

OLYMPISM AS A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

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Abstract. *Olympism is considered as a possible variant of the philosophy of life of modern society. Here is noted the rightfulness of the opinion expressed in the Olympic Charter that the idea of Olympism is most consistently and to the full embodied in sport. It is shown, however, that it is mostly true for the ancient sport and significantly less for the modern one. It is analyzed the question about the means which are advisable to take for a more active and deeper rooting of the principle of Olympism in sport and for the actual transformation of the Olympic sports in the philosophy of modern life.*

Keywords: *“philosophy of life” as essence of phenomenon; agon as universal social phenomenon; sport as self-sufficient competitive activity; Olympic sport as advanced version of philosophy of life for modern society.*

1. The Olympic Charter reads: “Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind” [11, p. 9]. Philosophy of life! What is an essence of that kind of philosophy and what other versions of such philosophy we know? Buddhism, Christianity, Islam may be mentioned as three philosophies of a devotional life. Democracy, liberalism, totalitarianism may be referred to as three philosophies of a secular life. It is obvious that there are quite many other philosophies; basically, every historical epoch, civilization and culture has come up its own philosophies at least within the above domains. Moreover, it is quite clear that every human being holds to its own “philosophy of life” for at least the reason that every person realizes his/her own existence in the world; and he/she not only lives but perceives his/her own self in existence and, therefore, tends to live in his/her own specific way. An individual life may be interpreted as the ontological situation of specific nature, i.e. the situation of a *reflexive* existence closed on oneself. A human is a *metaphysical* being since his/ her existence in itself may

be viewed as some kind of a *practically exercised philosophy* (M. Heidegger: “Metaphysics is a fundamental event in human existence” [16, p. 460]; M. Mamardashvili: “A human being may not get constructed unless performs certain philosophical acts regardless of whether it realizes them or not” [6, p. 11]; and “It is the metaphysical one that is the only human in us” [7, p. 346].)

2. Philosophy, therefore, is the way of human life existence as such. Some versions of the philosophy of life, being presented in a verbal or textual form, in certain conditions may evolve into highly authoritative religious, philosophical or political doctrines welcomed by many people, like it was the case for Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, for instance. They are normally referred to as the *global* religions, albeit it is quite obvious that the worldwide or global nature of these religions (or any other world outlook paradigm that exists today at a doctrinal level being popular in the society) should be considered on a rather conditional basis. As a matter of fact, every of the doctrines, including each of the *global* religions once emerged, have been dominant in its influence and often dominant today only within *certain* geographical area(s). However, it is only natural that in our days, in the ongoing process of the social life globalization, the former strict regional structure tends to dissolve – albeit it is still in place on the whole. The only fact that we speak today of a few world religions rather than one is supportive of this notion in some way. Therefore, it might be pertinent to discuss in the modern conditions the generally applicable philosophy of life probably in the sense that all of us are involved (even if we fail to fully realize that) into the above globali-

zation process; and in this context we find ourselves in the social-and-cultural space that may be considered, with certain degree of conditionality, *common* for all of us. It should be noted, however, that the relevant idea does not exist at this juncture at a doctrinal level. There might be some reasons to say, of course, that it is postmodernism that should be referred to as the today's philosophy. It is widely known to unveil the relativity of the differences perceived as radical in the past and dethrone the once established stereotypes of self-consciousness. In doing that it, nevertheless, never drives the analysis of the current situations to the expected result, i.e. makes no provisions for the really existing unity being apprehended at the conceptual level and, hence, gives no way for this unity to fully evolve into a "reality for itself" that means – to develop into a fully-fledged unity. Therefore, we can only agree with J. Habermas who described the postmodernist philosophy as an "unfinished project" [13, p. 37].

3. As things now stand, we are in need of a philosophy that would address – in a more fundamental manner than the traditional ones – specifics of the ongoing social life in its horizontal and vertical dimensions, the philosophy being broader in its scope and deeper at the same time; otherwise, the broad scope of life without the due depth will give no way to attain the desired height. It is exactly the situation we find ourselves in now, and it is in these conditions that we face the acute need for discovering a philosophy of life – to inspire our life with a descent philosophy and to accept the life as a happening philosophical truth. The Olympic Charter offers the idea of Olympism as an option to solve the above problem. It should be emphasized, however, that this offer should be considered rather as exclusively declarative in its essence as long as it is not supported by a doctrinally sound concept of Olympism. The idea of a human existence being fairly balanced (or harmonized) offered in the above is in fact one of the most popular and basically eternal notions in the

history of human community; and the one more statement of this old idea in the Olympic Charter spelled out as it is, without necessary clarifications and definitions, may be considered one more declarative message pointing to the desirable in a romantic appeal for the expected outcome. The idea needs to be first supported by a due concept and then welcomed by the society to come to the potential implementation stage. The present situation is somewhat new in the sense that we are proposed to assume, first and foremost, that it is the sporting activity that gives the best opportunities for this idea being implemented in full. (The Olympic Charter formally states: "The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity" [11, p. 9]). Sport, therefore, is presented there as at least one of the potential major carriers of the Olympic idea. It should be emphasized once again, however, that this statement in the Olympic Charter (that was conceptually formed, as well known, by Pierre de Coubertin) has always been in need of some basic theoretical substantiations, albeit no one of them may be found today even in the research and philosophical studies of the problems faced by Olympism. Special notion should be made in this context of the fact that the initial definition of Olympism in the Olympic Charter made no reference to sports whatsoever and, moreover, this fundamental document offers no definition of sports; and this fact, frankly speaking, is somewhat perplexing for the reader.

4. Coming up with the concept of Olympism as a basic idea for sports, with the idea being offered as fundamental in his interpretation of the concept of Olympism as a philosophy of life, Pierre de Coubertin was driven by the desire to, first, ennoble sports and, second, make them (in this ennobled version) an efficient tool to improve the modern society on the whole. Pierre de Coubertin was much inspired by these ideas. However,

his grounds for the initiative were dominated by rather the general impressions from the ancient sports and intuitional apprehension of them as a media for the Pierre de Coubertin's aspirations being realized in full – than analytical structuring of the idea of sports and Olympism. Pierre de Coubertin was, so to say, learning from the ancient Greeks and encouraged us to do the same. "My concept of sports, – says Pierre de Coubertin, – has always been different from most of the athletes' concepts. Sport for me has always been a religion with its own church, dogmas, worship and, above all, its own religious consciousness" [8, p.91-92]. (It may be pertinent to mention that "religious" in this context might mean "meta-physical" in fact). He further complains: "Sport religion. Ancient people realized the meaning of these words, albeit our contemporaries still fail to do that" [18]. Pierre de Coubertin recommended learning from the Greeks and it should be underlined that he was extremely far-seeing in this matter. M. Heidegger, when considering our present situation, rightfully stated the following: "Any comprehension of modernity on the whole may emerge and get enrooted only on the condition that, in its dialogue with the Greek philosophers, it lets its roots grow into the soil of our historical existence. Such dialogue is still waiting to get started. It is still being prepared, but this dialogue for us is only a prerequisite for further inevitable dialogue with the East-Asian world" [15, p. 332].

5. Modern sports are naturally different from ancient sports, albeit they are still much the same in their deeply underlying existential and essential senses. It should be noted, first of all, that these genuine senses are basically predetermined by the fact that it is the *competitive (agonal)* relationship that forms a basis for any sport including the Olympic ones, and it may be viewed as a fundamental, universal element in the existence and movement of the world. It should be further emphasized that sport is not only one of many possible agonal activities but a "purely competi-

tive activity" [2, p. 126]. Sport is a self-sufficient competitive relationship – much the same, by the way, as science that may be viewed as a cognitive competitive relationship, or morality as an ethical relationship. *Sport is designed to ideally reproduce the situation of a fair victory.* And this idea was well understood by the ancient Greeks, including, for instance, Heraklitos (VI-V centuries B.C.) who believed that the world is a unity and conflict of opposites [3, p. 177] and Empedocles (V century B.C.) who assumed that the life of Cosmos may be described as an interaction and competition of two elements one of which is *Philia (Love)* and the other is *Neikos (Hostility)* [17, p. 351-352]. ("It is through the conflict of opposites, – said Friedrich Nietzsche of the Greek's ideas, – that every establishment takes place... Everything happens in the course of this conflict, and it is through it that the eternal fairness emerges" [10, p. 216]). It should be emphasized that this eternal fairness within the social domain is connected with manifestations of human volitional efforts focused – and this is critical – rather on the interaction of the opposite sides and their merger than on the victory of either of them. *It is even rather the mutual convergence of the opposites than their merger.* It is through this process that a human reunites with the world and becomes an active participant (co-participant) of its self-controlled movement, and a contributor to the establishment of the world that happens in the *universe of the bodily location* of the person that experiences and *lives through* the establishment process; and it is through this process, as mentioned by M. Heidegger, that "the self-identification of the human corresponds to the self-opening of the objective reality" [16, p. 347]. It is through this process that the human realizes and acquires its own self essentially – as a subject of responsible action, a *subject of necessity*. (M. Bakhtin: "I accept my responsibility for my own existence" [1, p.77].) A competition in the social domain may be described as the process of human self-fulfilment and self-assertion. It is where

the two base human aspirations – for individualization and belonging – come in acute opposition and at the same time interact. (P. Tillich said: “I become Myself only for the reason that there is a world, a structured universe, where I belong to and at the same time somewhat separate from; for Myself and the world are correlative as much as correlative are the individualization and belonging” [12, p. 21].)

6. Sport reproduces the agonal process in an ordered form that is expressed in many semantic aspects of the process. Sport activates to the maximum possible degree and exposes the human aspiration for personal success (with the success herein being associated, first of all, with the effective external self-assertion); and, declaring and logically implementing in practice the concept of fair competition, gives the way to one more aspiration – for productive and creative devotion of human to society in which he competes – to attain the internal self-assertion. A human being aspires and gets an opportunity to fully experience his/her existence in the world accepting its own self as an equal to the world and at the same time radically opposite to it. Human assertion of his/her own self in this situation means the realization of its strive for a “fair victory” in competition for the highest award – which is the status of the subject playing a role of decisive factor in recreation and strengthening of the community that favours and appreciates a fair individual victory and highly and objectively recognizes the social importance of every human and applies a fair measure of his/her exclusiveness – among the equal, equally deserving humans. It may be referred to as the core philosophy of sport – in its active, practical and conceptual dimensions.

7. Sport is naturally associated with extremely ethically and mentally tense situations that are highly demanding to the human’s ability to accept the world realistically and clear and, hence, be able to employ the intrinsic concept of fairness though efficient activity in the world. The activi-

ty is naturally associated with the highest risks of falling into only one of the self-assertion options: exclusively external (potentially this is the case of actively aggressive behaviour) or exclusively internal (potentially the case of passively infantile behaviour) option. This is basically how the sporting activity evolves to expose the very core of the human agonal existence to help the human realize the sense of his/her existence and come, within its frame, to a fully-fledged spiritual and practical self-assertion. It is sport in its essential option – as practically implemented principle of Olympism, and it is the Olympism in its large-scale presentation – that is accomplished in the form of sport. It is the Olympic sport and sport Olympism. It may be pertinent to emphasise once again in this context that it is not a philosophy of balance and harmony understood in a simplified manner when harmony is interpreted as the situation where the conflicting opposites just level down one another. Olympism is the harmony that exposes conflict in an expressed and fully-sided manner – rather emphasized than mitigated. And at the same time it is the situation when each of the opposing sides is fully filled with the other. M. Heidegger refers to this situation as *universal* and underlines that it is dominated “rather by the struggle with the insuperable ambiguity of any questioning and being than blissful reverence” [16, p. 473]. It is where the consciousness is not zoomed out into a dot, nor fades nor passes to nothing, but rather expands its space of existence where consciousness actually acts and reaches its full clarity. It may be also said that sport sharply reproduces the base situation of human communication with the unavoidable duality of the latter. (K. Jaspers refers to this communication as the process characterized by “the unique struggle equal to love, the “loving struggle” that accepts the world only as the harmony that makes communication totally impossible by putting everything in question, generating difficulties and coming up with aspirations that are very serious under high solidarity of the relevant

interacting parties” [5, p. 217].) Olympism may be described as the clear vision of contradictions in the world and the acute sensation of the dramatic aspect of being, with the human feeling inspired by the chance to act as a factor of creation in conflict – and largely due to – this destructive dramatic aspect. The feel of life being recreated in this case means that the human is overwhelmingly sure that nothing and nobody can take away his joy of determined life-affirming activity, and it is the superior human feeling. Sport potentially awards a human with a deep competence in the world outlook. (Nikos Nissiotis: “It is through sport that a human discovers that the sense of its existence is in apprehension of the superior form of being” [19, p. 173].)

8. Competition is the basic element of the process of human existence viewed as the metaphysical being process. Competitiveness (agonality) in its totally complete form comprises the philosophy of life in its active and practical manifestation in its doctrinal presentation domain. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari mention: “If the modern philosophy really originates, as commonly accepted, from Greece, it is for the reason that a Greek polis, unlike empires and states, was the form where agon was invented as a rule of community of “friends” that mean the people (citizens) who are free and freely compete with one another” [4, p. 14]; and “Agon means the athleticism generally applicable as a universal concept” [4, p. 11]. This notion is very important in the context of our analysis. It virtually implies that it is the state of superior spiritual and practical energy, the energy of agonal existence that is the essential form of being. It is only the athletic, highly strong condition, as underlined by M. Mamardashvili, that “gives birth to dignity, honour, thought and truth; and when we are back in our non-strong state, we tend to think poorly and, more than that, act poorly” [6, p. 320]. Olympism is the *philosophy of strong state*. It should be remembered in this context of the ongoing attempts to formulate

and acquire a philosophy of life most appropriate in the present situation. And it is here that the importance of sports in the concept of Olympism being accepted and implemented is so obvious. It is pretty clear that our life today is short of, first of all, due spiritual and practical tonus, i.e. full involvement of humans in the feeling of absolute contentment by being in the world as a participant of the universal life. It is what the Olympic sport fully assumes. It also assumes a synthesis of the traditional – and still largely authoritative for today – paradigms of the world outlook (including Antiquity, Christianity, Buddhism, etc.) [2].

9. Philosophy of life is, above all, the *ethical philosophy*. It confirms that the only measure of importance of one or another activity – in expressing certain philosophy of life – is how this activity is really reproducing the situation of *self-sufficient reflexive existence*, i.e. how efficient it is in making the human fulfilled, satisfied and happy, and how this happiness is really filled with essentially important content. It makes sense to ask in this context: can the Olympic sports give such a chance to a human? Yes, it can, beyond doubt. And it is no less important to emphasize once again the fact that it is the state of happiness when the person feels totally protected from misfortunes, the happiness won by the person in the situation that put him/ her in the very epicentre of human existence that is always dramatic. Olympism is the ethics that motivates a person for the highest life-assertion in front of nonexistence. It may be pertinent to recall the clear words of Michael Novak: “We, mortals, will sooner or later be defeated in the game of life. We will die. And a sport competition is the ritually repeated triumphs of human in struggle with always the same competitor which is death” [7].

10. Summarizing the above, we would note that the whole existence of modern human is filled with the idea of sport. The modern human is obviously highly absorbed by this idea in the emotional, intellectual and practical aspects. It

may be fair to say that the philosophy of sport has really and meaningfully entered the life of a modern person. Sport has been accepted as the repeated event that many times happened in the past and is still happening now. Our analysis emphasizes that an important prerequisite for the above is that sport is an expressly agonal activity. It is the active agonality as one of the most deep-rooted strata of the human existence that is exposed in sports and lays a foundation for sports being so attractive both as a show and a form of practical activity that manifests itself today everywhere. However, modern sport has still failed to fully implement the idea it potentially carries as the self-sufficient competitive activity, and this failure prevents it from evolving into a fully-fledged and metaphysically founded world outlook, i.e. fully

functional philosophy of life. Olympic sport may be viewed as the sport that fully employs the valuable resource of agonality it is based upon. It may be said that Olympism is the objective the sport is genuinely focused on in its evolutionary process. Special efforts need to be taken to more actively support this focus to facilitate the idea of sport being closer united with the idea of Olympism - that implies, in fact, a deeper apprehension and spiritual and practical employment of the idea of agonality that may be viewed as a basis for every relationship in sports. *We are in need of genuine sports, truly Olympic sports!* This kind of sports may truly make our long dreams come true by helping the modern society obtain a fully-fledged philosophy of life.

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