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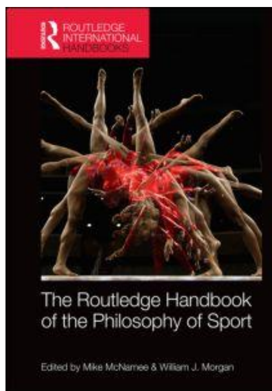

Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Sport

Mike McNamee, William J. Morgan

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Publication details
https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203466261.ch24
Heather L. Reid
Published online on: 27 Mar 2015

How to cite :- Heather L. Reid. 27 Mar 2015, *Olympism – a Philosophy of Sport? from:* Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Sport Routledge
Accessed on: 07 Jun 2023
https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203466261.ch24

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OLYMPISM – A PHILOSOPHY OF SPORT?

Heather L. Reid

The philosophy that underpins the Olympic movement is generally referred to as "Olympism," but it is far from clear exactly what Olympism is, where it comes from, and where it takes itself to be going. The purpose of this chapter is to explore those questions, beginning with a discussion of whether Olympism can legitimately be called a philosophy at all. The second question addressed is whether Olympism constitutes a philosophy of sport, or rather is a philosophy informed by sport – specifically, values intrinsic to sport which support the larger goals of the Olympic movement. One of these values is that of human excellence, but it can be hard to discern exactly what is Olympism's idea of human excellence. Olympism also touts the value of education through sport – specifically the educational value of good example, but it needs to be made clear what these examples are and how they are expected to educate. The values of justice and athletic fair play are also affirmed, but they face the challenge of diverse ethical views within international communities. This leads to the political ideal of a world community and the question of how the Olympics might promote it without falling into the traps of hegemony or homogenization. Given the movement's grand social and political goals, Olympism can appear inadequate as a philosophy. This inadequacy, paradoxically, may be the secret to Olympism's success.

Is Olympism a philosophy?

Before we can discuss Olympism as a philosophy of sport, we must first address the question of whether it *is* a philosophy of sport – or even a philosophy at all. If we think of Olympism expansively as a philosophy emerging from the ancient Olympic Games and the rich philosophical heritage of Greece (Nissiotis, 1979; Reid, 2006), we may conclude that it is one of the most important philosophies of sport in history. If we think of Olympism more historically as the eclectic and often-contradictory ideas of the French pedagogue, Baron Pierre de Coubertin (Loland, 1995; Chatziefstathiou, 2005, 2012), we may conclude that it is not a philosophy at all but, at best, an ideology that served the needs of the nineteenth-century revival, which has since become outdated and irrelevant (Bale and Christensen, 2004). And if we think of Olympism in practical terms, as a philosophy that must unite and guide the modern Olympic movement, with its massive global reach and ambitious social goals, we may conclude that it is hopelessly thin and vague – incapable of articulating clear principles or setting rigid guidelines, and

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therefore impotent to face such challenges as multiculturalism, globalization and environmental degradation (Segrave, 1988). It turns out, paradoxically, that Olympism's weakness as a philosophy may be its strength as an international philosophy of sport.

In his detailed examination of Olympism from the perspective of the history of ideas, Sigmund Loland (1995, p. 49) considers Olympism to be an ideology rather than a philosophy – that is, a set of beliefs designed to bring about a particular social order. That analysis is certainly consistent with the aims of Pierre de Coubertin, who was neither a professional philosopher nor a great intellectual – but rather an idealistic pedagogue seeking to organize an ambitious event for the tangible benefit of his French compatriots and, ultimately, all of mankind. Coubertin apparently coined the term 'Olympism' in 1894 during the run-up to the first modern Games of 1896, but he never seems to have completed his articulation of the philosophy. In 1936, the year before his death, he regretfully concluded that he had failed to define Olympism in an accessible way (Coubertin, 1939, p. 1). This "failure" may be due to the fact that Coubertin's idea of Olympism changed throughout his lifetime. The writings and speeches he left behind paint an eclectic and sometimes contradictory picture of his philosophical vision (Müller, 2000). But Olympism's "failure" to be rigidly defined would turn out to be the secret of its success. In an overview of the philosophical controversy surrounding Olympism, Lamartine DaCosta (2006, pp. 169–70) concludes that it should be considered a process philosophy – an ongoing philosophical conversation merely started by Coubertin and open to the contributions of subsequent philosophers. As a matter of practice, that is exactly what Olympism has turned out to be – a philosophical conversation about the value of sport for promulgating a particular vision of humanity and for achieving international social goals.

The foundational text of Olympism can be found in the Olympic Charter; specifically, the section that articulates six "Fundamental Principles of Olympism." Of these, only the first two are obviously philosophical. In fact, it is the first fundamental principle that declares Olympism to be a philosophy:

> Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, social responsibility and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.
>
> *(International Olympic Committee, 2011, p. 10)*

Embedded in this statement are metaphysical and ethical claims about the nature of human beings and the kinds of lives they ought to live, as well as an assertion that there are (or at least should be) universal ethical principles of some sort. The second fundamental principle lays out Olympism's political vision: "The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity" (ibid.).

This goal is political in the Aristotelian sense of being concerned with the community – in this case, the world community. The very assumption that the world should be a community is itself a political statement. More specifically, the Olympic movement here is declaring its political goal to be peace – something confirmed by the fourth item under the "Mission and Role of the International Olympic Committee," which is to "endeavor to place sport at the service of humanity and thereby to promote peace" (International Olympic Committee, 2011, p. 14).

To understand Olympism as a philosophy, however, we must go beyond its published "Fundamental Principles." We must examine the philosophical heritage of Ancient Greece as

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well as the enlightenment ideas that influenced the articulation of those ideals. We should also consider the symbols and sayings of the Olympic movement, such as the five interlocking rings, the Olympic motto: *citius, altius, fortius* (faster, higher, stronger), and the Olympic creed: "The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part." Finally, we must look at Olympic history; at the way the movement has behaved in light of its stated ideals. Olympism is, if nothing else, a living philosophy that has served and must continue to serve the practical needs of the Olympic movement for vision and guidance. And even if we successfully discern (or perhaps construct) a coherent philosophy from all of these elements, it is still unclear whether we will have a philosophy of sport.

A theory of sport?

What could we mean by a "philosophy of sport" in this context? Does the philosophy of Olympism offer, for example, a metaphysical account of sport? The International Olympic Committee (IOC) sets out criteria for inclusion of sports in the Olympic program, so there is, as Parry (2006, p. 21) notes, some meaningful debate about what an *Olympic* sport should be.[1] But this is not a discussion of what *sport is,* it is rather an eligibility discussion concerning which sports are appropriate for the Games, which is to say which sports are conducive to the goals of the Olympic movement – including such practical concerns as media-friendliness, commercial potential, and so on. What this shows is that Olympism is primarily a social and political philosophy of sport, one that considers how to use sport or what can be accomplished through sport, rather than a philosophy that seeks to define what is sport.

Even though Olympism does not define or even discuss the metaphysical nature of sport *per se,* its social goals dictate to a certain extent what sport *should be.* Indeed, if we take the expansive view of Olympism as a philosophy arising from the ancient Olympic Games, we may observe that practical social problems during that era gave shape to the configuration of sport as we know it. The initial problem for the ancient Greeks was how to select among competing claims to a social honor – a problem still common today and one very often resolved through a competition in which each candidate is given an equal opportunity and the reward is allotted according to merit. Places in college, contracts for work, even architectural designs, are frequently decided this way.

Since its origins around the eighth-century BCE, ancient Olympia had been a religious sanctuary – one where diverse tribes would gather to sacrifice to common gods. The honor of lighting the sacrificial flame would conventionally go to the highest ranking member of a given society – the king or primary ruler. But Olympia was a Pan-Hellenic sanctuary – one dedicated to all the Hellenes rather than any single tribe – and so there must have been multiple sovereigns making claims to this particular honor. What is more, from a religious point of view, it was important to choose an honoree who would be pleasing to the god in question – a god who was understood to transcend the social rivalries and hierarchies of mere mortals. This social problem seems to have been solved by running a race from the edge of the sanctuary to the sacrificial altar.[2] Equal opportunity, reward according to merit, public observation of the process – this set of foundational qualities endures in Olympic and non-Olympic sports alike.

Looking at the challenges faced by the modern Olympic movement, especially with regard to their selection of sports to be included in their program – these qualities remain central and they go beyond sport. Equality of opportunity may be enshrined in the rules of individual events, but it is difficult to achieve when observed from a global perspective. Not only do most Olympic sports have a Western heritage (judo and taekwondo are the only non-Western sports on the current program), global economic disparities exclude large numbers of people from

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expensive sports such as sailing and equestrianism. Sports like figure skating, track cycling, luge, and gymnastics, require facilities that are not available publically in much of the world. Other sports, such as skiing, cycling, and bobsled, are influenced by expensive technologies available to only a select few. Accordingly, Olympic participants from less wealthy countries and families are poorly represented in these sports, whereas sports requiring minimal facilities and equipment such as running, soccer, and wrestling boast a more geographically diverse slate of participants. This diversity is important to the Games' political goal of "a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity" (International Olympic Committee, 2011, p. 10).

Olympic sport cannot uphold the ideals of equal opportunity if social and economic disparities impede large numbers of athletes from participation in the first place. This lesson had been learned already in the ancient Olympic Games where aristocrats had hoped that athletic excellence would justify their social privilege, but the success of lower class athletes undermined this hope. So they attempted to gain competitive advantage with their wealth, first by hiring coaches and trainers and eventually by adding equestrian events in which the victory crowns were awarded to the owner rather than the rider or chariot driver (Reid, 2011, pp. 37–9). Stephen Miller (2004, p. 233) argues with much support that there is a connection between the equal opportunity inherent in sport and the birth of democracy in Ancient Greece. Although wealthy countries and individuals still try to buy competitive advantages in the modern Games, Olympism demands that sport be kept as free as possible from economic disparities. In fact, since 1981, the IOC has promoted a program called Olympic Solidarity, which distributes a proportion of Olympic television revenues to athletes and organizations in need, to live up to the ideal of equal opportunity and reward according to (athletic) merit – as opposed to wealth or social position.[3]

So, even if Olympism does not offer a metaphysical account of sport, the goals and ideals of the Olympic movement seem to dictate that Olympic sports must exhibit the principles of equal opportunity and reward according to athletic merit. These principles may seem to be guaranteed internally by the rules of sport, but in an international context they demand an effort to compensate for external social inequities, and to regulate or exclude sports which emphasize technology and financing at the expense of the human element. The Olympics may include sailing on the program, but the boats are identical and relatively inexpensive – in contrast to the Americas' Cup yacht race, which is as much a contest of wealth and technology as it is one of sailing.[4] It is only by applying the foundational sports value of equal opportunity – as symbolized by the common starting line and level playing field – beyond the contests themselves and in the larger global community, that Olympism can meet the contemporary challenges of the Games. Olympism does not proffer a theory about what sport is, but what sport is – in terms of its internal values and principles – shapes the contours of Olympism.

A theory of human excellence through sport

Another way to look at Olympism as a philosophy is as a theory of human excellence through sport, or as Lenk (1982) and Parry (1998) describe it, a philosophical anthropology. To be sure, Olympism is a humanistic philosophy. Its first fundamental principle says that Olympism "exalts" humanity as a "balanced whole" of the qualities of "body, will, and mind" (International Olympic Committee, 2011, p. 10). This particular language reflects the modern European metaphysical idea of persons as combinations of body, will, and mind, but it also emphasizes – contrary to the received opinion of the day – that these qualities should be balanced and that the emphasis should be placed on the whole. Ever since Rene Descartes's (1985) radical separation of body and mind in the seventeenth century, the emphasis had been put on mind rather

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than body. Descartes' famous statement, "*Cogito ergo sum*" (I think, therefore I am) promulgated an interpretation of humanity that not only took our minds to be more important than our bodies, but declared us to be *essentially* thinking (rather than playing, dancing, or even moving) beings.[5] Unsurprisingly, under this intellectual hegemony sport and physical education – as well as general health and fitness – were significantly undervalued. Coubertin was one of several pedagogues trying to fight this devaluation by re-emphasizing the physical dimension of our being.

"*Mens sana in corpore sano*" (sound mind in sound body) was among the favorite slogans of the pedagogical movement called Muscular Christianity. Its origins suggested a connection with ancient Greco-Roman world – which was in fashion at the time due to new archeological excavations and academic discoveries. Tapping into that sentiment was a great way to increase Olympism's appeal. In practical terms, however, the Roman writer Juvenal's coining of the phrase "*mens sana in corpore sano*" had nothing to do with the Olympic Games, sports, or even exercise. He was simply recommending a prayer (Young, 1996, p. 189). It was absolutely correct, however, to associate a holistic view of human excellence with the ancient world. Whether he knew it or not, Coubertin was tapping into a very rich philosophical tradition when he placed human excellence at the center of Olympism.

The Greek word for human (and other kinds of) excellence is *aretē*, and it is at the center of the most venerated ethical traditions of the ancient world. Starting no later than Socrates, and moving through Plato, Aristotle, and even the Roman Stoics, the cultivation of *aretē* is the central focus of a good life. Socrates chastises the Athenians at his trial for caring too much for wealth and not enough for *aretē* (Plato, *Apology* 29de), Aristotle defines human happiness (*eudaimonia*) as activity in accordance with *aretē* (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1098a), and the Stoics were said to believe that "nothing is good except for virtue."[6] Pythagoras, before all of them, had gone to the gymnasium in search of good students for philosophy, not least because athleticism had been long interpreted as a sign of *aretē* (Iamblichus 1818, p. 5). What the eighth-century BCE advent of the Olympic Games did was to generate the idea that *aretē* was not just a matter of noble birth, but could be acquired through training like athleticism. This training for virtue became the task of moral philosophy and indeed the Ancient Greek philosophers' methods of dialogue and dialectic are not far removed from athletic competition (Reid, 2011). Both sport and philosophy in the ancient world were understood as means of cultivating excellence.

What is more, this Ancient Greek and Roman notion of excellence was understood holistically as a quality that engaged body and mind. Although most ancient philosophers conceptually divided body (*sōma*) and mind/soul (*psychē*), they understood the *psychē* to be the origin not only of intellect and thinking, but also of locomotion and of life itself. *Aretē* was therefore an excellence of both body and mind, the source of the strong and beautiful movements associated with athletes. In Plato's famous political treatise, *Republic,* sport and exercise are prescribed explicitly for the health of the *psychē* (411e). Even famous Greek athletic statues like Myron's *Discus Thrower* are to be interpreted not as portraits of great physical specimens, but rather as the expression of *aretē through* the body (Reid, 2012). *Kalokagathia,* a concept combining beauty and goodness, is practically synonymous with *aretē* and is specifically associated with youthful athleticism (Martinkova, 2001).

So Olympism's exaltation of humanity as a "balanced whole," like the nineteenth-century slogan of "*mens sana in corpore sano,*" taps into a very rich and very relevant philosophy of human excellence, even if it does so inadvertently. In addition, this ancient tradition of virtue ethics meshes well with the Eastern philosophical traditions of Daoism and Confucianism, thereby shielding Olympism somewhat from the criticism that it is an irretrievably Eurocentric philosophy (Inoue, 1999). Likewise, by failing to spell out in much detail exactly what this ideal of

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humanity looks like – by failing even to list the particular excellences prized in human beings – Olympism also manages to transcend the limitations of a specifically historical philosophy.[7]

By exalting human excellence but keeping our minds open about the various ways it may be instantiated, the Olympic Games have managed to put a very diverse face on the conception of an excellent human being. Olympic Champions admired for their excellence include tiny females like Nadia Comenici and imposing males like Usain Bolt. They come from every human race, every socioeconomic class, and a variety of religious backgrounds. But they all have a common athletic excellence which "exalt(s) and combine(s) in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind" (International Olympic Committee, 2011, p. 10). These few words and the Olympic Games' long history result in a theory of human excellence robust enough to carry philosophical weight, but not so clearly defined as to exclude the possibility of human excellence through sport coming from an unexpected place – perhaps even from a disabled athlete. Olympism's ideal of human excellence should tap in deeply to its ancient roots to find philosophical structure, but it should also look to the future with an open mind and heart.

A theory of education through sport

A third way to interpret Olympism is as a theory of education through sport. I say education through sport rather than sports education or even physical education to emphasize that the goal of Olympism is not primarily the acquisition of athletic skills or physical strength and fitness. Even from Pierre de Coubertin's perspective, physical education was a means to larger social and political goals (Chatziefstathiou, 2012). As we saw in the last section, the humanistic vision of Olympism aims at cultivating excellence and, as the first Fundamental Principle of Olympism states, it expects to do this at least partially through "the educational value of a good example." The Olympic motto and creed, meanwhile, suggest a pursuit of excellence (higher, faster, stronger) through participation (the important thing is not to win, but to take part). Superficially, these three things may seem contradictory. Is Olympism promoting education through spectatorship, playing to win, or mere participation? Is the example to be followed a champion, a gracious loser, or perhaps not a person at all but a particular kind of spirit exhibited through gestures of fair play?

The obvious interpretation of what Olympism means by a "good example" would be the Olympic athlete and specifically his or her display of excellence, which is thought to educate by inspiring others to strive for excellence, too. The stories of children taking to sport after watching the Olympics on television are legion and the idea is hardly new; in fact, Ancient Greek athletes performed the same educational function. Winners at the ancient Olympic Games earned the right to erect statues of themselves in the sanctuary at Olympia, sometimes they also commissioned poets like Pindar to compose victory odes that celebrated their glory. The odes and the statues intentionally idealized the beauty of the athletes and their feats because their social function was to celebrate the community's shared value of *aretē* – a quality which was thought to bring humans closer to divine perfection. Like the prize of the olive crown, which dries up and disintegrates quickly, human excellence is ephemeral and merely reflective of that of the gods – as Pindar (1997) put it famously, "a dream of a shadow is man" (*Pythain* 8, p. 97). Even today, Olympic victors represent – at least symbolically – such globally shared values as courage, self-discipline, and respect.

There is a danger, however, with the educational use of athletes as role models – one recognized even by Socrates who said that Athens should reward him for his educational services rather than rewarding Olympic athletes for their victories because their victories only made

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them think themselves better while his questioning actually made them better (Plato, *Apology* 36de). The Modern Olympic Games have had to deal with the problem of athletes whose virtues in the contest are not always reflected in their behavior outside of competition – Oscar Pistorius facing trial for murder comes to mind – and athletes who turn out to have gained their medals through dubious or illicit means, such as doping.[8] Marion Jones and Lance Armstrong are prime examples of this problem. The danger is not only that individuals sometimes succeed in sport without actually having the virtues the victor is supposed to symbolize, but also the larger educational message that what *matters* is victory by any means and not the virtues associated with it.

Unfortunately, the ethos in many Olympic sports and even some national Olympic committees is focused squarely on results or private rewards and only tangentially on the human excellences that give the medals their symbolic value.[9] This focus on results may be thought to represent the Olympic motto "*citius, altius, fortius*" described in the *Olympic Charter* as expressing "the aspirations of the Olympic Movement" (International Olympic Committee, 2011, p. 21). It is also a phrase, as Loland (2001) points out, that seems to reflect fascination with records of progress common in Coubertin's era. But the motto need not be interpreted exclusively as a focus on results, or even more generally as the overcoming or outdoing of others. That latter interpretation would, as several philosophers have noticed, be at odds with the Olympic creed, which states:

> The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well.[10]

As sport philosopher Cesar Torres (2006, p. 243) observes, an enlightened understanding of Olympism – and athletic competition itself – requires that we see the Olympic motto and creed as compatible, even complementary. Meaningful participation in athletic competition implies a concern with performance and results insofar as these represent the goals of the contest itself. But it is the process of engagement in competition – the taking part, the struggle – that makes sport and even victory itself valuable. You can buy an Olympic medal on eBay but its purchase value is nothing compared with the value of actually winning it through good competition. Likewise, a competition may be won without struggle, through lack of good competition, or maybe just luck – as when Steven Bradbury won a gold medal in short-track speed skating at the 2002 Olympics because all the competitors ahead of him crashed into each other in the final turn (Baka and Hess, 2002). But this kind of victory lacks value – indeed it lacks the spirit of *citius, altius, fortius* – the athletic ethos of constantly improving and performing as well as one can, whatever the result.

So Olympism's educationally valuable good examples are not limited to winners or even individuals. The entire spectacle of striving for excellence through fair competition itself, taking into account particular obstacles overcome and challenges met, qualifies as an educationally valuable example. It is characteristic of the Olympic Games to celebrate athletes who overcome particular social and economic barriers. Even athletes who perform well below international standards, such as Eric "The Eel" Moussambani, a swimmer from Equatorial Guinea, or Wojdan Shahrkhani, the first female Olympian from Saudi Arabia, are cheered by the crowds and feted in the media. Unlike world championships and most other competitions, the Olympic Games leave some room for athletes to participate who would not otherwise qualify based on performance. This practice entails, however, that some potential medalists will be left at home (as when one country has the top three athletes in a given discipline, but is only

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allowed to send one or two of them to the Games), and it provides strong evidence to counter the charge that Olympism cares only about performance. The IOC's emphasis on diversity and inclusion is itself an important educational example. Furthermore, encouraging and facilitating diverse participation produces a wide variety of role models. By failing to define its educational examples – even in terms of athletic success – Olympism allows for a conception of excellence valid around the world.

A theory of justice through sport

If Olympism is characterized, as many philosophers claim, by an effort to promote moral values through sport, its most important educational examples will not be athletes but actions – especially its own institutional behavior.[11] Although the first Fundamental Principle cites "respect for universal fundamental ethical principles," it does not specify what those principles are or how they are to be understood. Those who consider ethics to be culturally relative would deny the existence of universal principles, and indeed Olympism risks a kind of ethical imperialism if it understands Anglo-European principles to be universal.[12] Doing ethics in a multicultural environment requires some form of common ground and in the Olympic Games, sport provides the common ground. The primary ethical principle of sport is fair play, which the fourth Fundamental Principle of Olympism identifies, along with mutual understanding, friendship, and solidarity, as essential to the "Olympic spirit." If fair play can be understood as the ethical principle of justice applied to sport, Olympism may also be interpreted as a theory of justice through sport.

In Ancient Greek philosophy, justice is understood generally as the excellence appropriate to communities. It is the subject of Plato's utopian dialogue *Republic,* and it is discussed extensively by Aristotle in two books: *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. Although the concept of fair play seems specific to or at least derived from sport, it is relevant to justice understood as the excellence of communities because – as Alisdair MacIntyre's (1981) work has shown – sport *is* a kind of community. For one thing, sports are governed by rules similar to the way communities are governed by laws, and it is important both to sport and to communities that these regulations are well-formed, generally respected, and properly enforced. Democratic communities consider themselves to be ruled by law. In all communities, rules and laws should be constructed in such a way that excellence may be cultivated, expressed, and appropriately awarded. One of Olympism's primary ethical demands, we may conclude, is for the proper administration of the rules and regulations of sport. It is no mistake that Olympic athletes and officials take oaths in which they swear "to respect and abide by the rules" governing the Games.[13]

It would be a mistake, however, to reduce Olympism's conception of justice or fair play merely to rule adherence. After all, the fourth Fundamental Principle characterizes fair play as a "spirit" rather than a principle. In this it is not so distant from Ancient Greek ideas of justice as it may seem. Aristotle in particular took the concept of beauty (*to kalon*) to be essential to ethical social action. In the *Eudemian Ethics*, he describes justice as something beautiful and says that the good and beautiful person (*kaloskagathos*) does just actions in the community not because they provide any personal benefit, but simply because they are beautiful (1249a). The English word "fair" retains this aesthetic link between beauty and justice, although it often seems forgotten in contemporary discussions of fair play, which tend toward the technical and legalistic. For example, the advantage gained by hydrodynamic swimsuits in the 2008 Beijing Games was largely accepted because it violated no rules. It took a larger sense of justice for the International Swimming Federation to finally ban the suits in 2009, under pressure partly from

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the threatened boycott of Michael Phelps, who had arguably been the biggest beneficiary of the suits, winning eight gold medals in Beijing. Phelps' opposition to the suits was aimed at benefiting his sports community,[14] something Aristotle might have recognized as beautifully just.

If it is to be a universal ethical principle, justice in the Olympic community cannot depend on the legalistic authority of a single body – even an international body like the IOC. It needs to transcend individual and national interests to serve the common interests of the international sports community. This lesson was learned in ancient Olympia, which was a PanHellenic sanctuary, by definition the property of all Hellenes and therefore lacking a sovereign ruling authority – other than the god Zeus, whom all officials, athletes, and spectators were there to worship. The race, mentioned above, to select an honoree to light the sacrificial flame was a fair solution to the problem of competing claims to that honor, not least because everyone present could witness the contest and attest to its impartiality and the validity of its results. The open and transparent process seems to have had a unifying and pacifying effect on rival tribes who in most other contexts would address their differences through violence. One might even say the ancient contest had been conducted with "a spirit of friendship, solidarity, and fair play," that is to say, in the Olympic spirit, which cannot be dissociated from the aesthetics of justice.

The transparency required by this Olympic aesthetic of justice explains why "invisible" problems like doping and corruption are such a big threat to the Olympic Games. Unlike fouls committed in the contest, doping is a form of injustice that cannot be seen by the audience or even the officials without the aid of sophisticated scientific testing. Since those responsible for policing doping in sport often had a financial interest in preserving the illusion of justice; they usually acted not like Aristotle's *kaloskagathos* to preserve the intrinsic good of the community, but rather on the basis of lower motivations like avoidance of shame and accumulation of wealth. When doping cases were exposed – like Ben Johnson's after his victory in the 100 meter sprint at the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games – it was usually due to a courageous and sometimes insubordinate act by a single individual. It was not until 1999, when the doping problem was perceived to threaten the entire Olympic movement, that the independent World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) was founded. About the same time, the text of the Olympic athletes' oath was changed to include the phrase, "committing ourselves to a sport without doping and without drugs." Only in recent years has this massive anti-doping effort begun to restore public confidence in the fairness of Olympic competition. Maintaining transparency may be seen as central to the goal of promoting Olympic justice.

Philosopher Claudia Pawlenka (2005) argues that fairness as a moral concept actually derives from sport. Given that sport is the common denominator for the multicultural Olympic community, it makes sense that a sport-inspired concept of justice should be its primary ethical principle. Furthermore, since the Olympic community must operate in the absence of a single authority, the democratic idea of the rule of law, exemplified by sport's close association with rules, is very promising. The Olympic understanding of justice must not be reduced, as noted, to rule adherence, however. In fact Olympism, as also noted, characterizes fair play as a "spirit" or attitude that includes community based concepts of mutual understanding, solidarity, and friendship. This characterization harks back to the aesthetic aspect of justice touted by Ancient Greek philosophy that demands transparency and community observation. In the London 2012 Games, this aesthetic conception of Olympic justice as a kind of spirit seems to have been employed by badminton officials who disqualified eight players for "not using their best efforts" in preliminary matches so they could gain advantageous matches in the finals (BBC, 2012). Olympism's theory of justice may indeed be derived from the principle of fair play that informs sport itself, but the concept turns out to be ethically robust while accommodating diverse cultural beliefs.

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A theory of world community through sport

The attempt to create an international or indeed universal philosophy may be Olympism's most distinctive characteristic. The Olympic ideal of a world community is expressed in its symbol of five interlocking rings, which "represents the union of the five continents and the meeting of athletes from throughout the world at the Olympic Games" (International Olympic Committee, 2011, p. 21). The fourth Fundamental Principle of Olympism demands universal access to this world sporting community: "The practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have the possibility of practicing sport without discrimination of any kind." (ibid., p. 10). The sixth Principle reinforces the point, "Any form of discrimination with regard to a country or a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender or otherwise is incompatible with belonging to the Olympic Movement" (ibid., p. 11). These very strong statements are at odds with Olympic history – which is riddled with exclusions based on race, creed, politics, and gender. Olympism's effort to provide some kind of coherent philosophy for an extremely diverse community – without capitulating either to hegemony or homogenization – is daunting. It should not be seen as trivial or quixotic, however, because this is the challenge posed by the phenomenon of globalization.

Globalization is the twenty-first-century version of a phenomenon that has appeared in the world before. It refers to advances in travel and communication technology which increased contact between people and cultures that were formerly more isolated from one another. In our current times, internet technology and air travel characterize the phenomenon, but developments in telegraph and train technology can be correlated with the inauguration of the Modern Olympic Games in 1896, and even the eighth-century BCE founding of the Ancient Olympic Games can be linked with expansion of shipping and trade in the Mediterranean. The link between the Olympic Games and such "world-shrinking" phenomena is that both bring diverse people together and challenge them to get along despite their differences. First of all this requires at least a temporary change of attitude – an effort to see oneself as part of a world community, what the ancients called "cosmopolitanism."[15]

Unlike cosmopolitanism, globalization is not an ideal. It is a phenomenon that brings with it the twin dangers of hegemony and homogenization, both of which challenge the Olympic Movement's goals.[16] Hegemony is imposition of the dominant group's values upon all others and in the case of the modern Olympic movement, the dominant group has historically been European and North American. Globalization, furthermore, tends to favor the wealthy and powerful. As Olympic scholar Jim Parry (2000) points out, this combination portends a perfect storm in which Olympism's world community risks becoming a giant Europe or United States, rather than a multicultural society. Charges of Eurocentrism or American dominance are accordingly common in the Olympic Movement, but as Mike McNamee (2006, p. 185) notes, the social practice of sport furnishes Olympism with a notion of universal human virtues which transcend distinctively Western values. A similar conclusion is reached by Nanayakkara (2008). Even if charges of Eurocentrism are overblown, however, Olympism demands that the movement fight against the risk of Western hegemony by striving for diversity in terms of its official sports, host cities, and organizations – not least the IOC itself.

Diversity is also essential to resist globalization's tendency toward homogenization – the elimination of differing styles and approaches not just in sport but in all kinds of social practices. Often this happens in the name of efficiency – a particular approach to a sport increases the chances of success and pretty soon everyone is using it. Complex sports like soccer can and do accommodate a variety of playing styles and approaches – indeed the great success of the Federation of International Football Associations' World Cup depends on the diversity of styles

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employed by the various national teams. As Sigmund Loland (2006, p. 147) observes, however, less-complex, record-type sports like the 100-meter dash do not allow for much diversity because the standards for performance are so strictly structured and defined. These sports have the tendency to become homogenized to the point that the athletes, their preparation, and even their styles all start to resemble one another. Very often they train together in one place under one or a few coaches, no matter the country they actually compete for at the Olympics. As we noted earlier, the emphasis on records and performance has its place in Olympism, but diversity is an equally important value and sports should be chosen and regulated in such a way as to promote it.

A special case of diversity very important to Olympism is that of women. Despite the exclusion of women from the ancient Olympic Games,[17] and Pierre de Coubertin's initial opposition to their participation in the modern Games, women have competed in every Olympics since 1900 and in the London Games of 2012, they competed in every sport on the program, making up 44 percent of all athletes (International Olympic Committee, 2013b, p. 1). The Olympic Charter, furthermore, defines one of the roles of the IOC as follows: "to encourage and support the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in all structures, with a view to implementing the principle of equality of men and women" (International Olympic Committee, 2011, p. 14). This commitment to female participation engages the issue of diversity in a special way because it can be just as easily interpreted as a case of cultural hegemony as prevention of sex discrimination. In many countries, females are not considered equal to males under the law and their participation in sport is discouraged. When the IOC pressures these countries to include females on their Olympic teams, are they demonstrating "mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity, and fair play," or are they arrogantly forcing their own views on a minority?

The participation of women from conservative Muslim countries has been a particular concern for the Olympic movement. As William Morgan's (1998) essay on Algerian runner Hassiba Boulmerka shows, this issue engages issues of religion, culture, politics, and economics. Not only does the IOC's declaration of equality between males and females contradict traditional Muslim beliefs and laws, the uniforms required by many sports along with public display more generally is seen by many – male and female – to flout appropriate standards of female modesty.[18] What is more, the honor and reputation of a woman's entire family is often thought to depend on perceptions of her morality (Pfister 2010, p. 2946). For the London 2012 Olympics, the IOC pressured the Saudi Arabians to include female athletes in their team. The Saudis complied by entering a judoka but then threatened to withdraw when the International Judo Federation declared that she could not wear a headscarf in competition for safety reasons. Eventually, the athlete was allowed to wear a modified scarf that addressed – at least partially – the safety concerns. The episode illustrates the complexity of Olympism's commitment to nondiscrimination and the challenge of building a world community through sport that does not amount to an empire. Olympism must provide a philosophical foundation from which to negotiate particular issues, without becoming so rigid as to work against the goals of the movement.

Conclusion

Olympism's goal of a "peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity" (IOC 2011, p. 10) incorporates all of the interpretations we have surveyed in this chapter. Although Olympism does not offer a metaphysics of sport, the principles implied by the structure of sport – such as equal opportunity and reward according to merit – provide common ground and common values around which a flexible and adaptable philosophy can be

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constructed. Part of this philosophy is a theory of human excellence, which is tied closely to sport but not necessarily to victory or to any particular type of human being. Like Ancient Greek virtue ethics, Olympism promotes an ideal that is harmonious, holistic, and based on activity rather than status. Olympism also offers a theory of education through sport, both through participation and through the observance of good examples. Olympism's theory of justice derives from the sporting idea of fair play, incorporating both rule-based and aesthetic understandings of fairness. Finally Olympism promulgates an ideal of world community, characterized by non-discrimination and a commitment to mutual understanding, but also conditioned by the claim that sport is a human right. The Olympic movement must remain aware of the twin dangers of globalization, hegemony and homogenization, if it is to create a peaceful international community.

As the philosophical beacon for the Modern Olympic Games, Olympism is right to make sport its common denominator and to remain flexible enough to adapt to a constantly changing world. We might wish for a clearer and more robust Olympic philosophy, but such an articulation may in practice be less conducive to the movement's goals. Olympism is a philosophy of what can be achieved through sport, rather than a philosophy of sport *per se.* But the question of what can be achieved through sport just is the central concern of the philosophy of sport – an improved critical understanding of sport is valuable insofar as it enables us to improve our lives as human beings and perhaps even to promote "a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity" (International Olympic Committee, 2011, p. 10).

Notes

1. As Parry explains, the criteria for inclusion of a sport in the Olympic program (International Olympic Committee, 2007) are based on popularity and universality, but Coubertin also wanted the Olympic movement to contribute to the development of all sport. The debate about which sports should be included and why is accordingly complex.
2. This is the story told by Philostratos (*Gym.* 5). For a fuller discussion, see Reid (2006).
3. See "Olympic Solidarity Commission" *Olympic.org.* Available online at www.olympic.org/olympic-solidarity-commission (accessed online October 21, 2014).
4. Taking these principles seriously as tenets of Olympism means leaving behind Coubertin's narrow understanding of Olympism. Coubertin was not an advocate of equal opportunity – at least outside sport. Women and lower classes were at best discouraged and at worst excluded outright from the early Olympic Games.
5. The Latin formulation of this saying comes from *Principles of Philosophy* 1644: 1.7. The more popular text that makes the "cogito" argument is *Meditations on First Philosophy* 1.16–17.
6. According to some scholars this comment may be misleading, see Nicholas White's introduction to the *Handbook of Epictetus* (Epictetus, 1983: 7–8).
7. As is well known, the ancient Olympic Games excluded females, slaves, and non-Hellenes. The first Modern Olympic Games also excluded females and discrimination based on race, religion, class, politics, and disability have also been issues in the modern Games. The point is that Olympism should be based on ideals rather than historical practice.
8. Schneider and Butcher (1994) explain how doping conflicts with the ideals of Olympism.
9. National Olympic committees pay particular attention to the so-called medal count, not even considering the fact that this constitutes an unofficial and unfair competition, which clearly favors the larger and richer countries. For an interesting account, see Bernard and Busse (2004).
10. The Olympic creed does not appear in the *Olympic Charter* or on the current IOC website, but it is so frequently cited in discussions of Olympic history and ideals as to be considered part of Olympism.
11. As Derek Bok (1996) has shown, moral behavior (good and bad) is learned more by observing an institution's behavior than from the teaching or professing of theories.
12. Indeed European Rationalism, a movement that includes such philosophers as Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant, took its philosophy to be universal since human reason is universal. But there are other ethical traditions, such as the Eastern philosophies of Daoism and Confucianism, which believe

ethical truths transcend rational expression. For a discussion of this problem, see Reid (2010).

13 Coaches and IOC members also take similar oaths. The text of the IOC member's oath can be found on p. 30 of the Olympic Charter. The athletes, officials, and coaches' oaths can be found in an IOC Factsheet (International Olympic Committee 2013a, p. 3).

14 This is, at least, suggested by Phelps' comments at the time; see Associated Press, FINA moves up body-suit ban. *ESPN Olympic Sports*, July 31, 2009. Available online at http://sports.espn.go.com/oly/swimming/news/story?id=4368338 (accessed October 21, 2014).

15 At the ancient Olympic Games, that larger community was that of all Hellenes, as opposed to particular tribes, and its purpose was to worship a common deity. The concept of a world community appropriate to the Modern Olympic Games also emerged in Ancient Greece with Diogenes, the fifth-century BCE Cynic philosopher, who is said to have coined the Greek term *cosmopolis,* which means "world community." The idea was later embraced by the Roman Stoic school, especially Marcus Aurelius, who envisioned the wellbeing of all mankind to be intertwined and advocated cosmopolitanism, an attitude of world citizenship. For a full account of Stoic cosmopolitanism in relation to Roman sport, see Reid (2011), chapter 9.

16 Nationalism and "insincere internationalism" are also threats; see Iowerth, Jones and Hardman (2010), and Morgan (1995).

17 Women were excluded from the Olympic Games, but not all of Ancient Greek sport and there is evidence that they competed in other PanHellenic games, such as those at Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea. For female exclusion at Olympia, see Mouratidis (1984). For women in Greek sport, see Scanlon (2002) chapters 4–7. For the philosophical debate between Plato and Aristotle on the females and sport, see Reid (2011, pp. 64–8 and 77–8).

18 This is true not only for Islam, but for conservative communities within most major religions, including Judaism and Christianity. For more on concerns about female bodies at the Olympic Games, see Weaving (2013).

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