

Pierre de Coubertin,
Le Regime Arnoldien and La Pedagogie Sportive

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In analysing the impact of English Athleticism on the thought and work of Pierre de Coubertin, this paper focuses upon two broad questions: In what ways and to what extent was Coubertin influenced by the sporting traditions and ideology of the English Public Schools and Oxbridge? And, Why, in adopting such traditions, was Coubertin more successful in his promotion of the Modern Olympics, than in his efforts at "rebronzing" French youth through reform of the *Lycees*?

In developing his vision both of a reinvigorated French nation and of the Modern Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin drew on a number of sources of inspiration. This paper concentrates on three of those sources, all of which had their basis in the English Public Schools and Oxbridge. *Le regime Arnoldien; la pedagogie sportive,*

and the structure and workings of the Committee of management of Henley Royal Regatta. *Le regime Arnoldien* provides part of the ideological basis for, and a father-figure upon whom to endow, the growth and success of the athletic system of games and sports known to Coubertin as *la pedagogie sportive*. Through such pedagogical system boys could be taught to be moral and manly, achieve sound character and learn good conduct - the national genius of the English upper-middle classes. Coubertin saw this system as essential to his aim. of reinvigorating French youth. Behind this system loomed the figure of Thomas Arnold, in Coubertin's eyes the source of this great pedagogical success.

Although Coubertin has been described as a follower of ideas, he was nothing if not an efficient organizer and effective controller of people, power, and the politics of a governing body. In his structuring of the International Olympic Committee, Coubertin essentially followed the model of the Committee of the Management of Henley Royal Regatta which was itself a reflection of the structure of sporting clubs found at Oxbridge and the ancient public schools.

Using both primary and secondary sources, this paper places, the efforts and effectiveness of the man known as the founder of the Modern Olympics within the context of *the fin de siecle*, and suggests that Coubertin's dream of an Olympic festival and of reforming the *Lycees* reflects the romantic elitism of a nineteenth-century autocrat employing Darwinian principles and idealizing them with rituals and social conventions. The structural conduciveness of the Olympics, with its Darwinian motto *Citius, Altius, Fortius*, its aristocratic patronage, and its amateur ideology provided a much better outlet for Coubertin's efforts than the more culturally circumscribed *Lycees* where the reality of replacing the French *gentilhomme* with the idealized image of the English gentleman would be far less easy to achieve.