

# Physical Education as Olympic Education

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## **Introduction**

In a recent paper (Parry, 1998, p. 64), I argued that

*the justification of PE activities lies in their capacity to facilitate the development of certain human excellences of a valued kind. Of course, the problem now lies in specifying those 'human excellences of a valued kind', and (for anyone) this task leads us into the area of philosophical anthropology.*

I suggested that the way forward for Physical Education lies in the philosophical anthropology (and the ethical ideals) of Olympism, which provide a specification of a variety of human values and excellences which:

- have been attractive to human groups over an impressive span of time and space
- have contributed massively to our historically developed conceptions of ourselves
- have helped to develop a range of artistic and cultural conceptions that have defined Western culture.
- have produced a range of physical activities that have been found universally satisfying and challenging.

Although physical activities are widely considered to be pleasurable, their likelihood of gaining wide acceptance lies rather in their intrinsic value, which transcends the simply hedonic or relative good. Their ability to furnish us with pleasurable experiences depends upon our prior recognition in them of opportunities for the development and expression of valued human excellences. They are widely considered to be such opportunities for the expression of valued human excellences because, even when as local instantiations, their object is to challenge our common human propensities and abilities.

I claimed that Olympic ideals may be seen not merely as inert 'ideals', but living ideas which have the power to remake our notions of sport in education, seeing sport not as mere physical activity but as the cultural and developmental activity of an aspiring, achieving, well-balanced, educated and ethical individual.

This paper seeks to make good that claim by trying to develop a case for Physical Education as Olympic Education. I begin by setting out various accounts and conceptions of the Olympic Idea; then I suggest a unifying and organising account of the philosophical anthropology of Olympism; and this is followed by the practical application of that account in two examples of current ethical issues. Finally, I seek to present an account of Physical Education as Olympic Education.

## **The Olympic Idea**

For most people, I suppose, the word 'Olympic' will conjure up images of the Olympic Games, either ancient or modern. The focus of their interest will be a two-week festival of sport held once in every four years between elite athletes representing their countries or city-states in inter-communal competition.

Most people, too, will have heard of an 'Olympiad'. Although it is sometimes thought to refer to a particular Games, it refers in fact to a four-year period, whose opening is celebrated by a Games, during which a Games may or may not be held. So: the Sydney Games are properly referred to not as the XXVII Games (since there have been only twenty-four, three having been cancelled due to World Wars) but as the Games of the XXVII Olympiad (see de Coubertin, 1929, pp. 110-1).

Fewer, however, will have heard of 'Olympism', the philosophy developed by the founder of the modern Olympic Movement, Baron Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937), a French aristocrat who had been much influenced by the British Public School tradition of sport in education. This philosophy has as its focus of interest not just the elite athlete, but everyone; not just a short truce period, but the whole of life; not just competition and winning, but also the values of participation and co-operation; not just sport as an activity, but also as a formative and developmental influence contributing to desirable characteristics of individual personality and social life.

For Olympism is a social philosophy which emphasises the role of sport in world development, international understanding, peaceful co-existence, and social and moral education. De Coubertin understood, towards the end of the nineteenth century, that sport was about to become a major growth point in popular culture - and that, as physical activity grounded in rule-adherence, it was apparently universalisable, providing a contact point across cultures.

A universal philosophy by definition applies to everyone, regardless of nation, race, gender, social class, religion or ideology, and so the Olympic Movement has worked for a coherent universal representation of itself - a concept of Olympism which identifies a range of values to which each nation can sincerely commit itself whilst at the same time finding for the general idea a form of expression which is unique to itself, generated by its own culture, location, history, tradition and projected future.

De Coubertin, being a product of late nineteenth-century liberalism, emphasised the values of equality, fairness, justice, respect for persons, rationality and understanding, autonomy, and excellence. These are values which span nearly 3000 years of Olympic history, although some of them may be differently interpreted at different times. De Coubertin said: "But now Olympia ... has been rebuilt or rather renovated under forms which are different because modern, yet steeped in a kindred atmosphere." (1906, p. 16).

They are, basically, the main values of liberal humanism - or perhaps we should say simply humanism, since socialist societies seem to have found little difficulty in including Olympic ideals into their overall ideological stance towards sport, and it is not clear in what sense ancient Greek society might be considered 'liberal'.

The contemporary task for the Olympic Movement is to further this project: to try to see more clearly what its Games (and sport in wider society) might come to mean. This task will be both at the level of ideas and of action. If the practice of sport is to be pursued and developed according to Olympic values, the theory must strive for a conception of Olympism which will support that practice. The ideal should seek both to sustain sports practice against unjust criticism (where it exists) and to lead sport towards a vision of Olympism which will help to deal with the challenges which are bound to emerge<sup>1</sup>.

### **Conceptions of Olympism**

Side-stepping, for present purposes, the interesting debate about the relation between ancient ideals and values, and those of modern ‘revivalists’<sup>2</sup>, let me try to set out some of the many modern attempts that there have been to capture the meaning of Olympism, to try to give a flavour of the idea in all its complexity. I simply report others’ positions, in the main, but occasionally I take the opportunity to comment on some theme, where it seems necessary or useful.

#### 1. Contemporary Official Sources:

The first words of the Olympic Charter (1994) state simply the nature and goals of Olympism:

Fundamental Principle 2 (p. 10) says:

*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 found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.*

Fundamental Principle 6 (p. 11) says:

*The goal of the Olympic Movement is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practised without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play.*

In referring to this goal, the President of the IOC, JA Samaranché, appeals to six ‘basic elements’ of Olympic ethics (1995, p. 3):

- tolerance
- generosity
- solidarity
- friendship
- non-discrimination
- respect for others

Later in the same editorial he says that the principles which inspire the Olympic Movement are based on

- justice
- democracy
- equality
- tolerance

## 2. Hans Lenk

Lenk (1964, p. 206) refers to over 30 Olympic aims and values dealt with in his book of the same title as the essay, including:

- values or religious-cultural import
- festive, artistic and spiritual planning of the Games
- creation of a sporting elite
- ideas relating to performance (competition, records, etc)
- equality of opportunity (the equal starting position)
- reference to the Greek idea of 'agonistic' activity
- fair play
- the ancient idea of a truce, and the Olympic Movement's peaceful mission
- making the Movement international and independent
- the desire to give the Games the character of the host country
- the value of amateurism
- sweeping aside all cultural, racial, national, religious and social barriers
- uniting all forms of sport on an equal footing at Olympia
- relating the ancient meaning of the Games to their modern form
- regulating sporting life by looking towards the Olympic Games periodically
- the beneficial effects of the example of Olympic competitors
- the incentive provided by the possibility of participating in the Games.

## 3. Ommo Grupe

Grupe's recent paper (1997)<sup>3</sup> addresses De Coubertin's pedagogical concept of Olympism which, he says, was based on five points:

- i. unity of mind and body

However, de Coubertin (1894b) had a more differentiated view:

“... there are not two parts to a man - body and soul: there are three - body, mind and character; character is not formed by the mind, but primarily by the body. The men of antiquity knew this, and we are painfully relearning it.”

And later (Letter III, 1918b):

“I prefer to harness a foursome and to distinguish not only body and soul, ... but muscles, intelligence, character and conscience.”

This is important, showing concern for the whole person; the relation between sport and moral education; and the role of properly designed physical activity in character development. De Coubertin often made the point that Olympism seeks to promote moral sport and moral education through sport. Referring to the UK school reforms of 1840, he says (1896, p. 11):

*In these reforms physical games and sports hold, we may say, the most prominent place: the muscles are made to do the work of a moral educator. It is the application to modern requirements of one of the most characteristic principles of Greek civilisation: to make the muscles the chief factor in the work of moral education.*

ii. self-improvement (developing one's abilities)

iii. amateurism - with its connotations of (i) 'nobility' and (ii) 'chivalry'.

(a) However, de Coubertin was critical of the kind of social inequality sometimes reinforced by assumptions and practices related to class privilege in discussions of the value of amateurism. For example, he fulminates against "the English of England, and on their heels the English of the Dominions" (1924, p. 94), alleging against them:

*"A good sports club in their eyes continues to be a club in which the members are gentlemen on the same level. That was the first condition. They have not succeeded in freeing themselves from it. That is why, in rowing for example, they formerly declared every manual worker a professional. The university rowers wished to preserve in this way the aristocratic hall-mark of their favourite sport. It took a long time to put an end in theory to such medieval legislation. When it will disappear in practice no-one knows."*

(b) De Coubertin certainly looked favourably upon medieval notions of chivalry, though, suggesting that such an ideology of honour pre-figured modern notions of fair play. So popular were tournaments and some folk games that the Church had to tolerate them for some time:

*"It is certain that the sporting spirit could easily have developed in Europe in the Middle Ages. But feudalism repressed it, and as soon as the Church became detached from Chivalry it returned to its distrust of physical culture, in which it appeared to descry a dangerous forerunner of free thought."*

(De Coubertin, 1918a, p. 46)

iv. fairness, and fair play

v. peace

Hans Lenk had pointed out that the Olympic motto '*citius, altius, fortius*' (swifter, higher, stronger) may lead us astray, given the dangers for humaneness of the constant striving for records, and the attendant dangers of cheating, political exploitation and commercialism<sup>4</sup>. Grupe also warns of today's dangers, and asserts that we need a new definition and a new legitimacy. On his account, Olympism today, he says, is about:

- education, self-fulfilment, effort
- fairness
- peace, toleration, anti-discrimination
- sport for all

#### 4. Pierre de Coubertin

Now let us remind ourselves of the considered ideas of the founder of the modern Olympic Movement, Pierre de Coubertin. His mature article 'The Philosophical Foundations of Modern Olympism' (1935) clarifies the idea of Olympism: It is:

- i A religion of sport (the religio athletae).

*"I was right to create from the outset, around the renewed Olympism, a religious sentiment (transformed and widened by Internationalism, Democracy and Science)... This is the origin of all the rites which go to make the ceremonies of the modern Games." (p. 131)*

Roesch (1979), however, argues that this is to misunderstand the nature of the religious life:

*"Religious life and cultic expressions take part in other forms and contents, such as gesture, attitude, ritual dance, prayer, speech and rites. The individual athlete, no matter what his religion, denomination or ideology, lives and acts, according to his religious conviction as a Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, Jew and so on ... 'Olympism' can't take the place of that" (p. 199).*

Roesch calls the ritual elements of Olympism consciously created by de Coubertin 'pseudo-cultic' expressions (p. 200), and he proposes four central values of Olympism, which seem to be entirely secular: freedom, fairness, friendship, peace.

This insistence on the secular nature of Olympic values seems to me entirely correct; but Roesch creates his contrast only by failing to take account of what de Coubertin means by 'religion', and of what he repeatedly says about 'the religio athletae'<sup>5</sup>. Again, the core of de Coubertin's concern here is the *moral* value of sport.

- ii. An aristocracy, an elite (but egalitarian and meritocratic)
- iii. Chivalry (comradeship and rivalry - suspension of exclusively national sentiments)
- iv. Truce (the temporary cessation of quarrels, disputes and misunderstandings): "... to interrupt their struggles for a moment in order to celebrate loyal and courteous muscular Games."
- v. Rhythm (the Olympiad)
- vi. The Young Adult Male Individual. "It follows from what I have said that the true Olympic hero is in my view the adult male individual," (p. 133) who alone should be able to enter the Altis, or sacred enclosure. This means that team games will be at best secondary, taking place outside the modern Altis ("... fittingly honoured, but in the second rank."). It also means that women "could also take part

here if it is judged necessary,” although de Coubertin himself thought that they had no place even in the second rank. He says:

*“I personally do not approve of the participation of women in public competitions, which is not to say that they must abstain from practising a great number of sports, provided they do not make a public spectacle of themselves. In the Olympic Games, as in the contests of former times, their primary role should be to crown the victors.”* (p. 133)

He is at least consistent on this:

*“I still think that contact with feminine athletics is bad for him (the modern athlete) and that these athletics should be excluded from the Olympic programme”* (1934, p. 129).

*“As to the admission of women to the Games, I remain strongly against it. It was against my will that they were admitted to a growing number of competitions.”* (1928, p. 106).

There are very important corollaries of this kind of statement. For example, those who simply disparage the Muslim doctrine of ‘separate but equal development’ should notice the echoes of that view in de Coubertin’s work, in the practice of the Ancient Olympics, and in the educational ideology of single-sex schooling throughout Europe. And those who, on other issues, call upon the authority of the thought of de Coubertin or of ancient practices to support their views, should notice that such ‘authority’ does not necessarily derive from justifiable principle, and does not necessarily support their other views.

vii. Beauty - artistic and literary creation: “intellectual manifestations organised around the Games”, so as to promote “civilisation, truth, and human dignity, as well as ... international relations.” (pp. 133-4)

viii. Peace, promoted by mutual respect based on mutual understanding.

ix. Let us also add: participation and competition. De Coubertin (1908, pp. 19-20), said in London at the close of the 1908 Games:

*“Last Sunday, in the course of the ceremony organised at St Paul’s in honour of the athletes, the bishop of Pennsylvania recalled this in felicitous words: ‘the important thing in these Olympiads (sic)<sup>6</sup> is less to win than to take part in them.’ ... Gentlemen, let us bear this potent word in mind. It extends across every domain to form the basis of a serene and healthy philosophy. The important thing in life is not victory but struggle; the essential is not to have won but to have fought well.”*

In saying this, de Coubertin gave credit to the bishop for a sentiment that was often on his own lips. Fourteen years earlier he is quoted as exhorting an audience at the Parnassus Club in Athens to support the revival of the Games (1894b, p. 10), and:

*“... not to let their enthusiasm be cooled by the thought that they might be beaten by strangers. ‘Dishonour’, he said, ‘would not lie in defeat, but in failure to take part.’”*

## 5. Avery Brundage

Just to show how things change over a very short period of time, consider the views expressed by the former President of the IOC, Avery Brundage, in terms that remained fairly standard (although under threat) into the 1980’s:

*“The first and most important of these rules, for good reasons, was that the Games must be amateur. They are not a commercial enterprise and no one, promoters, managers, coaches, participants, individuals or nations, is permitted to use them for profit.”<sup>7</sup> (1963, p. 30)*

The Olympic Games were revived by the Baron de Coubertin, Brundage says, to:

- i. bring to the attention of the world the fact that a national program of physical training and competitive sport will not only develop stronger and healthier boys and girls but also, and perhaps more important, will make better citizens through the character building that follows participation in properly administered amateur sport;
- ii. demonstrate the principles of fair play and good sportsmanship, which could be adopted with great advantage in many other spheres of activity;
- iii. stimulate interest in the fine arts through exhibitions and demonstrations, and thus contribute to a broader and more well rounded life;
- iv. teach that sport is play for fun and enjoyment and not to make money, and that with devotion to the task at hand the reward will take care of itself; the philosophy of amateurism as contrasted to that of materialism;
- v. create international amity and good will, thus leading to a happier and more peaceful world.” (p. 39)

## **The Philosophical Anthropology of Olympism**

What are we to make of this bewildering welter of ideas, offered by various writers as values, aims, goals or principles of Olympism, the Olympic Movement or the Olympic Games? The ideas so far presented are highly suggestive, but they are not systematic or coherent, and I have been able to discuss only a fraction of them, and only at a relatively superficial level.

We need to try to find a way to organise our thoughts in relation to all these ideas in order, if possible, to pull them together into a framework that renders some version of them systematic and coherent.

My guiding thought lies in the status of Olympism as a social, political and educational ideology. Any such ideology necessarily appeals to a philosophical anthropology - an idealised conception of the human being towards which the ideology strives in its attempted social reproduction of the individual. Social anthropology is the investigation of whole cultures, which are preferably, from the point of view of the researcher, quite alien to the researcher's own society<sup>8</sup>. A social anthropologist investigates the living instantiations of human nature - the quite different kinds of human nature that are to be found around the world - practically, scientifically, through observation and social scientific methodology.

A philosophical anthropologist, however, tries to create a theory about human nature by thinking about the human being at the most general level. Hoberman (1984, p. 2) writes about the differing political conceptions of sport, but finds it necessary to refer to several levels of explanation and theorising:

*“(Different societies) ‘... have distinct political anthropologies or idealised models of the exemplary citizen which constitute complex answers to the fundamental question of philosophical anthropology: ‘What is a human being?’”*

He quotes John F Kennedy as a representative of ‘centrist neo-Hellenism’:

*“... the same civilisation which produced some of our highest achievements of philosophy and drama, government and art, also gave us a belief in the importance of physical soundness which has become a part of Western tradition; from the mens sana in corpore sano of the Romans to the British belief that the playing fields of Eton brought victory on the battlefields of Europe.”<sup>9</sup> (p. 21)*

In order to try to fill out just what were the ideas that have been handed down from classical times, to be reinterpreted and re-specified (by de Coubertin and others) we need to examine two central ideas.

### The Ideas of Kalos K’agathos and Arete

Lenk says (1964, p. 206):

*“Many representatives of the Olympic movement combine these values together to form a picture of the human being harmoniously balanced intellectually and physically in the sense of the Greek ‘kalos k’agathos’.”*

This is also a theme in Nissiotis (1984, p. 64):

*“... the Olympic Ideal is what qualifies sport exercise in general as a means for educating the whole man as a conscious citizen of the world ... The Olympic Idea is that exemplary principle which expresses the deeper essence of sport as an authentic educative process through a continuous struggle to create healthy and virtuous man in the highest possible way (‘kalos k’agathos’) in the image of the Olympic winner and athlete.”*

Eyler (1981) pursues the meaning of the Olympic virtue of excellence in performance and in character, through Homer, early philosophers, Pindar and Pausanias. He concludes:

*In summary, arete has several meanings - distinction, duty (primarily to oneself), excellence, fame, glorious deeds, goodness, greatness, heroism ... valour and virtue. Some of the many implications of these meanings contextually are: man is born, grows old, and dies; performance is not without risks; winning is all; man achieves by his own skills ... human performance is the quintessence of life; and finally, man is the measure of all things and the responsible agent.” (p. 165)*

He quotes Kitto (1951):

*“... what moves a Greek warrior to heroism is not a sense of duty as we understand it, i.e. duty towards others, it is rather a duty towards oneself. He strives after that which we translate virtue or excellence, the Greek ‘arete’ (The Right Stuff).” (p. 166)*

Lenk (1982a, p. 166) emphasises the centrality of the ideas of action and achievement:

*“The Olympic athlete thus illustrates the Herculean myth of culturally exceptional achievement, i.e. of action essentially unnecessary for life’s sustenance that is nevertheless highly valued and arises from complete devotion to striving to attain a difficult goal.”*

Paleologos (1982, p. 63) echoes the mythical origins of the Ancient Games in the deeds of one of the great heroes of antiquity, Hercules:

*“With the twelve labours depicted by the bas-reliefs on the two metopes of the Temple (of Zeus), the world is presented with the content of the moral teachings which Olympia intended with the Games.”*

The idea is that the sculptures of the demi-God Hercules in Olympia performed a morally educative function, standing as role models, especially for the athletes who were there to train for the Games, of physical, moral and intellectual virtue:

*“... Hercules is shown bearded, with beautiful features, ... a well-trained body, fine, proportioned muscles, ... as a representative of the ‘kalos kagathos’ type, where the body is well-formed and harmonious, the expression of a beautiful soul, and the face radiates intelligence, kindness and integrity.” (p. 67)*

Nissiotis concludes (1984, p. 66):

*“The Olympic Idea is thus a permanent invitation to all sportsmen to transcend ... their own physical and intellectual limits ... for the sake of a continuously higher achievement in the physical, ethical and intellectual struggle of a human being towards perfection.”*

So: a philosophical anthropology is an idealised conception of the human. If we ask ourselves what the Olympic Idea is, it translates into a few simple phrases which capture the essence of what an ideal human being ought to be and to aspire to. From the above, and drawing on conceptions of Olympism presented in the previous section, I think we might suggest that the philosophical anthropology of Olympism promotes the ideals of:

- individual all round harmonious human development
- towards excellence and achievement
- through effort in competitive sporting activity
- under conditions of mutual respect, fairness, justice and equality
- with a view to creating lasting personal human relationships of friendship;
- international relationships of peace, toleration and understanding;
- and cultural alliances with the arts

That's the general idea - a conception of the human being who is capable of being and doing those things.

### **Ethical Applications**

Now we must ask ourselves: just how does that relate to ethical aspects of participation in sport? There are two ways applying this kind of approach:

1. When we try to state the philosophical anthropology of Olympism - when we attempt to describe what the ideal conception of the human being is from the Olympic perspective - that statement itself will straight away throw up ethical principles. The specification will already be packed with ethical indicators.

For example, consider the value of respect for persons. If we are interested in individual development we are obviously interested in individuals - which raises some interesting questions about team games, but we may discuss that later. If we have a concern for someone's educational development it is very difficult to express such a concern without respecting them and their rights. So already such a philosophical anthropology draws with it certain values and commits us to doing certain things in practice.

A second value is one which we might call equality, or fairness, or justice; and it draws with it other subsidiary values. Anti-discrimination is one; and three examples are race, class and gender. If we seriously believe in fair play, if we seriously think that the athlete is a person who ought fully to understand and respect the conventions of fair play, it seems to follow that we have to take a stand on equality (racial, political, gender) and support equal opportunity and equal consideration initiatives in sport.

2. The second way of applying this kind of approach is to notice that, if we have decided to which ethical principles we ought to be committed if we subscribe to the philosophical anthropology of Olympism, we are not out of the woods yet! For it still remains to be argued which principles are to be applied in what way to particular examples in ethical dispute. That is to say, there is still plenty of work for applied

ethical argument to do here. How might all this be beneficially worked out in practice?

### Example 1: The drugs issue

Is it permissible or wrong to take drugs in sport? A knee-jerk reaction is to say: drugs are wrong and should be banned, so we should set up an apparatus to police such a ban, and pursue, prosecute and punish offenders. Now, perhaps this is the right thing to do; but I'm asking that we should examine the values that underlie that conclusion, in order to establish whether they cohere with other values to which we claim to be committed. Does it, for example, respect the individual autonomy of the athlete to take decisions for him/herself?

The method here is to work back to the ethical aspects of the philosophical anthropology. If we really believe in that philosophical anthropology and in the values that it throws up, then we should seek to see them applied in practice. And if we're not going to support their practical application, then there ought to be a large question raised as to whether we fully believe in them. Here we see a punitive authoritarian response to an issue and not an educative response - so we have to ask how this can be squared with an interest in was educational development?

I would rather appeal to drug users to consider the values within Olympism, and to try to square them with drug taking. I would want to ask someone who is taking drugs, 'is it fair to other competitors'? If the answer is no, then that might be why drug taking is wrong. Or I might say that taking drugs makes one an instrumentalist - a self-instrumentalist - in using one's own body as an instrument to success. If we are sincerely interested in human values such as respect for persons (which includes not using persons as a means to ends; but seeing them as ends in themselves) then it seems wrong for them to be used (even by themselves) as an instrument.

Now, it may well appear to be naively idealistic to rely on education to solve all our problems (eventually); for in the meantime cheats may prosper. The point, though, is not that an educational approach denies to us an interim punitive option - but rather that any approach to the problem which does not include *as primary* an educational element will not serve the interests of sport as Olympism sees it. This is precisely what was defective in the approach of the Sports Council earlier this decade, which relied mainly on poorly evidenced (and therefore risible) death warnings, and threats of punitive action.

However, a positive feature of the debate about performance-enhancing drugs was that it forced everyone to think in ethical terms, and to appeal to ethical principles. But if we take these appeals seriously, and follow them through, there are some interesting consequences. Assume that drug-taking in sport is wrong. Now, ask the question: 'why is it wrong?' The answer we give to this question has to be in terms of an ethical principle that we claim to be central to our idea of sport, which drug-taking allegedly violates.

#### i. The 'Natural' Athlete - the Track versus the Laboratory

For example, some say that what is wrong with drug-taking is that it removes competition from the track to the laboratory. But, if we are to be consistent, we should note that the development of sports science in general promotes competition between physiology, psychology and biomechanics labs as support services for training. If we're so worried about removing the competition from the track to the lab, maybe we should look again at the ethical status of sports sciences more generally.

#### ii. Unfair Advantage or Inequality of Opportunity

Others say that what is wrong with drug-taking is that it confers an unfair advantage. Notice that no-one can (sincerely) make this objection to drug-taking unless he is sincere in his commitment to sport as embodying fairness, and as disallowing unfair advantages as being against the idea of sport.

But many of those who hold this objection against drug-taking seem perfectly prepared to allow various kinds of very obviously unfair advantages. For example, only certain countries are able to generate and enjoy the fruits of developments in sports science; and only certain countries are able to take advantage of the knowledge and technology required for the production of specialised technical equipment. Is this fair? The company that produced the so-called 'moon-bikes' later shamelessly marketed them under the slogan: *'The Unfair Advantage'*. And yet there are often very simple and cheap ways of equalising equipment, which might readily be explored by sports science.

Let's widen the issue: it seems to me a fact that international competition is grossly unfair, because some countries have the resources to enhance the performance of their athletes, and some don't. Those nurtured within advanced systems might take time to consider the extent to which their performances are a function not just of their abilities as individual sportspeople but also of the social context within which they have been nurtured. Have not their performances been enhanced? Are not their advantages unfair?

#### iii. Rule-Breaking, or Cheating

Others say that drug-taking is wrong simply because it is against the rules of competition. But pace-making is against the rules of the IAAF, although it is allowed so as to facilitate record-breaking attempts in the commercial promotion of media spectacle, and no-one is disqualified. In fact, runners can earn large fees for performing this 'service'.

In a world where the values of sport are sometimes forgotten under the pressures of medal-winning and the marketplace, it ill behoves those responsible to turn a moralistic eye on athletes. Why should athletes take any notice of moral exhortation when they see the true values lived and expressed by those around them?

#### iv. Conclusion

The drugs debate has made everyone stand on ethical principle. But think how sport might develop (what it might become) if those principles were not merely used

opportunistically over the drugs issue, but rather were acted upon consistently in the interests of truly fair competition and equality of opportunity.

I think that there is an opportunity here to open up debate again about the ethical basis of sport, so that our sports practice (and the sports science and training theory that support it) becomes rooted in firm principles that encapsulate what we think sport *should be*.

### Example 2: Equality

If we really do believe in equality, that belief commits us also to anti-discrimination. People should be treated equally unless there is a good reason why not. But if we really do believe in anti-discrimination then we should be keen to see the idea applied in practice. On the race issue in South Africa, it was quite clear that there was racial discrimination - the Group Areas Act was quite explicitly a racially divisive act, whose intention was to reserve certain privileged conditions (including those in the field of sport) for those of a certain race.

If our professed commitments are against that kind of thing, then we have to oppose it in practice. If it is so blatant, then we have to oppose it bluntly, and to the credit of the IOC that's what its members did. They didn't say: "We don't like your politics and we don't play with people whose politics we don't like". (For if we all said that no-one would play with anyone!) They said instead: "We can't play sport with people who don't play sport properly; and you can't play sport properly unless you have equality of opportunity and equality of consideration."

A related example: why is it then that in the case of those countries who do not permit their women to participate at all, the IOC permits their men to participate in the Olympic Games? If we really believe in Olympism as philosophical anthropology and the values it generates of equality, justice, fairness to all, we do not appear to have a very good answer at present. This is a very thorny issue for the IOC and its President. It brings up the difficult matter of the definition of equality; and of contesting approaches to equality of opportunity and consideration. I have here the space merely to raise these questions, not to discuss them: What is wrong with separate development? What is wrong with promoting the equal development of women's sport whilst not allowing men to compete alongside them, in the same meetings and events?

Another example: social class. If we are really committed to equality and fairness then we shall seek to eradicate distinctions on the basis of social class that have consequences for equal participation; and in my view that is what the amateurism debate was all about. It was about an historically generated class-based idea of who should be allowed participate at what. Years ago, only officers and not those in other ranks could participate in Olympic equestrian events. In order to overcome this rule, certain National Olympic Committees promoted team members to officer status for the period of the Games and then demoted them afterwards! The idea, I suppose, was that such inequalities should not have been permitted in practice, and deserved to be subverted. I don't say that I agree with this route to principle, since it involves the compromising of another principle - not to flout the rules - but the example makes the point.

## **Overview**

In the above, I am seeking to recommend routes and strategies towards consistency in our principles, values, approaches and practices; and I have tried to suggest ways of thinking: either beginning from our basic values and trying to work them through to the conclusion; or beginning with an 'intuitive' conclusion and working all the way back to our principles, in order to see whether and how the one resonates with the other. In other words: we can ask whether and how a particular practice exemplifies the principles that we can discover in Olympism; or we can ask ourselves how would a person who is committed to Olympic principles approach a particular ethical issue like drug taking or anti-discrimination. These are powerful ways of interrogating both our principles and our intuitions for their practical adequacy.

I have tried to present an account of the Olympic Idea, and some examples of ethical aspects of the Olympic Movement. More importantly, though, I have tried to suggest, with examples, a systematic method of arriving at principled judgements about ethical matters through the values of Olympism. Our answers to our ethical dilemmas must resonate with some previously established set of values - in this case relating to the philosophical anthropological nature of Olympism. We should be trying to make an argumentative relationship, a reasoned relationship, between principles, values and practical outcomes.

There is no guarantee that even people who agree at the level of principle will agree on particular practical applications, since there are so many other variables. But at least we should be able to assess, from the various arguments, who has made a proper and consistent appeal to his own principles, which is at least an aid to clarity, and which might lead to the elucidation of moral issues.

## **Practices, Virtues and Physical Education as Olympic Education**

So far I have tried to show how philosophical anthropology, ethical principle and ethical practice can and should cohere. Now it remains for me to indicate how this might translate into the educational situation. At this point, let us remind ourselves of a thought of de Coubertin's (1894b), quoted above:

*... character is not formed by the mind, but primarily by the body. The men of antiquity knew this, and we are painfully relearning it.*

I said some time ago (1986, pp. 144-5)

*Games are laboratories for value experiments. Students are put in the position of having to act, time and time again, sometimes in haste, under pressure or provocation, either to prevent something or to achieve something, under a structure of rules. The settled dispositions which it is claimed emerge from such a crucible of value-related behaviour are those which were consciously cultivated through games in the public schools in the last century.*

and, a little later (1988b, p. 117), that we should:

*... seek to develop an account of culture and human experience which gives due weight to those forms of athletic, outdoor, sporting, aesthetic activities which focus on bodily performance, and which are generally grouped under the heading of physical education. Such an account, combining claims about human capacities and excellences with claims about the importance of a range of cultural forms, would seek to develop arguments which could justify the place of PE on the curriculum ...*

The suggestion here is that PE activities should be seen as ‘practices’ which act as a context for the development of human excellences and ‘virtues’, and the cultivation of those qualities of character which dispose one to act virtuously.

In an oft-quoted passage<sup>10</sup>, MacIntyre (1981, p. 194) describes a ‘practice’ as:

*Any coherent and complex socially established co-operative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended.*

Carr (1987, p. 173) has applied the insights of MacIntyre and Gadamer to education<sup>11</sup>:

*‘What is an educational practice?’ The answer I have tried to provide is one which is firmly grounded in those developments in post-analytic philosophy which seek to re-establish the classical concept of ‘practice’ in the modern world.*

Hirst, too, has picked up the theme:

*It is those practices that can constitute a flourishing life that I now consider fundamental to education (1992, p. 6)*

and he goes on to suggest that a curriculum should be organised in terms of ‘significant practices’. However, just *which* practices constitute a flourishing life, or just which practices are to be deemed significant, remains opaque in his account. This paper has been an attempt to sketch out some considerations in favour of sport as a significant practice.

Practices, then, promote those human excellences and values that constitute a flourishing life. But, more than that, practices are the very *sites of development* of those dispositions and virtues, for it is *within* practices that opportunities arise for (e.g.) moral education, including the nurturing and development of virtues. It is by *participating* in a practice (and by practising its skills and procedures) that one begins to understand its standards and excellences, and the virtues required for successful participation.

As Piers Benn puts it (1998, pp. 167-8):

*... we do not become virtuous ... by learning rules ... We gain virtue, and hence learn to make right decisions, by cultivating certain dispositions ...*

*... we can see the importance of the education of character - the acquisition of these firm dispositions ... this does not come naturally but must be taught.*

*... there is some similarity between acquiring virtue and acquiring skills such as the mastery of a musical instrument; both require practice before the appropriate habits are acquired. You get the dispositions by first of all acting as if you had them - you train yourself to do the right things, and gradually you gain a standing disposition to do them.*

I would like to conclude by suggesting that the practice of sport, informed by the philosophical anthropology of Olympism, offers a context and a route for PE teachers to achieve a number of important aims relating to moral education:

- (a) to further their traditional concern for the whole person whilst working at the levels both of activity and of ideas (because the practical work can be seen as a kind of laboratory for value experiments)
- (b) to show coherence between approaches to practical and theoretical work (because the physical activity is designed as an example and exemplar of the ideas in practice)
- (c) to explore in upper years ideas implicit in work in lower years (because the practical work encapsulating the values and ideas can be taught well before the children are old enough to grasp the full intellectual content of the ideas)

Of course, still to be worked out in detail is an Olympic pedagogy, since we still stand in need of a specification of ways in which the above considerations will impact upon the actual content and procedures of the educational process.

However, confident in our ability to specify and achieve success in such working practices, I would wish to commend to teachers and coaches the principles of Olympism not just not just as historical anachronisms or moralising dogmas, nor as inert ideas to be passed on unthinkingly to students and athletes, but as living ideas which have the power to remake our notions of sport in education, seeing sport not as mere physical activity but as the purposeful physical activity of an educated and ethical individual, aiming at the cultivation of virtuous dispositions.

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### **Notes**

1. This opening section draws on earlier versions, especially Parry, 1989; and 1994, pp. 181-2.
2. See, for example: Laemmer 1987; Segrave 1988, Young 1984, Parry, 1988a)
3. Grupe's title is in quotation marks because it was taken (without attribution) from a letter of de Coubertin's (1918c, Letter IV, p55): "Olympism is not a system; it is a state of mind."
4. Grupe tells us that Lenk had added '*humanius*' - but actually, at this reference, Lenk also includes *pulchrius* (more beautiful) "to correspond to the five Olympic rings" (1982b, p.228).
5. This is such an important theme, with consequences for the development of a morally educative sport, that it deserves separate consideration; and I intend to address it elsewhere.
6. We are working at second and third hand here, but if this is an accurate record of de Coubertin's report of the bishop's words, then one of them has failed to heed de Coubertin's warning against confusing an Olympiad with its Games (see the second paragraph of the second section of this paper).
7. This sounds a very strange sentence these days! But Brundage's obsessive anti-commercialism was rigorously applied, especially in the case of the individual athlete, and drew the sobriquets 'Slavery Avery' and 'Bondage Brundage'.
8. This raises the interesting question of just what the differences are between sociology and social anthropology. For starters, anyway, it seems that, if I'm British and I investigate Britain, I'm called a sociologist - but if I'm British and investigate a group of people whose lives, language, culture and ideas are foreign to me I'm called a social anthropologist.
9. This point is given classical reference by de Coubertin (1918a, p44):  
*"Now if many centuries later ... an English general was able to say that the battle of Waterloo had been won on the playing-fields of Eton, how much more accurate still is it to proclaim that the glory of Marathon and Salamis was forged in the precincts of the Greek gymnasium."*
10. See, e.g., Steenbergen J and Tamboer J (1998, p. 44)
11. Similarly, Arnold has outlined a 'practice view' of sport from a MacIntyrean perspective (1992, pp. 237-240); and the idea of 'sporting practices' has been developed by McNamee (1995).

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