



**UNIVERSITY OF PELOPONNESE  
FACULTY OF HUMAN MOVEMENT AND  
QUALITY OF LIFE SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF SPORTS ORGANIZATION  
AND MANAGEMENT**

MASTER'S THESIS

“OLYMPIC STUDIES, OLYMPIC EDUCATION, ORGANIZATION  
AND MANAGEMENT OF OLYMPIC EVENTS”

**Title of the thesis**

*“The idea of Olympism in the modern world. How the Olympic values can be an  
answer of meaning and purpose against nihilism and relativism”*

**Theofilos L. Pouliopoulos**

**Supervisor:** Dr. Jim Parry

Chair, British Philosophy of Sport Association

Sparta, July, 2013





**UNIVERSITY OF PELOPONNESE  
FACULTY OF HUMAN MOVEMENT AND  
QUALITY OF LIFE SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF SPORTS ORGANIZATION  
AND MANAGEMENT**

MASTER'S THESIS

“OLYMPIC STUDIES, OLYMPIC EDUCATION, ORGANIZATION  
AND MANAGEMENT OF OLYMPIC EVENTS”

**Title of the thesis**

*“The idea of Olympism in the modern world. How the Olympic values can be an  
answer of meaning and purpose against nihilism and relativism”*

**Theofilos L. Pouliopoulos**

**Supervisor:** Dr. Jim Parry

Chair, British Philosophy of Sport Association

It was approved by the Advisory Committee on the .....

Jim Parry

K. Georgiadis

K. Mountakis

Supervising Professor

Professor-1

Professor-2

Sparta, July, 2013

.....

Theofilos L. Pouliopoulos

Master's Degree Holder of University of Peloponnese

Copyright © Theofilos L. Pouliopoulos, 2013

All rights reserved.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	5
<b>1. The ancient Olympic Games</b>	
1.1 <i>The history of Olympic Games and the civilization of Greeks</i> .....	7
1.2 <i>The Olympic Games environment and the stakeholders</i> .....	10
1.3 <i>Arête, Isonomy and Cosmopolitanism</i> .....	13
<b>2. Modern Sport and De Coubertin</b>	
2.1 <i>Enlightenment and Sportization</i> .....	17
2.2 <i>England and Modern Sport</i> .....	19
2.3 <i>De Coubertin and modern Olympic Games</i> .....	22
<b>3. Olympism as a movement</b>	
3.1 <i>Olympism as a philosophy</i> .....	26
3.2 <i>The core values and the ongoing process</i> .....	29
3.3 <i>The Olympic Education</i> .....	32
<b>4. The connection with other movements of thought</b>	
4.1 <i>Liberalism</i> .....	36
4.2 <i>Multiculturalism</i> .....	38
4.3 <i>Globalization and Universalism</i> .....	42
<b>5. Olympism as a proposal of meaning</b>	
5.1 <i>Nihilism</i> .....	46
5.2 <i>Relativism</i> .....	50
5.3 <i>Olympism as an answer of meaning</i> .....	53
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	57
<b>References</b> .....	60

## **Introduction**

Olympism is the movement of thought that was introduced to the world by Barron Pierre de Coubertin and became not only the foundation, but also the theoretical background of the modern Olympic Games. The whole philosophy of Olympism and the Olympic values which it represents and they are being promoted by I.O.C, is the core of meaning that Olympic Games can give to modern society, through sports and the educational aspect it may refers. Olympic Games is the most famous sport event in the world, with not only thousands of athletes participating from almost every country of the world, but also with billions of spectators. Furthermore, the meaning of sport in the everyday life of the modern world citizen is so significant, that allows us to analyze how sport and Olympism can give a purpose of life and also, a code of values.

Nowadays technology, science and globalization created a completely new environment for the modern man, an environment never existed before in history. Within the concepts of information, globalization, materialistic happiness etc. modern man seems to be unhappy, living a meaningless life without morals and values. Those words might seem awkward to the pop culture of nihilism and relativism, but many great sociologists and philosophers agree that modern man today is spiritually lost.

The aim of this master thesis is to analyze the role of Olympism and sport in today's world and how Olympic values can inspire a new generation of purpose and meaning. It is more or less an ontological and philosophical approach for the meaning and significance of sport and education that Olympism presents. We cannot and we will not analyze deeply complicated theories, but we will try to explain our view about Olympism and the other movements of thought in a simple way.

Firstly, we are going to search the roots of Olympic Games through the great civilization of the ancient Greeks, discover the impact of the Games in the ancient Greek society and examine the values that were inspiring back then. In the second chapter and after our quest in the ancient Games, we are going to search into the history of modern sport and in particular how England, Enlightenment and the formation of modern Europe affected the ideas of De Coubertin to revive the Olympic Games and make up the idea of Olympism.

The next step of our thesis is to analyze the connection of Olympism with other movements of thought and specifically with Liberalism, Multiculturalism and Universalism, because they are mostly connected with the theory and the ideas of Olympism. On the other hand, Relativism and Nihilism are completely hostile to the theory of morals and values and we are going to see the clash of the ideals. In our thesis we examine how and why those ideas are so strong today and prevalent in our mentality. Olympism, through sport and education is proposing a code of values that can inspire the new generation to find meaning and create a better society. In this master thesis we are going to analyze how Olympism and Olympic Values can be a way out from the dark tunnel of relativity and vanity.

# 1. The ancient Olympic Games

## 1.1 *The Ancient Greeks and the Olympic Games*

The ancient Greek civilization is considered to be one of the greatest throughout history. Philosophy, drama, mathematics and the culture of Greeks in general, became the foundation for the formation of the modern western world. Together with the Roman culture, the Greek civilization affected significantly the thought and the values of our society. The purpose of this chapter is not to describe in an analytical approach the facts and dates of the Ancient Greek culture, but mainly to examine the conditions under which, those Games were invented by the Greeks and which is the connection to their whole philosophy of life and existence.

The father and story teller of ancient Greece is considered to be Homer and his epic poems “Iliad” and “Odyssey” rose ages and ages of Greeks. If we study these poems explicitly we can find traces of sport and thus place them in a historic frame. One of the most exceptional scholars of ancient Greek sport is Steven Miller and in one of his famous books he mentions the roots of Greek sport:

*“We may next look for the origins of Greek athletics in Bronze Age Greece. The brilliant Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations of the second millennium B.C are clearly the ancestors of Greek culture of the following millennium, and the Mycenaeans wrote and spoke an early form of the Greek language. Further, the myths of classical Greece are set in the labyrinths of Minoan Crete and the familial bloodbaths of Mycenae. The Greeks themselves looked back to those civilizations as the source of their own. Were athletics part of those roots? Their presences in the Homeric poems suggest that they were.”* (Miller, 2004, pg.20)

In Homer’s “Iliad” especially, where funerary athletic Games were taken place in order to honor the dead hero “Patroklos”, we can trace the roots of ancient sports in Greece back in the age of Heroes, before the 8<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C, the age that the Homeric poems are describing. Miller tries to describe the unclear image of sport competitions of this time by saying:



*“The Homeric poems gives us an image, incomplete and in full focus, of those earliest athletic competitions. We see that they are local and informal. They are not part of a recurring festival, but take place occasionally and in response to a particular stimulus. The stimulus can be a funeral, like the Games of Patroklos. Funeral Games represent a reaffirmation of life in the face of death, a revival that provides the underlying religious basis for all such Games. But the stimulus can simply be a more general expression of life, the desire of youth to exercise its vigor that we see in the informal “pick up” games of the Phaeacians in the Odyssey.”* (Miller, 2004, pg.27)

Miller, from the two controversial aspects of athletic games that we find in the Homeric poems gives the notion that in both cases, sport competitions and events represent a relaxation, a rest from the daily routine of work, or war; so the warriors are not training for battle in any sense, according to his approach. He makes a connection between the voluntary subjection to flogging and its implicit acceptance of equality before the law with the equality in the sport competitions and he connects this quality of ancient Greek Athletics with a national character. The American scholar tries to give a common national character for all the Greeks, but as we know, there were significant differences, for example between the military state of Sparta and the Democratic system of Athens, so the common athletic character for all the Greeks is not a easy matter to deal with .

From the world of Homer and after, the “urbanization” process began in the Greek area and together with the “colonization” process the Greeks dominated the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and Southern Italy, where they organized their cities in a form never witnessed before in history. Actually, they had formed the City-state (polis) which became the fundamental political and social unit of ancient Greece and played a significant role for the development of the Pan-Hellenic festivals, like the Olympic Games. In addition, in every Greek city, together with agora (the market), the temples and the theater there was also a “gymnasion”. As we can read in Pleket:

*“Depending on its size, each city had one or more gymnasia, in which the urban youngsters of the middle and upper classes were subjected to military and athletic training. Originally the military was predominant but over the course of the centuries athletic training also became an end in its own right. ‘Athletic training’ in*

*the gymnasia did not consist of a sort of preparatory gymnastics aimed at the improvement of the general physical fitness of the participants, but of competitive contests in disciplines also on the programme of the games outside the gymnasium.”*(Pleket, 2004, pg.402)

The Olympic Games was indeed the biggest and most significant event of the ancient Greece, but it was not the only one. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE three other major athletic events in the Greek area were established: the Pythian Games in Delphi, the Nemean Games and the Isthmian Games. Those three events, together with the greater one, the Olympic Games, were called the crown-games, because the prize for victory was just a crown in contrast with other athletic events in Greece that time, where the prize was money<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the winners of Olympic Games had been awarded with an olive wreath, but some City-states were also giving material prizes in order to honor them. In general, the idea of winning prizes in competitions was not strong in the ancient Greek society, but the idea of competition and victory itself seems to hold the greatest importance. Crowther notes that:

*“This strong emphasis on competition distinguished Greece from almost all other ancient civilizations, which tended not to institutionalize sport. As early as the time of Homer and perhaps even in the Mycenaean Age, Greece had been an agonistic society. It held contests on a periodic basis not only in sport but also in drama, music, beauty, fine arts, and other aspects of life. The Greek concept of competition (agōn), which also means “gathering,” or “assembly,” found expression in the famous athletic festivals that consisted of a coming together of both participants and spectators for a contest.”*(Crowther, 2007, pg. 57).

The ancient Olympic Games were held in Olympia every four years, without interruption for more than a thousand years. In the primitive form of the Games, the one and only event was the race of “stadion” (192 meters) but through the years the program became much wider. The “official” date in which the first Olympic Games took place is considered to be 776 B.C. but again the case is that the initial stage of the Games is poor comparing with the Games from the 5<sup>th</sup> century and after. The

---

<sup>1</sup> see Miller, “Ancient Greek Athletics”, pg.129

ancient program had running events (stadion, diaulos and a long distance race called “dolichos”), the pentathlon and the “heavy” events (wrestling, boxing and pankration). Also, the equestrian events were completing the program. But why the greatest Games were held in Olympia and what are the mythical and the real roots of the Games? In Parry we read that:

*“Olympia has been a sacred place since very early times. Thousands of votive offerings have been found there dating from at least the tenth century BC, left by a fertility cult associated with an oracle of Rhea, the earth goddess. But Zeus was the supreme Greek god, and the grove known as the Altis at Olympia became his most sacred precinct, beautifully situated at the foot of Mount Kronion (named after Kronos, the husband of Rhea and the father of Zeus... The Olympic festival marked the beginning (and later also the middle point) of a Great Year of eight years. Thus an Olympiad was a period of four years, with each Olympiad celebrating one Games, and this gradually became a standard way of calendar dating in ancient times. It was a festival of Zeus, held in early autumn, a season of rest from agricultural work and celebration of fertility - a sort of Harvest Festival.” (Parry, 2009, pg. 38)*

Considering the mythical aspect, the roots of the Games were associated apart from Zeus, also Pelops and Heracles, but the truth was so unclear, even in this time back. The ancient Greeks were connecting every aspect of their life with a mythical root from Gods or heroes. They were symbolizing the main idea of their customs with an ancient myth, but the point for us is to understand the mentality and the need they had to create these customs and in our case, the Olympic Games.

### *1.2 The Olympic Games environment and the stakeholders*

No matter the roots and the true meaning of the Olympic Games in ancient Greece, the one thing for sure is that we talk for a great festival that was attracting thousands of people. As Crowther says:

*“Every four years, heralds from Elis announced to the Greek people that the Olympic festival would begin at the time of the second full moon after the summer solstice, which fell in July or August on the modern calendar. Upwards of 40,000 people traveled to Olympia to witness the greatest single attraction of any kind in the Greek world”.* (Crowther, 2007, pg. 48)

The organization of the Games was in the hands of two local towns, Pisa in the beginning and Elis after the mid-sixth century. Those two small towns were so powerful that time, because of the Olympic Games.

*“Organizers, judges and other officials (alytarchai, hellanodikai) were all Eleans. To some degree, Elis’s position was a measure of the community’s marginality, politically and militarily as well as in its out-of-the-way location: control of Olympia was too crucial to fall into the hands of one of the great powers”* (Golden, 2004, pg.115).

The Elean officials were taking care of the training period in Elis (one month before the Games) and also with the management of the festival. Hellanodikai were the judges of the Games with the authority to accept or expel the athletes, judge the competitions and punish the cheaters. Although their job was sacred, things were not ideal with referees even in the ancient times.

*“The Hellanodikai believed that they judged the events at Olympia impartially and even took an oath that they would examine the boys and foals without taking bribes and would keep secret what they had learnt about an athlete, whether they accepted him or not. Yet despite their high reputation, some ancient writers occasionally criticized them for their “hometown” decisions and for abusing their power”.* (Crowther, 2007, pg. 52)

The athletes of course were the main stakeholders of the Olympic Games. In the first stages of the festival, the participants were probably local people but through the years the best athletes of the Greek world were coming to Olympia with only one purpose, victory.

*“The ancient ‘Olympians’ were a selection of many great athletes who, over time, participated firstly in the contests of the gymnasium and subsequently in the ever increasing number of urban contests all over the Greek and Hellenized parts of the Mediterranean world. Athletes registered personally in Elis when they felt they were capable of competing at the highest level. After arrival in Elis, one month before the beginning of the Games, the so-called Olympic arbiters, chosen from the Elean elite, checked the credentials of the candidates”* (Pleket, 2004, pg.404).

The participants must have fulfilled some criteria and those were: they ought to be free-born Greek male citizens and not guilty of homicide. The level of competition was very high in the Games, so the judges had to make sure that only the best would compete in the Games. Although the Olympic Games were Pan-Hellenic, the City-states did not select representatives, but every athlete individually applied to compete and only after victories the City-states usually took care of their athletes. As we have mentioned before, the prize for the winners in the Olympic Games was symbolic; an olive wreath from the sacred tree of Zeus, because the point was the eternal glory of victory. Even though there were no monetary prizes in Olympia, some City-states awarded their victorious athletes with some material prizes. Athens for example, graced its champions by offering them many advantages and awards. The idea of amateurism might be connected with the ancient Olympic Games but the truth is that many athletes enjoyed reward for their efforts.

One of the greatest legacies that the ancient Olympic Games inherited to us and is also a controversial matter, about the real facts is the Olympic truce (ekecheiria). Before every major sporting festival in Greece, officials guaranteed safe passage throughout the Mediterranean for a given amount of time before and after the games—at Olympia safe passage usually lasted three months. The custom of truce actually worked with exceptions of course, although it did not entail a complete cessation of all warfare in Greece. If a certain City-state broke the Olympic truce, Elis excluded that city from the games until it paid the appropriate fine; Sparta for example was excluded for several Olympiads after 420 B.C.E for this reason.

Therefore, the Olympic truce was the small period of time before and after the Olympic Games that all the City-states of Greece had the agreement to let the pilgrims and the spectators travel safely to Olympia. But the Olympic truce did not necessarily meant the cessation of the warfare. As Reid says:

*“Ancient Greece itself was no paradise of peace and concord. Classical Greek society was at least as militant as ours, and the Olympic Games featured cultural and political rivalries just as bitter as those seen today...indeed the Games' ability to promote an atmosphere of friendship and solidarity among otherwise diverse (and often warring) people may be their most remarkable (and perhaps unexpected) legacy”* (Reid, 2009, pg. 26).

The ideal picture of an athletic event to stop conflicts might never come true, but the fact that the ancient Olympic Games brought together people from all over the Greek world under the same rules, regulations and spirit, for more than a thousand years is something worth to be mentioned in any case. Something that makes us wonder nowadays, about the power of sport in peacemaking and peacekeeping process. If thousands of years before hostile regions were competing under the same rules how we can consider ourselves civilized with the boycotts in the Olympic Games? The meaning of the past is to makes us wonder about the present.

### *1.3 Arête, Isonomy and Cosmopolitanism*

The philosophical background behind ancient Greek sport and the Olympic Games is a difficult matter to deal with. As we mentioned above, the athletic Games started for a number of reasons such as religious purposes, like the funerary Games, a preparation for war (the Dorian/Spartan way) or as an escape from the daily routine.<sup>2</sup> The unique point in ancient Greece was the institutionalization of sports and the existence of “gymnastirion/palaistra” (public gym) as a vital part of every City-state.

The Greeks had their own theory of life, far apart from the mystical theories of the eastern civilizations. What is more, they created a code of everyday life values. In addition to this, one of the greatest moral values, that is also connected to sports, is Arête. Professor Miller gives the definition of the word:

---

<sup>2</sup> Steven Miller's approach.

*“The Greek word arête comes down to us inextricably connected to the athletics of ancient Greece and laden with a plethora of meanings. A definition of arete would include virtue, skill, prowess, pride, excellence, valor and nobility, but these words, whether taken individually or collectively, do not fulfill the meaning of arête. Arête existed, to some degree, in every ancient Greek and was, at the same time, a goal to be sought and reached for by every Greek”.* (Miller, Arête, 2004, pg.9)

In the same direction, Eyler describes the “circle of life” of the ancient Greek man. The significant note is the self awareness about the duty of man to himself at first:

*“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...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 “arête”* (Parry, 2009, quotation from Eyler, 1981, p. 166).

So, Arête was a universal value for Greeks and represented a guide in order to adjust their everyday life accordingly. Notably, sport with all its requiring effort, was an excellent way to practice and experience Arête. Great philosophers, as Socrates and Plato, appreciated very much the contribution of sport in society. For the ancient Greek mentality, sport and gymnastics is not an end in itself, but a means to achieve physical and mental well-being, that will help those who practice sport to create a complete personality and become useful for life and society. Sport, like the politics or the social affairs was a mean to achieve Arête, a mean to co-exist and interact with the others and through the same code of values, to become a better person, firstly for yourself and then for society.

Apart from Arête, which is probably the central and main value of ancient Greeks, another significant value that is also connected to sports is justice (or isonomy). As we read in Panagopoulos:

*“The moral philosophy of the ancient Greeks and its relation to education and sport should be associated with two concepts: justice and freedom of thought. Justice, in all its forms, both as proportional and retributive (or corrective) law and as retaliatory law, represented for the ancient Greeks the predominant doctrine, as love would be later for the Christians”.*( Panagopoulos, 2006 ,pg.32)

The ancient Greek society was a pioneer society in terms of isonomy and justice, at least for the free-born Greek men, and Miller believes that sport was the cause for the prevalence of justice/isonomy in society and afterwards of democracy:

*“Perhaps the most important contribution of athletics, at least in my opinion, was its creation for the concept of equality before the law, isonomia, the foundation on which, democracy is based. In a Darwinian world of survival of the fittest, the notion of isonomia is unnatural, and it was not the first social concept developed, yet it had clearly been formed by the early sixth century B.C, just at the time the stephanic cycle was completed with the addition of the festivals of Delphoi, Isthmia and Nemea to the Olympic festival”.* (Miller, 2004, pg.232)

Miller also connects the concept of the naked athletes (gymnikoi agones) to the idea of isonomy in society. That is because, as he quotes, when all the men are naked, only their performance in sport defines them, and not their social or economical background. Isonomy and justice are the presuppositions for contest and competition. The ancient Greeks had no respect for the joy of effort, but only for victory. But even though victory was the only case; respect and fair play were values existed in the ancient times with some bad exceptions, as it appears to be today. The gathering of athletes and pilgrims from every corner of the Greek world, created a spirit of diversity and “cosmopolitanism”. Reid says:

*“By coming to Olympia for common worship, feasting, and athletic competition, this group created a new community - one by definition more culturally and politically diverse than the faraway communities from which they had themselves come. A modern might call this Olympic community “multicultural”, but the Greeks had their own word for it, “cosmopolitan”...this intellectual community-expansion reflects the ancient concept of cosmopolitanism or world-citizenship. This idea*



*bloomed when the Socratically-inspired philosophy of Greek Stoicism faced the unprecedented racial and religious diversity of the Roman Empire...(Stoic philosophy) posited a higher human community of which each individual is simultaneously a part... like Coubertin's "sincere internationalism", did not depend on one culture's being insulated from another, rather it sought to engage different cultures on some sort of common ground". (Reid, 2009, pg. 32)*

Reid searches the idea of “cosmopolitanism” and through Stoic philosophy, connects the ancient Olympic Games with the ideas of Coubertin’s Olympism. If we assume that Reid’s analysis is correct, we find a very significant connection between the ancient Olympic Game’s spirit and the modern Olympism. The idea of “cosmopolitanism” in these ancient times seems to be very similar to the modern multiculturalism, a concept very important and vital for Olympism and the values it represents. What exactly is multiculturalism and how it is connected closely to Olympism, we are going to see in chapter four.

## 2. Modern Sport and De Coubertin

### 2.1 Enlightenment and the sportization process

The end of the Ancient Olympic Games came in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century C.E. Although it might be a variety of reasons, Kyle believes that the beginning of the end was the Hellenistic period and the Roman era that followed.

*“According to the conventional interpretation, the Hellenistic era was an age of ‘decline’ from the start and so deserved less attention. Sources did increase, and Greeks and gymnasia spread out, but the sporting ideal was lost: and soon Rome cast a shadow on the world of ancient sport. The ancient Romans—so impressive in non-sporting areas—only hastened the decline of true, Greek sport because the Roman mind could not appreciate it. Roman tastes called for more violent and spectacular ‘games.’ Although there were exceptional Romans, patronage, and minor revivals in Greek sport, the power and character of Rome could not be altered. The rise of Christianity commendably undermined the Roman spectacles, but unfortunately the church saw Greek sport as a pagan practice. Thus the Olympic Games ceased and, except for the factionalism and chariot races of Byzantium, the history of ancient sport ended”.* (Kyle, 1983, pg.9)

It is probably significant to mention that in the Hellenistic era, where the Cynic philosophers became popular and the ideas about life changed, has been affected also the concept of sport. This matter is going to be discussed in the following chapters.

After the transformation of the Roman Empire into two, the prevalence of Christianity and all the dramatic changes in the Mediterranean area, the end of the Games was inevitable. The idea for life and existence changed. Christianity gave a completely new message of love and hope for humanity, but the Catholic Church through the centuries, created an empire of fear and hate. An era of oppressions and cruelty paved the way for the dark ages, where the human body considered being sinful and evil. The point is that for many centuries sport was absent from Europe.

It was not until the 17<sup>th</sup> century when something seemed to change in Europe. After centuries of wars, crusades and religious revolutions, a cultural movement

appeared to change completely the thought and ideas, first in France and afterwards in many countries in Europe and America. Enlightenment introduced the idea of reason and science. It promoted rationality and skepticism and opposed superstition and obedience without reasoning. Many philosophers in France and England following the new movement revived also the ancient Greek culture through the ancient texts, in philosophy, political theory and art. This revival of ancient Greek culture was probably the chance for a new perception in sports and physical activity. Harker mentions the struggle between Judeo-Christianity and Hellenism; he says:

*“The irreconcilable world-views at the basis of this clash about sports have been enshrined in Western civilization. This is why ancient Greece has always been a rallying point for opposition to Biblical Christianity in the Western world.”* and he continues *“The antipathy between these two great influences in Western civilization explains why interest in sports revived whenever there was a revival of interest in ancient Greece.* (Harker, 1997, pg.275)

As we mentioned above, the perception for the human body and physical activity was not allowing any kind of sport. Superstition from Church and State was keeping sports away from the people. But Enlightenment with the new ideas brought skepticism about physical recreation. As we read in Baker:

*“The era from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution is better, if unevenly, documented. Proposals for healthy recreation infused utopian and educational schemes alike in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Nor can we any longer dismiss the Puritans as mere spoilsports. Abuses in modern sports make us all the more sympathetic to the Puritans’ ambivalence, their consistent ideological and practical grounds of opposition to various pastimes, and their dogged insistence on asking fundamental questions about the nature, role, and purpose of physical recreation.”* (Harker, 1997, pg.275)

So, Enlightenment and the revival of ancient Greek culture in thought and science, brought a new era for Europe and western civilization in general. Sport was not yet a priority, but the dramatic changes would give space for sport to flourish and conquer England first and afterwards the rest of the world.

In Joe Maguire's famous book<sup>3</sup> the author, by reviewing a great number of writers and books gives to us a clear image about these changes and processes that lead to the new era of sports. Maguire by analyzing the phases of Globalization he gives also the notion of "Sportization", the process that lead to the formation of modern sport. He writes

*"In what Robertson terms the "germinal phase", lasting in Europe from the early fifteenth until the mid-eighteenth century, several important shifts occurred. In this phase, the incipient growth of national communities, the accentuation of the notion of the individual and of ideas about humanity and the development of a scientific worldview emerged".* (Maguire, 1999, pg.77)

In this first phase of Sportization, Maguire defines the frame where the new ideas of Enlightenment and the other movements of thought, changed completely the European societies. In the second phase that lasted from the 1850 until 1870, the notions of individual rights and international relations paved the way for the new era of sports. England was the pioneer country in this direction and we are going to see what conditions formed the idea of modern sport.

## *2.2 England and Modern Sport*

The British Empire is considered to be one of the greatest and richest empires in history. The establishment of the British Commonwealth and the great number of colonies allowed England, as the center of the Empire, to flourish and prosper. The dramatic social and political changes in Europe found in the Victorian England a fertile ground to spread the new global reality. As we saw above, Maguire together with the Globalization process proposes and analyzes the sportization process.

The term "sportization" is used from Maguire to describe the transformation of English pastimes into sports and the export of some to the outside world. Though the English term sport comes from the past, dating back as far as the fifteenth century, only in the eighteenth century did actually begin to acquire its specific modern

---

<sup>3</sup> Maguire, J., *Global Sport—Identities, Societies, Civilizations*, Polity Press, 1999

connotations. The main reason for the beginning of the sportization phase according to Maguire is another process, the ‘parliamentarization’ which emerged from the power structure and the cultural relations in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century in England. We read in Global Sport

*“Elias and advocates of this approach argue that the emergence of sports as a form of physical combat of a relatively non-violent type was connected with a period when the cycle of violence between different political factions (Cavaliers and Roundheads during the English Civil War) ‘calmed down’. Groups increasingly settled differences by non-violent means. Parliament became the symbolic battleground where conflicts of interest were resolved and defused. Military skills gave way to verbal skills of debate. Crucial in both the parliamentarization and sportization processes was the involvement of the landed aristocracy and gentry.”* (Maguire, 1999, pg.79)

In this text we have a splendid analysis of the true social background of sports in England and Maguire goes even further and wonders which of those two processes came first. He wonders if parliamentarization ‘caused’ sportization, or sportization of pastimes ‘caused’ the parliamentarization of politics. He believes that the same people, the landed aristocracy and gentry, were caught up in two aspects of a process of development in which there occurred a ‘civilizing spurt’. In a few words, the civilizing process that caused by the pacification of political conflicts in Parliament, allowed the aristocracy at first, to develop more civilized ways to enjoy their leisure time. This was the main reason for the appearance of cricket, fox-hunting, horse-racing and boxing in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century in England.

In the same direction with Maguire we meet the theory of Szymanski, who is proposing as a foundation for the emergence of modern sport in England the term of ‘associativity’. Firstly, he defines the term as

*“Associativity may loosely be defined as the tendency of individuals to create social networks and organisations outside of the family. At its simplest, it is the tendency of humans to form clubs, and the motives for forming clubs are as varied as the human imagination. A key characteristic of an association is the capacity to write its own rules and oblige members to abide by them”.* (Szymanski, 2006, pg.1)

Szymanski believes that this new social mechanism allowed people in England that time, to come together and form different kinds of small societies. He connects associativity with sport by saying that

*“Many sports that we call modern grew out of this form of associativity. The development of associative sports in England during this period paralleled the development of the coffee houses, public societies and the press, institutions which typified this new public sphere. The basic organizational unit of this branch of modern sport was the club, a voluntary association of individuals agreeing to abide by a form of private law, autonomous within the state. During the eighteenth century the development of cricket, golf and horseracing, inter alia, created the models along which later modern sports such as baseball, football (in all its various codes), basketball and tennis developed.”* (Szymanski, 2006, pg.2)

So, together with industrialization, the civilizing process, commercialism etc. the idea of associativity comes to be added in the significant factors that caused the emergence of modern sport in England. These innovative social changes happened in a country that had all the presuppositions to stage the appearance of modern sport. We let Huizinga to conclude and explain why England is the mother of modern sport.

*“The great ball games in particular require the existence of permanent teams, and herein lies the starting point of modern sport. The process arises quite spontaneously in the meeting of village against village, school against school, one part of a town against the rest, etc. That the process started in nineteenth-century England is understandable up to a point, though how far the specifically Anglo-Saxon bent of mind can be deemed an efficient cause is less certain. But it cannot be doubted that the structure of English life had much to do with it. Local self-government encouraged the spirit of association and solidarity. The absence of obligatory military training favored the occasion for, and the need of, physical exercise. The peculiar form of education tended to work in the same direction, and finally the geography of the country and the nature of the terrain, on the whole flat and, in the ubiquitous commons, offering the most perfect playing-fields that could be desired, were of the*

*greatest importance. Thus England became the cradle and focus of modern sporting life.”* (Maguire, 1999, pg.26, quotation from Huizinga, 1970, pg.223)

### *2.3 De Coubertin and modern Olympic Games*

The educational system, the innovative social and political changes and the English culture in general, were some of the most important, if not the main ones, inspirations of Baron Pier de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic Games. Coubertin was a French aristocrat from a relatively wealthy, conservative and religious family background. The young Coubertin was raised in a turbulent environment in France, where the collapse of Bonaparte’s empire and the defeat of France in the war against Prussia in 1871, left the country in a transitional environment. As we read in Loland:

*“Coubertin received, noblesse oblige, a classical education in the traditional Jesuit school system. He was a bright student and excelled in the competitive system of his school, Collège Saint-Ignace. Still, except for a few teachers, such as père Caron, a connoisseur of ancient Greek and Roman culture who made a lasting impression on Coubertin...he was highly skeptical of their strict discipline and old fashioned curriculum in which religion, classical languages and literature were given priority over modern natural and social science. In addition, Coubertin pointed at what he found to be a total neglect of the values of physical education and sport”* (Loland, 1995, pg.52)

These radical ideas of Coubertin did not allow him to conform to his family’s expectations to follow a professional career, suitable to his class, and also to accept the conservative political system of this time. On the contrary, Coubertin was a convinced democrat and his wide open mind helped him obviously to come up with the idea of Olympism.

To return back to the mother of modern sports, Coubertin was an admirer, apart from the English spirit and splendor of this time, of the educational system of England. As we read in Loland again:

*“Coubertin’s fascination with English culture and educational systems was rooted in his childhood. At the age of twelve he read a French translation of Thomas Hughes’ classic Tom Brown’s Schooldays (1857) in a youth magazine, Journal de la Jeunesse. Hughes described public school life at Rugby with particular weight on the educational values of sport...The idealized picture of the public schools and of Arnold became a main source of inspiration to Coubertin”.* (Loland, 1995, pg.55)

In 1883, Coubertin travelled himself to England and he visited many colleges and universities, seeing with his own eyes the educational system that would inspire to him the idea of Olympism. The educational system of England that time had as a significant column, the concept of sports. This idea was based in a sense, on the theory of Muscular Christianity.

*“Sports attained this legitimacy through the influence of the Muscular Christianity movement which promoted a thinly Christianised version of the cult of manliness which emerged from the classical revival. Muscular Christianity provided a rationale for the ancient Greek infatuation with winning under the guise of Christianity morality.”* (Harker, 1997, pg.15)

The ideas of competition under morality were fundamental for Coubertin, as we are going to see more analytically below. Coubertin saw in sports the perfect element to combine education, moral development and physical activity. Apart from that, he understood that sport is a vehicle for democratization and isonomy, Loland says

*“Coubertin saw the English school system not only as cultivating individual moral qualities, but as social training for life in a democratic society. The public schools were considered to be ideal liberal meritocracies in which the boys were rewarded not on inherited privileges or fortune but on their own talents and efforts”.* (Loland, 1995, pg.56)

This idea reminds us the ancient Greek isonomy and the theory of Steven Miller, that sport was the field, where the first seeds of democracy were spread. In 1889, Coubertin travelled in North America and he gained priceless gifts from the New World. First of all, he made many contacts that would help him later to connect



to the I.O.C, but the most important thing was that he discovered ‘the sporting character’ of the American lifestyle and ‘the circus atmosphere’ in the sport events, that would be significant characteristics of the Olympic Games in the future. Another major influence for Coubertin was with no doubt, the Peace Movement and the other movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that were based on the ideas of the liberal internationalism and the global peace.

Although the modern societies differed in beliefs and political orientation, they had in common the basic idea that, in an enlightened age and a civilized global community, conflicts between nations ought to be settled with diplomacy and negotiations, not with weapons. Western world was seen to have entered an era of reason in which there was no more need for war. Of course this idea was too early to become true, because the two world wars would make clear that the global society was not ready yet to embrace peace and solidarity.

We are going to see more analytically the liberal influences of peace and internationalism in the next chapter, but one thing for sure that Coubertin gained from the Peace movement, was the organizational model and the international background, that would use them for the I.O.C. Another international event that gave to Coubertin the idea of modern Olympics was the institution of international expositions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. First in Europe and after in America, the international expositions with the millions of visitors gave to the French pioneer the idea of international athletic events, and that’s why the Olympic Games of 1900 in Paris and 1904 in St.Louis were organized together with expositions.

As we mentioned above, the Jesuit school that Coubertin was educated and in particular one of his teachers, affected very much his perception about the ancient Greek culture. Resurrection and Enlightenment had already awakened the ancient Greek spirit in Europe with philosophy, art and political thought. Coubertin would find the chance to revive the ancient athletic spirit as well. His ideas about education, sports and internationalism would become the foundations of the modern Olympic Games. Some folklore sport events named “Olympics” are dating back in 17<sup>th</sup> century England and 19<sup>th</sup> century Sweden and also in the motherland of the Olympics, in Greece, an athletic event named ‘Zappia’, in favor of the donator, tried to revive the spirit of the ancient Olympic Games.<sup>4</sup> Coubertin himself attended the Much-Wenlock

---

<sup>4</sup> See Georgiadis K, Olympic Revival, Ekdotiki Athinon, 2003

Games in 1890, on the invitation of their founder, the local surgeon and judge, William P. Brookes, who inspired Coubertin with his pure athletic spirit.

Although these festivals across Europe were more local folklore, Coubertin with his cosmopolitan thinking combined the elements of these events to create the international Games he had in mind. So, Coubertin founded the International Olympic Committee in Paris in 1894 and in 1896 the first modern Olympic Games took place in Athens. From then, the great travel of Olympics began, to become the number one sport event in the modern history in any social, political or historical aspect. In the next chapter we are going to see which exactly is the theoretical and philosophical background of the Olympics, and what lead Coubertin to create the idea of ‘Olympism’ and become so significant for us today.

### 3. Olympism as a movement

#### 3.1 Olympism as a philosophy

The Olympic Games is the most significant and inspiring multi-sport event in modern history, until nowadays. As we saw above, ‘Olympism’ is the theoretical background of the Games with a great number of ideas and meanings that Coubertin and other distinguished scholars formatted. The question that may arise at this point is: can ‘Olympism’ fulfill the expectations to be inspiring as a life-time idea and not only as a two-week sport event?

*“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 every four years between elite athletes representing their countries or city-states in intercommunal competition...Fewer, however, will have heard of “Olympism,” the philosophy developed since the 1890s by the founder of the modern Olympic Movement, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, 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 elite athletes 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 cooperation, sport not just as an activity but also as a formative and developmental influence contributing to desirable characteristics of individual personality and social life.” (Parry, 2006, pg.190)*

The great majority of the people have entirely identified the Olympic idea and the Olympic movement with only the Olympic Games. Most of us believe that the Olympic Games is just the biggest multi-sport event in the world and the idea of Olympism lasts only for the two weeks of the Games. But the philosophical background of Olympism as a movement and as an idea is so deep, that can surprise the ignorant.

So, as Parry and many scholars believe ‘Olympism’ is a philosophy, with specific values, ideas, characteristics and a code of conduct. Parry again gives the definition of the term by saying

*“Olympism is a social philosophy that emphasizes the role of sport in global culture, international understanding, peaceful coexistence, and social and moral education. De Coubertin understood, toward the end of the 19th century, that sport was about to become a major growth point in popular culture—and that, as physical activity, it was potentially universal, providing a means of contact and communication across cultures...De Coubertin, being a product of late 19th-century liberalism, emphasized the values of formal equality, fairness, justice, and respect for persons and excellence. These are values that span nearly 3,000 years of Olympic history, although some of them may be differently interpreted at different times. They are, basically, the main values of liberal humanism—or perhaps we should say simply humanism, because socialist societies have had little difficulty in including Olympic ideals into their overall ideological stance toward sport and culture. (Parry, 2006, pg.190)*

In another paper of his, the sport ethics philosopher mentions also the ideas of the philosophical anthropology of Olympism, and those are:

*the ideal 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 and international relationships of peace, toleration and understanding.(Parry, 2009, pg.40)*

In addition, Nissiotis also gives the essence of philosophy and explains how significant Olympism is, by saying:

*“The Olympic Games constitute an event, a phenomenon in space and time bearing the marks of a value system which can be deduced by human reason. The human mind is thus challenged to investigate this value system and to grasp its roots... Philosophy seeks, through abstraction, to penetrate into the substance of all things, all events, all emotions, and impressions caused by the external world, that is to penetrate into their qualitative form of existence.”(Nissiotis, 1976, pg. 83)*

In other words, the promoters of Olympism like Parry and Nissiotis believe that philosophy can have an actual impact in the everyday life of people and in their mentality. Olympism is a theory that through sport can awake some of the most noble and pure instincts of men and so form a better life for the individual and for the society as well.

Many texts and papers have been written about Coubertin and 'Olympism'. Some scholars consider him as a tragic figure with aristocratic ideas while others points out only his good aspects. But no one can deny his organizing skills and his great vision for the modern Games and Olympism. Coubertin did never organize his ideas into a strict system of values and as a complete proposal. He characterized Olympism not as a system, but as a state of mind which advocates a comprehensive sporting education accessible to all, braided with manly valor and chivalrous spirit, implicated in aesthetic and literary manifestations, serving as a motor to national life and a focus to civic life.

In Loland's paper we find a very deep and careful analysis about the multiple dimensions of Olympism. The author uses the theory of the 'unit-ideas' from Lovejoy and try to find the basic ideas on which the ideology of Olympism was built. Even if there are many contradictions in Coubertin's texts through the years he wrote about Olympism, Loland identifies four main columns. The first one is the cultivation of the individual through sports and connects absolutely with the second one that is the cultivation of the relationship between men in society.

*“Coubertin was a firm believer in the possibility of reforming society through education. If sport could cultivate the individual, it ought to be able as well to cultivate the relation between men in society. Coubertin found sport to be an efficient means in developing mutual respect between persons irrespective of social status and wealth.”*(Loland, 1995, pg.64)

So, individual performance and growth through sports and education can have a positive outcome in society. This is probably the main axis where Olympism is based on. The next goal of Olympism expresses even more general aims. According to Loland:

*“If sport can develop the individual and society, it should have a cultivating potential in the relationship between societies and nations as well. The Olympic Games are intended as an arena which takes no account of social, economic, national or cultural borders and in which all nations can communicate and understand each other.”*(Loland, 1995, pg.65)

In this third goal of Olympism we recognize the international character of Olympic Games and Coubertin’s belief for the international understanding and peace, inspired also from the ancient concept of truce. In the last but not least goal of Olympism, Loland points out the will of Coubertin to create a new humanistic religion of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He explains:

*“The “new aristocracy” of top level athletes could serve as ideals for the masses and as a motivating force to more sport activity and thus moral development of individuals in all layers of society. Hence, the Olympic Games could become the most important cult in what Coubertin called a religio athletae, “a philosophico-religious doctrine.”*(Loland, 1995, pg.66)

To sum up, Loland gathers all the main aspects of Olympism and declares that they are composing a humanistic unit-idea, significant enough to consider Olympism as one of the great movements of thought in the modern era. The idea that Olympism can be a modern religion that introduced from Coubertin is a highly controversial matter that we are going to discuss in the following chapters. Nevertheless, Olympism is an idea of depth and significance, with an actual impact in global society through sport and education.

### *3.2 The core values and the ongoing process*

From the analysis of Olympism as a philosophy, created in the mind of Coubertin and continued by scholars and philosophers, we reached to a point that Olympism is a code of values that cannot be restricted in the frame of sport. Through the years, the truth is that commercialization and media made Olympic Games an event of mass consumption, leaving not so much space in the pure idea of Olympism

and all the values it carries. Even so, the I.O.C tries to maintain the basic ideas of Olympism and act according to them. In the Olympic Charter we learn the definition of Olympism and the Olympic values

*“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 values based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example and respect of universal fundamental ethical principles...The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promote a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.” Also it continues “the practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have the possibility of practicing sport, without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with the spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play.”* (The Olympic Charter, 2011, pg. 10)

So, Olympic charter gives us briefly and eloquently all the basic values of Olympism which are joy of effort, the value of good example, respect for universal ethical principles, harmonious development of man, peaceful society and preservation of human dignity, antidiscrimination, mutual understanding, friendship, solidarity and fair play. In summary and more specifically Parry proposed the core values of Olympism

*“If we add to this de Coubertin’s famous dicta “all sports for all people” and “all games, all nations” we seem to have a recipe for the core values of Olympism: respect for universal ethical principles, fair play, mutual understanding, antidiscrimination, education through sport, and multiculturalism”* (Parry, 2006, pg.192)”.

The I.O.C is one of the most powerful and influential organizations in the world with more member-states even from the United Nations. As we saw above, Olympism is the compass of the I.O.C and the acts and deeds of the organization must fulfill the above mentioned values and criteria. Also, the Olympic Charter makes clear that the mission of the IOC is to promote Olympism throughout the world and to lead the Olympic Movement. Rivals of the Olympic Games of course, or even subjective

critics, can find many examples that the I.O.C and the Olympic Games are not so pure and many things are very far from the idealistic values of Olympism. Commercialization of the Games, doping, bribery of I.O.C members and some other facts makes clear that the reality behind the Olympic curtain is imperfect. The truth is that those accusations are not very far from truth, but it would be wrong if we would stay in those imperfections and not see the complete image. The effect of Olympism and the Olympic Games in the formation of the modern world is undeniable.

Apart from the problems and scandals through the years, the Olympic movement was there for good in many cases. The exclusion of South Africa because of the Apartheid, the common parade of North and South Korea, the chance for cities of the periphery to host Olympic Games (Seoul, Beijing, and Rio) are only some of the examples that I.O.C and the Olympic movement followed the Olympic Values and gave a message of hope in the world. Also, the Olympic Games became numerous times the scene of historical acts of peace and friendship. Even some times against the willingness of the I.O.C, the Games were a chance for passing the message of freedom and justice to the entire world, like the case of the Black Fist.<sup>5</sup>

One of the main actions of the I.O.C with significant outcome for poor countries and athletes and sport in general is the program of the Olympic Solidarity. As we read in the Olympic Charter:

*“The aim of Olympic Solidarity is to organize assistance to NOCs, in particular those which have the greatest need of it. This assistance takes the form of programmes elaborated jointly by the IOC and the NOCs, with the technical assistance of the IFs, if necessary.”* (The Olympic Charter, 2011, pg. 17)

The Olympic Solidarity is mainly a financial program that helps NOC's and athletes from poor countries to built sport facilities, to hire professional stuff like coaches and to participate in the Olympic Games and other sport events by covering the expenses. This program is vital for the participation in the Games of more than 200 countries and gives the opportunity to many athletes from all over the world to train in normal conditions. Also, the facilities and the financial assistance of the NOC's increase the level of sport infrastructure and organization in many countries.

---

<sup>5</sup>For details see “Silent Gesture – Autobiography of Tommie Smith (Smith, Tommie & Steele, David), Temple University Press, 2007”



### 3.3 The Olympic Education

Baron Pierre de Coubertin as we saw above, apart from the revival of the games wanted to introduce a code of ethical and humanistic values and rules. This code of values we can call it “Olympism” and the educational process “Olympic Education”. He wanted to combine the new era of Olympic Games with constant pedagogy similar to the ancient gymnasium. In Naul’s book<sup>6</sup> we read a part from his letters.

*“this Olympic pedagogy which I recently said was based at once on the cult of effort combined on the cult of eurhythmia-and consequently on the love of excess combined with the love of moderation-is not sufficiently served by being glorified before the world once every four years in the Olympic Games. It needs permanent factories. The Olympic factory for the ancient world was the gymnasium. The Olympiads have been renewed, but the gymnasium of antiquity has not-as yet. It must be”* (Naul, 2008, pg.25, quotation from Coubertin, 2000, p.217).

Coubertin’s main ideas were the “cult of effort” and “eurhythmia” (education of body and mind, education of culture and sport). This idea had to become an ongoing process that would lead to the reformation of society through sports and education. The French pioneer was convinced that Olympic Games would not have any meaning without the constant educational background.

As years gone by, the Olympic Games became huge, but the impact of the Olympic Education is not as significant as the commercial impact of the Games for example. For the most people, the term “Olympic Education” is not so clear, but many scholars’ tries for many years to continue the ideas of De Coubertin. Definitions of the term had been given; educational programs and codes of values had been proposed. Naul for instance, summarizes and explains the aforementioned paragraphs from the Olympic Charter by saying:

*“These paragraphs describe goals for education in sports and through sports. They address all three of an individual’s behavioral areas: motoric-sporting*

---

<sup>6</sup> Naul N., Olympic Education, Meyer & Meyer Verlag, 2008

*development as physical education, socioaffective conduct in sporting and other specific situations between individuals, and the consolidation of ethico-moral attitudes so that the individual is guided by certain values and standards in life and in sport. The simultaneous and consistent development of all three behavioral areas by learning, continual training and application in sports amounts to a holistic and harmonious culture of body will and mind” (Naul, 2008, pg.21).*

Naul’s analysis makes clear that the goals of Olympism are straight applicable to an educational process. Sport seems to be the perfect practice to achieve educational goals. The inventor of the term Olympic Education, N.Muller traces back to Coubertin’ legacy and identifies the five columns of Olympic Education, which are:

*1) the concept of harmonious development of the whole human being, 2) the idea of striving for perfection through life performance, 3) sporting activity voluntarily linked to ethical principles such as fair play and equal opportunities, 4) the concept of peace and goodwill between nations, reflected by respect and tolerance between individuals and 5) the promotion of moves towards emancipation in and through sports. (Muller, 2004, pg.11)*

The German Professor through these five columns describes how sport can be useful through education and leaves us no doubt about this. Another distinguished scholar, Bruce Kidd identified the following points of correspondence between Olympism and Education which are

*“mass participation, the expansion of opportunities for sport and play to create what de Coubertin called “the democracy of youth”; Sport as Education: the development of opportunities that are genuinely educational, that assist both individuals and groups in the process of knowledge; Sportsmanship: the fostering of a high standard of sportsmanship, that de Coubertin called “the new code of chivalry”. Cultural Exchange: the integration of the visual and performing arts into the Olympic celebrations; International Understanding: the creation of a movement whose membership transcends racial, religious, political and economic categories, a brotherhood that promotes understanding and thus contributes to world peace; and*

*Excellence: the pursuit of excellence in performance* (Binder, 2010, pg. 4, from Kidd, 1985, pg.10).

The intention of Coubertin and the modern scholars, is those ideas and values to become a daily habit of people and first of all, of the children. The school is the first place where Olympic Education must be introduced to society. There is a whole process the recent years for the Olympic Education to become a part of the school programs. One of the exceptional scholars that try to implement Olympic values in schools is Deana Binder. She was the soul of a program that introduced the objectives of the activities of the Olympic Education which aim to:

*enrich the human personality through physical activity and sport, blended with culture, and understood as lifelong experience; develop a sense of human solidarity, tolerance and mutual respect associated with fair play; encourage peace, mutual understanding, respect for different cultures, protection of the environment, basic human values and concerns, according to regional and national requirements; encourage excellence and achievement in accordance with fundamental Olympic ideals; develop a sense of the continuity of human civilization as explored through ancient and modern Olympic history* (Binder, 2010, pg. 6).

These values come from all the scholars through the years, from Coubertin until today and gives the idea of how important is Olympic Education as a school program or activity. Binder published the international teachers' handbook (*Be A Champion in Life*)<sup>7</sup> and also in 2007, on behalf of the IOC, developed the Olympic Education Toolkit<sup>8</sup>, as an element of the Olympic Values Education Project, emphasized the following five principles as a value catalogue: joy of effort, fair play, respect for others, pursuit of excellence and balance between body, will and mind. Those values are of the highest importance for today's children. Only education and sport can make clear to children that a life without morals and values is a worthless life. As we are going to see in the next two chapters, modern people nowadays face tremendous changes in their everyday life with technology, science and globalization. But the question is if those changes make our society better or worse and in which terms.

---

<sup>7</sup> Binder D., *Be a Champion in Life*, Foundation for Olympic and Sport Education, 2010

<sup>8</sup> Binder D., *Teaching Values, An Olympic Education Toolkit*, I.O.C, 2007

Education and Olympism are two concepts that surely we need to take into consideration about the present and the future of our society.

## 4. The connection with other movements of thought

### 4.1 Liberalism

In the previous chapter we analyzed the concept of “Olympism” and we saw which ideas inspired Coubertin in order to create this philosophy of life. Olympism is a unit-idea (as we read over in Loland’s analysis) with a wide range of social, political and anthropological aspects. In this chapter, we are going to examine what other movements of thought inspired Coubertin to come up with this idea and what other social and political philosophies are connected with Olympism.

As we mentioned in chapter three according to Parry, Coubertin was a product of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Liberalism and we already saw some characteristics of this idea, like formal equality, fairness, justice, and respect for persons and excellence. Those ideas of Liberalism come directly from Enlightenment and in a deeper sense from the Ancient Greek culture as well. According to Heywood

*“The term liberal has been in use since the fourteenth century but has had a wide variety of meanings. The Latin “liber” referred to a class of freeman, in other words, men who were neither serfs nor slaves. It has meant generous as in liberal helpings of food and drink or in reference to social attitudes it has implied openness or open mindedness. It also came to be increasingly associated with ideas of freedom and choice”* (Heywood, 1997, pg.27)

Liberal ideas born before and during the procedure of de-colonization, when the colonized countries tried and achieved to win their independence from the western powers. Liberalism, affected by Enlightenment, gave to people the ideas of freedom, rationality, equality and tolerance. After centuries of empires, kingdoms, slavery and oppression, the new dawn, firstly in Europe and afterwards in the rest of the world, brought the ideas of freedom and justice that gave to societies and individuals the opportunity to change and evolve in many terms. At that time, Coubertin was there to see and recognize these changes.

Together with Liberalism, Coubertin was affected much from a similar movement of thought, called Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism. As we read in Morgan

*“Coubertin remarked that a second way, and an even more widespread and influential way, to think of internationalism is as a “gigantic egalitarianism” in which the “civilized world” is conceived as “a state without borders and barriers.” This longing for an open-ended, boundless world, a world unmarked by national and other cultural differences, he remarked further, was a favored world among socialist, revolutionary, religious, theoretical, and utopian types” (Morgan, 1995, pg.83)*

Coubertin was himself a cosmopolitan by any means. In addition, Internationalism and Liberalism were the main columns of his idea to establish an international sport event with a social and political background. Liberalism was so influential for Coubertin and his idea for Olympism, but also conquered as an idea almost the entire world. Barry gives us briefly the political and social context of the modern western societies by saying:

*“The broad sense of ‘liberalism’ takes it to be the contemporary development of the basic values of the Enlightenment. In abstract terms, we may say that liberalism stands for individualism (versus communalism), equality (as against any notion of natural or divinely-appointed hierarchy), and moral universalism (as against moral particularism). More concretely, at the core of liberalism is the idea of equal citizenship. Members of a liberal state enjoy a common citizenship, which does not recognize any ascriptive basis for differentiation such as race or gender... The laws prescribe a framework of equal liberty within which people are free to decide how to live their own lives, pursuing their ends either individually or in association with others.”(Barry, 1997, pg.3)*

So, Liberalism doesn't offer a definition of what a good life is, but provides to the individuals the principles in order to choose their own way of life, within the limits of law in every society. But even if Liberalism is prevalent nowadays, like in all theories, some critics are skeptical about it. As we read in Loobuyck's paper:

*“Some critics of traditional liberalism are mild, while others are harsh. According to some, liberalism should refine itself from within. But, according to others, we have to go ‘beyond liberalism’. Taylor complains that the egalitarian*

*liberal position is 'inhospitable to difference', and Young writes that the liberal principles of equal treatment are bound up with 'the ideal of assimilation'. The charge is that the (implicit) aim of liberalism is to exclude or homogenize difference. Moreover, in the eyes of the adepts in the politics of difference, people do not simply demand equal treatment, but more importantly, 'recognition' of their distinct identities as members of particular cultural communities. The liberal civil rights are said to pay insufficient attention to the latter." (Loobuyck, 2005, pg.109)*

The deep analysis of Liberalism is not the purpose of this Thesis. In a few words, we are going to say that even if Liberalism gave freedom to the modern world from oppression, nationalism and the fear of difference, there are some points that modern societies have to redefine and offer to their citizens a code of values that can be universal and we are going to see this below. At this point we must punctuate that no one can offer a code of values in a sense of forcing someone to embrace them. The code of values can only be proposed and embraced unstrained.

Liberalism and Olympism share more or less the same background. Most of the Olympic values are also characteristics of Liberalism. Equality, antidiscrimination, freedom and justice are the columns where the two ideas are built upon. The difference is that Olympism through sports gives a code of conduct inside a specific frame. For example, everyone is equal but only under the rules of the Games. Everyone is allowed to participate in sport according to the idea of Olympism, but only if he respects the rules and regulations. Sport offers the field where an individual can perform and win, but also promotes the notion of responsibility which is one of the main concepts of a free man, an idea that is mostly forgotten nowadays. As a consequence, the human rights become a futile idea if it is not followed by the responsibility and respect for others. And here is the point where another great value of Olympism arises and that is Multiculturalism.

#### *4.2 Multiculturalism*

Multiculturalism is the main field where Liberalism can grow and prosper. It is easy for a group of people sharing the same culture and background to live and cooperate together. The case is how possible is for people from different cultures,

coming from completely different backgrounds, to be together without conflicts? The greatest wars in the history of humanity happened because one culture believed in the superiority of itself against the others. Ethnical, social, political and religious differences defined people throughout history, but in recent centuries all the social changes that we have discussed before, gave to humanity the value of respect for the difference. Modern societies, in the West at least, are for decades now multicultural. The United States of America is the biggest example, but all the western countries more or less have more than one ethnicities and minorities.

This term is very significant in the process of Globalization, to understand the interaction between the different cultures. Multiculturalism applies equality to all members of a society and supports the idea of collaboration and mutual respect. In the general sense, Multiculturalism is the idea that all cultures and nations in the world should respect one the other and collaborate for the common good. For most Western societies, the existence of viable and stable social groups within them is a political priority. It outlaws discrimination against groups and individuals on terms of ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, political beliefs class, gender, or sexual preference.

The new reality in the modern multicultural societies starts from the school. That is why the term Multiculturalism is also considered an educational term. According to Siegel:

*“‘Multiculturalism’ is often used to refer to the contemporary ‘educational reform movement that aims to equalize educational opportunities for diverse racial and ethnic groups’, which movement ‘incorporates the idea that all students—regardless of their gender and social class, and their ethnic, racial or cultural characteristics— should have an equal opportunity to learn in school.’ It typically refers also to the more general ideas that schools, and people and institutions more generally, should acknowledge, value and respect cultural differences and the alternative experiences and perspectives of members of different cultures; and that members of ‘minority’ cultures should not be required to assimilate into, nor to adopt the alien cultural commitments or identities of, nor be marginalized, silenced or oppressed by, a dominant, hegemonic ‘majority’ culture” (Siegel, 1999, pg.388).*



The author believes that education is the common ground where the multicultural seeds for respect can grow. From the school, the citizens of tomorrow can learn to understand and appreciate the difference. But how this can be achieved is not an easy task. The values and characteristics of Multiculturalism might seem charming and great to the most of us, but are they applied to everyone? Like Liberalism, some critics believe that in Multiculturalism some things are relevant and we cannot have a common point of view by any means. As we read in Schuster:

*“Liberal multiculturalists, in contrast, advocate multiculturalism on the basis of liberal values. As moderate multiculturalists, liberal proponents of the politics of recognition wish to avoid both the collectivism of radical multiculturalism and the exaggerated individualism associated with liberalism. Liberal multiculturalists retain the liberal emphasis on the individual by claiming that recognizing cultural difference is essential for the individual and thus for individual equality. While a liberal perspective is constitutive of these philosophers’ self-conception, there are significant differences between the two main strands of liberal multiculturalism. Most liberal multiculturalists argue along either of the two lines or combine arguments so as to create a broader theoretical foundation.”*(Schuster, 2006, pg. 3)

As we can realize, when we talk about political and social ideas and concepts things are not so clear. But we must find a concept where the propositions of Liberalism and Multiculturalism can be as persuasive and objective as possible. James Parry in his article *“Sport and Olympism: Universals and multiculturalism”* makes a distinguished effort to create a frame for understanding these theories and define the real concept. We read in his paper:

*“Multiculturalism, says Raz, “requires a political society to recognize the equal standing of all stable and viable communities existing in a society”. However, some of these may be authoritarian, illiberal, and oppressive—so does “multiculturalism” apply equally to all communities? In order to address this question, Tamir distinguishes two concepts of multiculturalism: thin and thick. Thin multiculturalism involves differences between different liberal cultures, where consensus over foundational values means that there will be no serious problem of cultural*

*relativism. Thick multiculturalism involves differences between liberal and illiberal cultures. Thin multiculturalism leads to an interest-group politics. Thick multiculturalism leads to a standoff, when an illiberal point of view seeks to secure its own existence in liberal society. Tamir's claim is that we all need induction into the discourse of rights and rationality, since without such "thin civic education," cross-cultural discussions based on equal respect and concern for all will be impossible. This kind of consideration is not based on assimilation but on a valuing of diversity. "It is a respect for and a belief in the importance of belonging to thick cultures that motivates the search for a thin layer of agreement" (Parry, 2006, pg. 193)*

The distinction between thin and thick Multiculturalism is crucial and also Tamir's approach that we must induce into the discourse of rights and rationality, so to make cross-cultural discussion possible gives us the answer to our problem. Parry believes that this approach calls for a compromise between liberal and illiberal views. He proposes the Rawl's attempts to draw guidelines for a "law of peoples", that is acceptable to members of both liberal and illiberal societies by introducing the notion of "reasonable societies." These societies, though illiberal, follow certain core principles and values such as: peace, common good, consultation, responsibility and freedom. From Parry's paper we found the common code of communication between cultures and the everlasting strain to come together and prosper through peace and understanding. Last but not least, Parry gives the answer to the question in a few words by saying:

*"Why should we be multiculturalists? Because we want to honor and respect the widest variety of human culture. Why? Because it enriches us all. We value diversity because every culture expresses a form of human life and helps us appreciate the full range of difference and choice. It is the same reason for which we value knowledge of the history of human social evolution: to help us to understand more fully our identity as humans (Parry, 2006, pg.195).*

The anthropological approach of Parry in this question gives us the opportunity to value sport and Olympism as well, because Multiculturalism is one of the core values of Olympism. The Olympic Games itself is the greatest example, where people

from all over the world strive, compete, laugh, cry, win and lose together in the number one multicultural festival in the world. This environment cannot be and it is definitely not only western. An actual example of this, is given by Nanayakkara.

*“The Olympic Games have a strong commitment to treat every event equally and respectfully, thus it includes Taekwondo, Karate and Judo which originated from East Asia. This is a classic example for multiculturalism in the Olympics (Nanayakkara, 2008, pg.355).*

Multiculturalism and Olympism are parallel ideas and no one of two can stand without the other. And this is becoming more significant in an ever-changing world environment where cultures and ideas come together in a global society. Technology and Science eliminated the distances and we reached a time that we speak for a “global village”.

#### *4.3 Globalization and Universalism*

Until this point we examined analytically the concept of Olympism. We analyzed how it started, which were the ideas that influenced Coubertin to come up with this philosophy and the connection with Liberalism and Multiculturalism. Although Coubertin experienced internationalism and multiculturalism in the primitive stages of a global environment, he could never imagine the frame where Olympism now stands. This global frame, that is called “Globalization”, is the new reality where everything else is a part of it. These movements of thought that we examined constitutes some of the ideas that Globalization introduced to the whole world. Globalization is considered to be a reality and also an ever going process. According to Maguire

*“Globalization processes are viewed here as being long term processes that have occurred unevenly across all areas of the planet. These processes-involving an increasing intensification of global interconnectedness-appear to be gathering momentum and despite their ‘unevenness’, it is more difficult to understand local or*

*national experiences without references to these global flows. Every aspect of social reality-people's living conditions, beliefs, knowledge and actions-is intertwined with unfolding globalization processes. These processes include the emergence of a global economy, a transnational cosmopolitan culture and a range of international social movements.”(Maguire, 1999, pg.3)*

Maguire includes in this text all the aspects of the Global society. To analyze if sport and Olympism are parts of this process would be pointless. Sport and the Olympic Games are foundations of the modern global reality. We are going to stay in the last sentence of Maguire's text, about the international social movements. In the process of Globalization where people in all over the world share the same ideas, the question that rises is how universal are these ideas? In our case we are going to examine how universal is the idea of Olympism. Parry gives the definition of universal philosophy by saying

*“A universal philosophy by definition sees itself as relevant 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. The principles of Olympism, to be universal, must be unchanging, and yet they must apparently be everywhere different.” Continuing also he wonders “They must not change over time, but at all times we see rule changes reflecting social changes. How are these paradoxes to be resolved?”(Parry, 2006, pg.190)*

The definition of Universal Philosophy by Parry gives us the exact frame to search for the universalism of sport and Olympism. Also, he makes the right question, so to be followed by the analysis that:

*“The ancient Games had developed over a thousand years as an expression of the values of a developing archaic community. The modern Games, however, were created by a set of 19th-century ideas that sought to impose a modern ideology on ancient values so as to affect contemporary social practice for the better...Such differences are inevitable, over time and space. Social ideas, or ideas inscribed in social practices, depend on a specific social order or a particular set of social*

*relationships for their full meaning to be exemplified. This seems to suggest that such meanings are culturally relative and that therefore there could be no such thing as a universal idea of Olympism. But are we doomed to relativism?* (Parry, 2006, pg.190-191)

There is no doubt that the answer to this question is essential, but we are going to continue on this subject in the last chapter of this Thesis and after the analysis of the terms “*Relativism*” and “*Nihilism*”. What we can highlight at this point is that some concepts inside sport and education are absolutely universal and we are going to see that below. Opponents of Olympism and particularly of the idea that represents universal values claim that Olympism is nothing but a mere invention of the western culture and a product of this, the aristocrat De Coubertin. The purpose of this depreciation of Olympism is to support the belief that Olympism has nothing to tell to non western societies and the values it holds are consequently not universal. According to Heywood:

*“In a general sense, the term (the west) refers to the cultural and philosophical inheritance of Europe, which has often been exported through migration or colonialism. The roots of this inheritance lie in Judeo-Christian religion and the learning of “classical” Greece and Rome shaped in the modern period by the ideas and values of liberalism”.*(Heywood, 1997, pg.27)

In a few words, the main foundations of western culture are in chronological order, the legacy of Ancient Greece and Rome, Christianity and Liberalism. Those pillars created today’s Global Society through centuries by migration, colonialism and technology. The ideas of western world after the processes of Colonization and Globalization were spread in all over the world. Rivals of Universalism claim that these ideas can only applied to the western world and the existence of them in other cultures is a misconception.

The point is that we cannot define if all the ideas that prevailed and gradually became global are right or wrong. It depends on the values and the characteristics each idea holds, that makes it universal. For example, although the idea of democracy as we saw above began in Ancient Greece, the values of equality and isonomy that Democracy includes, are not only applied in the ancient Greeks, but also are

applicable to other cultural contexts. It is impossible to claim that Democracy is only for Greeks and the other cultures must keep authoritarian systems. In other words, it does not matter where an idea has its roots. What matters is the actual impact of the idea on people and common good. Accordingly, it can be stated that Olympism has the potentials to be considered as a universal idea. Therefore, in the next and last chapter we are going to see if Olympism and the values it represents can make the difference in our modern society and become a universal idea of meaning.

## 5. Olympism as a proposal of meaning

### 5.1 Nihilism

In the analysis about the origins of Olympism and Coubertin's ideas, we have marked the significance of the Enlightenment in the formation of the ideas that prevailed in the modern world. Liberalism, Internationalism and all the other great movements of thought transformed the global society until nowadays and changed completely the political and philosophical thought. The new radical ideas opened new horizons and unchained people from the oppression of superstitions and dogmas. But like in every change of every new situation, there are both positive and negative aspects. We saw the positive aspects when we talked about democracy, equality, tolerance and human rights.

People nowadays, in the western world mainly, are much freer from restraints than ever before. What is more, technology and science are offering a dreamy world, where everyone is free and capable of anything. The negative aspect of this situation is the fact that the reality is not exactly as dreamy as we thought it would be. People in the modern western societies, even if they enjoy a high standard of wealth and material prosperity, they tend to be unhappy. The reason for this paradox is probably the notion that people are also spiritual beings and they need guidance in the terms of a religion, an idea or a code of values, in order to live a life of meaning and purpose. A movement of thought that is completely hostile to this idea is Nihilism.

Nihilism inspired dramatically the philosophical thought of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century and the fragments of this provocative theory are very noticeable today. To begin with, Nihilism is separated in different forms.

*“Political Nihilism, as noted, is associated with the belief that the destruction of all existing political, social, and religious order is a prerequisite for any future improvement. Ethical nihilism or moral nihilism rejects the possibility of absolute moral or ethical values. Instead, good and evil are nebulous, and values addressing such are the product of nothing more than social and emotive pressures. Existential*

*nihilism is the notion that life has no intrinsic meaning or value, and it is, no doubt, the most commonly used and understood sense of the word today.”(Pratt, 2005)*

In our case we are going to stay in the moral Nihilism. In a few words, proponents of Nihilism believe that our lives are meaningless. There is no point in searching for values and a common code of conduct. There are no absolute truths and whatever pathway we may follow in life, it does not matter at all. So, we are doomed to contingency. As Almeida says

*“There is nothing we can do, at any time in our lives that would make any moral difference at all. We arrive at the unsettling conclusion that there is no better reason to live one way rather than another. All of our life choices, from the moral point of view, are pointless.”(Almeida, 2010, pg.96)*

This idea might seem strange and awkward to the average person. But the effect of this theory in our modern culture the last century is tremendous, even if the most of us are not aware of this. The seeds of nihilistic thought are coming from the past. While Plato claims that values shows us what is good for us independent of our interests and desires, some centuries after, the Cynics and Skeptics believed that there is no actual truth in the world. Many centuries after, the enlightenment would introduce again the idea that values are objective and it is up to us, to choose our own values.

Among the philosophers who inspired modern thought and also defined Nihilism, is Friedrich Nietzsche. The philosopher who claimed that “God is dead and we have killed him”, tried to create a new mentality that denies everything we knew and believed until then. Nihilism is more or less Nietzsche's name for this loss of meaning or direction. Nietzsche and other nihilistic philosophers believed that if nihilism was complete, there would be no significant private or public issues. Every one of us would be free from any authorities and restraints. There would be nothing to make us follow and believe in. Nietzsche had been affected much by the ancient cynic philosophers and was generally a great scholar of the ancient Greek philosophy. Being a rebel spirit from his early days, he filtered all this knowledge and thought from the ancient texts and came up with his brand new theory for the values and the search for a purpose. He argued that:



*“every belief, every considering something-true is necessarily false, because there is simply no true world...The caustic strength of nihilism is absolute, and under its withering scrutiny the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking, and ‘Why’ finds no answer” (Will to Power). (Pratt, 2005, quotation from Nietzsche, 1883-1887)*

The actual impact of this extreme idea is something we can easily notice in our modern age. Maybe the intention of Nietzsche to introduce freedom and the smash of boundaries of the past had been misunderstood by us. Maybe the idea that there is no actual truth in the world, made us lose the ability to understand the differences and qualities. We have lost the perception to think, to select and to believe in something.

Throughout history, in every society was something at stake; there were questions and possible answers that all could agree were important, even if they were disagreeing as to what the answers to these questions would be. But in our age, everything seems to be in a process of becoming equal. There is less and less difference between political parties and practices, between social theories, between cultural standards etc. All meaningful differences that used to be vital and significant are being leveled.

Hence, from the aforementioned reality we understand that modern man has no guidelines to live and feels isolated and weak. The homogenization of everything and the contingency of all, make us feel powerless and confused about ourselves and our world in general. One of the philosophers who tried to explain Nihilism was Martin Heidegger. As we read in Dreyfus, who analyzed Heidegger extensively:

*“The things that once evoked commitment --gods, heroes, the God-man, the acts of great statesmen, the words of great thinkers -- have lost their authority...When everything that is material and social has become completely flat and drab, people retreat into their private experiences as the only remaining place to find significance. Heidegger sees this move to private experience as characteristic of the modern age. Art, religion, sex, education all becomes varieties of experiences. When all our concerns have been reduced to the common denominator of "experience" we will have reached the last stage of nihilism. One then sees "the plunge into frenzy and the*

*disintegration into sheer feeling as redemptive. The 'lived experience' as such becomes decisive.*"(Dreyfus, 1993, pg.6)

So, when the only place to find significance is the private experiences, then we must probably have to redefine ourselves. Aristotle believed that human being is by nature social. This is a universal truth and is very difficult for someone to deny it. They say that happiness exists only when you share it. But then, why nowadays we are tending to be closing in ourselves and afraid of sharing and living with others? This question might seem mere philosophical, but actual is the simplest question someone can make. The American philosopher, from the perspective of Heidegger, proposes a solution in this dead end:

*"The only way to have a meaningful life in the present age, then, is to let your involvement become definitive of reality for you, and what is definitive of reality for you is not something that is in any way provisional -- although it certainly is vulnerable. That is why, once a society like ours becomes rational and reflective, such total commitments begin to look like a kind of dangerous dependency. The committed individual is identified as a workaholic or a woman who loves too much. This suggests that to be recognized and appreciated individual commitment requires a shared understanding of what is worth pursuing. But as our culture comes more and more to celebrate critical detachment, self-sufficiency, and rational choice, there are fewer and fewer shared commitments. So, commitment itself begins to look like craziness.*"(Dreyfus, 1993, pg.5)

This magnificent analysis shows us how vital is, more than ever before, to agree in a code of shared commitments. We have to wonder how we reached the point that commitments seems to be crazy and dangerous in our society. It is more than obvious that relevance is not a proposal anymore. But before we do this, let us see first the idea of "Relativism".

## 5.2 Relativism

A philosophical concept that shares common characteristics with Nihilism is Relativism. There are many varieties of this idea, like moral, cultural, ontological, conceptual Relativism etc. In our case, we are going to examine the moral/ethical relativism and the cultural one. According to LaFollete

*“Ethical relativism is the thesis that ethical principles or judgments are relative to the individual or culture. When stated so vaguely relativism is embraced by numerous lay persons and a sizeable contingent of philosophers. Other philosophers, however, find the thesis patently false, even wonder how anyone could seriously entertain it.”* (LaFollete, 1991, pg.146)

Relativism is not a modern idea and its roots, like Nihilism, come from the distant past. The Ancient Greek philosopher (or sophist) Protagoras declared that “man is the measure of all things”, paving the way for the Cynics after, to argue the objectivity and relativity of moral values and reality in general. As we saw above, in Nihilism, Enlightenment introduced again to humanity the idea of objectivity in morality and we reached a point today to discuss if universal values really can exist.

Relativism is an old idea that became popular again during the last two centuries, but the idea of cultural relativism has a completely new meaning with globalization and the great diversity of cultures, that coming together nowadays. This fact makes the idea of cultural relativism very significant for our modern society. According to Donnelly:

*“Cultural relativity is an undeniable fact; Moral rules and social institutions evidence and astonishing cultural and historical variability. Cultural relativism is a doctrine that holds that (at least some) such variations are exempt from legitimate criticism by outsiders, a doctrine that is strongly supported by notions of communal autonomy and self-determination. Moral judgments, however, would seem to be essentially universal, as suggested not only by Kant’s categorical imperative but also by the common sense distinction between principled and self-interested action. And if human rights are, literally, the rights (every)one has simply because one is a human being, they would seem to be universal by definition.”* ( Donnelly, 1984, pg.400)

Between these two views that Donnelly presented is an ongoing conflict. The two extreme sides of these views are called by Donnelly radical cultural relativism and radical universalism. The scholar defines them by saying that Radical cultural relativism would hold that culture is the sole source of the validity of a moral right or rule. Radical universalism would hold that culture is irrelevant to the validity of moral rights and rules, which are universal valid. Inside Relativism there are two categories that define it, the strong and the weak one. In a few words, Edwards explains that:

*“In strong relativism, truth is relativized either to individuals or to schemes...A more plausible strategy for the relativist to pursue is to argue that truth is relativized to incommensurable schemes (once translation is allowed, weak relativism lapses into strong relativism).”*(Edwards, 2008, pg.600)

The complexity between strong and not strong relativism makes us realize that this theory is wide and tries to find an identity to become persuasive. We are going to see below that this is something difficult for this particular theory. To return to the cultural relativism, Donnelly again says:

*“Strong cultural relativism holds that culture is the principal source of the validity of a moral right or rule. In other words, the presumption is that rights (and other social practices, values and moral rules) are culturally determined, but the universality of human nature and rights serves as a check on the potential excesses of relativism. At its furthest extreme, just short of radical relativism, strong cultural relativism would accept a few basic rights with virtually universal application, but allow such a wide range of variation for most rights that two entirely justifiable sets might overlap only slightly. Weak cultural relativism holds that culture may be an important source of the validity of a moral right or rule. In other words, there is a weak presumption of universality, but the relativity of human nature, communities, and rights serves as a check on potential excesses of universalism. At its further extreme, just short of radical relativism, weak cultural relativism would recognize a comprehensive set of prima facie universal human rights and allow only relatively rare and strictly limited local variations and exceptions.”* (Donnelly, 1984, pg.401)

From this analytical definition, we can understand that cultural relativism is quite flexible. The values and common rights might be present in a small extent, or they might be not at all. It depends on who defines relativism probably. The idea of relativism started also to become popular after the atrocities of the extreme ideas of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nazism, Fascism and Communism were disastrous in practice and the superiority of an idea against all the others became a matter under serious consideration. This point is what the proponents of relativism use to argue that morals and values must be relevant for every culture. There is also a high controversy between philosophers and anthropologists for this matter. As we read in Johnson

*“Philosophers like Vivas and Rachels who proclaimed that cultural relativism equated with moral relativism and believed that relativism stood in the way of arriving at universal ethical standards were basing their standard on their own cultural values. What they saw as "relative" could be seen as positive in another culture, or as a cultural adaptation by an anthropologist. For anthropologists like Herskovits, cultural relativism is a practical means or method of discovery, not an ethical disaster. It also could acknowledge that other cultures might not agree with cultural or moral standards imposed by the West or any other colonizing society, and that they had a right to be what they were. Put in this way, philosophy and anthropology seem to have diametrically opposite goals and objectives with regard to how they assess the value of cultural relativism. For anthropologists, philosophy's understanding of ethics is ethnocentric. For philosophers, anthropology is too relativistic.”* (Johnson, 2007, pg.796)

So, which of these two sides is right and which is wrong? The answer might be not so simple. Johnson goes one step further and criticizes these both approaches when he says that philosophers and anthropologists do not understand that "objective" study of another culture leads not to moral relativism, but to an even stronger realization of moral and social problems and issues. This practice makes many anthropologists to take actions that would never have occurred to them (or to philosophers) if they had not studied another culture.

The scholar also, points out that relativism can be an extremely useful tool to understand the universal meaning of ideas, only by the notion that it questions everything. He believes that cultural relativism creates a heightened, perhaps new and

even different understanding of morality that could eventually lead to a clearer understanding of ethical universals than Western philosophy has been able to articulate until now. This aspect of relativism is very significant and useful. From this point of view, we can see relativism not as the nihilistic idea that denies everything, but as the vehicle to criticize everything and keep only what really matters and makes sense. So, it is not the case for us to accept the one culture or the other. Our job is to find out the common values that can make every culture and every citizen of the world better. This is the idea behind Olympism on how can be proposed as a code of common values for the entire world.

### *5.3 Olympism as an answer of meaning*

In chapter three where we analyzed Olympism, we examined analytically how this idea has a very specific and serious theoretical background. From Coubertin to the modern scholars, the idea of Olympism evolved and became an actual proposition for a common code of values in the modern world. But what exactly are the values that we talk about? Horn says

*“In a philosophical-theological discussion, it refers to what is good and what is of high standard. When you consider the phenomenological philosophy by M. Scheler or N. Hartmann, there is an independent moral concept towards values efficient perception of reality, apart from the facts of reality, by which you can objectivize values and show their importance for all people, because they are closely connected with the idea of man, with the idea of sense, with the conviction about what is reasonable or not.”*(Horn, 2008, pg.130)

Throughout human history, the values were the benchmarks that people used to create and maintain the society. The values formed the code of conduct for people, even before philosophy defines them, even before Socrates or Plato discuss about them. Family, homeland, religion, love, justice etc. or materialism and individuality, were only some of the values that existed in many cultures. Of course every culture

was not the same with the other in terms of values. Time, place, people and circumstances could make cultures have different values. Our aim is to find out the common values, the “good” values, those that unites cultures and do not divide them. The values that promote peace, justice, equality, respect and tolerance. The values that gives a purpose to people and makes them be better parts of the whole that is the society, where every one of us is so unique and every one of us can make the difference and contribute to create a better society.

The two movements of thought that we examined above, Nihilism and Relativism, are more or less in the same direction. Nihilism denies everything and does not distinguish good from evil. Proponents of Nihilism believe that there is no truth in the world and the effort to define values is in vain. Nihilism is a provocative theory that probably helped philosophers and intellectuals to question all the dogmas and perceptions that oppressed humanity through the ages. The problem is that Nihilism denies everything and proposes actually nothing. But the necessity for man to create society and culture is to give order in chaos. In chaos there is no possibility to establish society and the law of the jungle will allow only the strong to survive and prosper. And of course, in chaos we cannot even discuss for culture, art, solidarity or other noble facets of man.

Relativism also, is a theory similar to Nihilism. We saw above that relativism’s range is quite wider than Nihilism, but in general the two ideas are not proposing something practical. Relativism proposes objectivity and relativity but the problem is that this idea is defeated by its own weapons. As Parry says

*“Relativism itself is a kind of concealed ethnocentrism. It is not true that to respect other cultures is to abstain from criticizing them. Rather relativism is a kind of disrespect—failing to apply to others (denying to others) the standards of justification and argument we apply to ourselves. Relativism is self-refuting. It is a theory that claims that there are no cross-cultural truths. But we can ask, does relativism apply to itself? If so, relativism is not true (because it says that there are no cross-cultural truths, so relativism is just a cultural practice of Western anthropologists, with no claim to truth and therefore nothing to say to outsiders). So even if relativism could be true, it would make itself false (or, at least, merely relative). But relativism cannot be true, since it claims that there is no such thing as truth.”*(Parry, 2006, pg.197)

Hence, if we agree that Nihilism and Relativism are pointless, then we need to find something to give us purpose and meaning. Modern western societies found meaning in consumption. The Globalization process tries to impose the value of consumption to the entire world. The free markets and capitalism promotes the idea of materialistic happiness and individuality. It is a notion that we can find happiness and meaning in the material things and the hedonistic activities that we experience inside our ego. As we said above, modern societies left behind many oppressive and cruel ideas that made people suffer for centuries. But the consequence of individuality and the relevance of values left the modern individual alone, with no social activity, with no compassion and solidarity for the others and just with the thirst for more material things and ephemeral joy. Actually, the consequence for modern man is to feel “hollow”. Here is where Olympism appears. We cannot say that Olympism can be a modern religion. The term “religion” is too difficult to define and claim that Olympism can replace the need of human being to believe in something greater than him. But what we can surely claim is that Olympism can propose a very serious common code of values.

These two great pillars of Olympism, sport and education, creates the frame where the significance of the idea is built upon. For the concept of sport, everyone who just once in his life played football or competed in a running event can understand how beautiful feeling is to play and strive with friends and opponents. Apart from the pure notion of sport, modern sport as a constitution and a form of society, contributed to the positive progress of humanity. Parry again says:

*“This search for universal representations at the interpersonal and political level of our common humanity seems to me to be the essence of the optimism and hope of various forms of humanism and internationalism. I believe that sport has made an enormous contribution to modern society over the past hundred years or so, and that there is a strong case for sport as an efficient means to these ends.”*(Parry, 2012, pg.10)

Sport, as an idea fulfills inside its frame, all the values of a life worth living. Effort, determination, respect for rules and opponents, friendship, pursue for excellence and team spirit are only some of the great values that people who do sport



can follow and also adapt them, in their own personal and social life. As we saw in chapter three, sport bring people together and offer to cultures a common ground, where they can interact and co-operate for the common good. As Coubertin said:

*“To demand from nations to love each other is foolish; but to ask them to respect each other is not utopian; but for being able to respect each other it is necessary to know each other”*(Horn, 2008, pg.134, quotation from Coubertin, 1971, pg.51).

And practice showed us, that the best common ground for cultures to interact is sport, where they can find same rules and regulations and through the spirit of sport can overcome the boundaries that divide them, in terms of color, race and social background. The educational aspect of Olympism is also the key that makes the proposal of Olympism so important and serious. With Relativism education cannot exist. If everything is relevant and futile, then what is the purpose to teach our children anything? The responsibility of every society is to give to the people of tomorrow the necessary background to grow, learn and become happy. That must be the ultimate purpose of education. And if practice shows us that current education does not make children and so people happy, then something must change.

Education must give to children all the aspects of what a good life can be and never oppress for anything. But is also vital to insist and offer to young people the code of values that will make them good civilians, for themselves and for society as well. Then it's up to the individual to make his own choices. But from the time education offers the right values and examples to the young people, society can be optimistic for a brighter future. From the entire analysis of the idea of Olympism in this master thesis, we can claim that Olympism and the Olympic values through sport and education can become a vehicle of hope and meaning for modern societies. This theory to become practice, it is only up to us, who believe in this.

## Conclusions

In ancient Greece we have the first institutionalization of sport in history. The Olympic Games were a significant and vital part of the ancient Greek culture in every aspect. Not only the athletic, religious and cultural event that was taking place every four years, but the institution of “palaistra/gymnasion” and the daily practice in athletic training, was one of the basic characteristics of the ancient Greek education and mentality in general. Together with philosophy, music and mathematics, athletics were a part of the everyday life for every free young man. The event of the Olympic Games now, that was being held every four years, was the greatest meeting of all the Greek city states. The days of the Games the Greeks were gathering to compete in the athletic events, to worship their gods, to admire the athletes, to discuss about their matters and to take part in the greatest festival of their time. The exact roots of the Games are not very clear and many theories exist to explain the significance of this festival for the Greeks. The only thing sure is that the ancient Games left us a legacy of some important values.

Things were not ideal in the Ancient Greece. The City-states were fighting each other very often and the Games were used numerous times for political reasons. But on the other hand, we cannot deny that the Olympic Games were the scene for deeds of valor, honor and pride. The athletes were performing most of the times, in equal terms and cheaters were being punished and humiliated. So, justice, isonomy and arête were the values that inspired the Greeks through the Games. Also, the idea of cosmopolitanism or primitive cosmopolitanism was present during the days of the festival, because the Greeks from all around the Mediterranean Sea were coming together, bringing different customs and ideas. These values from ancient Greece were passed to us through thousands of years and the main essence of them remained vivid. Coubertin, together with all the great changes of his time will awaken them to form the idea of Olympism.

Enlightenment and the brand new social and political ideas in Europe would bring colossal changes in the European societies at first and afterwards to the colonies as well. The British Empire, being the greatest power of its time, will make England become the center and the core of the new reality. Apart from the parliament and the steam engine, England is the mother of modern sport. The modern team sports, the

institutionalization of modern sport competitions, the establishment of federations and the introduction of sport in education, took place in Victorian England and afterwards. Coubertin was there to take advantage of the British innovations and together with Internationalism, Liberalism and Multiculturalism, created in his mind the idea of the modern Olympic Games and Olympism. Education and sport in a multicultural, liberal society was the main axis of Olympism for Coubertin. The French pioneer was convinced that all these great changes in global society can create a better world, only if we accept the common code of values that Olympism offers to us.

Through the decades and while the Olympic Games were becoming the greatest multisport event in the world, the idea of Olympism was left behind. The importance of sport in the global society many times made the Olympic Games a scene for political and economical conflicts. The commercialization of the Games inside the frame of a materialistic society was inevitable. The I.O.C, as we saw in chapter 3, through Olympic solidarity and some other activities somehow try to keep the spirit of Olympism alive. But these efforts are definitely not enough. Marketing and doping are the first words coming in our minds when we think about the Olympic Games. Olympism and the Olympic values and their meaning are known only to some. In a world where individuality and materialism prevail, sport is probably the only place where people are coming together and witness something bigger than themselves.

The I.O.C has the power to make this difference and take as priority not economical benefits and geopolitical influence, but peace, friendship and hope for a better future. The impact of I.O.C and the Olympic Games in the global society is tremendous. The opportunity for the Olympic movement to promote Olympism as an idea of meaning and purpose to the entire world is priceless. Olympism cannot replace religion or the need of man to believe in something greater than him, but surely can offer a meaningful way out of the confusion of modern life.

Many ontological and philosophical ideas proposed numerous theories throughout modern era. Scholars and scientists analyzed and discussed thousands of pages of sociological and philosophical approaches. All these efforts definitely helped the evolution and progress of thought about the social and philosophical ideas. But sometimes may the easy way, is the best way. What we mean is that the idea of Olympism is simple and pure. Sport, friendship, effort, the good example, fair play

and respect, are the basic characteristics of what a young child wants to do and must learn.

Through sport and all the great values it holds, the child can learn to play by the rules, to strive for victory, to respect the opponent, to believe in the team spirit and to recognize and accept the defeat. All these values can be adopted by the child for the rest of his life and through education will be able to understand how helpful these values can be. No one can say that through sport every child will be a better person. But what we can surely claim is that through sport, the young child has all the potentials to become a good man and a good citizen. What Olympism now proposes is exactly this. Give sport through education to the children, inside a code of common values throughout the world and prepare yourselves for a brighter future. The lost meaning and purpose for humans today can be found in the values of Olympism. A sport competition they say has many similarities with life itself more or less. Life is a struggle, some wins, others they lose, but everyone can make this struggle worth fighting, if they respect it and share it with others. That is the Olympic spirit and that is the spirit of sport. Let us pass the message.

## References

**Almeida M.** (2010), “Two Challenges to Moral Nihilism”, *The Monist*, Vol. 93, No.1, pp. 96-15.

**Barry B.** (1997), “Liberalism and Multiculturalism”, *Ethical Perspectives* 4, pp.3-12

**Binder, D.** (2010), “*Teaching Olympism in schools: Olympic Education as a focus on values education: university lectures on the Olympics*”, Edition 2010, Centre d’Estudis Olímpics (CEO-UAB).

**Crowther N.** (2007), “Sport in Ancient times”, Praeger, London

**Dreyfus H.** (1993), “Heidegger on the Connection between Nihilism, Art, Technology and Politics”, *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp.289-316

**Donnelly J.** (1984), “Cultural Relativism and Universal Human Rights”, *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol.6, No.4, pp.400-410.

**Edwards S.** (2008), “Relativism and Conceptual Schemes”, *The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms*, 2:4, pp.599-602

**Golden M.** (2004), “Sport in the Ancient World from A to Z”, Routledge.

**Harker B.** (1997), “Evolution and the Olympics”, *CEN Tech. J.*, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp.274-277

**Heywood A.** (1997) “*Politics*”, London: Mcmillan.

**Horn A.** (2008), “The values of Olympism and their importance in today’s world”, *I.O.A, 8<sup>th</sup> International Session for Educators and Officials*, 10-17 July 2008

**I.O.C** “Olympic Charter” (2011), Published by the *International Olympic Committee* – July 2011.

**Johnson T.** (2007), “Cultural Relativism, Interpretations of a Concept”, *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol.80, n.3, summer 2007, pp.791-802.

**Kyle D.** (1983), “Directions in Ancient Sport History”, *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp.7-34

**LaFollete H.** (1991), “The truth in Ethical Relativism”, *Journal of Social Philosophy*, vol.20, pp.146-154

**Loland S.** (1995), “Coubertin’s Ideology of Olympism from the Perspective of the History of Ideas”, *OLYMPIKA: The International Journal of Olympic Studies*, Vol.4, 1995, pp. 49-78.

**Loobuyck P.** (2005), “Liberal multiculturalism, A defence of liberal multicultural measures without minority right”, *Ethnicities* 5, 1 (2005) pp.108-123

**Maguire, J.** (1999), “*Global Sport—Identities, Societies, Civilizations*”, Cambridge, Polity Press

**Miller S.** (2004), “*Ancient Greek Athletics*”, New Haven, Yale University Press.

**Miller S.** (2004), “*Arête*”, Berkeley, University of California Press.

**Morgan W.** (1995) “Cosmopolitanism, Olympism and Nationalism: A Critical Interpretation of Coubertin’s Ideal of International Sporting Life”, *OLYMPIKA: The International Journal of Olympic Studies* Vol.4, 1995, pp. 79-92.

**Muller N.** (2004), “Olympic Education” University lecture on the Olympics), *CEO-UAB*, Barcelona

**Nanayakarra S.** (2008) “Olympism: a Western Liberal Idea that ought not to be imposed in other Cultures”, *9th International Symposium for Olympic Research*, Beijing, pp.351-358

**Naul N.** (2008), “*Olympic Education*”, Oxford, Meyer & Meyer Verlag.

**Nissiotis N.** (1976), “Philosophy of Olympism”, *Olympic Review*, No.136, LA84 Foundation.,pp.81-85

**Panagopoulos A.** (2006), “The Moral Philosophy of the Ancient Greeks and its Relationship to Education and Sport”, *7th International Session For Educators and Officials of Higher Institutes of Physical Education 20-27 July 2006*, International Olympic Academy.

**Parry J.** (2006), “Sport and Olympism: Universals and multiculturalism” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 2006 33, pp. 188-204

**Parry J.** (2009), “The religio athlete, Olympism and Peace” *Olympic Truce Sport as a Platform For Peace*”, International Olympic Truce Center, 2009, Athens

**Parry J.** (2012), “The power of sport in peacemaking and peacekeeping”, *Sport in Society*, iFirst article, 2012, pp.1–13

**Pleket H.W.** (2004), “The Olympic Games in Antiquity”, *European Review /* Vol. 12 / Issue 03, pp.401-413

**Pratt A.** (2005), “Nihilism”, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 15/01/2013.

**Reid H.** (2009), “Olympic Sport and Its Lessons for Peace”, *Olympic Truce Sport as a Platform for Peace*, International Olympic Truce Center.

**Schuster A.** (2006) “Does Liberalism Need Multiculturalism? A Critique of Liberal Multiculturalism”, *Essays in Philosophy*, Vol. 7, Iss. 1, Article 15.

**Siegel H.** (1999). “Multiculturalism and the Possibility of Transcultural Educational and Philosophical Ideals”, *Philosophy*, Vol. 74, Issue 03, pp.387-409

**Szymanski S.** (2006), “A theory of the evolution of modern sport, International Association of Sports Economists”, *Journal of Sports Economics* 5, 2: pp.111–126