so little attention was paid to the practical implications of this position (i.e., prescriptive recommendations on how to best implement sport-as-play in a classroom or sporting setting) or even some questions that might arise as a consequence of implementing sport-as-play and playmanship in an educational setting, like physical education and other community sport programs. This thesis also did not consider some important questions like, should moral character development and moral education be included in a public education system? Should it be part of community sport? Moreover, sport-as-play places a heavy emphasis on competition. Should competitive values be promoted? Other sport philosophers have addressed some of these questions and so this chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of their respective positions in relation to the main themes of this thesis.

Robert Simon, for example, considered the issues of indoctrination and partisanship when proposing his inner morality of sport. He raises the concern that some may believe moral education within the public school system is inappropriate. Instead, moral education should be

addressed in the home or religious contexts.³¹ The partisanship problem rests on the argument that “public schools have no business teaching values because there is no one set of values that all agree upon.”³² Moreover, the problem of indoctrination is centered upon the belief that “even if we could agree on the values that should be taught, we would be imposing a value system upon [students] without their autonomous consent.”³³ In an effort to avoid these accusations, “existing programs of moral education often either attempt to help students clarify their own values or teach procedures of moral reasoning, such as trying to see things through the perspective of others, rather than endorsing substantive moral principles.”³⁴

But here too, Simon notes, this form of moral education has been criticized for advancing a hidden moral agenda. One which teaches a kind of moral relativism and revolves around the maxim: “it doesn’t matter what values you hold as long as you can clearly articulate them and authentically accept them.”³⁵ As such, he suggests the inner morality of sport evades the charges of partisanship and indoctrination since “informal moral education is going on in the schools all the time,” and “training that helps immature and not-yet-competent individuals develop such traits is not harmful indoctrination that subordinates critical thinking but instead is part of a social process that develops critical thinkers and autonomous persons.”³⁶ In other words, Simon argues the inner morality of sport avoids the problem of partisanship “because it concerns values that all committed to the activities in question have good reason to support.”³⁷ It also avoids the problem of indoctrination because the development of “values such as commitment, discipline,

³¹ Simon et al., 224.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 225.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 226-227.

³⁷ Ibid., 226.

respect for the standing of others and for the rules, and appreciation of excellence are also presuppositions of moral and rational development.”³⁸

A similar defense might be adopted by an expanded conception of physical literacy to include the development of moral character. Simon’s defence of the inner morality of sport adds another dimension to the philosophical theme of universality inherent to physical literacy. Specifically, as a universal concept, this revised conception of physical literacy is not only inclusive insofar as it intends to serve all embodied individuals despite their varying motor abilities, but also because the moral development that unfolds within the sporting context is concerned with the development of virtuous character traits all people have good reason to support. In addition, encouraging students to develop their sense of practical wisdom by engaging in competition does not suppress or discourage one from critical thinking, but instead promotes the development of critical thinking and autonomy such that practical wisdom – as the ability to display intelligence-in-action – is contingent on one’s ability to read a particular situation, employ critical thinking to determine what action or behaviour is most suitable to respond to the situation, and finally to act accordingly; a choice reasonably construed as an expression of one’s autonomy. Much like Simon’s “defensible inner morality of sport,” the inclusion of moral character development in physical literacy is appropriate since “the kind at issue [moral education] is limited to promoting those dispositions of mind and character that can reasonably be regarded as prerequisites of the capacity to engage in autonomous critical inquiry with others.”³⁹

³⁸ Ibid., 227.

³⁹ Ibid., 228.

Additionally, although this thesis did not directly attend to whether the inclusion and promotion of competition in an educational context is appropriate, this question has been somewhat addressed by other scholars.⁴⁰ Specifically, even though this thesis has made a case for the inclusion of competition in physical literacy – and so, possibly physical education – as a rich source for the development of the moral self, this position is heavily influenced by sport philosophy literature and thus, might remain “rather one-sided and somewhat underwhelming.”⁴¹ This is because “the application of sport philosophy seems to neglect reflections about the different contextual conditions of youth sport communities and physical education.”⁴² In this regard, we might join scholars like Kenneth Aggerholm and colleagues in their effort to open up this discussion by outlining four normative arguments – avoid, ask, adapt and accept – concerning competition and physical education.

Finally, I concede that this thesis is mostly a theoretical account of the inclusion of the moral dimension of life in physical literacy, whose practical implications lie more in the attitudes of players than in specific recommendations as to how activities in a curriculum plan might be implemented. In other words, a major ‘practical’ implication of this thesis has to do with the way we think about sport and competition. Although a shift in thoughts, ideas and attitudes might not necessarily be practical in nature (i.e., a shift in attitude and ideas is not a recommendation for physical action), this attitudinal shift opens the possibility for one to better understand the social context they are immersed in, and so might incite a change in how one conducts oneself. After all, virtue ethics calls for the successful exercise of practical wisdom. This may very well mean the way physical educators – presumably those who focus on developing physical literacy –

⁴⁰ Aggerholm et al., 385-400.

⁴¹ Ibid., 388.

⁴² Ibid.

teach the mechanics of varying physical skills might not ‘look’ different (e.g., the mechanics of a foul shot in basketball remain the same no matter the conception of sport). In standard sports and games, the lusory means and constitutive rules of the game do not change. What can change, however, are the attitudes and actions of the players to encourage a sport-as-play motif where a moral sense of self can be developed.

The power of sport to serve as a significant source of moral education lies in our conception of the activity. That is, in our ideas as to how to best conceive of sport, and our attitude toward making this conception a reality. Thus, if the physical literacy concept is to account for the development of moral character and discovery of the moral sense of self, it should include a play conception of sport which has special regard for the elements of competition, shared play experience and the values of playmanship. Physical literacy, in this capacity, is a robust educational concept that demonstrates why, “as the ancient Greeks knew, *gymnastikê* and athletics [...] is a fundamental discipline for education to full humanity.”⁴³ And with this I conclude. A more comprehensive account of the sense of self physical literacy advocates is one that should include the development of the moral self; an all-encompassing sense of self acquired through practical engagement in sport and the application of virtue ethics as expressed in the values of playmanship.

⁴³ This quote refers to Drew Hyland’s discussion about the educational potential of sport. See, Simon et al., 228.

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