COUBERTIN'S THEORY OF OLYMPIC INTERNATIONALISM: A CRITICAL REINTERPRETATION

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The steady, one could even say relentless, stream of criticism and controversy that has dogged international movements like the Olympics is part and parcel, I believe, of a widespread attack on Western moral ideals that purport to double as cross-cultural ideals, that offer themselves for export to other cultures both near and far. This spirited attack, which has become increasingly belligerent in tone of late, has been orchestrated by essentially two well coordinated and vocal groups: the first situated outside and the second inside the borders of the West. The outsiders have been led by a group of postcolonial writers, most hardened nationalists, who have powerfully railed against Western colonial occupation and its imperialist notion of Empire, but who in their contempt for everything Western have reproved even those vintage Western ideals like justice (fair social cooperation) that cast the West's own imperial past in an unflattering and damming light. The insiders have been headed by postmodern types and strident multiculturalists, who in pushing their controversial claim that all cultures are of equal worth have spared no opportunity (evidently undaunted by the inconsistency) to skewer Western culture - - letting it be known to all who care to listen that "we" would all be better off if the rich democracies of the West simply disappeared into the sea.[1]

What is curious about this full scale assault on Western moral ideals and their cultural diffusion is that it has been greeted in the West with a remarkable silence (save a rogue band of much maligned conservative defenders of the canon), a silence which, no doubt, explains the West's extraordinary inarticulacy regarding its own core ideals and its reticence to defend, let alone recommend, them to others. The timorous response is owed, I contend, partly to the doctrinal commitments and partly to the sentimental dispositions of Western liberalism. On the doctrinal side, those Westerners who call themselves "procedural" liberals insist that the state exercise neutrality regarding questions of the good, which redound, they argue, to the private deliberations of individuals, and instead focus on the right, on a system of justice that allows individuals to pursue their own dreams of the good life deterred only by the norm of fairness. While there is much to be said in favor of this procedural liberalism, it does not make for a lively defense of moral goods and their constitutive ideals because it banishes all discussion of such goods and ideals to the margins of public life. On the sentimental side, those Westerners who define themselves by their anti-ethnocentrism, whom Rorty calls "wet" liberals, are hard-pressed to see any meaningful distinction between cultural diffusion and cultural imperialism. That is why they constantly fret about cultural bias, about whether even the mere suggestion that the virtues of liberal democracy might be worth trying elsewhere is tantamount to shameless proselytizing. This sentimental liberalism also does not make for a defense of moral ideals, nor even for the recognition of being a part of a "great tradition," since "wet" liberals have lost their "capacity for moral indignation," have "become so open-minded that [their] brains have fallen out."[2]

It is this peculiar cultural climate, then, by turns bellicose and diffident, that accounts for the jaundiced reception of international movements like the Olympics. In pointing this out I am not suggesting that the Olympic movement should be insulated from criticism, that critics of the Games should be reproached merely for being critical of them. That would be an unfortunate, not to mention a dumb, thing to suggest since many of their objections, particularly to the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) well-worn and mind-numbing invocation of the principle sport and politics do not and should not mix - - itself a crass political tactic contrived to abet the spread of Olympism across the globe by circumventing the troubling moral obstacles that stand in its way (obstacles that bear directly on questions of cultural suppression and imperialism), are well founded ones.[3] But I am suggesting that the present hostile regard for Olympic internationalism runs together, in the spirit of the muckraking times in which we live, two things that ought to be kept separate: namely, the failure to live up to its lofty ideals and the worthiness of those moral ideals themselves. In other words, what the critics would have us believe is that the failure to abide Olympic ideals is itself a sign, indeed the most important sign, of the intrinsic weakness of those ideals. This is a half truth at best. For while ideals ought to be held at least in part accountable for what happens to them when they make their way into the real world, as Nozick forcefully writes "if time after time an ideal gets institutionalized and operates in the world a certain way, then that is what it comes to in the world,"[4] it is too dismissive, not to mention exculpatory, to hold them completely accountable for such. This is especially true in the present tendentious age, in which, to reiterate, the tendency to conflate moral failings with the failure of principled ideals is all the rage, and in which, therefore, open contempt for ideals like Olympic internationalism is the rule rather than the exception.

It is also too dismissive, not to mention foolhardy, to write off the moral precepts of Olympism, its commitment to international peace and such, given the precarious state of the present social world. That state suggests that while the social universe, like its physical counterpart, is constantly and simultaneously expanding and contracting, it is currently contracting at a much faster rate than it is expanding. The signs of this powerful contraction are too pervasive to miss and too unsettling to ignore. In North American and Western European countries it is manifest in the divisive struggles of marginalized cultural communities for social recognition and in some cases political sovereignty (the Basques and Catalans in Spain, Northern Ireland in Britain, the Quebecois and Inuits in Canada, the Flemings in Belgium, Blacks and Indians in the United States), in which special collective ethnic rights vie with universal individual ones and a radically pluralist and relativist canon contends with a central unifying one. In Eastern Europe it is manifest in the collapse of the Russian empire, which resulted, as we all too well know, in the recrudescence of ethnic nationalism and genocide.[5] And in formerly colonial outposts like Africa, it is manifest in the exponential growth of mini-states and tribal factions whose borders are marked by the blood of those whom they despise. With the disintegration of former Yugoslavia at hand, and with the Ivory coast on the brink of becoming what Robert Kaplan in his disturbing essay "The Coming Anarchy" calls the next "African Yugoslavia,"[6] it seems all too apparent that "we," in the most inclusive sense that can be mustered for this plural pronoun, would all be better off if the international notions of solidarity and mutual respect preached by Olympism and other Western and nonwestern institutions had greater currency than they presently have. The idea that we can get by without such morally crafted images in these trying times, that we are not in need of the stretching of our moral horizons that it is the job of such images to instigate, is perhaps the ultimate and most dangerous conceit of those critics we mentioned above who would sooner have us demean Western ideals like Olympic internationalism than reflectively redeem and rework them.

What must be done, then, to obtain greater currency for moral notions like Olympic internationalism? The answer, I believe, is to submit them to the scalpel of critical reflection. It is to make them the object of what Charles Taylor calls a critical "retrieval,"[7] by which he means a thorough and careful articulation of the higher ideals they stand for so that we might come closer to realizing them and to lifting up from their present debasement the social practices to which they are attached. In the particular case of Olympic internationalism, fortunately, this critical task is made easier by the fact that neither Coubertin nor his predecessors were "wet" liberals, which explains their zeal both in defending and seeking converts to Olympism.[8] Unfortunately, this task is made more difficult because neither Coubertin nor his predecessors, nor for that matter the Olympic charter that contained and codified their views - - which, I should add, is a surprisingly threadbare moral document, were either articulate expositors or consistent defenders of its core ideals. Nonetheless, Coubertin at least, particularly in his early writings, sketched out a preliminary conception of Olympic internationalism that I will reconstruct and make the basis of my own extended interpretation. But in working out this fuller view, in trying to articulate better the moral substance of Olympic internationalism, I shall be forced to go beyond what Coubertin actually said in order to "retrieve" the moral force of his founding vision of Olympism. My intent in doing so is to make up for any loss in (strict) historical precision with a gain in greater conceptual precision and rigor, a gain, I hope, that better renders Coubertin's original views of the moral point and import of the modern Games.

Coubertin's Theory of Olympic Internationalism

I argue here that Coubertin's theory of internationalism is best regarded as a kind of moral epistemology, a high sounding phrase which means that knowing others (their core beliefs, values, and forms of life) is the prerequisite to treating them with proper moral discernment and respect, to treating them as they ought to be treated. That would suggest that the point of seeking an international perspective on the diverse peoples with whom we share the planet is to be able to give an undistorted account of them, an account that captures them in terms of the very cultural features that make them different from us, that, at first, but not necessarily last, glance estrange and alienate them from us. Only in this way, I interpret Coubertin to be saying, can we reasonably hope to achieve solidarity with others without suppressing or deforming their cultural identity, without, that is, turning them into something they are not: clones of us.

However, Coubertin was not of the view that just any international perspective could do the job, could successfully expand our range of identification with, and moral respect for, others. That sort of identification and moral respect, he argued, could only be realized by what he called a "true" or "sincere" internationalism. So we need to distinguish straightaway, with Coubertin, between two kinds of internationalism: the first a facile and insincere simulacrum, the second the genuine and real thing.

This first, facile form actually divides into two separate variants, both of which trade in a phony and dangerous cosmopolitanism. The first cosmopolitan variant is a favorite of socialist, revolutionary, religious, theoretical, and utopian types. What unites these otherwise disparate folks is a longing for a world without borders and barriers, a "gigantic egalitarian world" unmarked, they would say unscarred, by ethnic and national differences.[9] Coubertin mused, correctly to my mind, that this sort of cosmopolitan impulse is best suited to those people who have no country, [10] for cosmopolitans only feel at home in unlimited and universal settings, regarding all particular settings as insufferable and scandalous limitations, as obstacles to be overcome not to be borne - - and never to be borne cheerfully. Accordingly, universal cosmopolitans insist that moral discernment cannot be had by expanding our cultural horizons, by making contact with other cultures different from ours, but only by annulling all such cultural horizons, by penetrating beyond all existing cultural perspectives. The idea is simple enough even if its realization is not: others can be seen in the right light and given their just due if and only if we abandon our situated perspective of them, how they look to us, in Nagel's words,[11] from the point of view somewhere, in favor of an unsituated, decontextualized perspective of them, how they look to us from the point of view nowhere. To cosmopolitans of this bent, therefore, putting one's life in some larger, more meaningful perspective, and extending one's moral identification with others, is always a matter of turning one's back on those cultural differences that distinguish peoples from one another (Germans from Algerians, Algerians from Americans) so as to identify with something that is the same, that is coincident with our humanness as such, that applies to all human beings once they are shorn of their cultural particulars.

Coubertin dismissed this yearning and search for an unrealizable fraternité as a naive and childish utopian urge, one presumably that can be eradicated by any proper maturation process worth its salt. But there are better grounds than this one for dismissing such undiluted cosmopolitanism, at least two better grounds to be exact.

The first ground is an epistemological one that contends that the cosmopolitan seeking after a point of view from nowhere is an unsupported and unsupportable pipe dream, an empty fiction. We have good reason to reject such a privileged vantage point, in other words, because there are no good grounds for believing that such a vantage point exists. To paraphrase MacIntyre, the best reason for holding that there is no such cosmopolitan perspective is of the same type as the best reason we have for holding that there are no witches or that there are no unicorns: every effort to give good reasons for believing there are such things has failed.[12] To put the same point yet another way, the belief in the existence of such transcendent perspectives should be rejected because it rests on a flawed sociology and anthropology: a sociology that would have us believe that the social contexts in which we live out our lives and the cultural marks that stamp us as the particular people that we are are accidents that can be ignored without loss of meaning or intelligibility, and an anthropology that would have us believe that who we really are has nothing important to do with the social roles that we play, the communities to which we belong, and the cultural resources they make available to us. This is a flawed sociology and anthropology because every time we plumb the depths of our beings and cultures what we find is not something natural, a priori, or transcendent, but something social, historical, and contingent. That is to say, what we find is precisely what we ourselves have put there, nothing more and nothing less.

The second ground for rejecting the search for a transcendent cosmopolitan perspective is that the whole enterprise is a fraudulent one. This criticism follows from the first. For if indeed there is no world beyond the particular social worlds in which we reside, and if there is no true self beyond the contingent selves that live in these no less contingent social worlds, then it turns out that the effort to secure a point of view from nowhere is not just a pipe dream but a bogus exercise, and a cruel one to boot. It is a bogus exercise because what is actually going on here is that one view from somewhere is being singled out from all the other views from somewhere and transformed, through the legerdemain of theoretical abstraction, into a universal view. In other words, what we have here is a disguised ethnocentrism that by turning the home understanding and vocabulary into something it is not, a perspectiveless vantage point, is able to pass off the knowledge gained from this alleged privileged position as so intrinsically compelling that it requires no justification. But, of course, there is nothing special about this knowledge, not at least in terms of the site from which it was gathered, and certainly nothing special about it that qualifies it as indubitable, as exempt from any epistemological requirement to justify what it has to say or any moral requirement to defend what standards of rectitude it aims to impose. What makes this bogus process a cruel one is that the particular cultural perspectives selected to serve in these universal legislative capacities belong - - surprise, surprise - - to the hegemonic cultures of the world, which means that it is the non-hegemonic, mostly non-western cultures that are singled out disproportionately for moral rebuke and censure.

The second cosmopolitan variant of "insincere" internationalism that Coubertin exposes is a favorite of the European leisured aristocracy, and increasingly the favorite of men, and presumably women, of letters, artists, journalists, and scientists. These people, Coubertin tells us, have succumbed to the traveling urge, have become modern-day nomads wandering all over the world in search of pleasure and adventure. But Coubertin actually has two types of nomadic cosmopolitans in mind here. The first type makes sure that its provincial and petty habits don't get disturbed by its gallivanting in foreign lands by setting up enclaves (hotels, restaurants, places of amusement) in those lands that cater to, indeed replicate down to the finest details, the home culture. This provides, Coubertin sarcastically observes, the illusion of having visited a distant country without having left one's own country. The second type insulates its native beliefs and values from those of the cultures visited by immersing itself in the daily habits and conventions of those cultures. Although this type of cosmopolitan wanderer learns more about the countries they visit than the first type (finding out, for example, the places that the locals frequent to imbibe, eat, and enjoy themselves), what they learn is hardly revelatory of the core beliefs and values of these cultures. After all, Coubertin asks, "what connection can possibly exist between the fact that Americans drink iced water and eat tried oysters and their methods of government and education?" [13]

When all is said and done, however, it is what these two types of cosmopolitan travelers share in common that is most important. And perhaps the most important thing they share in common is this tendency to stay on the surface of the cultures they come into contact with, this contentment to gaze at and mingle with others but not to study or penetrate them. It is this evident indisposition to do anything more strenuous, to do little more than accumulate a storehouse of pleasant memories of places visited, that calls to mind Baudelaire's flâneur, whose "spectator's posture" captures well the habits of these restless cosmopolitans.[14] But in calling Baudelaire's flâneur to mind I mean not just to round out Coubertin's unflattering portrait of these cosmopolitan types, but to set up what I regard to be his decisive rebuff of them. For what he finds repellent about them and the brand of cosmopolitanism they practice is precisely what links them to the idle and strolling manner of the flâneur: their indisposition to do anything more than skim the surface of the cultures they encounter, an indisposition which gives rise, he argues, to "all kinds of dangerous misunderstandings and illusions."[15] In the first case, those misunderstandings and illusions are owed to the cosmopolitan's almost total ignorance of what is going on outside its well-sealed enclaves; in the second, they are owed to the cosmopolitan's failure to break the crust of the conventions that enshroud the cultural life of the people they visit. In neither case, Coubertin sharply observes, is anything of real worth learned about these cultures nor is any ground established for a friendly relation and significant interaction with them.

If these two kinds of cosmopolitanism and their sub-types fall short, in Coubertin's eyes, as examples of "true" internationalism, then it may be reasonably asked what does qualify as "true" internationalism? What perspectives, in short, make the grade as genuine internationalist ones? Coubertin's answer is a detailed and nuanced one that breaks down roughly into two parts.

The first part of his answer is that a "true" and "sincere" internationalism must rest upon a no less "true" and "sincere" nationalism. This sets up Coubertin's important distinction between a patriotic (true) nationalism and a strident (facile) one.[16] Patriotic nationalism, as its name suggests, is rooted in a love of one's country. But it would be a mistake to treat this love of country as a blind instinctual and emotional one, as somehow incompatible with a reasoned and principle regard for country. As Ignatief argues, and Coubertin would readily concur, "we can give good grounds for loving our country . . . and we can love it in an open-eyed and disabused manner, consistent with the . . . commitment to reason and reflection."[17] It would equally be a mistake to treat love of country as somehow incompatible with a critical reckoning of its main faults and shortcomings. That is because finding fault with one's country, being ashamed of what it stands for when it acts badly toward others, presupposes that one strongly identifies with one's country not that one disavows it, that one cares enough about it to correct its mistakes and make right its mistreatment of others not that one could care less about it : otherwise shame is likely to give way to condescension and scorn or simple indifference. It would further be a mistake to treat love of country as incompatible with an interest in other countries and cultures, as an obstacle to an internationalist understanding and appreciation of such countries and cultures. The reason why, argued Coubertin, is that "internationalism should be the state of mind of those who love their country above all, who seek to draw to it the friendship of foreigners by professing for the countries of those foreigners an intelligent and enlightened sympathy."[18] In other words, true patriots treat their love of country not as an abstraction, not as an empty endorsement of the status quo, but as an exhortation, as a call to make it a better and richer place by bringing to its attention and possible edification the alternative forms of life of different cultures.

Strident nationalism, by contrast, is rooted in a hatred of others. This suggests, firstly, that it is incompatible with a critical regard for country, for its hatred of others turns on a pernicious misology: a hatred of enlightenment both about its own inflated and self-important view of itself as well as its stereotypically deprecatory view of others. It suggests, secondly, that since strident nationalism espouses a belief in Volkish essences that equate truth with blood-lines and racial features, it is incompatible with shame, with finding fault with the shortcomings of country. It suggests, lastly, that since strident nationalism trades in what Berlin tellingly refers to as a "pathological form of self-protective resistance,"[19] it is incompatible with "true" internationalism. Indeed, it would be more accurate to say that strident nationalism is contemptuous of "true" internationalism because it counsels peoples to be above all else true to themselves. The message is a clear one (and, of course, a distressing one) even if its precise regulative import is not: Germans should be Germans; Americans should be Americans, the English should be English; and everyone ought to resist any urge or suggestion to become second-rate, inferior versions of anybody else.[20]

In the effort to stem this obstreperous strain of nationalism and to prevent its sincere strain from developing in this direction, Coubertin argued that genuine nationalist sentiments must not only supplant disingenuous ones but must be complemented, and at times corrected, by genuine internationalist sentiments. This, then, is the second part of Coubertin's answer as to what constitutes "true" internationalism. And what this second part requires is that nations come into contact with other nations in order to broaden their cultural horizons and to stretch their moral sensibilities. The aim of this cross-cultural interchange is to engender mutual respect for the nations of the world, a virtue which, according to Coubertin, lies somewhere between a begrudging and indifferent acceptance of others (tolerance) and a naive and impossible love of others (fraternité)?[21] Since Coubertin's effort to steer internationalism away from an impossible love of others was the basis of his previously discussed distinction between universal cosmopolitanism and "true" internationalism, I now want to focus on his effort to steer it away from mere tolerance of others. For it is this latter distinction that holds the key to this second part of his conception of internationalism.

I want to argue that Coubertin's aim of getting the nations of the world to respect rather than merely to tolerate one another makes him a maximalist internationalist as opposed to a minimalist one. What is the difference? To begin with the second of these, minimalist internationalists are so called for three reasons: first, their main objective is to secure the survival of cultures; second, in the interest of realizing this objective they search for values and beliefs shared by all cultures; third, in the further interest of protecting these values from being overridden, particularly by hegemonic nations, they assume a proceduralist pose prescribing norms of justice, of fair and impartial conduct, and issuing injunctions against those who see fit to violate their statutes.[22] The first two reasons set limits on the number and kind of values minimalists trade in; with respect to number, such values will turn out to be few rather than many since they must be shared by all cultures; with respect to kind, such values will turn out to be thin, abstract, and vital ones since they must be easily recognized across cultures and must actually protect the essential interests of all nations (censuring such things as murder, arbitrary imprisonment abject poverty, torture, homelessness).[23]

It is the third reason, however, that explains why minimalists are above all else connoisseurs of tolerance. For as proceduralists who deal in norms of justice that can be prescribed cross-culturally in a manner that thicker ideals like friendship cannot,[24] they are guided foremost by the aim of talking nations out of the urge to kill one another off, of literally exterminating one another if given half a chance. The best way to realize this regulative aim, they reason, is to engage the nations of the world in a dialogue whose point is twofold: first, to get them to recognize their mutual interests, and second, to persuade them to set aside, and so to let rest, those interests that divide them off from, and often against, one another. The real point of this dialogue, then, is to instill in the nations of the world a tolerance of one another, for tolerance can be defined jointly as a matter of recognizing what we hold in common with others, recognizing as it were our common lot (which, per necessity, will be a narrow and carefully delimited set of interests), and agreeing, in effect, to ignore or at least not to probe those things we don't hold in common, those things that distinguish us from one another and about which their can be no social agreement, nor what Rawls calls overlapping consensus. While this conception of tolerance may "not require changing one's own values or adopting the norms of those tolerated,"[25] and while it does counsel against learning anything more about a culture than is necessary to ensure the goal of mutual survival, it has, minimalists are keen to point out, two important things going for it. First, it does require we exercise genuine moral constraint in our dealings with other cultures, particularly those on the brink, and, secondly, it does require that we treat all nations, even the most destitute and powerless, as real conversational partners in the endgame of survival. Considering the gravity of what is at stake here, it would be churlish to criticize too harshly the limited conversational setting that tolerance prescribes, to dwell too long on what is willfully excluded from this conversation in the effort to meet the demands of tolerance; for surely it is better that some such conversation take place than none at all, and if minimalists are right, this is the only sort of conversation that has a chance of getting off the ground in a deeply divided and conflicted world, that has a chance of having any discernible effect on the conduct of nations in the fractious international arena.

While it might be churlish to criticize unduly or to trivialize the conversational settings that minimalists, in deference to virtues like tolerance, encourage and privilege, it would not be churlish, from Coubertin's standpoint at any rate, to criticize them for failing to cash in on the pacific potential of more ambitious, open-ended, and so potentially more contentious conversational settings. In seeking to cash in on the pacific potential of such conflict-riven conversations Coubertin's internationalism falls into the maximalist category. It does so for three reasons: first, it seeks the flourishing of nations not their mere survival; second, in trying to rejuvenate and revitalize nations it searches for novel, different, alternative values not shared ones; third, in the effort to acquire a larger stock of values, beliefs, and forms of life from nations the world over it takes on a substantialist cast rather than a proceduralist one, in which the prescription of cross-cultural standards of justice takes a second seat to the importation of new values through intercultural exchange, and in which the detached coolness and diffidence of tolerance gives way to the involved and impassioned interest in the goings-on of others.

The first two reasons remove many of the limits minimalists place on the number and kind of values maximalists like Coubertin trade in. With respect to number, the values exchanged will turn out to be many rather than few since they traffic in cultural differences not around them. With respect to kind, the values traded will turn out to be thick, concrete, and full-bodied ones rather than thin and abstract ones since, once again, they will be keyed to the promotion of cultural differences not their elimination.

It is the third reason, however, that shows Coubertin, not to mention his maximalist compatriots, to be a connoisseur of respect. For as a trader in "full blooded," substantive values unearthed from the diverse, and in some cases radically diverse, cultural resources (beliefs, values, forms of life) of the nations of the world, Coubertin was of the conviction that international order and harmony is contingent upon frequent and intense contact between nations, that is, on talking nations into having more, not less, to do with each other. The best way to accomplish this regulative idea, he thought, was to engage the nations of the world in a wide-ranging and probing dialogue regarding their often not easily recognizable or understandable cultural differences, to risk conflict and open up the conversation to alternative points of view that strain the status quo by sending the conversation off into new directions. But to open up the cultural conversation in this way, Coubertin argued, it is necessary that nations respect rather than merely tolerate one another. That is because respecting other nations is a matter of enlarging and deepening our knowledge of them not of constricting and bracketing such knowledge so that we might reach agreement with them over a narrowly defined, and antecedently held, set of common interests; it is a matter of learning more about other nations by penetrating their hardened exteriors and dissembling conventions not of maintaining a studied indifference to them by remaining on their surface. The path that must be traversed to respect another nation is, therefore, the same path that must be traversed to learn about and from it; in both cases it is to be negotiated by reversing the home perspective, by, to paraphrase Coubertin, trying to get outside of ourselves by asking how something might look if we were members of a different culture. For Coubertin "this manner of forming one's judgment is the only one which affords any chance of arriving at the truth and consequently of doing any good."[26]

Coubertin's maximalist reading of internationalism, then, contains its own recipe for international peace, one that differs in each of its particulars from the minimalist reading he took pains to distinguish his conception of internationalism from. The main ingredient of his recipe, I interpret him to be saying, is that a concern for the flourishing- of cultures cannot so easily be dissociated from a concern for the survival of cultures. It cannot so easily be dissociated because, first of all, cultures that are flourishing are less likely to engage in bellicose saber-rattling with their neighbors. Secondly, flourishing cultures are, as we have seen, active learning cultures, cultures that are more interested in finding out what new things their neighbors might be up to and what new, exotic beliefs they might hold, than what things and beliefs they already share in common. And with that learning comes the chance, odd as it may at first seem, to extend the number of things (beyond simply matters of fair social cooperation) about which it is possible for nations to reach consensus. And lastly, flourishing cultures are, as we have also seen, cultures that respect other cultures for, not in spite of, their differences, that go about the often arduous task of understanding others by loading their own moral imaginations and epistemological stocks of beliefs with the images and beliefs of the cultures they study. This makes for a more robust peace, a more vibrant international order, because it makes the world safe for pluralism by encouraging its upsurge rather than pluralism safe for the world by encouraging its enervation

These two elements, then, the conjoining of a sincere nationalism with a sincere internationalism (together with the image of world harmony they project), constitute the core of Coubertin' theory of internationalism. But, of course, they do not yet constitute the core of his theory of Olympic internationalism because they make no mention of the pivotal role sports, to be precise, symbolically weighted international sports, play in that theory. So we need to situate sports in his theory of internationalism and ask what features they possess that lend themselves to international understanding and peace, to the curbing of recreant nationalist stirrings and the achievement of an international perspective that packs real moral firepower? This is an important question if only because sports are not usually thought of as international political vehicles because either they are considered too light a vehicle to carry such heavy political baggage or too much a vehicle of nationalist passions to carry enlightened international ones. It is also an important question for Coubertin himself, since at the time of the writing of his "Does Cosmopolitan Life Lead to International Friendship?" essay at least he argued that the study of other cultures, particularly of their political histories, was the "true secret of international friendship."[27] We are led, then, back to our original question: what special features do (international) sports possess that prompted Coubertin to think they could foster (and I take it from his own Herculean efforts to revive the games that his firm conviction was they could do a better job of this than most anything else) international harmony and solidarity?

His answer, I argue, is that sports contain two such features that, when properly symbolized and conceptualized, make them ideal vessels of international goodwill. The first of these features has to do, Coubertin argues, with the fact that sports provide an opportunity for "impassioned soaring" that evinces a "healthy drunkenness of the blood."[28] Coubertin doubtless linked this transporting capacity of sports to a "healthy drunkenness" because it involves a raising and an intensification of human experience rather than an obliteration of such experience, which is a trademark of far too many contemporary forms of cultural expression, and because the intensification of experience it impels is a structurally bounded and carefully regulated one. This points to the rule governed and perfectionist character of sport practices. For sports are structurally bounded practices because they are rule-derived and driven ones, and they are perfectionist practices because their founding rules not only install unambiguous standards of excellence but make possible as well their realization by allowing practitioners to summon all their energy and to focus all their attention on the accomplishment of sublime athletic feats. Further, since the standards of excellence set in place by those rules ask, in fact demand, that athletes do more, indeed much more, than what is ordinarily asked of them in everyday life, sports are far more revelatory of the mores and beliefs of the disparate peoples that engage in them than other less demanding and more conventional practices. Hence, it is this telescoping of human effort and this continuous raising of the stakes of what is expected of athletes, which is in part reflected in the official Olympic slogan Citius, Altius, Fortius,[29] that accounts, in Coubertin's eyes at any rate, for sports' "impassioned soaring" and explains how sports played out on an international stage provide not just an occasion for mingling with other cultures but for penetrating their core beliefs and aspirations.[30]

If sports are to be more than devices for culture-mingling, however, if they are to be genuine devices of "impassioned soaring," then they must also be able to bring people together in some strong sense of the word together. For they must not only arouse people's interest in a focal event, after all, this is what the mass media does on a daily, uninspired basis, they must further wed people to that event in a way that bears directly on their cultural identity as a people. And this sports do more frequently, and perhaps more profoundly, than most anything else -- which is why Coubertin fastened on this bringing-together capacity of sports as the second feature that recommends their use as international exchange devices. How else are we to explain the fact that formerly colonial countries like the West Indies often show more interest in how their home cricket team is faring than how they are faring economically and politically as a people, or how in Islamic cultures like Algeria the remarkable athletic triumphs of Algerian runners such as woman's gold medal 1500 meter winner Hassiba Boulmerka can unite a deeply divided country, a feat made all the more remarkable by her violation of the Muslim practice of purdah (which decrees the segregation and discrimination of women and, among other things, the mandatory veiling of women from head to toe).[31] And, of course, it is not just poor, developing countries that place such national stock in their athletic representatives, that view them as their very own personal and cultural emissaries, but rich, developed ones as well. Even in stodgy old and culturally sophisticated England the failure of the national soccer team to qualify for the World Cup is often an occasion for national mourning, not to mention self-incriminating introspection. And what is true of England is no less true of its former colony America where sports are, as is true of these other countries and continents as well, also an occasion for more local forms of expression. Maya Angelou's poignant retelling of her and her friends experiences and feelings while gathered in her grandmother's store listening to a radio broadcast of a Joe Louis fight is a case in point. Whenever Louis seemed in danger of losing the match, she relates, "it was not just one black man against the ropes, it was our people falling. It was another lynching, yet another black man hanging on a tree. One more woman ambushed and raped. A black boy whipped and maimed. . . . We didn't hope. We waited."[32] When Louis squared off against the German boxer, and Nazi propaganda tool, Max Schmeling in 1938 this local expression of black unity quickly mushroomed into a national expression of American unity as his white sisters and brothers joined their black counterparts in urging Lewis on, in breathlessly awaiting his fate.

What these examples show, and what, no doubt, countless other examples would also show, is that Coubertin's hunch about the representational prowess of sports was right on the mark. What they also show is that to the people who so strongly identify with sports it is not enough to just watch them, to observe casually their goings on and outcomes. Rather, it seems that they must insert themselves into the action itself; that they must submerge their own individual identities and social identity as a people into their athletic representatives; that they must measure the worth of their own lives, divine their meaning, interpret their course, and gauge their effect all with an eye to the fortunes of their athletic heroes on the field. This is powerful stuff, and when all goes right it makes for a powerful form of intercultural exchange.

But what these examples and countless others also show, a critic might well retort, is that the "bringing-people-together" capacity of representational sports is a limited one at best, confined for the most part to the expression of particular, partisan, national interests rather than international ones. This is indeed powerful stuff, a critic might continue, but not for the reason Coubertin suggested, that it might spark an outpouring of internationalist sentiment that draws the nations of the world closer together, but for the reason his arch rival French nationalist Charles Maurras suggested, that it might spark an outpouring of chauvinist sentiment that drives the nations of the world apart and against one another. It won't do, in the effort to disarm the critic, to respond that since internationalist tendencies spring from nationalist ones the fact that sports bring the members of particular countries together means that sooner or later they will do the same for the international community. The problem with this, as we have argued, is that only genuine nationalist stirrings give rise to genuine internationalist ones, and it is at least an open question as to whether sports stoke this kind of nationalist feeling or the more virulent and destructive kind. And even if we can be sure that sports incite the right kind of nationalism, they must still be complemented, as we have also argued, by internationalist elements. The right response to our hypothetical critic, then, is the one that Coubertin himself gave, sports must be invested with the proper political and cultural symbolism if their representative power, and indeed their "impassioned soaring," is to have the desired international effect, if they are not to degenerate into crude displays of nationalistic excess.

But, Coubertin admonishes, it is not just a matter of knowing what symbols to load sports with to make them vessels of international good will, it is also a matter of knowing where to locate those symbols within the folds of sport practices. This explains why Coubertin resisted efforts either to tamper with the competitive character of sports or to weaken their nationalist connections. For to diminish the competitive intensity of sports by turning them into largely bland cooperative affairs, as some critics of the Games would have us do,[33] would only undermine, in Coubertin's view, their "impassioned soaring," their capacity to draw us out of our everyday cocoons, in which our daily habits and conventions conspire to conceal from us what we might be capable of if given a chance to break out from their stultifying constraints. And to insist that all traces of nationalism be expunged from the Games, either by clothing all athletes in a common uniform or by barring the playing of national anthems and the display of national flags or by having nationally mixed teams compete with one another, would only succeed, again in Coubertin's estimation, in deadening the nationalist identifications that bona fide internationalist ones draw their inspiration and vitality from. In either case, the outbreak of an unhealthy drunkenness of the blood would doubtless be checked, but at the too costly price of stopping up the lifelines of the Games themselves, of depriving them of the very blood they need to nourish and sustain themselves and to actuate their international commitments.

What sites within the precincts of sport practices, then, it may fairly be inquired, should these internationally tinctured symbols be lashed to? The answer, Coubertin opined, is their beginning and ending points. And so the idea was hatched of marking off the opening and closing of each Games, to include the "closing" (completion) of each athletic competition within the Games, with a carefully staged and politically inflected symbolic ceremony. Hence, the Opening Ceremonies are, MacAloon tells us, "rites of separation" from ordinary life whose point is not only to signal the special significance of the Games but to prepare everyone for the extraordinary events to follow.[35] The Opening Ceremonies also convey, through the mixing of national and Olympic flags and symbols, the complex and delicate interplay of national and international meanings that define the overarching political point of the Games. Further, the first set of recurring closing ceremonies, the Victory Ceremonies for the winners of each athletic event, accent the same interweaving of national and international themes featured in the Opening Ceremonies. In particular, they honor the winners exemplary accomplishments first by acknowledging their significance to the larger Olympic community, through the bestowal of Olympic medals and olive branches pruned from the grove of Zeus at Archaia Olympia, and second by acknowledging the significance of the victors' accomplishments to their respective nations, through the hoisting of the national flags and the playing of the gold medal winner's national anthem. Finally, the second set of closing ceremonies, which commemorate the closing of the Games themselves, are "rites of reaggregation" with ordinary life, in which international symbols pointedly dwarf national ones. These ceremonies stress the themes of international friendship and mutual respect and are most memorably marked by the athletes of the Olympic nations, some one hundred and ninety by last count, marching in unison, often hand in hand if not arm in arm, without any placard or flag to indicate their nationality.

If the above ceremonies supply the Games with the symbolic boost they need to overcome the centripetal forces of nationalism, we are still left with the question of how to conceptualize properly the manner in which sports actually serve as cultural bridges between nations, of how they carry out such difficult cross-cultural feats. In fact, we are left with two pressing problems that if they prove to be intractable would scuttle Coubertin's efforts to hook up his theory of internationalism with his theory of sports as political instruments - - notwithstanding their "impassioned soaring" and their ability to captivate the nations of the world over.

There is firstly the straightforward and simpler problem of how to conceive of sports, which are bound by their own rule-derived formal rationality and so evidently preoccupied with the imperatives that flow from that rationality, as transmitters of culturally encoded messages. There is secondly the deeper and thornier question of how to conceive of sports as offering some way out of, for lack of a better word, our epistemological predicament: the fact that we are inescapably tethered to our home vocabularies and forms of life. For here Coubertin's political designs on sports seem to collide with what I referred to earlier as his moral epistemology, which stipulated, or so I argued, that our knowledge of and access to others must be gained by way of particular, perspective-dependent vantage points (which would, at first glance at any rate, make them seem more like semantic monads than not) , rather than universal (cosmopolitan), perspectiveless vantage points. In the little time I have remaining, I can do little more than consider what sorts of difficulties these problems may or may not pose for Coubertin's larger theory.

In claiming that the first problem mentioned above is the simpler of the two problems that Coubertin's theory confronts I have already tipped my hand that it doesn't seriously jeopardize his theory. To see why I need only reprise the argument that underpins this problem. The argument is that since sports are tightly defined and demarcated practices that lay down to their practitioners not only what rigorous perfectionist standards are to be met but how they are to be met, they simply overwhelm practitioners with their performance requirements to the point that they can do little else but direct all their attention to trying to meet their stiff requirements. In other words, the performance constraints of sports are such that they take up all the conscious effort and focus of their practitioners, and while this frees up athletes, as I earlier argued, to exploit their athletic talents to the fullest, it also deprives them of any reflective space in which to say something more about themselves and the nations whence they come. In a word, they are too busy engaged in action to be able to tell us anything about themselves that is not already apparent from their athletic comportment. So while sports are luminous sites of action and interaction they are opaque sites of cultural expression, blocking the kind of cultural expression required by Coubertin's notion of sincere internationalism.

The flaw in this argument is not difficult to spot, and, fortunately, theorists of sports and of Olympic sports have not succumbed to its specious charm. The flaw concerns the dubious distinction drawn between action and narration, a distinction which would have us believe that narrative expression, or more simply discourse, is what occurs only after all action has ceased, that, in other words, discourse is a special faculty (traditionally reserved for the fine arts and other select technical disciplines) that kicks in only when the dust has settled and the mind (or whatever one wants to call it) has had the opportunity to absorb and reflect on what has happened and what it all means. The way to get around this suspiciously narrow rendering of discourse in the case of action-packed practices like sports was worked out some time ago by Clifford Geertz in his justly famous analysis of the Balinesse cockfight.[36] Geertz pointed out was that sports do just what defenders of high filutin discourse claim they cannot do: provide rich and dramatic occasions for people to tell stories about themselves. They do so, Geertz tells us further, not in spite of their action-dominated features, not, that is, by smuggling in, unbeknownst to the casual observer, extra-practice reflective moments to sort out and capture the significance of what has occurred, but by stylizing the action to suit their own cultural purposes, demeanor, and meaning (the rich contrasting styles of play in evidence at the recent World Cup soccer matches are a case in point). Sports, in other words, are cultural texts that speak a language all their own, a language in which, and this is its distinguishing mark, the telling lies in the action itself. That is why any distinction between action and narration must be abandoned with regard to performance genres like sports. And this lesson has not been lost on theorists of Olympic sports like MacAloon, who have been patiently telling us for some time now that storytelling is central to what the Games are all about, that what occurs every Olympiad is "a feast of storytelling" in which athletes from all over the world get a chance "to tell stories about themselves by telling stories about other peoples."[37]

But while Geertz's rendering of sports as cultural texts explains how they are able to send and receive culturally encoded messages it leaves unexplained whether any of those messages say anything meaningful or intelligible once they cross cultural boundaries. Here we encounter the second problem discussed previously which implicates Coubertin's moral epistemology, specifically, three key implicit premises that underpin this moral epistemology. Those premises are, first, that there are no privileged universal/cosmopolitan vantage points from which to view the world as it really is and the peoples that make it up as they really are; second, that our understanding of others is always, therefore, skewed and colored by the standards and beliefs of our home cultures; third, that we live in a world of, to use Lyotard's poignant phrase, "insurmountably diverse" cultures. The conclusion that follows from these premises is the distressing one that the cultures of the world are inscrutable to one another. They are inscrutable to one another because they are each immured in their own ethnocentric crannies, because the first order beliefs by which they live and the second order beliefs by which they justify the way they live both bear the indelible mark of their particular socialization. That means, therefore, that we stand to learn nothing form the beliefs and justificatory practices of other cultures because we have no way of assessing the rational and normative worth of their beliefs vis-à-vis our beliefs, no way, that is, to see how their beliefs play in our language games and how ours play in theirs.

It is not difficult to see how Coubertin's implicit moral epistemology, at least as I have interpreted here, plays havoc with his theory of internationalism and with his conception of sports as international political vehicles. For if we lack a common language with which to speak intelligibly to one another, with which to understand our differences let alone to sort them out, then what Coubertin calls "sincere internationalism" is, in fact, a sham, a pipe dream no less utopian than its cosmopolitan variant insofar as both falsely presume that we can get outside our own skins to understand and judge others. So sincere internationalism turns out to be, Coubertin's disclaimer notwithstanding, no more effective a prescription for international friendship than cosmopolitanism was, since what it conveys is not a richer understanding of others but a cacophony of discordant voices, a, as it were, Babel of tongues.

While this second argument is not without its own specious allure, it is a more powerful argument than the first, and so constitutes a more significant threat to Coubertin's theory of Olympic internationalism -- one that to date theorists of Olympic sports have scarcely noticed let alone taken seriously. MacAloon is something of an exception here noting how cultural gaps show up among member nations even with regard to the official Olympic menu of sports. As he observes, "the average American can make just about as much out of judo, team handball, or biathlon as the average Sri Lankan can out of basketball, or the average Kenyan out of gymnastics, ice hockey, or synchronized swimming."[38] But, alas, the upshot of this second argument is that the gaps are more far-reaching and deeper than these, extending even to the meanings of those sports that are mutually shared and played by Olympic nations, meanings that also, evidently, do not carry across cultural borders, not at least without apparent distortion. Hence, if Coubertin's rendering of the Olympic movement is to attain the genuine international stature that it aspires to, it must come to grips with this vexing feature of its moral epistemology.

Concluding Remarks

This completes my reinterpretation of Coubertin's theory of Olympic internationalism. In closing, I want to show that the alternative conception of social criticism that informs my reinterpretation, which unlike its muckraking rival contends that social criticism is only as good as the moral sources (ideals) that underpin it (the important corollary of which is that when those moral sources fail us they must either be refashioned or a search for new ones instigated), gives us something genuinely critical to say about whatever it is called upon to interpret and scrutinize, be it Coubertin's theory of Olympic internationalism or any other such theory. For this purpose, I want to use Guttmann's recent criticism of the Olympics as my point of departure.

Guttmann argues that the "root difficulty" of the Games "is that modern sports, like the universalistic political ideals institutionalized in the Olympic Games, are themselves a product of Western civilization. Paradoxically, the success of the baron's dream is one of the things that prevents the dream's full and complete realization."[39] I think that Guttmann is on to something important here, but I want to offer a slightly different reading of what that something is in order to bring out its critical importance. I would rephrase Guttmann's criticism to read that the "root difficulty" of the Olympics is not that the political ideals that lie behind them are Western but that the sports that make them up are (meaning not just that most of those sports were minted in the West, which is true enough, but that all of them were and are framed and conceptualized in Western terms). My version of Guttmann's criticism differs from his in that it endeavors to separate more cleanly the moral precepts of Olympism from the practice of passing off Western sports as quintessential Olympic ones, which I regard to be a clear and direct violation of those precepts. I think it is important to separate these two things because the political ideals of Olympism have an international resonance to them that its official program of sports do not. That is why I regard the Western derivation of those ideals to be unproblematic, for what counts here is not the historical lineage of those ideals, to insist on this is to take us precariously close to the ideal-bashing genre of social criticism I decry, but whether those ideals speak to cultural differences, whether they recognize them and provide for their flourishing. And it is because I have contended that Olympic ideals speak to those cultural differences more persuasively and more forcefully than its main postcolonial, postmodern, multicultural rivals, that I have stressed their international salience.

But I can draw the point more sharply than this and in a way that better underscores the critical promise of the brand of social criticism I espouse here. For I now want to say that it is the very political ideals of the Games that warrant our criticism of their exclusive use of Western sports in the first place, that justify our contention that this conflation of Olympic sports with Western sports is not only misguided but politically and morally wrongheaded. The reason why is as obvious as it is powerful. If the point of staging international athletic encounters between the peoples of the world is as these ideals suggest, to foster international friendship and solidarity, then it can scarcely be denied that excluding the indigenous sporting cultures of nonwestern nations from those encounters contravenes that political aim. Absent this ideal then, or something else very much like it, we would be hard pressed to say that the heavy Western slant of Olympic sports is politically and morally troublesome.

But it cuts even deeper than this. For absent this ideal or something closely resembling it we would be hard pressed to offer any remedy for this self-defeating Western bias - - assuming, per impossible, that we recognized it as a bias to begin with. That is because the discrepancy between Olympic ideal and practice evident here not only serves as a kind of diagnostic tool that tell us what is wrong with slighting nonwestern sports in such international contexts, but provides us with a ready and effective remedy. And that remedy is that if Coubertin's maximalist brand of athletic internationalism is to succeed, which prescribes closer and more intense contact between nations and their characteristic thick practices and ways of life than that allowed by the thin, procedural constraints of tolerance, then it must be inclusive of the moral minimum even if it need not be continuous with or derived from it. In other words, if the idea of risking more open-ended conversational settings is to send the cultural conversation off into heretofore uncharted territory then minimalist concerns about fairness, that each discussant in the conversation have a voice and that that voice be heard with sympathetic ears, cannot and should not be ignored even if their counsel to avoid such risks and agree to disagree about cultural differences can and should be ignored.

On this particular minimalist score then, the Olympics have been, despite a few notable exceptions,[40] a dismal failure. Their failure is a dismal one because it goes well beyond their dubious championing of Western sports and extends to the decidedly undemocratic style of governance and operation of their ruling body, the International Olympic Committee. The problem here, to put it bluntly, is that the IOC is disproportionately made up of white, male North Americans and Europeans who are subject to little if any democratic oversight or scrutiny, and whose decision-making, therefore, is largely unchecked by democratic constraints. But, I hasten to add, this failure is not owed to the Games' maximalist political and moral ideals, but, contrarily, to their transgression of those ideals. More particularly, it stems from a failure of moral vision and articulation, a failure to see that political and moral maximalism has a vested, even if a carefully delimited, interest in political and moral minimalism, in matters of basic justice and fairness. That is why I remain convinced that it is those who encourage such myopic thinking (and here the debunkers who delight in tearing down moral ideals at the first sign of trouble are joined by the charlatans who disdain the moral ideals they hide behind), and not the ideals that are the object of their derision, that deserve our contempt and reproach. For they would have us turn our backs on the moral sources that enliven social practices and institutions like the Olympics at the same time that they open them up to telling social criticism. We can do without these naysayers and hypocrites, but we cannot do without-these moral ideals.

Footnotes:

1. I should further note that this attack on the moral resourcefulness of the West has also been made by its friends, by those who proudly proclaim themselves to be Westerners, even quintessential Westerners. I have in mind here no-nonsense pragmatic types, or more simply technological pragmatists, who pride themselves on their realism and on their ability to get immediate results, and who see an incontrovertible connection between their realism (anti-idealism) and their technical knack for satisfying needs. Such pragmatists, who view their technical cunning and daring, their willingness to do things in new ways, as the only kind of adaptability needed to deal with people different from themselves (and so as superior in this respect at least to nebulous moral values like tolerance of others), need no convincing, then, that they can get along famously without the benefit of moral ideals. That is why they would not dream of passing on to other cultures anything other that their technical know-how and can-do spirit.

2. Richard Rorty, Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 203.

3. I should mention, however, that even the most severe critics of this hypocritical doctrine of the

absolute separation of sport and politics concede that if the Games were to become mere pawns of realpolitik they would be irreparably damaged. The sad plight of Youssef Nagui Assad, a shot putter from Cairo, is a powerful symbol of such base politization of Olympic sports. In 1968, at the age of twenty-three, he missed qualifying for the Egyptian national team by two centimeters. In 1972, he made the team only to be called home to show common cause with the Palestinians. In 1976, he again qualified and traveled to Montreal, but this time was summoned home to protest New Zealand's rugby ties to South Africa. And in 1980, now thirty-five years of age, he made the team but was barred from competing in Moscow because Egypt boycotted the games to protest Russia's invasion of Afghanistan. I owe this point to Allen Guttmann's fine book The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 141.

4. Robert Nozick, The Examined Life (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1989), p. 279.

5. Isaiah Berlin referred to the collapse of the Russian empire, correctly to my mind, as the last act of deconstruction of the Enlightenment ideals of unity [and] universality. See his the Return of the Volkgeist, New Perspective Quarterly (Fall, 1991), p. 6.

6. Robert Kaplan, The Coming Anarchy, The Atlantic Monthly (February, 1994), p. 49.

7. Charles Taylor, The Ethics of Authenticity (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 72.

8. More fortunate still, Coubertin at least did not share a view held by many classical liberals of his time, a view which, like its socialist variant, maintained that national, ethnic identities and attachments were atavistic throwbacks that would soon be displaced by a cosmopolitan individual (and in the case of socialism an international proletarian class). Coubertin held no such view arguing instead that the development of national identities was not only compatible with but crucial to the development of individual identities , a point which he made a central feature of the modern Games and, accordingly, part of the boilerplate of the Olympic Charter.

9. Pierre De Coubertin, Notes sur L'Education, quoted in Dietrich R. Quanz, Civic Pacifism and Sports-Based Internationalism: Framework for the Founding of the International Olympic Committee, Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies (1993), p. 18.

10. Pierre De Coubertin, Does Cosmopolitan Life Lead to International Friendliness?, The American Monthly Review of Reviews (April, 1898) p. 434.

11. Thomas Nagel, The View from Nowhere (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

12. Alaisdair MacIntyre, After Virtue (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) p. 69.

13. Does Cosmopolitan Life Lead to International Friendliness?, p. 431.

14. On this point see Foucault's essay What is Enlightenment?, in The Foucault Reader, Paul Rainbow (ed.), (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

15. Coubertin, Memoires Olympiques, p. 108, as quoted in John Hoberman's book The Olympic Crisis: Sport, Politics and the Moral Order (New Rochelle, N. Y.:Aristide D. Caratzas Publisher, 1986), p. 51.

16. I leave aside for now the presumption implicit in Coubertin's distinction, and I should add in the work of most other observers of the world scene until very recently, that nations are the basic unit of social organization. Kaplan suggests the tenuousness of this claim in The Coming Anarchy, p. 72, where he writes that the classificatory grid of nation-states is going to be replaced by a jagged-glass pattern of city states, shanty states, nebulous and anarchic regionalisms.

17. Michael Ignatief, Boundaries of Pain, New Republic 18 (November, 1993), p. 36.

18. Does Cosmopolitan Life Lead to International Friendliness?, p. 434.

19. Isaiah Berlin, The Bent Twig: On the Rise of Nationalism, in The Crooked Timber of Humanity (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), p. 260.

20. Something very much like this virulent strain of nationalism greeted Coubertin's own efforts to internationalize the sporting pastimes of his French compatriots, who rebuked his introduction of English sports to the lycées on the grounds that it asked the French to do the unthinkable: to be unFrench. On this point, see Eugen Weber's essay Pierre de Coubertin and the Introduction of Organized Sport in France, Journal of Contemporary History 5 (1970), p. 11.

21. Pierre de Coubertin, Le Respect Mutuel, pp. 14-5, as quoted in John MacAloon , The Turn of Two Centuries: Sport and the Politics of Intercultu-

ral Relations, Sport: The Third Millennium, F. Landry, M. Landry, M. Yerles (eds.), (Saint-Foy: Les Presses De L'Universite Laval, 1991), p. 33.

22. For this account of minimalism I am indebted to the following sources, Sissela Bok, The Search for a Shared Ethics, 3 Common Knowledge (Winter, 1992); Stuart Hampshire, Innocence and Experience (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Michael Walzer, Moral Minimalism, in From the Twilight of Probability: Ethics and Politics. W. Shea and A. Spadafora (eds.), (Canton, Mass.: Science History Publications, 1992).

23. Stuart Hampshire, Innocence and Experience, p. 90.

24. Bok, The Search for a Shared Ethics, p. 18.

25. Nick Fotion and Gerard Elfstrom, Toleration (Tuscalosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992), p. 132.

26. Does Cosmopolitan Life Lead to International Friendliness?, p. 433.

27. Does Cosmopolitan Life Lead to International Friendship?, p. 433. Richard Rorty recently issued an aesthetic variant of Coubertin's answer when he argued that those in the best position to mediate encounters between cultures are writers whose novels and memoirs reflect in their personal lives the tension between cultures, writers such as Salman Rushdie and V. S. Naipaul. See his A Pragmatist View of Rationality and Cultural Difference, Philosophy East & West (October, 1992) p. 593.

28. Pierre de Coubertin, The Olympic Idea, p. 32, as quoted in John MacAloon, Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies, p. 256, in Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance. John MacAloon (ed.), (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984).

29. I should add this is the good part of the official Olympic slogan Citius, Altius, Fortius, the part which while it gives license to the technical quest to enhance performance, to realize the perfectionist demands of sports, subordinates that quest to the overarching political aims of Olympic sports. In this regard, it is also worth commenting that although Avery Brundage was hardly an articulate or consistent defender of Olympic ideals, his response to those who criticized the decision to hold the 1968 Games in Mexico City because its high altitude would adversely affect the level of athletic performances was a telling one. He simply pointed out to the critics that The Olympic Games belong to all the world, not the part of it at sea level. Quoted in Allen Guttmann, The Olympics: A History of the Olympic Games, p. 133.

30. My coupling of Coubertin's characterization of sport as an impassioned soaring with its capacity for cultural penetration bears out his earlier privileging of respect over tolerance as the virtue most appropriate to international practice. For since toleration is exercised, argues Stanley Fish, in an inverse proportion to there being anything at stake, it follows that the more that is stake the less tolerant we will become. That means, obviously enough, that when the stakes of athletic games rise, as they ineluctably must given their intrinsic character, we must count on virtues like respect rather than tolerance to ensure that things don't get out of hand, that all hell doesn't break loose. For Fish's rendering of what he half-jokingly refers to as his first law of tolerance-dynamics see his There's No Such Thing As Free Speech: And It's a Good Thing Too (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 217.

31. However, the picture is not all rosy on the Algerian front. For a few months after Boulmerka's world championship success she was issued a Kofr -- an official condemnation of her violation of purdah, and for a time before her gold medal triumph in Barcelona she found it necessary, for her own safety and peace of mind, to train in Europe.

32. As quoted in Allen Guttmann, Sports Spectators (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 182.

33. See for instance the criticisms of German futurologist Robert Jungk discussed in John Hoberman's book The Olympic Crisis: Sports, Politics, and the Moral Order (New Rochelle, New York: Aristide D. Caratzas Publisher, 1986), pp. 124-5.

34. Nationally mixed teams were, however, a feature of the Games of 1896 and 1900 in doubles and mixed doubles tennis and in the 5,000 meter relay in track., without, it seems, apparent detrimental or positive effect See Guttmann, The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games, pp. 18-9, p. 24.

35. My account of these three Olympic ceremonies is merely a gloss of MacAloon's more detailed analysis. In this regard, see his Double Visions: Olympic Games and American Culture, The Kenyon Review (Winter, 1982), pp. 106-12.

36. Clifford Geertz, Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight, Daedalus (Winter, 1972), pp. l-37.

37. John MacAloon, This Great Symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the Origins of the Modern Olympic Games (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 267; John MacAloon, Double Visions: Olympic Games and American Culture, p. 111.

38. Double Visions: Olympic Games and American Culture, p. 100. MacAloon purposely ignores here the added difficulty that most Olympic sports are of European and North American descent. I will have something to say about this in my closing remarks.

39. The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games, p. 172.

40. I refer here not so much to the human rights statutes of the Olympic Charter - - for as important as these are they have seldom influenced in any forceful or sustained way the actions of the IOC, but to, for example, the establishment of Olympic Solidarity, which provides technical and financial assistance to third-world member nations.