

Olympism and the equilibrium of man



During the 1897 Le Havre Olympic Congress, Dr. Philippe Tissié and Father Henri Didon engaged in a „courteous“ dispute on „distinct pedagogic claims, even in opposition“, as reported by Pierre de Coubertin himself.¹ Symptomatically, controversies resulting from different approaches to humanism have remained constant throughout the history of the Olympic idea. Thus, the Le Havre dispute should stand as a milestone of the development of Olympism having minor consequences until today.

Actually, Olympism sought to realise its essential goal of placing „everywhere sport at the service of the harmonious development of man“² for one century. This notion of equilibrium is compatible with the present-day definition of Olympism found in the Olympic Charter as „a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind“³. However, are these humanistic prescriptions applicable to the reality of the Olympic Movement in a worldwide perspective? Rather, repeating an authoritative question recently posed by Yves-Pierre Boulongne: *Was Olympism ever transparent or unequivocal?*⁴

This essay has grown out of the conviction that much of the debate about Coubertin’s humanism and its corresponding Olympism is rooted in presuppositions that need to be questioned. The refusal taking it on as final devotional discourses or criticisms of the Olympic ethos rehabilitated the foundational approach in order to place Olympism within a larger context, making it less obscure and therefore more feasible.

In the forthcoming analysis I will argue at greater length that by stressing the roots from which Olympism arises, the prima facie notion of „equilibrium of man“ becomes central in Olympism. In short, my aim is to open possibilities for thought and suggest descriptions in which we can recognise contemporary Olympism, and so undermine other past interpretations and future perspectives whose plausibility depend on working from a more limited set of underlying bases. In order to help examine this strategy, I use Coubertin’s writings as a guide and take issue with his interpreters in order to draw new meanings and to redefine distinctions.

1 Coubertin, P.: Les Opinions du CIO. In: Revues Olympique, juillet 1902. Paris, pp. 46-47. In: Müller, N. / CIO (ed.): Pierre de Coubertin - Textes Choisis. Tome II. Zurich, Hildesheim, New York 1986, p. 694.

2 Olympic Charter, Fundamental Principle no. 3, IOC, Lausanne 1992, p. 11.

3 Ibid., Fundamental Principle no. 2, p. 11.

4 Boulongne, Y.-P.: Values and Significations of Modern Olympics. In: CNOSF (ed.): For a Humanism of Sport. Paris 1994, p. 29.

Reading Coubertin

The voluminous writings from Coubertin's intellectual life were often suited for the occasion, as Bernard Jeu once remarked.⁵ So far, one cannot expect conceptual rigor at first sight and much less scientific or philosophical coherence from the 60 thousand printed pages which represent the oeuvre of Olympism's founder.⁶ Undoubtedly this limitation concerns present-day reviewers, as Coubertin's works also answer questions that motivated his texts in different historical situations. This situational, hermetic understanding should then be elaborated by a reconstruction of the traditions in which Coubertin's literary production originated.

Despite the simplicity of this methodological claim, only a few interpreters have been capable of setting aside his or her horizons of understanding in researching Coubertin's historicity. The lack of interplay between the past and the present is furthermore criticised by Jean Durry (September 2nd, 1937 is the date of Coubertin's death): *„Depuis le 2 septembre 1937, le monde a changé. Comme ont pu changer la perception et l'analyse de Coubertin et de son oeuvre. Elles se bornèrent d'abord à l'affirmation et la transmission quasi-automatique d'un certain nombre de clichés, et l'on en demeure encore souvent à ce premier niveau.“*⁷

Indeed, from today's point of view the unsystematic writings of Coubertin are likely to be seen as superficial, intensely diverse and even contradictory. However, if eclecticism is the interpretative focus of these supposed relativistic statements and loose relationships of knowledge, the texts' significance cannot be called on to articulate conceptions in an unequivocal manner, but preferably to reconcile diverse ideas for appropriate selections and options. This has been the general understanding of the so-called „eclectic philosophy“ since Pico della Mirandola's Renaissance book *„Oratio de Hominis Dignitate“*⁸.

Again, eclecticism was an important course of thought during the eighteenth century, with Diderot being celebrated as an „eclectic philosopher“, a portrait similar to that of a freethinker of the French Enlightenment.⁹ In nineteenth century Britain, the same designation frequently identified John Stuart Mill for his insights into Enlightenment and Romanticism, both of which subscribed to what he called the „school of experience and association“¹⁰. But the culmination of eclecticism occurred in nineteenth century France with the emergence of an explicit line of thought delimited by Victor Cousin (1792 - 1867) as a development from Maine de Biran's (1766 - 1824) psychological stoicism.

For contemporary philosophers, Cousin's views remained as a reinterpretation of humanism in contrast to August Comte's (1798 - 1857) positivism. Both schools of thought thereafter revealed more points of similarity than differences, in addition to equally provide sources of social salvation. In all, French eclecticism experienced the tension between the sciences and humanities and, as a result, it dissipated progressively following Cousin's death in the mid-nineteenth century¹¹. Nevertheless, the philosophical positions of eclecticism continued to compound with pragmatism and other enlightened and evolutionary humanism which henceforth typified Western thought¹².

When we hold Coubertin's writings in comparison to Cousin's proposals, we may find more than analogies. In fact, there is a common identity shared by both intellectuals who were equally social reformers. For instance, in his

5 Jeu, B.: Values and Significations of Historical Olympism. In: CNOSE (ed.): For a Humanism of Sport. Paris 1994, pp. 59-65.

6 See Landry, F.: L'Actualité de Pierre de Pierre de Coubertin: De la pédagogie et de l'éducation physique appliquée à l'Amérique du Nord. In: Müller, N. (ed.): L'Actualité de Pierre de Coubertin. Neudamm 1987, p. 90.

7 Durry, J.: Le Vrai Pierre de Coubertin. Comité Français Pierre de Coubertin, Paris 1994.

8 The history of eclecticism is found in Holzhey, H.: Philosophie als Eklektik. Leibniz-Studien. Vol. 15, 1983, pp. 19-29.

9 See Casini, P.: Diderot et le Portrait de la Philosophie Eclectique. In: Revue Internationale de Philosophie. Vol. 38, 1984, pp. 35-45.

10 See Halliday, R.J.: John Stuart Mill. New York 1976.

11 For an interesting discussion of Cousin and Comte tensions see: Simon, W.M.: The Two Cultures in 19th Century France: Victor Cousin and Auguste Comte. In: Journal of History of Ideas. Vol. 26, 1965, pp. 45-58.

12 The subsistence of eclecticism's categories as one of the Enlightenment's fundamentals is discussed by Kelly, D.: What is Happening to the History of Ideas? In: Journal of History of Ideas. Vol. 51, 1990, pp. 3-25.

leading book „Du Vrai, du Beau et du Bien“ (1853), Cousin demonstrated that systematic thinking proceeds from doctrine to facts, while the eclectic approach, legitimised by experience, follows the procedure in the opposite direction. The same text also favours „a doctrine that conciliates all systems, integrating all facts which consolidate them“¹³.

Should these rationales be inserted into a critical framework of Coubertin's life contexts as those elaborated by Boulongne⁴, Hoberman⁵ or MacAloon⁶, the striking mixture of influences from which Olympism has emerged might become a model of eclectic thinking and behaviour. This clear-cut symmetry is precisely the origin of either acclamations or rejections from those interpreters. This is why Coubertin stands as „honnête homme“¹⁷ and Olympism as „a cult of reconciliation“¹⁸; or he acts as an „homme de lettre“¹⁹ and Olympism is seen as a „paradox“ because the Olympic Games „generate completely contrary experiences“²⁰.

Not surprisingly, only few investigations have grasped the eclectic meaning of Coubertin's texts. For example, Bernd Wirkus indicated Cousin's „école éclectique“ as a basis of Coubertin's method of thinking, as well as labelling Olympism as an eclectic „prescription“²¹. For this interpretation, Coubertin considered himself as a follower of Cousin and Jules Simon (1814 - 1896), another eclectic philosopher and famous politician²². Nikos Nissiotis was more accurate when he recognised Coubertinian eclecticism as a strategy of renovation. The consequence of this „non-systematic philosophy“ was to stress the proportions, the balance and the aesthetic experiences between extremes²³. In turn, Paiko Petrov suggests that being an „idealistic protagonist“ of his time, Coubertin „preferred to pick out eclectically only the ideas that best suited his own thesis, rather than tie himself in with a definite school of philosophy“²⁴.

These comments suggest that Coubertin's „lack of epistemological order“, once mentioned by Landry²⁵, was more apparent than most of his interpreters could have assessed. Certainly, he possessed a method and a philosophy behind it, usually replacing synthesis with analytical procedures in order to reach a deductive approach recommended by eclecticism²⁶. Notwithstanding, very often his interpreters sought syntheses to explain Olympism and other Coubertinian constructions through inductive reasoning. This opposition should explain the reason that most interpreters choose personal influences on Coubertin's thought and behaviour in order to gauge his fundamental beliefs.

13 Cousin, V.: Du Vrai, du Beau et du Bien. Didier, Paris 1853, pp. 360-392 (the textual citation is from p. 392).

14 Boulongne, Y.-P.: Origins of the Olympic Idea in the Western World. In: For a Humanism of Sport, op. cit. pp. 7-10 and Boulongne, Y.-P.: Humanism of Coubertinian Neo-Olympism. In: For a Humanism of Sport, op. cit. pp. 11-27.

15 Hoberman, J.: „Playing the Chameleon“: The Moral Bankruptcy of the Olympic Movement. In: The Olympic Crisis. New Rochelle, New York 1986, pp. 29-64.

16 MacAloon, J.J.: This Great Symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the Origins of the Modern Olympic Games. Chicago 1981.

17 Boulongne, Y.-P.: La Vie et l'Oeuvre Pédagogique de Pierre de Coubertin - 1863-1937. Editions Leméac, Ottawa 1975, p. 382.

18 Hoberman, J.: „Playing the Chameleon“: The Moral Bankruptcy of the Olympic Movement. In: The Olympic Crisis. New Rochelle, New York 1986, p. 31.

19 Mac Aloon, J.J.: Pierre de Coubertin and Contemporary Social Science. In: Müller, N. (ed.): The Relevance of Pierre de Coubertin Today. CIPC, Niedernhausen 1987, p. 200.

20 Hoberman, J.: „Playing the Chameleon“: The Moral Bankruptcy of the Olympic Movement. In: The Olympic Crisis. New Rochelle, New York 1986, p. 125.

21 Wirkus, B.: Pierre de Coubertin's Philosophical Eclecticism as the Essence of Olympism. In: Müller, N. (ed.): The Relevance of Pierre de Coubertin Today. CIPC, Niedernhausen 1987, pp. 179-190.

22 Ibid., p. 181.

23 Nissiotis, N.: L'Actualité de Pierre de Coubertin du Point de Vue Philosophique. In: Müller, N. (ed.): The Relevance of Pierre de Coubertin Today. CIPC, Niedernhausen 1987, pp. 125-161.

24 Petrov, P.: Pierre de Coubertin's Ideative and Ethic Heritage. In: Topicals of the International Olympic Movement. Sofia 198, pp. 31-46. The quotation is concerned to p. 38.

25 Landry, F.: L'Actualité de Pierre de Coubertin: De la Pédagogie et de l'Education Physique Appliqué à l'Amérique du Nord. In: Müller, N. (ed.): L'Actualité de Pierre de Coubertin. Niedernhausen 1987, p. 195.

26 See Boulongne, Y.-P.: Humanism of Coubertinian Neo-Olympism. In: CNOSF (ed.): For an Humansim of Sport, p. 19. The connection with eclecticism is a clarification not used by this author.

Summarising, Coubertin's intellectual works may be inaccessible to many present-day interpreters, except if they are familiar to the French tradition established in the last century by a combination of evolutionary epistemology, positivism, eclecticism and utilitarian humanism, blended with the idea of progress already reshaped by the enlightenment. Of course, matters become more complicated if those interpreters lack a unified perspective. To confront this difficulty, it is worth mentioning a description elaborated by Robert Nisbet:

The great objective of social philosophers and of naturalists too was the discovery of a unified law of progress. Condorcet, Saint-Simon, Comte, Hegel, Spencer, and Marx were among those who featured their respective „laws“ of progress. Progress, declared Spencer in his *Social Statics*, „is not an accident, but a necessity“. What Spencer called the law of progress, in his mind, meant exactly what others might call a law of evolution or development. Spencer himself used the word interchangeably²⁷.

Could we suggest, facing a broader context than the educational reform in France and the renovation of the Games, that Olympism is primarily a „law“ of unification? Did the eclectic Coubertin participate in the dispute between the utilitarian humanism (Dr. Tissié) and the ethical humanism (Father Didon) of his time, attempting to frame them in a unified conception (equilibrium of man)?

Eclecticism alive

Following Coubertin I will use historical facts in a deductive analysis to ground primary answers to the questions previously raised. Since experience gives the necessary meaning to potential answers in terms of eclecticism, my intention is to highlight the Latin America context of last century's intellectual life. Being historically a „laboratory“ for European ideas, the philosophy of positivism in this continent reached an even greater influence than it had in France, especially in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Chile. Also the idea of progress penetrated the hearts and minds of élites with more strength, becoming a powerful myth among Latin Americans from any country. By the mid-nineteenth century, eclecticism in particular had immigrated to Brazil, embodied in Cousin's disciples, soon becoming the official philosophy of the Brazilian Empire.

The contradiction in terms of an „official“ line of thought signals the importance of Brazilian eclecticism which had been incorporated to educational curricula in the country. The books of Cousin and Jules Simon were translated into Portuguese. During the second half of the century eclecticism was the major interest of Brazilian thinkers from several academic areas of knowledge. Medicine and law were specialisations from which original philosophical works emerged, such as those of Domingos Gonçalves de Magalhães (1811-1882) and Antonio Pedro de Figueiredo (1814-1859). According to Antonio Paim, a contemporary analyst of the „*escola eclética*“, the experience of eclecticism in Brazil finally encountered the philosophical problems left behind by Cousin and Simon and was forced to search for pertinent answers²⁸.

In sum, the seminal philosophers of French eclecticism supported the idea that morality was influenced by the sensitivity of individuals during voluntary physical efforts. In other words, there was a distinguishable physical component in moral judgement. Although difficult to be accepted by scientists, Maine de Biran's original conception marked most of the great thinkers of nineteenth century France, including the prestigious philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941). Coubertin also shared this belief, recognising the „*moral of the will*“ (Biran) as well as

27 Nisbet, R.: *History of the Idea of Progress*. New Brunswick, NY 1994, p. xv.

28 Paim, A.: *A Escola Eclética*. Editora da Universidade de Londrina, Londrina-Brazil 1996, pp. 349-415.

the „creative nature of the experience“ (Bergson). These latter remarks appeared in Georges Rioux’s preface to the major collection of Coubertin’s papers edited up to the present²⁹.

However, this point of view represented one of the weakest fundamental characteristics of Biran-Cousin’s eclecticism, because critics argued the arbitrary assemblage of different phenomena without convincing analysis. In Brazil, the medical doctor and philosopher Eduardo Ferreira Franca (1809-1857) had tried to solve this central problem earlier, giving more importance to singular characterisations of each phenomenon in relation to experience³⁰. By the end of the century, the Brazilian eclectic school was favouring historical legitimatisation of such phenomena. At that time eclecticism had been defined as „the philosophy of conciliation and reconstruction as opposed to scepticism“³¹. After this stage, the Brazilian eclectic school had been gradually dissolved.

Nevertheless, the specific outcome of these reflections is, in effect, an example of process philosophy incorporating an „epochal“ view of time. So eclecticism in Brazil — most likely the positivism in Latin America — is still alive and coexisting with other currents of thought. The peculiarity of a „living museum“ of ideas and cultural manifestations was analysed by Roberto Da Matta in a recent anthropological study on the so-called „Brazilian Puzzle“. For the eminent Brazilian scholar, the underlying logic of contradictory ideas hierarchically arranged different planes, as identified in many sectors of the Brazilian society by past and present observers, referring to the principle „the virtue lies in between“. This expression is not only a motto, but a state of mind, a fundamental element of Brazilian culture and of many parts of Latin America³².

Now again, we could find an experience here not transferable to other continents, but an indication that eclecticism was a process philosophy in France and kept this condition in Brazil. If it is true, this assumption has in philosophical grounds the meaning that if changes occur, many descriptions can be made without contradictions. That is, if the arguments of a philosophical position are sound then there really is no change. Ultimately, Cousin’s eclecticism was a work in progress, both in France and in its South American sanctuary.

Here the dynamic interplay of Coubertin with his historical context gains significance. He was deeply involved in a work in progress, to which interpreters attributed to changes in the focus of his interests over the years³³. Since Olympism remained a recurring theme during all of Coubertin’s intellectual lifetime, as ascertained by Müller and Schantz³⁴, it follows that this proposal may represent the basis of a possible unification. Trusting Boulongne’s overviews, Coubertin’s constant evocation of Olympism was consciously assumed in accordance to what he called „central clarity“ in a condition defined by universalism, that is „the great sets that one categorise along two very precise axes. On the one hand, the material world and the living conditions. On the other, the achievements of man throughout the centuries“³⁵.

In retrospect, the apparent confusion of Coubertin’s writings can be seen as a result of his eclecticism which presupposes a unified conception for his analytic compositions. According to the traditions of nineteenth century French thinking, this suggested unity should be a „law“ based on the idea of progress. A comparative review of eclecticism in France and in Brazil indicates that this tendency had been a process philosophy, which finally explains the changing pattern of Coubertin’s works and his conscious search of a universal value for Olympism.

29 Rioux, G.: Introduction Générale. In: Pierre de Coubertin - Textes Choisis. Tome I, op. cit. p. 18 for the quotations and p. 32 for the remarks.

30 Ferreira Franca, E.: Investigacoes de Psicologia. Salvador 1854, p. 80.

31 See Goncalves de Magalhaes, D.E.: Fatos do Espirito Humano. Garnier, Rio de Janeiro 1865, p. 36.

32 Da Matta, R.: For an Anthropology of the Brazilian Tradition. In: Hess, D. J. / Da Matta, R. (Eds.): The Brazilian Puzzle. New York 1995, pp. 270-291.

33 See, for example, Hoberman: op. cit. p. 33.

34 Müller, N. / IOC (ed.): Textes Choisis. Tome II. op. cit. pp. 359-441. This source put together 20 texts concerned to Olympism, issued from 1894 to 1936.

35 Boulongne, Y. P.: Humanism of Coubertinian Neo-Olympism. op. cit. p. 19.

From these conjectures we may consider the hypothesis acceptable, by historical observation that Olympism stands as a pretentious claim of unification and, by argument, as an individual achievement by means of effort.

Eclecticism and eurhythmy

At this point in the present analysis it is convenient to look for validation by quoting Coubertin when he approached Olympism as a „state of mind instead of a system“ introducing a statement of 1918: „L'Olympisme est un état d'esprit issu d'un double culte: celui de l'effort et celui de l'eurythmie. Et voyez combien conforme à l'humaine nature apparaît l'association de ces deux éléments — le goût de l'excès et le goût de la mesure — qui, d'aspect contradictoire, se trouvent pourtant à la base de toute virilité complète“³⁶.

This declaration was selected beforehand by Jean Durry to demonstrate the relevance of the oeuvre³⁷ and it is now used as a key for mapping the conceptual framework of Olympism in Coubertin's horizon of understanding. Here the thesis concerns the primary relation between effort and eurhythmy, the latter expression grounded by Coubertin as a „proportion“: „L'emploi ce terme proportion mais ce n'est pas celui que je voudrais employer. Le terme venant de soi-même sous ma plume serait celui d'eurythmie. Mais à cet égard nous nous entendons mal entre Français et Allemands. Les Allemands considèrent que, dans le mot grec 'eurythmie', c'est l'idée de rythme que domine. En français, on prête surtout attention à la première syllabe. On évoque d'abord l'idée de beau, de parfait. Est eurythmique tout ce qui est bien proportionné. L'Hellénisme a, par excellence, préconisé la mesure, la proportion créatrice de beauté, de grâce et de force associées. Il nous faut sous ce rapport revenir vers les conceptions helléniques pour contrebalancer les effrayantes laideurs de l'âge industriel que nous venons de traverser“³⁸.

In order to show what I called the primary relation between effort and eurhythmy and how it has an explanatory dependence, the emphasis should be placed on the contrast between „excess“ and „measure“ also asserted in the 1918 text. Seeking a broader understanding for excess in the context of sport, Coubertin wrote that „sport moves towards excesses... that is the core of the problem but at the same time it is its nobility and even its poetic charm“³⁹. In another meaningful account he declared that excess is the sport's „première raison d'être“ because sport is a passion, worthy of being controlled by wisdom⁴⁰. In my view, these clarifications may be addressed to the fundamental core of Miran-Cousin's eclecticism for conceiving effort (sport) as an autonomous and creative body action. As a consequence, measure (eurhythmy) is the content needed by sport to master its efforts in harmony and prudence.

So, by all means, eurhythmy is presumably a „law“ of equilibrium applied to individual achievements in sport, naturally submitted to excess. Not surprisingly, the quest of this supposed „law“ finds an answer in the present-day definition of Olympism: whether „a philosophy of life“ or not, the „balanced whole“ of body, will and mind, is a central condition of the „harmonious development of man“.

However, in terms of philosophical argument, the condition of equilibrium is necessary but not sufficient, because Olympism deals with the individual's autonomous and creative sport actions. Here lies an historical dispute of eclecticism and other sorts of humanism: to what extent should harmonious control of actions (eurhythmy) prevail over free-will (sport)?

This question can be posed to the conceptual framework of Olympism and even to review the „courteous“ dispute between Tissé (systematic physical education) and Didon (moral development through sport). And even, in

36 Coubertin, P.: Lettres olympiques. In: Textes Choisis. Tome II. op. cit. p. 385.

37 Durry, J.: op. cit. p. 39.

38 Coubertin, P.: Les sources et les limites du progrès sportive. In: Olympische Rundschau. No.5, Berlin avril 1939, pp. 1-2. In: Textes Choisis. Tome II. op. cit. p. 76.

39 Quoted in Müller, N.: One Hundred Years of Olympic Congresses 1894-1994. Lausanne 1994, p. 81.

40 Coubertin, P.: La bataille continue... In: Bulletin du B.I.P.S. No.5. Lausanne 1931, pp. 5-7. In: Textes Choisis. Tome II. op. cit. p. 294.

addition, to find a new meaning for Coubertin's cultivation of opposed tendencies, such as the one he explicitly modeled upon two original leaders of the Olympic Movement, Colonel Viktor Balck (Sweden) and Professor William Sloane (USA): „Balck, c'était l'action, et Sloane, l'intellectualisme ou service de l'Olympisme renouvelé"⁴¹. In the same article Coubertin praised an exhibition of Swedish gymnastics on the occasion of the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm; due to past confrontations with partisans of physical education systems he vividly wrote: „n'était-ce point la victoire de l'éclectisme? Mais il n'en pouvait être autrement. Point d'éclectisme, point d'Olympisme"⁴².

Then it is quite understandable that Coubertin's alternative to frame Olympism in a desirable concept of unification was to appeal for an association of control of actions and free will. This eclectic assemblage was vaguely referred to as a „state of mind“ („état d'esprit“) that was never submitted to clarifications. Symptomatically enough, Coubertin proceeded as did his Brazilian eclectic contemporaries, spending most of his life-time analysing in-depth „the great sets that categorise the Olympism“; or seeking legitimisation of his proposals in history; or, last but not least, selecting combinations between extremes.

Another coincidence to be taken into account is the Brazilian scholar's finding that was Hypolite Taine - one of Coubertin's „maîtres-à-penser“ - who severely criticised the eclectic school. The fact marked the decline of Victor Cousin and Jules Simon in French philosophy and also the beginning of a confrontation with positivism's adepts in Brazil as well⁴³. Of course, in France, Coubertin somehow managed both views, but future investigations are needed to evaluate of Jules Simon's true role in the theoretical construction of Olympism.

In sum, Olympism as an eclectic elaboration was ultimately a process philosophy during Coubertin's life-span. In spite of this on-going process of development, the notion of eurhythmy gave a direction to Olympism but not the necessary internal coherence. It follows that Olympism cannot be held as a philosophy, but rather one of the several versions of humanism, a philosophical position which over the ages became a pluralistic construction.

Yet these humanisms are currently identified by a complement that connotes their doctrinal directions. In this context Thomas Munro⁴⁴ gives a significant example that could be applied to Olympism. This is the case of naturalistic humanism, in which the adjective is an account of all values that incorporate physical and cultural capacity for good experiences in life. The resultant equilibrium of this combination tends to favour harmony, moderation, justice, freedom and rationality. In this sense, Munro's humanism is an updated version of the preceding „effort“ and „measure“ from the last century's mixture, for which the necessary condition of effectiveness is harmony and other categories of equilibrium.

So, shall we, in the threshold of the twenty-first century, arrive at one more humanism by shaping a pluralistic Olympism?

Toward a pluralistic Olympism

As a result of the diversity among humanisms, Coubertin and eclecticism may reach a new level of assessment, but the challenge of putting Olympism into practice still remains. This failure must now be placed in a new humanistic scenario: that of pluralism, which is primarily concerned into a multi-faceted world with many genuine views and interpretations. Philosophers of this new kind of legitimisation are re-evaluating man's relations to others, himself and to the environment⁴⁵.

41 Coubertin, P.: Silhouettes disparues. In: Gazette de Lausanne. 20 déc. 1928, p. 1. In: Textes Choisis. op. cit. pp. 354-355.

42 Ibid. p. 353.

43 See, for example, Paim, A.: op. cit. pp.6-25.

44 Munro, T.: A Note on the Aesthetics of Naturalistic Humanism. In: Journal of Aesthetic and Art Critique. Vol. 28. Fall 1969, pp. 45-47.

45 See, for instance, Barral, M. R.: Can Humanism Survive Technology? In: Proceedings of the XVth World Congress of Philosophy. Vol. III. Varna 1974, pp. 177-180.

What should be at stake in Olympism is that of a proper balance between its traditions and the new pluralistic humanism. Similarly, sport has already surpassed this necessity. Indeed, a few scholars are reshaping a new humanism for sport activities by tracing their institutional and scientific domination in contrast to the growing search for autonomy by participants⁴⁶. For José Maria Cagigal, in early 1980, this dichotomy between control and self-determinism should be contended in terms of macro-relations and micro-relations: the former as barriers to humanism and the latter as development of human values⁴⁷.

To date, pluralist humanisms are prevailing. The characteristic dichotomy of present-day sport should be seen as a moral dilemma, here understood by a choice between domination and autonomy. In a broader context the dilemma is pervasive and involves many of today's social relations. But to traditional institutions and lines of thought, the dilemma often becomes a paradox or any other interpretation. Ellen Paul et alia, reviewers of pluralism as an issue of philosophy and epistemology, assert:

The (Western science) tradition acknowledges pluralism in the positive sense, but rejects it in the normative sense: it acknowledges the existence of a diversity of cultures and moral beliefs, but denies that the validity of beliefs and practices can vary across cultures⁴⁸.

Placing the focus on the historical search for universal truths as a distinctive cultural tradition of the West, the same authors make a conclusion also suggestive to sport debate: „as societies become more pluralistic, and as cultural issues become increasingly divisive, moral philosophy needs to take account of the diversity of cultural traditions“⁴⁹.

This assertion refers to Olympism as well, as far as recent studies presented to the International Olympic Academy scrutinise dilemmas, paradoxes and overall constraints of the Olympic Movement worldwide⁵⁰. Then, philosophically, the practical meaning of Olympism is more concerned with cultural claims than with scientific or pedagogical prescriptions. This argument moreover may be further re-elaborated by the productive metaphors of homo athleticus and homo symbolicus in order to explain the cultural pitfalls of Olympism. In principle, while athleticism requires control in macro-relations, the symbolic identity of man in his pluralistic environment comprises values and contingent experiences in micro-relations, demanding a new approach to equilibrium after all.

At the onset of Olympism, eurhythmy aimed at providing harmony and prudence to excess, passion, autonomous and creative body actions or individual free-will embodied by homo athleticus everywhere in this world. Today, homo symbolicus, on behalf of a pluralistic version of Olympism, should master and control his or her sport involvement by measure, wisdom or harmony in action. In summary, for a new Olympism the notion of eurhythmy should be primarily addressed to homo symbolicus, with less attention to the long-admired homo athleticus.

While eclecticism can be seen as the missing link in the history of the idea of Olympism, eurhythmy presupposes holding the unitary and central foundation of Olympism at the same measure that the equilibrium of man can be set in regarding each specific cultural identity. In this case, the right measure is the local measure. Under such condition, pluricultural Olympism is a viable humanism. However, the self-circumscription adopted by Olympic leaders and scientists of sport in putting the Olympic idea into practice does not match such a theoretical construction.

In the past, much of the project of Olympism was articulated by the „esprit de geometrie“ with which French intellectuals comprehended the world in the eighteenth century. By 1897, during the Le Havre Congress, Coubertin

46 This tendency was identified by Sage, G.: Humanism and Sport. In: Sport and American Society: Selected Readings. Reading-Mass. 1980, pp. 353-368.

47 Cagigal, J.M.: Valeur Humaniste du Sport. Consejo Nacional del Deporte, Madrid 1980 (unpublished paper).

48 Paul, E./Miller, F./Paul, J. (eds.): Cultural Pluralism and Moral Knowledge. New York 1994, p.vii (Introduction).

49 Ibid. p. XIII.

50 The reference is the 33rd Session of the International Olympic Academy (1993) in which the central theme was „The Different Applications of Olympism in the Major Cultural Zones of the World“. See IOC/IOA (eds.): Report of the Thirty-Third Session. Lausanne 1994.

used the „esprit de finesse” — another typical French creation — to reconcile opposites. Should this strategy now be critically employed to build a pluricultural Olympism?

Résumé

Olympisme et équilibre de l'homme

Tout d'abord l'auteur se demande dans quelle mesure l'élément essentiel de l'olympisme „l'éducation harmonieuse et le développement de l'homme grâce au sport” pourrait être reporter sur la réalité olympique. Au cours de son exposé, il essaie de redéfinir les racines de l'olympisme et par conséquent de remettre en question l'humanisme de Coubertin. Pour ce faire, il choisit les Ecrits de ce dernier comme points de repère et se démêle avec leurs bien différentes interprétations.

Son but est, par ce biais, de créer une base plus large pour l'interprétation de l'olympisme actuel afin de le rendre plus compréhensible et en même temps plus réalisable. Le désordre apparent dans les Ecrits de Coubertin est pour l'auteur le résultat de la pensée élective de celui-ci. Grâce à une vue rétrospective comparée sur l'électisme en France et au Brésil, il essaie d'expliquer la systématique changeante dans les ouvrages de Coubertin ainsi que sa recherche vers une valeur unique pour l'olympisme. Les exposés suivants sur l'électisme et l'eurythmie donne à l'olympisme une certaine orientation sans pouvoir cependant lui donner la concision nécessaire.

L'auteur en conclut que l'olympisme n'est pas comparable à la philosophie, mais que c'est une version de l'humanisme, un comportement philosophique qui, avec le temps obtiendra une structure pluraliste.