

Pierre de Coubertin's Ideology of Olympism from the Perspective of the History of Ideas

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Healthy democracy, wise and peaceful internationalism, will penetrate the new stadium and preserve within it the cult of honour and disinterestedness which will enable athletics to help in the tasks of moral education and social peace as well as of muscular development.

Pierre de Coubertin, 1896.

I. INTRODUCTION¹

The Olympic Games and the Olympic Movement differ from other sport events and sport organizations as they are officially linked to an ideology; to "... a systematic set of arguments and beliefs used to justify an existing or desired social order"². In the Olympic Charter, the 'rule book' of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the official version of these arguments and beliefs is articulated in terms of the 'fundamental principles' of Olympism. As it is said in principle 2 and 3:

2. 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.

3. The goal of Olympism is to place everywhere sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to encouraging the establishment of a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.³

As most ideological declarations, the 'fundamental principles' are general in form. They are vague, ambiguous and open for interpretation. How can the principles be better understood? What is their historical background, and how can the ideology of

Olympism be elaborated and systematically expressed?

This essay attempts to answer these questions in a two step procedure. First, an analytic attempt is made to single out the most important ideas in Olympism and their historical background. Second, a synthesis is suggested in which the core ideas of the ideology in its original form are systematized in a logical and consistent way. Hence, the essay is inspired by the perspective of the history of ideas which by Lovejoy is given the following classical description:

"By the history of ideas I mean something at once more specific and less restricted than the history of philosophy. It is differentiated primarily by the character of the units with which it concerns itself. Though it deals in great part with the same materials as the other branches of history of thought and depend greatly upon their prior labors, it divides that material in a special way, brings the parts of it into new groupings and relations, views it from the standpoint of a distinctive purpose. Its initial procedure may be said - though the parallel has its dangers - to be somewhat analogous to that of analytic chemistry. In dealing with the history of philosophical doctrines, for example, it cuts into the hard-and-fast individual systems and, for its own purposes, breaks them up into their component elements, into what may be called their unit-ideas"⁴

How ought the key term 'unit-idea' to be understood here? Lovejoy is reluctant to give a formal definition and describes unit-ideas in a variety of ways; as

"...types of categories, thoughts concerning particular aspects of common experience, implicit or explicit presuppositions, sacred formulas and catchwords, specific philosophic theorems, or the larger hypotheses, generalizations or methodological assumptions of various sciences."⁵

Unit-ideas, like the idea of 'the great chain of being' on which Lovejoy wrote his main work, refer to the more general premises underlying main traditions of thought and are thus in his view not many in kind. Differences in philosophical systems and schools of thought are often due more to differences

in application and/or logical combinations of existent ideas than to novel conceptions. The task of the historian of ideas is therefore:

“...to go behind the superficial appearance of singleness and identity, to crack the shell that holds the mass together, if we are to see the real units, the effective working ideas, which, in any given case, are present.”⁶

This methodological advice is intriguing but by no means uncontroversial or unproblematic. Before proceeding, there is need for a few modifying comments.

First of all: Our aim here is somewhat more restricted than those expressed in Lovejoy’s general research program. Our purpose is not to distinguish and then trace general unit-ideas throughout history, but rather to examine if and possibly what kind of unit-ideas can be said to underlie the ideology of Olympism.

Moreover, Lovejoy’s characterization of the history of ideas was first published in 1936. Since then, the discipline has gone through significant developments.⁷ Let us briefly mention two of the challenges which meet its practitioners today.

A first challenge is this: In the attempt to reveal ‘hidden’ connections, discover new paths of thought and synthesize what was previously conceived as isolated elements and fragments, the efforts of the historian of ideas “... may easily degenerate into a species of merely imaginative historical generalization...”⁸ Our basic premise - that ‘behind the superficial appearance of singleness and identity’ of an ideology lies present one or a few basic unit-ideas - may turn into a prejudice leading to neglect of significant sources and important information. One consequence might be that our work turns into ideology itself; into the construction of systematic sets of arguments and beliefs which can be used to justify particular interests and power structures.

Indeed, this we will attempt to avoid. In our interpretations of source material, and in our reflections on our own interpretations, we will strive for an attitude of ‘benevolent skepticism’: of carefulness but at the same time openness for new possibilities.⁹ What we offer here, then, is one interpretation among many possible of the origins and content of Olympism. Of course, this does not mean that any interpretation is as good as another. Requirements

on closeness to sources, soberness in interpretation, and consistency in argument and conclusion are as valid here as in historical studies in general.

A second challenge is of particular importance in this context. With the focus on ‘unit-ideas’, central intentions and motives of individuals are easily disguised or distorted. As we shall see, Olympism was in its original form to a large extent the product of one man’s efforts. Even if the ideas upon which he built were not new, a decent historical survey can not ignore the importance of this individual’s imagination and synthetic skills. There will be no attempt here to justify the mythical ‘great man’-theory of the origin of Olympism prevalent in the Olympic Movement. On the contrary, through the study of the intellectual development of its founding father, we will see that he was the bearer of more general ideas which permeated the social and cultural milieu in which he lived.

Let me sum up these introductory remarks with a few comments on our source material. As Lovejoy remarks in his description of the discipline, the history of ideas depends greatly upon labor in other branches of the history of thought. So does this essay. The first part (chapters II-VI) deals with the historical roots of Olympism. The aim is to give an overview of current knowledge which necessarily implies that secondary sources play an important role.¹⁰ The second part (chapter VII) presents a synthesis in terms of a systematization of what is seen to be the main goals of Olympism and the unit-idea(s) on which it is built. This part is inspired by a careful reading of both primary and secondary sources combined with the synthetic and interpretative attempts of the author.

Now, then, having clarified our aims and perspectives: Where are we to begin? The IOC provides a first historical clue in their ‘fundamental principle’ number 1: “Modern Olympism was conceived by Pierre de Coubertin, on whose initiative the International Athletic Congress of Paris was held in June 1894”.¹¹ Let us take a closer look at what we may call ‘The French Connection’.

II. THE FRENCH CONNECTION

Even if the scholarly literature in some ways considers Coubertin a tragic figure who suffered defeats and disappointments both in public and private life,¹² no one disputes his originality and organizing

talent which led to the founding of the IOC in 1894 and to the realization of the first Olympic Games in Athens in 1896. Furthermore, as president of the IOC from 1896 to 1925, Coubertin played an important role in the development of the Movement in the first decades of this century. The personal factor in the establishment of Olympism is significant and can not be overlooked. Who, then, was Pierre de Coubertin?

Coubertin - Personal Background

As the title indicates, Coubertin was born into the French middle aristocracy. De Frédys, his family on his father's side, were relatively wealthy, conservative, religious royalists who traced their nobility back to the 15th Century and their ancestors to mediaeval Rome. Coming from the noble de Mirville family from an area close to Bolbec, Normandie, his mother had a similar background. Coubertin's father was a mediocre painter of religious, historical and patriotic themes, his mother a pious woman with strong sense for the values and traditions of the *noblesse*. In his own words, Coubertin had a happy childhood in an atmosphere of "... constant stimulation and amusement"¹³

However, during Coubertin's childhood and youth, France experienced turbulent times both socially, economically and politically. As most of contemporary noblesse, the Coubertins supported the royal Bourbon family and had little faith in Bonaparte's Second Empire of the 1850s and 1860s or in the weak Third Republic - "...one of the most confusing and paradoxical political regimes"¹⁴ - in which young Pierre grew up. The Franco-Prussian War in 1871, which led to a humiliating defeat by technologically and strategically superior Prussian troops, left Coubertin, as the majority of the French, with little trust in established power structures. As he later commented: "Three monarchies, two empires and three republics in less than a century, that was a lot, even for a people with the recourses of the French ..."¹⁵

Coubertin received *noblesse oblige*, a classical education in the traditional Jesuit school system. He was a bright student and excelled in the competitive system of his College Saint-Ignace. Still, contemporary French education was not left much honour in Coubertin's later writings. It was, in his view, unable to provide the youth with the necessary knowledge

and skills to cope with the social and political challenges of the day. He criticized the conservative Jesuits for their repressive and competitive pedagogy, he was highly skeptical to their strict discipline, heavy work loads and old fashioned curriculum in which religion, classical languages and literature were given priority over modern natural and social science.¹⁶ In addition, Coubertin pointed at what he found to be a total neglect of the values of physical education and sport:

"In France ... physical inertia was till recently considered an indispensable assistant to the perfecting of intellectual powers. Games were supposed to kill study. Regarding the development of youthful character, the axiom that a close connection exists between force of will and strength of body never entered anyone's mind."¹⁷

Coubertin made several attempts to conform to what was considered a suitable professional career for a young man of his class. In 1880, he attended the highly respected military academy St.-Cyr, but left the school after only two months. After having returned from a trip to England in 1884, he made a last attempt to live up to the expectations of his family by enrolling in the *Faculté de droit* to study law. But the frequent examinations and the formal atmosphere represented an educational system from which he had tried to escape, and he quit after only one month.¹⁸

Young Coubertin split not only with his family's expectations in terms of education and career but in terms of political orientation as well. He had little respect for the old-fashioned conservative royalism of the noblesse and reacted on the excessive *fin de siècle* life style of both his own class and the upper bourgeoisie. Their demonstrative wealth emphasized social inequality - corruption and irresponsible political action undermined their status in society.¹⁹ According to Mandell, Coubertin became a convinced republican around 1880.²⁰ This gave him important connections on high levels in the state bureaucracy and enabled him to move freely between the social classes in contemporary French society. The relative success of his later ideas on educational reforms depended, to a certain extent at least, on his ability to utilize his wide range of contacts for his own purposes.²¹

École Libre

Disappointed by the traditional school system, Coubertin was thrilled when he in the early 1880s discovered what in his view was the only free and liberal school in contemporary France: *École libre des sciences politiques*, which he attended more or less regularly from 1883 to 1886.

École libre was founded in 1872 by liberal and republican intellectuals, among them Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893), who, after the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, felt the need for liberal, comparative social and political studies in the tradition of Comte and Tocqueville. By the mid 1880s, *école libre* had become a key institution in the education of young men from the upper social classes to higher positions in the civil service and the diplomacy.

Both its political and intellectual profile and its relatively free organizational structure appealed to Coubertin. In a guest lecture there in the late 1890s, he described *école libre* as "... a school where students who are not *regular* students listen to professors who are not *regular* professors, and who dare to lecture on subjects which do not belong to the regular academic course."²² Moreover, the school strengthened Coubertin's interest in Anglo-Saxon culture - a favourite subject in its political studies. In the spirit of Taine's *Notes sur l'Angleterre* (1871), England was admired for its liberal political traditions and its educational system, ideals that were to become important sources of inspiration in Coubertin's later development of Olympism.

Frédéric Le Play

Even if Coubertin took a life-long interest in history and social science, the systematic and critical work of a scholar was not primarily his game. As a man of action, he gradually came under the influence of a related, but more practically oriented social and political movement led by the mine engineer, sociologist and social philosopher Frédéric Le Play (1806-1882).

In 1856, Le Play founded *Société d'économie sociale* with the aim to better understand and deal with the problems of contemporary society. In several works from the 1860s and 1870s, Le Play developed a political/social philosophy in which, as MacAloon notes, "... the values of family, property, social peace, worker security, Catholicism, decentraliza-

tion, and personal morality," were held high.²³ His social and political views were 'paternalistic and clearly anti-socialistic: Employers ought to take responsibility for their workers' well-being by, in addition to providing them with necessary material recourses, offering an education built on classical, humanistic ideals. On the other hand, the working class ought to understand and accept its role in society as providers of labour for which workers got paid. According to Le Play, only cultivation through education based on traditional values could heal the wounds caused by industrialism, urbanization and secularization in society.²⁴

After the war in 1870-71, Le Play felt the need for a more political organisation, and founded the *Union de la paix sociale* as "the propaganda arm" of the *Société*²⁵. Coubertin joined the Union in 1883, but did not become active until he left *école libre* in 1886. Among Le Play's followers, he received strong support for his thoughts on educational reforms. In 1887, at the age of twenty four, he got his first article on *le pédagogie sportive* published in the journal of the *Société La Réforme sociale*.

What role did Le Play and *Société d'économie sociale* play in the development of Coubertin's thought? To a large extent, Coubertin adopted Le Play's political and social views. In the Parnassus Club at Athens in 1894, he echoed his former teacher in the following diagnosis:

"If we begin to study the history of our century we are struck by the moral disorder, produced by the discoveries of industrial science. Life suffers an upheaval, people feel the ground tremble continually under their feet. They have nothing to hold on to, because everything around them is shifting and changing: and in their confusion, as though seeking some counterpoise to the material powers which rise like Cyclopean ramparts about them, they grope for whatever elements of moral strength lie scattered about the world."²⁶

Not only the diagnosis, but the treatment was inspired by Le Play. Coubertin was convinced that "...most great national questions can be reduced to educational questions, .."²⁷ The idea of educating the masses through classical ideals and thus bring about social harmony (and international peace) was, as we shall see later, to become a key thought in Olympism.²⁸

Jules Simon and *père* Didon

Through the meetings in the *Société*, Coubertin met Jules Simon (1814-1896), a former philosophy professor at the Sorbonne, republican politician and educational reformer. In 1887, Simon gave a speech at one of their meetings in which he enthusiastically endorsed English sport and athletics as an important part of young men's education. Coubertin saw in Simon a possible ally who was highly respected and had influence in society. After having conducted an investigation of the role of physical education in the French *lycées*, Coubertin approached Simon to get support for his thoughts on educational reform. The result was *Comité Jules Simon* (1888) which aimed at establishing an educational program in which physical education played a more important part. Coubertin was the leader by self appointment and with several prominent French educators, politicians, scientists, sport leaders and an influential journalist as members. As MacAloon puts it, in this way Coubertin "...included prestige as well as conviction."²⁹

Comité Jules Simon never reached agreement on any important matters or educational policies. On the contrary, conflicts between different views on physical education became even more apparent. However, the discussions seem to have matured Coubertin's own ideas. After the Dreyfus affair and the rebirth of right wing nationalism in French politics, Coubertin distanced himself from the nationalist and chauvinist ideology promoted by his long time rival Paschal Grousset.³⁰ In addition, he became even more critical of the hygienic ideals of German and Swedish gymnastics. In the discussion of the ideals and values of physical education, he rejected Juvenal's classical *mens sana in corpore sano* referred to by the "hygienists", and suggested a new slogan: *mens fervida in corpore lacertoso*: "...an ardent soul in a trained body".

In Coubertin's view, the valuable core of sport was to be found in its cultivating, moral force. And here, he found a compassionate ally and close collaborator in another man who was to exert strong influences in the development of the Olympic ideology: the Dominican priest, orator and educator *père* Henri-Martin Didon.³¹

Père Didon (1844-1900) was a man of strong political and social engagement and with controversial theological views.³² Conservative Catholics ac-

cused him of socialism and the Church was critical both of his views on moral issues like divorce and to his theological understanding of the Trinity. At one time, Rome sent him on a temporary exile in Corsica where he wrote a critical book on the background of the Franco-Prussian war, which pointed at the values of the German educational system (discipline, concern for public education with the right blend of physical and mental activities), and called for educational reforms in France.

In his later years, Didon became the head of a Dominican *lycée* in Paris. His belief in the cultivation of moral character through bodily activity and sport inspired Coubertin's view of human psychology, an influence that can be seen in his later development of a quasi-scientific sport psychology: *le psychologie de l'effort*³³. Moreover, chiselled in stone above the entrance of Didon's *lycée* in the heart of Paris, Coubertin found the words that later were to become the official Olympic motto:

"The whole story of athletics is contained in the three words spoken by Father Didon in building up the sporting spirit of his pupils in a football game: "Citius, altius, fortius!" (Faster, higher, stronger!).³⁴

III. THE ANGLO-SAXON CONNECTION

As we have seen, Coubertin's French background influenced the ideology of Olympism in several ways. His experiences with the school system led to a strong conviction that, to be able to cope with the social and political challenges of the day, it was necessary to reform French education. The idea of education *a la* Le Play as a solution to the problems of society was to become one of the core ideas in Olympism.³⁵

It may seem strange, however, that a society with as little interest in sport and physical education as the French was to foster the founding father of the Olympic Movement. The explanation is simple: Coubertin's main ideas of sport were not particularly French. The most important inspiration in this respect came from England and North America.

Coubertin's fascination with English culture and educational system had roots in his childhood. At the age of twelve he read a French translation of Thomas Hughes' classic *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) in a youth magazine; *Journal de la jeunesse*. Hughes

described public school life at Rugby with particular weight on the educational values of physical education and sport. As a former student of the legendary Thomas Arnold (headmaster at Rugby from 1828 to 1842), Hughes portrayed his headmaster with great respect. The idealized picture of the public schools and of Arnold became a main source of inspiration to Coubertin.³⁶

A few years later, at the age of seventeen, Taine's *Notes sur l'Angleterre* (1871), written during Taine's travels in England in 1859 and 1862, made a similarly strong impression. Taine discussed the English educational system and public school athletics as well, and underlined its value as a preparation for life in a democratic society.

In 1883, Coubertin went on a trip abroad, a *comme il faut* in the upbringing of young men of his class. In the tradition of anglophilic Frenchmen before him (Voltaire, Montesquieu, Taine), he crossed the Channel to England, a voyage he repeated six times between 1883 and 1887.³⁷ He went to educational institutions like Beaumont, Harrow, Eton and Rugby and to the universities Oxford and Cambridge. In 1886, as he sat down by Arnold's tomb stone in the chapel at Rugby, he had a vision of the blessings *le régime Arnoldien* and Arnold's thoughts on 'muscular Christianity' would have in the French educational system. He was, in his own words,

"... naturally led to consider how well it would be for France were we to introduce into our school system some of that physical vitality, some of that animal spirit, from with our neighbors have derived such incontestable benefits."³⁸

Coubertin referred to the English public schools as the bearers of ancient ideals in which "...the muscles are made to do the same work as a moral educator." Through physical education and sport, young boys could free their bodies from "...disordered passions to which it was often abandoned under the pretensions of individual liberty..."³⁹. In this way, sport and athletics could be used to serve moral development. In a Europe marked by Victorian morality, education aiming at control and discipline over the passions and desires of the body fit well within the traditional framework. However, different from French education, Coubertin's program did not focus on bodily repression and neglect as he sought

moral development through cultivation of the body in sport:

"..., since the middle ages a sort of discredit has hovered over bodily qualities and they have been isolated from qualities of the mind. Recently the first have been admitted to serve the second, but they are still treated as slaves and made every day to feel their dependence and inferiority.

This was an immense error whose scientific and social consequences it is almost impossible to calculate. After all, Gentlemen, there are not two parts of a man - body and soul: there are three - body, soul and character; character is not formed by the mind, but primarily by the body."⁴⁰

The English sport ideology presupposed a certain attitude among the participants: the amateur spirit of the sport *afficionado* expressed most clearly in the enlightened and benevolent sportsman and gentleman⁴¹. Coubertin wanted to introduce into modern sport "... the spirit of gay candour, the spirit of sincere disinterestedness which will revitalise ... and make collective muscular exercise a true school of moral perfection."⁴²

Moreover, he saw the English school system not only as cultivating individual moral qualities, but, as Taine, as social training for life in a democratic society. The public schools were considered to be ideal liberal meritocracies in which the boys were rewarded not on inherited privileges or fortune but on their own talents and efforts. Compared to the repressive discipline of the French *lycées*, pupils were given the possibility to form and organize their own leisure activities, a practice which strongly appealed to Coubertin. There was little doubt in his mind that an education similar to the English was the solution for the French as well.

America

The belief in the educational potential of Anglo-Saxon sport was strengthened during Coubertin's five months trip to North America in 1889. The visit was a result of an official assignment from the Ministry of Public Instruction to study American universities, and, more in Coubertin's own interest, the role played there by physical education and sport. He visited institutions like Amherst, Harvard, Cornell, Tulane, Johns Hopkins and Princeton.⁴³

Before returning home, he attended a Physical Training Conference in Boston with more than two thousand delegates. Here, he found some of the same disagreements as he had experienced in *Comité Jules Simon*.⁴⁴ The disputes convinced Coubertin even more of the superiority of the English sport ideology. In his own speech, he argued emphatically for *le regime Arnoldien* and recommended English sport for young boys between the age of twelve and eighteen, not only to train the body, but the character and will as well.⁴⁵

In the fall of 1893, Coubertin returned to America as a representative of French Higher Education to the Chicago World Fair. He stayed for four months and travelled across the continent to California where he visited "... the Olympic Club in San Francisco, with its prophetic name.

What, then, were the influences from America on Coubertin's later ideology of Olympism?

As with England, Coubertin was by no means without previous knowledge of the country he visited. At *l'école libre* and in the *Société*, strong interest was taken in The New World. Moreover, he most certainly knew the work of Tocqueville (*De la démocratie en Amérique* (1835-40)). In his long report from his first visit (*Universités Transatlantique*, 1890), Coubertin gave a characterization of Americans as being of a strong, innovative spirit and with admirable intellectual and scientific curiosity. He praised the American liberal democracy and the role of sport in the university system and returned to France as a great admirer of 'the sporting character' of American life.

More specifically, the New World gave Coubertin his first experiences with modern spectator sport. A certain scepticism to its 'circus atmosphere' led him later to develop his own aesthetic view of the interplay between athletes and spectators in the Olympic Games.⁴⁷ And last, but not least, during his visits he met some of the men who were to become his closest collaborators in the years to come. In New York, he became acquainted with future president Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt's strong will, his general belief in the educational value of sports, his initiative to start boxing clubs in the poor neighbourhoods in New York - all this made him one of Coubertin's life-long heroes.⁴⁸ In addition, Coubertin met Columbia political science professor William Milligan Sloane who was to become one of the founding

members of the IOC and an influential associate of the Olympic Movement.

Anglo-Saxon Sport: Myth and Reality

How, then, did Coubertin's picture of the English sport ideology fit reality? How accurate was his interpretation of Arnold and Taine? What was 19th Century English public school life really like?

Coubertin's image of Arnold was idealized and built on descriptions of former students who admired their headmaster and later glorified him. Arnold was a complex man. He saw in his pupils imperfect, uncultivated human nature which ought to be disciplined and controlled. Moreover, sport and athletics were not his primary interest. Mandell writes:

"Although Arnold was an avid walker, runner, and horseman, he viewed these activities as entirely apart from his work. He wanted the boys to be Christians, gentlemen and educated persons - in that order. In all his writings, he took the position of a staunch traditionalist, a man rigid in his prescribed morality, an irascible hater of his own times and a pessimist about the future."⁴⁹

Coubertin's interpretation of Taine was rather eclectic as well. Taine's exposition of English culture was not without critical notes. Whereas he praised the industry, the work discipline and the stable, democratic political culture, he was critical towards class differences, the hard life of the lower classes in the cities, and towards what he found to be anti-intellectual and excessive sport practices that pervaded parts of society and the school system.

Coubertin's understanding of life in the public schools was an idealization. Other and probably more historically correct versions describe public school life as hard and to a certain extent repressive." A power hierarchy based upon physical size and force, and corporal punishment, was the rule rather than the exception. In fact, in the 1870s several English commentators raised critiques against the physical education at the public schools as "...bloody athleticism gone mad."

As MacAloon says: "Coubertin was a moralist, not a scholar, he wished less to study England than to transplant a piece of her to France."⁵² Even if he argued with intensity and conviction for educational

reforms, and even if his ideas were discussed with interest in France in the 1880s and 1890s, there was no definite break-through for the integration of sports in the school system.⁵³ It was Coubertin's increasing international orientation in the early 1890s and his linking of *le pédagogie sportive* to the ancient Olympic *mythos* that contributed to his later international success.

V. THE INTERNATIONALIST CONNECTION

Originally, Coubertin's motives for establishing a sport ideology were, as we have seen, patriotic in character. At the same time, he was a man open to new ideas and possibilities, an attitude which had been cultivated at *ecole libre*, during his travels abroad, and, perhaps most important, by the *Zeitgeist* of French *fin de siècle* - a time when "... change became the nature of life, novelty a part of the normal diet", a time of "change for the sake of change."⁵⁴ His patriotism, therefore, never developed to the hard core chauvinism of contemporary French right wing nationalism.⁵⁵ On the contrary, to Coubertin, the emergence of the European national states led to an increased awareness of the potential of international cooperation.⁵⁶

In his opening speech of the Sorbonne Congress, he linked the internationalism of the time to sport:

"Modern athletics, gentlemen, show two trends to which I would draw your attention. It is becoming firstly democratic and secondly international. The social revolution already accomplished among men and perhaps shortly to be accomplished among things also, is the explanation of the first trend; fast transport and easy communications are the explanation of the second."⁵⁷

This liberal internationalism and the strong belief in 'the great idea of progress' of the late decades of the century were closely related to beliefs in the possibilities for international peace. The Society for The Promotion of Permanent and Universal Peace (also called The London Peace Society) was founded in London in 1816 by Quakers and sympathizers of the liberal and humanitarian ideas of the Enlightenment. The Second General Peace Congress, in which Victor Hugo gave the presidential address and Tocqueville gave a gala reception, and

of which Coubertin most certainly had heard and read, was arranged in Paris in 1849. In 1888-89, the international Interparliamentary Union was established on the initiative of, among others, Jules Simon. The first of the annual Universal Peace Congresses took place in Paris in 1889. And, in 1892, a permanent headquarter for peace societies throughout the world, the International Peace Bureau, was established in Berne, Switzerland.

Although peace societies differed in beliefs and political orientation, they had in common the basic idea that, in an enlightened age, conflicts between nations ought to be settled with reason, not with weapons. Western civilization was seen to enter an era of advanced development in which there was no more need for war. To use a nation's wealth on armament and military hostility was considered not only morally repugnant, but a waste of resources leading to economic decline which again increased the chance for social unrest and revolution.⁵⁸

Dietrich R. Quanz has argued convincingly for the impact of the peace movement on Coubertin and on his later ideology of Olympism.⁵⁹ In the 1880s, Paris was an international centre for pacifists. In 1896, the same year as the first modern Olympic Games were arranged in Athens, a national council to coordinate peace activities (*Bureau Francais de la Paix*) was founded here. Coubertin had extensive contacts with leading personalities in the movement. According to Quanz, the list of participants at the 1894 Sorbonne Conference included "the entire power structure of the International Peace Bureau" in addition to presidents of the Universal Peace Congresses in 1889, 1890 and 1891. In fact, one third of the participants at the Sorbonne meeting can be linked to the peace movement.

What, then, was the main inspiration from the peace movement on Coubertin? Quanz lists three important points. First, here Coubertin found organizational models which he later utilized in the establishment of the IOC: the formation of an international committee with a permanent secretariat, the arrangement of seminars and conferences, and the establishment of voluntary organizations in major cities with links to the secretariat. Second, Coubertin's ideas of internationalism echo the views held by the peace movement. He focused on an 'enlightened patriotism' which was built on positive national sentiments and which abstained from discrimination of other countries and from the glorifi-

cation of war. Coubertin talked frequently about "...a "civilized humanity" characterized by the pursuit for the maturity required by international peace."⁶⁰ Third, the peace movement considered education as an important instrument in the promotion of their ideology. The practice of arranging annual student conferences with artistic and sport activities is similar to what we find in the later Olympic Movement.

Coubertin's internationalism was influenced by other contemporary events as well. The belief in progress, internationalism and peace found its perhaps most distinct expression in the international expositions which were arranged in the last half of the 19th Century. Starting with London's Crystal Palace in 1851, world expositions grew increasingly popular and were arranged in France in 1867, 1878, 1889 and 1900. Already in 1851, the British newspaper *The Spectator* wrote of Crystal Palace as "this Olympic Games of Industry..."⁶¹ At the 1867 *Universal International Exposition* in Paris, 7-8 million spectators attended. In 1878, the number had increased to 16 million, among them the fifteen year old Coubertin. The Paris Universal Exposition in 1889, famous for its Eiffel Tower, took place in a year that marked the centennial of the Revolution and attracted 32 million visitors. Coubertin's teacher Le Play was the commissioner here as he had been in 1878. This time Coubertin took part actively through a five session programme in which practical demonstrations of how to utilize sport in the educational system were given - his first experiences with sport in an international setting. In fact, in the 1900 Paris exposition, which attracted approximately 100 million people, the second Olympic Games were included.

The exposition tradition thrilled Coubertin. In the *grandeur* of the opening ceremonies, which in 1889 included speeches, singing of the Marseillaise and military parades, and in the tribute to progress and international understanding, the expositions had some of the same characteristics that later were to become parts of the Olympic Games. In a speech preceding the Olympic Games in Athens in 1896, Coubertin said:

"... the great inventions of the age, railroads and telegraphs, have brought into communications people of all nationalities. Easier intercourse between men of all languages has naturally opened

a wider sphere for common interests. Men have begun to lead less isolated existences, different races have learnt to know and understand each other better, they have compared their powers and achievements in the fields of art, industry and science, and a noble rivalry has sprung up amongst them, urging them on to greater accomplishments. Universal expositions have collected together at one point of the globe the products of its remotest comers. In the domain of science and literature, assemblies and conferences have united the most distinguished intellectual laborers of all nations. Could it be otherwise, but that sportsmen also of diverse nationalities should begin to meet each other on common ground?"⁶²

Finally, at the *Palais des beaux Art* of the 1889 exposition, the architect Victor Laloux presented a vivid reconstruction of classical Olympia which most certainly must have drawn the attention of the classically educated Coubertin. Through providing the English sport ideology and contemporary internationalism with a mythical framework inspired by the ancient Greeks, his Olympism found its final form.

VI. THE ANCIENT CONNECTION

The Olympic *mythos* has been a recurrent theme in European culture since the Renaissance.⁶³ The term 'Olympia' can be found in Latin texts from the early middle ages and referred to the classical four year period between the Games. The term *olympien* was used of the gods of Mount Olympus in Northern Greece. Among German classicists such as Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Herder, Kant and Humboldt, the ancient Olympic Games have been known and cherished.⁶⁴ Winckelman's *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764) emphasized not only the aesthetic beauty but the moral force in the experience of classical art, an art which subsequent ages could do no better than imitate. Winckelman's work became a significant source of inspiration in the strong interest taken in classical antiquity in the 19th century.

During the last decades of the 18th century, several Northern European travellers visited the Greek town Elis in search for the location of the old Olympic sites. In 1766, the English antiquary Richard Chandler found a wall and a Doric capital after having gone through the area with the Roman cultural his-

torian Pausanias' description from the second century AD at hand. In 1829, the French Morea-expedition partially excavated the temple of Zeus. After having gained its independence from Turkey in 1830, Greece did not want its cultural heritage exploited by foreigners, and further excavations were limited until the last decades of the 19th Century. Between 1875 and 1881, German archeologist Ernst Curtius agreed with Greek authorities on conditions for excavations, and found large parts of the old sites of archaic Olympia, among them the *altis*, the sacred site which had been the centre of the Olympic cult.

Curtius' findings were reported in scientific journals in Europe and America during the 1880s and 1890s. In 1887, the French historian, former minister of education and former member of *comité Jules Simon* Victor Duruy wrote a larger work on Greek history. Duruy's detailed description of the cultic character of the ancient Games found resonance in the classically educated Coubertin. He later wrote of the impression the excavations had made on him:

"Nothing in ancient history had given me more food for thought than Olympia. This dream city, consecrated through a task strictly human and material in form, but purified and elevated by the idea of patriotism which there possessed as it were a factory of life-force, loomed with its colonnades and porticos unceasingly before my adolescent mind... Germany had brought to light what remained of Olympia; why should not France succeed in rebuilding its splendors? It was not far from there to the less dazzling but more practical and fruitful project of reviving the Games, particularly since the hour had struck when international sport seemed destined once again to play its part in the world."⁶⁵

Even if Coubertin first publicly suggested the revival of the ancient Olympic Games in 1892, the idea was by no means new.⁶⁶ The 'Cotswold Games', initiated by the Catholic English lawyer Robert Dover in the early 17th Century, also called 'Olympick Games', were probably the first athletic festivals in modern times to be linked to the ancient Games. However, other arrangements in other countries strove to establish connections to these noble roots as well. In Germany, philanthropic educational theorists and physical educators of the Enlightenment Guts Muths (1759-1839) and 'Turnwater' Jahn

(1778-1852) suggested the revival of the classical Olympic Games. In the 1830s, Gustav Schartau, the successor of Ling as a gymnastic and fencing instructor at the University of Lund, took the initiative to arrange folk festivals called the Olympic Games in Ramlösa in southwestern Sweden. In the county of Shropshire, England, the Much-Wenlock Games had been held regularly as 'Olympic festivals' since 1849. Coubertin personally attended the Much-Wenlock Games in 1890 on the invitation of their founder, the local surgeon and judge William P. Brookes.⁶⁷ Finally, the Greeks had had their own Olympic Games in Athens, probably arranged four times between 1859 and 1889 and initiated by the wealthy business man Evangelos Zappas.

It is important to underline, however, that these 'pseudo-Olympics' were not direct predecessors of the modern Games. They are best characterized as local folklore within a neoclassicist framework. Coubertin's originality consisted not in reviving the idea of the Olympic Games, but in using the idea to establish an international movement with global pretensions.

What, then, are the basic ideas from the ancient tradition on which Coubertin built? As in the case of 'the Anglo-Saxon connection', his views on the classical Games were based on an idealization.⁶⁸ Here, he thought he found the very highest of human ideals. The modern Olympic Movement should, in Coubertin's view, foster men who had the characteristics of the ancient scholar-athlete with the Aristotelian virtue of *eutrapelia*: "...- an idealized concept of vitality, versatility, and, above all, a sense of proportion."⁶⁹ This ancient ideal found its historical counterpart only in the English sportsman and gentleman.

Moreover, Coubertin wanted the modern Games not only to be celebrations of athletic excellence but cultural events including elements of art and beauty as well. In ancient times, extraordinary feats in fair and equal contests were immortalized through artistic interpretations in terms of sculptures, vase paintings and poetry. In a speech "To The 'Trustees' of the Olympic Idea" during the 1908 London Games, he said:

"The Olympic idea is in our view the conception of a strong physical culture based in part on the spirit of chivalry, which you so attractively call

“fair play”, and in part on an aesthetic idea, the cult of beauty and grace.

Coubertin thought art could elevate and enoble modern sport. In turn, sport had its own beauty, and could serve as an inspiration for artists within all art disciplines.^{71,72} To emphasize the elements of cult and beauty, he suggested a framework with ceremonies and rituals. He wanted to give the Games an overall expression of the ancient idea of *eurythmy*, the classical harmony of proportion:

“It is primarily through the ceremonies that the Olympiad must distinguish itself from a mere series of world championships... Nowadays scarcely any public cult is possible ... As for lay festivals, nobody has anywhere succeeded as yet in giving them an appearance of true nobility and eurythmy ... It is their (the restored Olympiads) function and their lot to unite across the fleeting hour the things that were and the things which are to be. They are preeminently the festivals of youth, beauty and strength. In this key-note we must seek the secret of the ceremonies to be adopted.”⁷³

Finally, Coubertin found the ancient Games to have been one of the strongest binding forces of Greek culture. As forthcoming Games were announced, a sacred truce for a three months period before and after the Games was declared. The truce was not based on a (modern) understanding of war as morally wrong, but rather on pragmatic reasons: to prevent war from disrupting the Games and threaten the thousands who travelled to take part in the cult.⁷⁴ Having evolved in the ancient sociopolitical context of the Greek city states in ongoing conflict, Coubertin saw a parallel in the emerging nation states in contemporary Europe. Whereas the ancient Olympic Games were devoted to a cultic celebration of the unity of Greekness, Coubertin saw the new Olympic Games as a possible cult of human progress, international understanding and peace.

The Coubertinian interpretation of the Olympic *mythos* became the last piece of the puzzle which was now about to be finished: the ideology of Olympism.

VII. COUBERTIN'S IDEOLOGY OF OLYMPISM

So far we have attempted to cut into ‘the hard-and-fast individual system’ of Olympism to give an account of its basic ideas and their historical roots. Now, then, it is time for a more systematic discussion of its component elements: the unit-idea(s) on which Olympism is built.

This is by no means an easy task. Coubertin never organized his ideas into a strict system of norms and values. On the contrary, in his voluminous writings on Olympism there are both contradictions and inconsistencies. Moreover, Coubertin’s ideas developed over time. At the same time, there are stable elements such as the view of Olympism as an educational philosophy of “... religion, peace and beauty.”⁷⁵ What follows here, then, is an attempt to systematize these stable elements in terms of four main goals and to link Olympism to one central unit-idea which seems to found the very basis of the ideology.

First of all, Olympism builds on a belief in the possibility of cultivating the individual through education of both mind, soul and body. A main goal is **to educate and cultivate the individual through sport.**

The vision of cultivating the individual through (bodily) education is old - with roots in Greek antiquity at least - but is in Olympism primarily a result of Coubertin’s fascination with the English sport ideology. As a child of his time, he believed sport to be an arena for men only and for the development of traditional masculine virtues:

“Sport plants in the body seeds of physio-psychological qualities such as coolness, confidence, decision etc... The educator’s task is to make the seed bear fruit throughout the organism, to transpose it from a particular circumstance to a whole array of circumstances, from a special category of activities to all the individual’s actions.”⁷⁶

But Coubertin aimed not primarily at an equilibrium ideal. In sport, man transcended his previous borders. Sport could thus become a paradigmatic example on one of the predominant ideas of the late 19th century, ‘the great idea of progress’ :⁷⁷

“The term “Olympic” quite wrongly conjures up an idea of placid equilibrium, of perfectly compensated forces, of a balance with evenly-weighted scales. Mens sana ... the old refrain for prize-day speeches. But look, all that isn’t human, or at least it isn’t young. It’s an old buffers’ ideal. Equilibrium occurs in life as a result and not as a goal, as a reward and not as a search. It is not obtained by a piling-on of precautions but by an alternation of effort.”⁷⁸

And:

“(Sport) needs the freedom of excess. That is its essence, its object, and the secret of its moral worth... Daring for the sake of daring, and without real necessity - it is in this way that our body rises above its animal nature.”⁷⁹

The sport record played an important part in Coubertin’s Olympism. In the last paragraph of his ‘Olympic Memoirs’ from 1931, Coubertin defended the ideal of record breaking more strongly than ever:

“Thus the athletic record stands inescapably at the very summit of the sports edifice, like the “eternal axiom” referred to by the French writer Taine concerning Newton’s law. You cannot hope to remove it without destroying everything else. Resign yourself therefore, you partisans of the unrealistic Utopia of moderation -which is quite against nature -to seeing us continue to put into practice the motto Father Didon used to quote to his students, and which has since become that of Olympism: CITIUS, ALTIUS, FORTIUS.”⁸⁰

In this way, Coubertin developed a strong elitistic sport philosophy. The Olympic Movement could establish top level athletes as ‘a new aristocracy,’

“...whose origin is completely egalitarian, since it is determined only by the bodily superiority of the individual and his muscular possibilities, multiplied to some extent by his will to train.”⁸¹

It is tempting here to point at one of the more fundamental contradictions in Coubertin’s thought. His perhaps best known aphorism is really a quote from the bishop of Pennsylvania who, in a speech

linked to the 1908 London Games, claimed that “...the important thing in these Olympiads is less to win than to take part in them.”⁸² In other words Coubertin praised the ethos of excess while at the same time prescribing participation in sport with the disinterested attitude of the English gentleman amateur.

Coubertin tried, more or less successfully, to overcome this contradiction and to combine an elitistic outlook with democratic concern for individual development among ordinary men :

“Formerly the practice of sport was the occasional pastime of the rich and idle youth. I have labored for thirty years to make it the habitual pleasure of the lower middle class. It is now necessary for this pleasure to enter the lives of the adolescent proletariat.... All forms of sport for everyone; that is no doubt a formula which is going to be criticised as madly utopian, I do not care. I have weighed and examined it for a long time; I know it is accurate and possible.”⁸³

According to Lucas, however, Coubertin’s harmonizing attempts were not particularly successful. He was never able to distinguish between the Olympic Movement as a new twentieth-century humanistic “sport for all”-movement and the movement behind “the world’s most important competitive, and therefore, exclusive sporting event - the Olympic Games.”⁸⁴

The first goal on cultivation of the individual leads towards a second main goal in Olympism. As his teacher Frederic Le Play, Coubertin was a firm believer in the possibility of reforming society through individual education. If sport could cultivate the individual, Coubertin’s rather simplistic understanding of the dynamics of social development pointed towards a further goal:

to cultivate the relation between men in society. Coubertin found sport to be an efficient means in the democratic education of the masses:

“Inequality in sport is based on justice, because the individual owes what success he obtains only to his natural qualities multiplied with his will power... These are the interesting data for Democracy...Thus the sportsman has before his eyes a permanently-valid lesson in the necessity to command, control and unity, while the very na-

ture of comradeship around him obliges him to see in his comrades both collaborators and rivals - which from the philosophic angle seems to be the ideal principle of any democratic society. If we add to this that the practice of sport creates an atmosphere of absolute frankness, since it is impossible to falsify results which are more or less numerical and whose only value lies in being open to general scrutiny (even with himself a sportsman cannot cheat successfully), we shall reach the conclusion that the little republic of sport is a sort of miniature of the model democratic state.^{85,}

A third goal expresses even more general aims. If sport can develop the individual and society, it should have a cultivating potential in the relationship between societies and nations as well. Coubertin wanted the Olympic Games to become a universal language which took no account of social, economical, national or cultural borders and in which all nations could communicate and understand each other. Inspired by internationalist and pacifist thoughts and the idea of a sacred truce in the ancient Games, Coubertin included in Olympism the goal to use sport

to promote international understanding and peace.

“... the revived Olympic Games must give the youth of all the world a chance of a happy and brotherly encounter, which will gradually efface the people’s ignorance of things which concern them all, an ignorance which feeds hatreds, accumulates misunderstandings and hurtles events along a barbarous path towards a merciless conflict.”⁸⁶

Coubertin’s special blend of patriotism, peace and international understanding merged into what he called “internationalism,” “... 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.”⁸⁷ During the Games, “... national sentiments must be ... suspended, so to speak sent on a temporary holiday.”⁸⁸

These goals are underlined in what is seen as a very important aesthetic framework consisting of symbols, rituals and ceremonies.⁸⁹ Whereas the Ancient

Games were part of a cult to the honour of Zeus, a key goal in their modern version ought to be **to worship human greatness and possibility.**

“The first essential characteristics of ancient and of modern Olympism is that of being a religion. By chiselling his body with exercise as a sculptor chisels a statue the athlete of antiquity was “honoring the gods”. In doing likewise the modern athlete exalts his country, his race, his flag. I therefore think I was right to recreate from the outset, around the renewed Olympism, a religious sentiment transformed and widened by the Internationalism and Democracy which distinguish the present age, but still the same as that which led the young Greeks, ambitious for the triumph of their muscles, to the foot of the altar of Zeus.”⁹⁰

The ‘new aristocracy’ of top level athletes could serve as ideals for the masses and as a motivating force to more sport activity and thus moral development of individuals in all layers of society. Hence, the Olympic Games could become the most important cult in what Coubertin called a *religio athletae*, a new humanistic religion for the 20th Century.⁹¹

Is it now, from what is said above, possible to sum up the content of the ideology in terms of one or a few unit-ideas? Is it possible to link Olympism to other and more general traditions of thought? Clearly, I believe the answer is yes. Through the widening of perspectives in the goals of Olympism from individual development to visions of universal happiness and peace, we find variations over the central theme in what is sometimes called ‘the great humanist tradition of the West.’⁹² With roots in antiquity and with its constitutive period in the Renaissance, the humanist tradition offers an alternative to theological views which see human beings as a parts of a divine order, and to scientific outlooks in which humans are parts of a natural order. It represents an alternative to authoritarianism and intolerance and offers a non-reductionist and non-determinist view on the individual human being. The basic assumption of the humanist tradition is that it is possible to mould human personality by (classical) education, and that, through such education, human beings can realize their potential of being free and thus able to shape their own destiny and history. This again opens the possibility of what the Renaissance humanists called a *regnum hominis*;

a future kingdom ruled by the belief in the autotelic worth and infinite possibilities of each individual human being.⁹³

In other words, through the four goals of Olympism formulated above, we have suggested an interpretation of its basic unit-idea: humanism. Coubertin is, of course, not among the strongest representatives of the humanist tradition. For example, his philosophical anthropology never comes close to vitalists like Nietzsche or Bergson, his simplistic political and social analysis are far removed from the originality and deep understanding found in the works of his contemporaries Durkheim and Weber. Nevertheless, due to his pioneering role in the revival of the modern Olympic Games, Coubertin is perhaps one of the humanist 'thinkers' who has had the greatest impact on the lives of ordinary men and women in the 20th century.

VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the perspective of the history of ideas, we have tried to answer the questions posed initially on the origins and content of the ideology of Olympism. Our aim has been to provide a better understanding of the ideology both in terms of content and historical roots. A final, critical question could be this: Is our perspective of relevance in the understanding of the current status of the Olympic Movement and the Olympic Games? Does knowledge of the origins and basic 'unit-idea' of Olympism provide any important insights to the understanding of the enormous growth and popularity of the Olympic Movement in our century?

At first glance, Olympism and its history seems rather unimportant. The founders of the Olympic Movement are sometimes described as "... congenial, well-meaning, second-ranked intellectuals, academicians and bureaucrats,"⁹⁴ who sought stability and social peace in a changing world they did not really understand. In less than a decennium, the Olympic Games have grown to be one of the most popular products on the international entertainment market. In today's commercialized and professionalized world of international top level sport, Olympism appears as an anachronism. Its 'fundamental principles' provide little action guiding force, inconsistencies and contradictions reduce its value as a system of ideas. Critics even argue that Olympism is the false, manipulative ideology of a movement

whose driving force is the search for power, prestige and profit.⁹⁵ Its main ideas, its ceremonies and rituals are all blendwork. Hoberman characterizes the Olympic Movement as based on an 'amoral universalism' which "... strives for global participation at all costs, even sacrificing rudimentary moral standards."⁹⁶

A brief look at Olympic history supports such claims. Olympic athletes seem to be highly specialized entertainment artists to whom prestige and commercial pay-offs are more important than fair play and moral development. The values of friendship and mutual respect seem unimportant in the all-consuming quest for victory. Moreover, the Games have been an arena for political and nationalistic struggle from the very beginning. Hence, its peace-promoting functions can indeed be questioned. One could argue that the global success of the Olympic Games is easier to explain by the spread of the aggressive Western market economy on all continents than by increased international understanding and harmony.⁹⁷

On the other hand, even if such critique is to the point, it provides no deeper understanding of our culture's fascination with the Games. On the contrary, one is sometimes left wondering on how what is described as a destructive and degenerated movement can survive and grow at all. Here, then, Coubertin more or less intuitively offers clues to understanding which might be more to the point than his critics like to admit. In a modern society characterized by secularization and rationalization; by *die Entzauberung der Welt*, to use Weber's description of the process, the Olympic Movement represents an alternative. Every fourth year, it offers to a worldwide audience strong and deep experiences in a setting of rituals and ceremonies in which human possibility and freedom, at least in a symbolic form, is celebrated and cherished. As cultural performances, the Games are, in John MacAloon's words

"... more than pure entertainment, more than didactic or persuasive formulations, and more than cathartic indulgences. They are occasions in which as a culture or a society we repeat upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others."⁹⁸

This is why, from my point view, Coubertin's Olympism is an interesting ideology. And this is why knowledge of its basic ideas and their history has an important role to play in the understanding of development of the Olympic Movement in the 20th Century.

Notes:

1. The research leading to this article is funded by the Norwegian Research Council.

2. Quoted from Dictionary of Political Science (1964,250)

3. IOC 1991, 7

4. Lovejoy (1936) 1964, p.3

5. Quoted in Mandelbaum 1983, p. 199, For a more in-septh discussion of the characteristics of unit-leads, see Lovejoy 1964, pp. 7 ff.

6. Lovejoy 1964, p.6

7. For an informative overview, see King 1983, in particular Mandelbaum's article (pp. 198-210).

8. Lovejoy 1963, p.21.

9. The expression is borrowed from Boas (1969, ix). See Hayden White (1982, pp. 280-290) for a discussion of traditional and alternative approaches in intellectual history.

10. The discussion is to a certain extent based on original writings of Coubertin (1967 and 1979), but primarily on secondary sources such as Mandell (1979) Lucan (1978), MacAllon (1981), Hoverman (1986) Sandblad (1985), Weber (1986) and Zeldin (1973 a,ab).

11. IOC 1991, p.7.

12. There are, of course, different views on Coubertin's talents and the role he played in the Olympic Movement. See for example Mandell 1976: 65ff, MacAloon 1981: 1-8. As Mandell (1976, 180-181) ironically notes, one biographer claim Coubertin to be a significant philosopher in the great vitalistics tradition of Nietzsche and Bergson, whereas a critical study inspired by the Franfurter school links Coubertin's dreams of establishing a new humanistic religion to the positivistic from Auguste Comte.

13. MacAloon 1981, p.32.

14. Zeldin 1973, p. 571.

15. Quoted in MacAllon '1981, p.27.

16. In fact, in some French universities Newtonian mechanics was not introduced as a field of study until the end of the 19th century. See eldin (1977b) pp. 317-345 for an overview of higher education in France in the last half of the 19th Century.

17. Coubertin (1896) 1967, p. 11.

18. As MacAllon (1981, p.38) notes. After 1990, Coubertin never spent more than a year in any public institutions he attended.

19. Coubertin skepticism towards the conservative and royalistic political values of his own class seems to have developed at an early age. Twelve years old, he is supposed to have shocked a family visitor by claiming that the radical republican Leon Gambetta was a true French patriot. In 1879, he found out that an uncle of his mother, the black sheep of the family whose name was never mentioned, has been a supporter of de lammenais (1782-1854), who had been accused by conservative Catholics of being a free thinker and a socialist, and the early rally-movement which "urged moderate social reform and proposed that the Church end its hostility to the (by then) established republic". (Mandell 1976, pp.53,56). In 1888, Coubertin made a pilgrimage to his relative's overgrown grave and an "intensely emotional and richly symbolic experience which seemed to have played an important part in his search for alternative values and identity (MacAllon 1981, pp. 29, 93-96).

20. Mandell 1976, xi.

21. As Mandell (1976, p.67) writes "For the programs at his banquets and for his letterheads, Coubertin assembled lists of "honourary members" who had titles before their names, particles in the middle of their names, and lots of initials (indicating decorations and academic honours) after their names. His organization charts had grandeur: at the top of each was the name of a distinguished president, when possible a king, prince of the elected leader of a nation."

22. Quoted in MacAloon 1981, p.58.

23. MacAloon 1981, p.85.

24. For a discussion of the social and political views of Le Paly, see also Zeldin 1977 II, pp.953-959.

25. MacAloon 1981, p. 86.

26. Coubertin (1896) 1967, p. 11.

27. op. cit.

28. Here, Coubertin probably found ideas for the later organizational structure of the IOC (MacAloon 1981, p.89). Following an idea for the Societe, he

prescribed a 'reversed deputaion' in which the members were seen to represent not national interest but are "... the representatives of Olympians in their respective countries" (Coubertin (1931) 1979, p. 12).

29. MacAloon., 1981, p.103.

30. Grousset, an old communard, had been in exile in England, and after his return home in the 1880s he established Ligue nationale de l'education physique. Grousset even introduced the idea of establishing the French Olympic Games. His sport ideology came to direct opposition to Coubertin's increasing internationalism (Sandblad 1985, p.214).

31. For the influence of pere Didon, see Andrieu 1989, pp. 179-189, and Mandell 1976, pp.62-63.

32. Pere Didon was a strong defender of the Ralliement movement as was Coubertin's relative who he as a young man had so much admired. Coubertin even wrote a novel on the theme: le roman d'un rallie, published under the pseudonym George Hohrod (1902).

33. See for example his resume from the Sports Psychology Congress in Lausanne, 1913 (Coubertin 1979, pp 81 ff)

34. From Coubertin's Souvenir D'Amerique et de Grece (1897), quoted in Henry 1948, p.28.

35. In addition, of course, Coubertin's intellectual development and his political views were influenced by his family and the milieu into which he was born. In spite of his apparent rebellion against family values (he married a Protestant, Marie Rothan, in 1895), he never really abandoned the political conservatism and elitism of the noblesse. Mac Allon (1981, pp. 15-16) offers some deeper, psychological speculations on the shaping of Coubertin's mind. The ethos of his class - the virtue of prouesse: "... in search for spontaneous, irreproducible, unique and conspicuous moral acts, undertaken for honour and not for utility" was deeply rooted in his personality. However, Coubertin attempted to combine the virtue of prouesse with social responsibility and action; with patriotic patronage; "... organized acts of prouesse in which the lower orders serve as direct objects and not as merely validating spectators." His plans of reforming the French school system, and later, of the revival of the Olympic Games, became acts of prouesse and patronage to which Coubertin devoted much of his life.

36. Arnold remained one of Coubertin's life-long heroes. In a lecture on Olympic five years before his death, Coubertin expressed his idealized view on

Arnold thus: "...;Arnold makes the muscles more education, more meticulous and more constant servants of character formation. He draws up- very quickly- for his career is short- fourteen years only to transform Rugby school of which he is headmaster- the fundamental rules of the pedagogy of sport. From rugby he affects the other public schools by the contagion of his example, without resounding phrases or indiscreet interference; and soon the keystone of the British Empire is laid." (Coubertin (1929) 1967, pp.113-114)

37. Lucas

38. Coubertin (1896) 1967, p.11.

39. op.cit.

40. Coubertin (1894) 1967, pp. 6-7

41. The question of amateurism has been a recurring topic of discussion in the Olympic Movement and has at times been given a rigid interpretation, particularly during the presidency of Avery Brundage (1921-29). For an exposition of the history of amateurism, see Glaser 1978. Coubertin seems to have had a less rigid attitude to amateurism than many of his colleagues. As he wrote in 1931 (1979, p. 65): "Today I can admit it. The question (of amateurism) never really bothered me. It had served as a screen to convene the Congress (of 1894) to revive the Olympic Games. Realising the importance attached to it in sports circles, I always showed the necessary enthusiasm, but it was an enthusiasm without real conviction. My own conception of sport has always been very different from that of a large number perhaps the majority of sportsmen. To me, sport was a religion with its church, dogmas, service... but above all a religious feeling, and it seemed to me as childish to make all this depend upon whether an athlete had received a five franc coin as automatically to consider the parish vergor an unbeliever because he receives a salary for looking after the church."

42. Coubertin (1906) 1967, p. 15.

43. After having arrived New York, Coubertin went to New England, Montreal, Quebec, Toronto, Chicago, down the Mississippi to New Orleans, thereafter through Florida and Virginia, via Washington and Baltimore and back to New York.

44. As Coubertin later described the situation: "Everywhere I found discord, civil war was raging between the partisans and the adversaries of one particular kind of sport. This state of affairs seemed to me to be caused by a tendency to excessive

specialisation. Those who went for jumping, despised rowing, fencers were against cyclists, marksmen looked down on lawn tennis players, even amongst the adepts in one and the same sport there existed no more harmony. The admirers of German gymnastics denied all merits to

the Swedish method, and American football rules seemed to the English player devoid all common sense.” (Coubertin (1896) 1967, p. 12). The revival of the Olympic Games, then, could demonstrate to all athletes their common identity as sportsmen.

45. MacAloon 1981, pp. 115 ff, Lucas 1988, p. 92.

46. Coubertin (1931) 1979, p. 10.

47. Sandblad 1985, pp. 234-235.

48. MacAloon 1981, p. 127, Sandblad 1985, p. 215

49. Mandell 1976, p. 60

50. For an elaboration of the ideology and practice of the English public school of the period, see Mangan (1981).

51. Lucas 1976, p. 33.

52. MacAloon 1981, p. 58. MacAloon (1981, p. 79) interprets Coubertin’s fascination for Anglo-Saxon culture in psycho-dynamic terms. Coubertin wanted to fulfil his noble duty of *prouesse* in a way that benefited his countrymen. In his search for an own identity, he found in Arnold a father figure and in the public school boys new family ties. Arnold became “... an illusion in the Freudian sense of the term: a deep and multiply determined wish fulfilled”.

53. See Weber 1986, pp. 213 ff for a sketch of the situation of school sport in late 19th Century France. In 1896, Coubertin himself offered a more optimistic picture of the situation: “The task of doing so (introduce sport in the French school system) ... has thrived rapidly. “L’Union des Sports Athlétiques” whose beginnings were very modest, already included in 1892 a considerable number of school sporting societies, formed and governed by the pupils themselves.” (Coubertin 1967, p. 11).

54. Weber 1986, p. 6.

55. Right wing nationalism as represented by Maurice Barrés’ *Action française*, Charles Maurras, and in terms of physical education: Paschal Grousset, was in no way compatible to Coubertin’s increasing internationalism.

56. According to Boulouge (1976, pp. 90-91), up to 1914 Coubertin still held racist and imperialist views. He regarded the developed European powers as being natural leaders in the world and with the

right to colonialize and rule Africa, Asia and the far East. However, in a letter to the French youth which he published in 1915, he advocated to treat all cultures and societies with the same respect. France ought to show its superiority through cultural performances, not through colonialization and war. The sincerity of Coubertin’s democratic and pacifist conviction is doubted by some of his biographers. Hoberman (1986, p. 35) regards Coubertin as a cultural conservative who was a democrat who listed the triumph of democracy as one of four innovations history would be better without, and as a pacifist who referred to antimilitarism as a form of neurosis, a kind of weapons’ phobia, infantile and pitiful .

57. Coubertin 1894 (1967), p. 9.

58. For informative introductions and a collection of original essays from the internationalist and pacifist movements of the 19th century, see Cooper 1976.

59. Quanz 1993, pp. 1-23

60. Quanz 1993, p. 10.

61. Quoted in MacAloon 1981, p. 131.

62. Coubertin (1896) 1967, p. 10.

63. As Mandell (1976, pp. 29ff) notes: Already Shakespeare referred to the Olympic Games in his historical dramas of the early 1590s such as *Henry VI* and in *Troilus and Cressida*, Milton did similarly in *Paradise Lost* from 1667. In 1727, Voltaire described an athletic festival in England which he compared with the Olympic Games. In 1732, the work of the Dutch clergyman Theodorus Antonides (1647-1715) entitled *Olympia: dat is de Olymp-Speelen der Grieken*, was published in Dutch, and is probably the first work on the ancient Games in modern times (Renson 1991, p. 6).

64. Ueberhorst 1976, pp. 14-15

65. Coubertin(1908) 1967, p. 1. MacAloon (1981, pp. 139 ff) expresses his doubts about the accuracy of Coubertin’s memory here, and explains Coubertin’s interest in the ancient Games primarily with his reading of Duruy.

66. For an overview over the so called “pseudo-Olympics”, see Redmond 1988, pp. 71-87.

67. See Hill (1992, pp. 9-17) who discusses in detail Brooke’s connection to Coubertin and Brooke’s role in the revival of the Modern Olympic Games.

68. See Young (1984, pp. 57-75) who argues convincingly against Coubertin’s “Olympic myth of Greek amateur athletics”.

69. Lucas, 1976, p. 27.
70. Coubertin (1908) 1967, p. 19.
71. The IOC agreed upon having art competitions as parts of the Games, and in Stockholm in 1912 "the pentathlon of the Muses" was introduced for the first time. The arts festivals were to include architecture, dramatic art, dance and choreography, decorations, literature, music, poetry, painting and sculpture. Coubertin himself won the first prize in the poetry competition with his "Ode to Sport", written under the pseudonym "G. Hohrod and M. Eschbach". For a discussion of the history of the Olympic art festivals, see Bandy (1988, pp. 163-169).
72. As Sandblad (1985, pp. 234 235) points out, Coubertin vision of the role of the artis was inspired not only by classical ideals, by the British philosopher John Ruskin, a cultural critic who regarded art as a possible way to a higher spiritual life and as an alternative to modern civilization and the materialistic urban life.
73. Coubertin (1910) 1967, p. 34.
74. Finley and Pleket 1976, p. 98.
75. Lucas 1978, p. 78.
76. Coubertin (1918) 1967, p. 4.
77. This view fits well within Coubertin's more general anthropology: "Man has always been passionate and heaven preserve us from a society in which there were no excess, and in which the expression of ardent feelings were caught up for ever in the too-narrow confines of decorum." (Coubertin (1908) 1967, p. 19).
78. Coubertin (1918) 1967, p. 48.
79. Coubertin (1924) 1967, p. 96.
80. Coubertin (1931) 1979, p. 139.
81. Coubertin (1935) 1967, p. 131.
82. Coubertin (1908) 1967, p. 20.
83. Coubertin (1919) 1967, p. 60.
84. Lucas 1980, p. 23. Lucas continues: "Throughout his writings, Coubertin fluctuated between egalitarian concern for the physical well being of all peoples and also for that tiny fraction the world's greatest athletes. His writings are frequently a tortuous labyrinth of inconsistencies and I believe the main reason for such obtuseness was his life long inability to deal with each phenomenon separately."
85. Coubertin (19 18) 1967, pp. 48-49.
86. Coubertin (1894) 1967, p. 9.
87. Coubertin 1898, quoted in Segrave 1988, p. 153.
88. Coubertin (1935) 1967, p. 132.
89. The grand opening ceremony and rituals around the celebration of winners have been part of the Games since their very beginning in Athens in 1896. The Olympic Oath, in which one athlete promise on the behalf of all to take part in the Games with respect for the rules and with good sporting spirit, was introduced by Coubertin in 1920. The Olympic torch, first lit in Berlin in 1936, symbolizes the peace and harmony in which the arrangements are supposed to take place. The Olympic flag with the five coloured rings on white was probably designed by Coubertin in 1914 to illustrate the peaceful cooperation among the five continents in the Olympic Movement.
90. Coubertin (1935) 1967, p. 131.
91. Coubertin (1918) 1967, p. 43.
92. For an elaboration of 'the humanist tradition of the West' see Bullock's 1985 book with the same name. For a discussion of humanism as an attitude towards life, see von Wright 1979, in particular pp. 159 ff.
93. Bullock's (1985, p. 155) description of the humanist tradition as being echoes Lovejoy's understanding of a unit-idea: ... not a school of thought or a philosophical doctrine, but a broad tendency, a dimension of thought and belief, a continuing debate within which at any one time there will be found very different - at times opposed - views, held together not by a unified structure but by certain shared assumptions and preoccupation with certain characteristic problems and topics, which change from one period to the next.
94. Mandell 1976, p. x.
95. For example, the Olympic Charter devotes one page to general 'fundamental principles' whereas the following 73 pages deal with legal, organizational and economical matters.
96. Hoberman 1986, p. 2.
97. Coubertin is rightly characterized as an idealist in many ways but he was not blind. He saw the threats to the ideals of the Olympic Movement and warned frequently against the development of the Olympic Games in his numerous writings and speeches. On amateurism, professionalism and commercialism, see Coubertin (1920) 1967, p. 83. On the development of sport science and specialization, see Coubertin (1920) 1967, 83 and (1925) 1967, p. 99. On the promotion of peace and international understanding, see Coubertin (1935) 1967, p. 134.

98. MacAloon 1984, p. 1.

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