



“Philosophy of Olympism”* (end)

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- c) *The fact that the Games must be repeated as a reminder of what would continually happen as the true essence of life.*

The four year interval in between points to the rhythmic, ever-existing process of renewal with the deepest values of life. The Olympic Games are regular manifestations in time and space of eternal principles which govern the natural process of the develop-

ment, growth and maturity of human life. On the basis of man's reference to his highest possible reality, the Games offer to him in space and time the means of realising it and becoming conscious of the deepest root of his being.

It is remarkable that Olympism attempts this reference to the “beautiful, great and truthful” through bodily power and ability. It is also a paradox that the struggle against the opponent, the desire to best him or to surpass him have become the means of unity with the highest essence and purpose of life and of the harmonious relationship

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with all people beyond any kind of racial, ethnic or cultural enmity and hostility. Precisely here lies the beauty, the greatness and the truth of life ; that is, the natural acts of violence and power, of selfishness and egocentric power opposed to this reference can have the opposite meaning and effect in man through the impact of the spirit, the will and reason.

In actual fact, it is only through a radical change of natural forces and inclinations by the free will and conscious decision by man that he can achieve the deepest sense of his life. Pure strength and zealous rivalry can be used for the best relationship with the other man, the opponent, if one has grasped that no natural, physical and material strength is an end in itself. Everything is a reference to a possibility of achieving a higher purpose if man is carried by the meaning of being which is his root and origin. If this is the case, then the more one struggles for supremacy, the more one is apt for relationships, the more one dominates one's opponents and is crowned a winner, the more one becomes a means of establishing solidarity and mutual respect.

Olympism in ancient times, within the Greek philosophic tradition, is the manifestation of the radical dialectic between spirit and body, essence and existence, individual and community, power and co-operation. It is a continuation of the most rigid competition for power which can result in the most solid and unbroken unity of races and cultures.

The strongest athlete may become an example of modesty making his victory a tool for brotherhood and coexistence. The main purpose of the Olympic victory is to transform power into relationship, to break egocentricity with communal spirit to save the individual from his self-destructive isolation.

Olympism affects man's very deepest truth, seeking to serve, strengthen and promote harmony in relationships and in all his aspirations away from the oppositions and contrasts that he experiences in life. There is an optimistic but sober view of reality. There is no superficial appreciation of the world's drama and the resistance to evil in history. This harmony is not sought by an ironic, passive spirit. On the contrary, Olympism reminds us of the struggle that one must wage against oneself and-against the powers and the principalities of this world. There is no romanticism and aestheti-

cism in the Olympic movement, but rather a continuous and consistent fight for perpetual improvement of the individual to reach harmony between violent opposites and difficult deceptions and failures. It is the struggle against the bloody wars which result in the Olympic "truce" as a break and a pause, reminding us, through another kind of struggle of power and competition in sport, that life has another deeper dimension. It is the fight against the thirst for primacy and domination which induces the desire to win and become superior to others, but this happens now as the result of a peaceful competition in honour of the divine power. It is the combat against the desire to have all material goods for oneself, but now the hardest work and the most gruelling effort are rewarded only by the crowning of the winner with the leaves of an olive tree.

Harmony has a value if achieved as a combination of contrasts between matter and spirit, egocentricity and communal co-operation, ethnic ambition and world society, supremacy and modesty. Harmony in "*beauty, greatness and truth*" is never a ready-made product or a machine-like automatic function. It is a hard process of achieving a "truce" through a continuous struggle. It requires patience, perseverance and concentration of one's whole self, one's knowledge, desires and feelings towards the achievement of a higher goal in life. Harmony, as it is understood in the Olympic movement and expressed in the Games, is a situation of conscious reconciliation of opposing powers within man's inner spiritual being. It is the experience of a kind of dynamic tranquility against all sorts of anxieties caused by the struggle against evil forces which disrupt human existence.

Unlike the human disorder in social relationships, due to egoism and self-sufficiency, Olympic competition is characterised by self-discipline and the beauty of bodily movements. An athlete chosen by the spirit of Olympism to incarnate the deepest human values of "*beauty, greatness and truth*" demonstrates the harmony of principles of human life gained by hard training, a total devotion to his purpose and continued excellence beyond his natural limits. The breaking of world records is the proof that man does not accept a final limitation of his nature. The act of surpassing a record denotes the infinite power to transcend, which is man's property, making him a being of divine origin and purpose. The Olympic



record-holder is a symbol reminding man of his transcendental dimension. Harmony here is not a simple concordant coexistence of two or more qualities, but rather, an achievement of man beyond the limits of human nature, an effort towards uniting with the source of his creation through his creative power.

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It is in this dynamic way that we can approach the crux of the Olympic philosophy which is of an anthropological nature. Olympism regards man in his natural form as "*kalos kagathos*". Again this is not an *optimistic, superficial, romantic, humanistic understanding* of man looked upon from ivory tower and on the basis of an idealistic system of transcendental philosophy. This concept of man, which runs across the whole spiritual, philosophic, moral and artistic creativity of Greek antiquity is the most realistic concept in anthropology. Man is considered not on what he is now, but on what he is induced to become in the image of the Supreme Being. It is the Spirit of "beauty, greatness and truth" in which man shares, through a hard, continuous struggle *against himself* and against the evil forces. The "*kalos kagathos*" is again a process to be completed, a target to be hit, an end to be achieved gradually as far as possible. It is from this end that our human being is to be defined and tested. Our efforts shape our future. We should never be satisfied with what we are at the present time.

That is why the anthropological principles of Olympism, centered around the "*kalos kagathos*" idea, cannot be considered in isolation from the other principle of ancient wisdom "*know thyself*", which is the most difficult operation of knowledge that exists

for man. Man resists his own knowledge, his introspection, his self-examination. He is hesitant, afraid and anxious to grasp himself as he really is at present. He is reluctant to know what he really believes, does and thinks in his solitude. He feels that he always lacks a study, an analysis and an objective criticism of himself, though he understands in his deeper being that without it he can never provide direction for or attribute a value to his personality. No one can *really serve* himself and the *community* in which he lives unless he has passed through a *critical self-examination*. The principle of "*know thyself*" reveals man's misery, but also the possibility of realising his higher calling, because man finds his misery only if he has the power to see it and compare it with his hidden splendour and glory, namely his possibility to overcome this misery. No one can appreciate his misery unless he is attracted by the opposite of his misery, which also exists since he is able to make the comparison and decide to overcome the weakness. The "*kalos kagathos*" idea is the decision of a man to start always anew with the way to perfection. It can be only the result of a serious introspection.

"*Kalos kagathos*" may be explained literally as the man who is beautiful and balanced in body and soul. He combines a natural aesthetic appearance with a fine exterior, and elegance with acquired spiritual virtue as well as with a moral being.

It represents the combination of a natural contribution and a conscious achievement. It is a mixture of talent and ethical exploit.

And yet this is not the whole of what one can say about this principle. It is not an individualistic qualification of man. Again we must understand its meaning on the basis of the philosophy of the Olympic movement, as a future dynamic with an orientation to which all men equally aspire. No one can

pretend that he has already attained the status of "*kalos kagathos*" (then he would have proved that he has nothing in common with it) because he would then be the incarnation of the beauty in the narrow sense of external appearance and the perfect realisation of the highest morality. Beauty is a very relative quality depending to a great extent on subjective appreciation ; as a value, it is unlimited and therefore always refers to a more perfect model. On the other hand, the perfect morality is beyond all forms of human achievements.

Therefore, the anthropological affirmation "*kalos kagathos*" of ancient times places all men in front of the same maximum possible realisation of their lives. It motivates our dynamic development towards an ever-higher purpose, towards a new world record, that is beyond our present limitations in health, bodily existence and especially in spirit and ethical behaviour. The two sides of human being are but a single unit of the psychosomatic interpretation. One perfects the other ; they are mutually inter-dependent.

The Olympic movement tends precisely towards this deeper connection. It appeals openly to the physical achievement but seeks to complete it, to counter-balance it with the ethical dimension. It recognises the winner and honours him, but only as a token, an example of a man serving the highest purpose of human existence. Olympism does not seek to commend winners to the public as strong men, but it commends participants who struggle for victory independent of considerations of their physical power which enables them to dominate the others. The winner is crowned only as representative of all of those who participate. He is the first among equals and is called upon to prove whether he is a real winner for himself, against himself, by transcending the limits of his natural force, while also excelling in virtue, in promoting universal brotherhood and community beyond all forms of racial, cultural and ethnic discrimination.

The moment of victory in Olympic Games should not lead to an easy sense of triumph. This moment involves a heavy burden for the winner, for the city to which he belongs and for the sport that he practises. It is a moment of difficult struggle against pride, individualism, undignified feelings of superiority, unworthy chauvinism and craving for material benefits. It is the critical moment

which makes manifest the evil in the most direct and clear way. At this moment the human being is threatened by the forces opposed to "*kalos kagathos*". It is the moment of the most difficult test of a man who, as an Olympic winner, has reached the summit of an one-sided achievement. He will always require these ethical forces which at the moment of victory risk to be diminished to the minimum possible, because of the maximum possession of power as an Olympic winner.

For antiquity, the Olympic Games were a religious celebration of life's hardships and struggle. It is a celebration, which must lead to the most dynamic and efficient instruction in real life. The crisis of Olympism, the decay of the Olympic Games which are degenerating into a slow professionalism is due to the one-sided understanding of Olympic victory. *All institutions degenerate because of their weakness, but Olympism degenerates because of its power and material wealth.* The development of the Olympic Games in ancient times is proof of this rule. The history of the Olympic Games from 884 B.C. until their disappearance in 393 A.D. is the history of a glorious institution which perishes in its glory. We are experiencing the same itinerary within only the last eighty years of the existence of modern Olympic Games. We become more and more anxious spectators of the rapid growth of the modern Games because we are witnessing that within this growth there are the elements of corruption which are also growing.

Only a philosophy of the Olympic movement can help us to resist this one-sided growth which overlooks the sound principles of Olympism. We must study the purpose of the reorganisation of the Games by Pierre de Coubertin on the basis of the sound principles of ancient times and evaluate the way in which the Games are developing in the modern era.

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