

SOME SELECTED HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES OF KALOKAGATHIA AND ARETĒ IN THE MIRROR OF MODERN SPORTS

Introduction

- Within the literature published after 2000, we can find a lot of critical studies concerning the contemporary situation of the Olympic Games. Both summer and winter Olympics still present very prestigious events. They also present a kind of challenge for some big cities to become candidates for **hosting** the Olympics (Kubo, 2014; Rose & Spiegel, 2011). On the other hand, a great range of aspects (or better, pros and cons) is considered these days more carefully and more critically than fifteen (or twenty) years ago. During the process of deciding whether to become candidates, the **economic** aspects play the most important role (Austermann & Wassong, 2014; Madden, 2002). However, not just economic profit has to be considered; there are many other approaches and viewpoints – **environmental** (Konstantaki, 2018), **political** (Heine, 2018; Reid, 2012), **social** (Tomlinson, 2014), and **cultural** (McNamee, 2006; Parry, 2006).
- Diversity of approaches and plurality of discourses concerning the Olympics are caused, or at least strengthened, by some postmodern philosophical and ideological streams in which the “world of sport” presents a bit controversial topic. There is something like a gap formed by the rapid development of modern professional sports during the second half of the 20th century and deepened at the beginning of the 21st century. **The point of this gap consists of goals and establishing of modern professional sports in comparison to the principles of the ancient Olympic Games.**

- Within the next part of our paper, we would like to argue that for some authors, the principles of Olympism are strongly related to the ancient original Olympic roots. However, this approach can be very illusory (at least in some aspects which we would like to describe later), and it could present (in some cases) rather a **false marketing strategy** than a frank effort for recovering the Olympic ideals.
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- Undoubtedly, many authors really try to take the crisis of the Olympic movement as a chance to remind the original principles and to **resuscitate the intrinsic values** which ancient sports events would provide. In our opinion, this approach can be praiseworthy, but there is a serious question whether it is possible to apply the old ideas on the new, rapidly changed situation. We are aware of a complex character of this issue, and that is why we know that the answer cannot be yes or no. However, some “recovering” ideas should be discussed and examined. It should present a task for historians, as well as for philosophers. The abstract character of philosophy could become a kind of danger. The ontological and ethical positions are very important, but they should be considered in the context of historical development.
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Some ideas about Olympism reflecting the selected philosophical positions

- As we mentioned earlier, some authors can understand the situation around the Olympics as a challenge for some improvements. Bayle (2016) notices the **social responsibility**, and at this point, we can agree that in the social field the Olympic Games can bring something like a “new hope” how to deal with the social inequality. The other phenomenon which is more or less political and which is very closely tied to the ancient Olympic heritage and which can present a good chance for the future is “**ekecheria**” (a sacred peace obeyed during the events). Of course, the political situation is completely different in the modern world than in the ancient time, but some international conflicts can be solved, or the situation can be partly improved thanks to the Olympic Movement even in the modern times (Del Tedesco Guioti, Cardoso Simões, & de Toledo, 2016).
- If we use the words Olympism and philosophy altogether, Pierre de Coubertin is probably the first person who comes to mind (at least in the context of modern Olympism). He was the one who presented the idea of “**the philosophy of Olympism**”.

- The contradiction between two renowned Coubertin's mottos presents a significant dilemma which became a topic of many sophisticated considerations. The first idea says: **"The important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win, but to take part."** The other statement became the official Olympic motto after 1924 (the Olympic Games in Paris), and it sounds: **"Citius, Altius, Fortius"** (Faster, Higher, Stronger).
- To keep both the ideas at the same time can be a bit strange because they seem to be in a logical contradiction, but it is not impossible. If we understand the first one thus like we want to do our best, but we prefer making a good effort to winning at any cost, we can imagine that we have no problem with our effort of being faster and stronger. In our opinion, **the incompatibility of both ideas cannot be insurmountable** if we remember the ancient principles of kalokagathia and aretē, as we explain later.
- However, this compatibility could work quite well in the **"world of amateur athletes"**. In our previous works, we paid some attention to the selected differences between amateurs and professionals (Hurych, 2019). We do not want to repeat these ideas here in detail. However, the main idea is that the questions like "who is better: amateurs or professionals?" does not make sense without establishing the criteria of evaluation. If we establish **measurable performance as the criterion, the professionals (in the majority of cases) will be better.**
- On the other hand, there are still a lot of reasons why to admire amateur athletes and even some reasons why **to prefer amateurs to professionals.** These approaches were very usual in history. At the beginnings of the modern Olympics, they were even dominant. Now professional athletes rule over the world of sport. We can meet some critical studies about failing of amateur concept of the sportsperson and about its consequences (Stone, 2019).
- However, what is our conclusion? We argue that **professional sports must logically fail** in some aspects. Minimally in those which are connected with the principles of aretē and kalokagathia.

Two pillars of the Olympism?

- There is a very limited space here to describe aretē and kalokagathia in detail. In the context of kinanthropology we can mention some works by Martínková (2010), or Šíp (2008). In the ancient conception, **kalokagathia** presented the harmony of beauty and good. Within the sport settings, we can meet this phenomenon more often in its narrow understanding presented by harmony (later interpreted as a kind of balance) between physical and mental performance. This conception is strongly reductive, but it can work (at least somehow) in the case of the amateur sport. Here the
- For professional sportspersons, it could present a good inspiration but just related to their personal choice. The general establishing in modern professional sport aims **against versatility and leads towards the top and very specific performance** which is awarded (in the case of professional athletes it is paid).

Two pillars of the Olympism?

- Concerning **aretē** two related terms are often mentioned – excellence and virtue. This terminological issue is remarkable itself because modern sports (perhaps more clearly than some other fields of human activities) in a very interesting way display that compatibility of excellence and virtue brings a lot of contradictions.
- Reminding the ancient concept of **four cardinal virtues** proposed by Plato (and then developed by Aristotle) we can mention **prudence, courage, temperance, and justice**. If we admit that modern sports provide a lot of opportunities to develop courage (not just in the physical understanding) and that there is a good space for justice (obeying rules etc.), we should think over prudence and temperance.

Two pillars of the Olympism?

- Prudence is by some authors (Cicero, Aristotle) understood as a kind of **wisdom**. However, wisdom presents a very “floating” phenomenon because it is very difficult to define it and it is impossible to measure it. The world of modern sports is very closely connected with the objectivization trends and with the effort to measure performance.
- Concerning **temperance**, we can remind Aristotle and his concept in which temperance presents a mean with regard to pleasure (Niemec, 2013). Aristotle did not propose to stay in the middle, but he recommended to avoid the extreme positions and remember to come back towards the middle. Modern sports present very extreme load and require extrema effort which must necessarily lead to antagonistic positions to temperance principles.
- Undoubtedly, **excellence can present a kind of virtue**. However, the question here is whether *the excellence* which is related to professional sports (it means effort for top measured performance at any cost) presents a kind of virtue. The problem is more complex and more difficult than the scope of this paper carries but at least two cardinal virtues – prudence and temperance – are very disputable in the world of modern sports.

No simple solutions

- There are many publications devoted to the problem mentioned above. Bayle (2016) reminds the core values and see the effort for athletic excellence as a challenge for modern Olympics. Martínková (2012) proposes two chances for modern Olympics based on Coubertin's visions and examined through the philosophical concepts of Patočka and Heidegger – fair and temple. Brown (2012) reminds Michel Foucault's ideas in the context of Coubertin's Olympic philosophy.
- We can meet interconnecting Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical conception ("Superman", "the will to power") and Olympic ideas (Cléret & McNamee, 2012). Moral judgement and its backgrounds in the reflection of the Olympic principles are examined by Culbertson (2012) in a very interesting way. Da Costa (2006) notices that the philosophical controversies over the problems of Olympism bring new and new pages of the "never-ending story".

No simple solutions

- The necessity of reimagining and redefining some ideals of Olympism because of serious trouble is described in the works of Llewellyn (2011), Loland (2012), McNamee & Parry (2012), Rohde (2018).
- Of course, there is still a great heritage coming from the ancient Olympic tradition (Reid, 2017). The education, which includes the Olympic ideals presents a great opportunity for presenting their core values (Teetzel, 2012). Even in the world of modern sports, there is some space for coaches to develop the Olympic ideas (Torres, 2012).
- Some intrinsic values are included in sports essentially, and concerning this point, Olympism can present one of the leading possibilities for the next development, as McFee (2012) notices. The interconnected power of the Olympic Movement all over the world is still indisputable. It results, as Reid (2010) mentions, from a good and understandable concept for many nations and countries (in the context of the eastern philosophies, as well as the western way of life).

Conclusions

- The aim of this short paper is quite modest. We argue that the concept of Olympism contains many very useful and valuable ideas. There are **a lot of positive things** which Olympism can offer even these days when the elite sport is mainly made up of professionals.
- On the other hand, we guess that we should notice some problems which are (in our opinion) caused by **pretending that sports have the same face** as in the Coubertin's times.
- No matter how this position could provide **some marketing profits**, we argue that now (in 2019) it is the proper time **to admit that the principles of aretē and kalokagathia can hardly find a place** in the real settings of the Olympic Games. We tried to mention at least some arguments why these two principles become more and more incompatible with establishing of modern sports.
- Of course, this paper does not provide space enough to examine the problem more in detail. That is why we understand it as **an impulse for the next discussions**.

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