



## GRUNDTVIG WORKSHOP "EDUCATION THROUGH SPORT"

ESTONIA, 9.-14.07.2013

### THE ETHICS AND POLITICS OF OLYMPISM

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### 'Olympic' - the Olympic Games, ancient or modern.

- a two-week festival of sport
- held once in every four years
- between elite athletes representing their countries or city-states
- in inter-communal competition.

### 'Olympiad'

- a four-year period, during which a Games may or may not be held.
- so: the London Games are properly referred to not as the XXX Games (since there have been only twenty-seven, three having been cancelled due to World Wars) but as the Games of the XXX Olympiad.

### 'Olympism'

- not just the elite athlete, but everyone
- not just a short truce period, but the whole of life
- not just competition and winning, but also the values of participation and co-operation
- not just sport as an activity, but also as a formative and developmental influence

### 'Olympism'

a universal social philosophy which emphasises the role of sport:

- in world development
- international understanding
- peaceful co-existence
- social and moral education.

### THE OLYMPIC CHARTER

Fundamental Principle 2 (p7) says:

*Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the **joy found in effort**, the educational value of **good example** and respect for **universal fundamental ethical principles**.*

## THE OLYMPIC CHARTER

*Fundamental Principle 6 (p7) says:*

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

## THE OLYMPIC CHARTER

Chapter IV states the duties of NOCs with regard to Olympic education (p31):

*The **mission** of the NOCs is to develop and protect the **Olympic Movement** ...  
(and to) propagate the fundamental principles of **Olympism** at national level ...  
and otherwise contribute to the **diffusion of Olympism** in the teaching programmes of physical education and sport in schools and university establishments ...  
(and to) see to the creation of **institutions which devote themselves to Olympic education**.*

## Philosophical anthropology

The philosophical anthropology of Olympism promotes the ideals of:

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

## Concept of Sport

- *physical (effort)*
- *contest ( 'contract to contest' - competition and excellence)*
- *rule-governed (fair play, equality and justice)*
- *institutionalised ( 'lawful authority' )*
- *shared values and commitments (respect)*

## Liberalism

- Does not tell you what is the Good Life
- Sees itself as neutral
- Citizens free to choose their own Good
- Sees itself as multicultural and universal

## Multiculturalism (1)

Has liberal democracy won the battle for global political hegemony?  
Multicultural ideals such as:

- recognition
- respect
- equal status for all cultures

## Multiculturalism (2)

Multiculturalism, says Raz,  
'requires a political society to recognise the equal standing of all stable and viable communities existing in a society.'

However, some of these may be:

- authoritarian
- illiberal
- oppressive

Does 'multiculturalism' apply equally to all communities?

## The Law of Peoples

Rawls: Law of Peoples acceptable to liberal and illiberal societies, introducing the idea of 'reasonable societies' who, though illiberal, follow certain core principles:

- Peace (gain their ends through diplomacy and trade)
- Common Good (a conception of justice)
- Consultation (a reasonable hierarchy thereof)
- Responsibility (citizens accept obligations and take part in social life).
- Freedom (some freedom of conscience/thought)

'Reasonable societies' could agree to a Law of Peoples based on a 'thin liberalism'.  
But liberal democracy is (still) an exclusionary system!

## Why Be Multiculturalist?

- Values diversity
- Tolerates difference
- Promotes democracy
  
- This means we must:
- Defend the liberal rights of the individual
- Defend liberal societies (politics is necessary!)

## Is Universalism Ethnocentric?

- Is liberalism a western product? (yes)
  
- Does this mean it's ethnocentric? (no)
  
- Are all values culturally relative (no)

## Cultural Relativism

It says, "all values arise within cultures and they can only be judged from inside; therefore there are no universal values"

- Cannot account for cultural criticism
- Is in fact disrespectful to others
- Is self-refuting

It says, "there are no cross-cultural truths"

(a) is that supposed to be true, or what?

(b) if it's true, it says it's false!

- Rejects possibility of UN and Human Rights
- Tolerance is a universal (liberal) principle!

## Is liberalism a western product?

*A series of European inventions (17-18 century)*

- The constitution of the individual
- Scepticism as to the truth
- Self-criticism
- Separation of church and politics
- Separation of church and knowledge

## Does this mean it's ethnocentric?

Geometry arose in Ancient Greece

*Is geometry therefore Greek ideology?*

Later developments in maths came from medieval Arabs ('Arabic' numerals)

*Should we see maths as an Arabic imposition on European society?*

*No: origins are distinct from validity*

## Back to Olympism

Concepts of Olympism (and sport) are at a high level of generality - set out a range of 'thin' liberal values to which all can agree

But those values admit of contesting interpretations (a range of 'thick' values) as the concept of Olympism finds different expressions in time and place, history and geography.

## Olympism (2)

The 'thin' values underpinning the rule structures of sport include:

- fairness
- equality
- respect for others
- rule-adherence
- contract-keeping

## Olympism (3)

In addition, the ethos of Olympism emphasises values of:

- friendship
- mutual understanding
- peace
- respect for others' cultures

And sporting practices bring awareness of possibilities of:

- international co-operation
- mutual respect and mutual valuing

## A Philosophical Anthropology of Olympism

- each society (and each ideology) has a political and philosophical anthropology - an idealised conception of the kind of person that that society (or ideology) values
- a philosophical anthropology of Olympism as a contribution to a theory of physical education
- basis for the world-wide development of sport and physical education as a valued element in everyone's general education, and as a contribution to multicultural dialogue.

## Our duty ...

Our duty within liberal society, and within liberal organizations (incl. Olympic ones!)

- to be aware
- to take a critical interest
- to learn to understand the issues
- to express a point of view
- to contribute to the formation of judgement
- to support and preserve liberal institutions

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And that is why we are here!

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