



# Olympic values in the 21st century: between continuity and change

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# Summary

1. Introduction	.....	1
2. Olympism and Modernity	.....	1
3. Olympism on the vanguard of neo-modernity?	.....	5
4. Olympic values in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century, a continuum between continuity and change	.....	11
Bibliography	.....	15



## 1. Introduction

Olympic values may be narrowly tied to the 20th century and its values. Although sports had their beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they may be affirmed to have assumed their virtually universal popular character in the 20<sup>th</sup>, particularly in the second half. On one hand, this was due to the expansion of western modernity, which we have witnessed in the last fifty and some odd years; on the other, to the global expansion of the Olympic Movement itself. Therefore, we have considered the centrality of this Movement for globalization from a determined set of forms of sports practice and sports-related values.

A second reason resides in the fact that we have effectively passed through a time of highly accentuated changes, in which much thinking about the permanency and change of the values of the world in which we live points to a crisis of beliefs and suppositions on which the modern world supports itself.

To start with, I attempt, though briefly, to analyze so-called 'Olympic values' as a form of expression and possible configuration of humanism and western modernity. In the second part, from a review of what has been discussed regarding the change and/or crisis of values that guide the contemporary world, I attempt to examine facts that might indicate a possible reconfiguration of Olympic values. Finally, I analyze how the intellectual fundamentals of Olympism itself have furnished us elements for thinking about the permanence and relevance of Olympic values in the 21<sup>st</sup> century within a context of continuity and change. In this way, I seek to observe Olympic values in their *process* dimension.

## 2. Olympism and Modernity

Modernity is the product of the triumph of the humanistic and rationalistic theories that have given rise to the modern state and the idea of the individual as an autonomous entity. On one hand, it entails the *regnum hominis* – a humanistic vision that offers a non-reductionist and non-deterministic idea of the human being (Loland 1995). On the other hand, it is a movement that has made science, art and morality areas that are autonomous from religion. The resultant secularization of these three spheres has enabled the free accumulation of knowledge, modern art and the concept of universal moral principles.

At any rate, the belief in human reason has shown itself to be a great unifying force. The modern world has been dislocated towards an anthropocentric vision, with reason acting as the mediator between humankind and nature. The subject – not nature – has been set in place as the epistemological, ethical and ontological foundation to the degree in which the existence of things is conditioned to the ability to prove them (Fensterseifer 2001). This humanistic and rationalistic tradition has as its basic premise the possibilities of molding the human personality through education. Illuministic pedagogy has fully authorized trust in reason as the source of freedom and liberation. Education has the duty of perfecting human nature. Through education, human beings can realize their potential as free beings and can mold their own destiny and history.

Authors such as Lolland have cited Olympic values as a “secular and vitalistic” expression of western humanism (Lolland 1995:66). However, evidence that they are also – or should be – the concretization of a social reform philosophy based on the educational value of sports is less recognized. For Coubertin, the Games have represented the institutionalization of the belief in sports as a moral and social undertaking. In this sense, they would be a ‘pedagogical manifestation’ of the values that have been attributed to the practice of sports. He had labeled this set of values ‘Olympism’.

As we know, if there is any academic consensus at all about Olympism, it resides in the fact that there is no sufficiently good definition as to what it is. Thus, possible agreements about what it might be can pass through more systematized academic developments to a more or less generic consensus derived from commonsense.

In light of its historical dimension and global reach, Olympism continues to require complex approaches due to its multiple levels of analysis and possibilities of interpretation. This thesis has roots in interpretations such as those by Hans Lenk, who proposes that “a somewhat concise definition of the term ‘Olympic Idea’ must necessarily comprehend the pluralistic structure of the basic values, norms and characteristics of the Olympic Movement” (DaCosta

2002:35). Actually, this possibility of more or less broad interpretation adjusts itself to the intellectual perspective of the history of ideas in which it has been written.<sup>1</sup>

A review of the Olympic Idea in Coubertin – but also in its network of interpreters – can show Olympism to be a reconciliation between romantic values (the notions of honor, duty, self-surpassing, fair play, moral excellence and a feeling of belonging) and illuministic values (individualism, universalism, belief in the transforming power of education and the value of competition).

The way in which we practiced and, especially, the values we attributed to the practice of sports in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were largely formatted by the Olympic Movement in spite of its differentiated impacts and diverse local appropriations. Such a fact justifies assertions such as those of Sigmund Loland, for whom “Olympism is perhaps the interpretation of the basic idea of humanism that has had the greatest impact on the life of ordinary men and women in the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Loland 1995:66).

From this perspective, Parry (1997:1) observes that

A universal philosophy by definition applies to everyone, regardless of nation, race, gender, social class, religion or ideology, and so the Olympic movement has worked for a coherent universal representation of itself a concept of Olympism which identifies a range of values to which each nation can sincerely commit itself whilst at same time finding for the general idea a form of expression which is unique to itself, generated by its own culture, location, history tradition and projected future.

However, this articulation between universal and local values has not been free of contradiction and tension, since its operationalization more clearly portrays the relationship between discourse and practice to the degree in which it establishes concrete choices that exemplify cultural values that are not always easily compatible.

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, Allan Bullock quoted by Loland “observes that humanism is not a school of thought or a philosophical doctrine, but a broad tendency, a dimension of thought and belief, a continual debate within which at any time highly different - and at time opposing - viewpoints can be found, not united by a unifying structure, but through certain shared presuppositions and preoccupations with certain characteristic problems and topics, which change from time to time”. Sigmund Loland, “Coubertin’s Ideology of Olympism from the Perspective of the History of Ideas”, p. 77.

The mimetic relationship with modernity becomes obvious. For Giddens (1991), the Modern Era is multidimensional, and in order to understand its nature one must examine its immense dynamism, global scope and differences from traditional cultures. Like other modern forms, Olympic values connect local and global forms in ways never before imagined.

The close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the rise of diverse analysis that postulate that the social process has given way to the emergence of a group of phenomena that characterize the out-dating of modern values. Important interpreters of modernity, such as Sergio Rouanet (1987), suggest that modernity, with its paradigms of progress and universal reason, has grown old. In a general manner, this time has been called somewhat imprecisely as post-modernity. In light of this picture, questions concerning the validity of Olympic values within this new scenario seem to be justified.

In spite of this, however, the Olympic Movement seems to be growing stronger and stronger, or at least more popular. The Games continue to be an event that galvanizes public attention the world over. A large number of cities throughout the world continue to want to host the Games and the downside value of holding them has not dampened such enthusiasm – rather, the opposite is the case. In the same way, their ability to represent a dimension of human excellence remains untouched. The Games are alive and well and show no signs of growing old.

One must note, however, that much of the debate concerning the value of Olympic competition is based on arguments of a rather conservative nature. Criticisms about its organization, values, manifestations and effects are based on the idea that these aspects have changed and that the Olympic Movement less and less reflects the values that it has historically proposed to spread and defend.

Thus, we find ourselves faced with two paradoxes. The first involves those who criticize modernity and those who criticize the Olympic Movement; some pointing to the fact that the Olympic Movement is outdated; others wanting to protect it. The meeting of these contradictory positions leads us to develop the hypothesis that the Games themselves have



comprised a field of manifestation of the displacement of values at the end of the last century. Consequently, a third paradox becomes obvious. It consists in the possibility of tension between the modern nature of Olympic values and the manifestation of post-modern elements or values at the heart of the Olympic Movement. Therefore, we might ask what the Olympic values might be in this ambiguous process of continuity and change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **3. Olympism on the vanguard of neo-modernity?**

According to Terry Eagleton (1998), although there is a distinction between post-modernism as a cultural movement and post-modernity as a historical period, because of the intimate relationship between both, it is possible to address them as a whole. Others deny the existence of post-modernity as a distinct historical period. For them, there is no new course or social order distinct from modernity. Thus, it would be more appropriate to think about a radicalization of the current phase of modernity (Giddens 1991) or the incompleteness of its purpose. (Rouanet 1987).

At any rate, there is a reasonable consensus that what is called post-modernism is comprised of a line of thought that questions the classic ideas of truth, reason, objectivized identity and universal emancipation. For its theoreticians, the post-modern world would be diverse, unstable and unpredictable. Hence, we would be entering an era characterized by the impossibility of truth and the end of the teleological idea and of progress.

Arising from opposition or indifference towards ideology, history and politics, post-modernity would be based on the value of pluralism, heterogeneity and difference. Within this context, it would find its unity in dogmatic anti-essentialism and disbelief in the idea of totality.

However, the term 'post-modern' lacks a good definition. For Rouanet (1987), post-modern consciousness is false to the degree that it does not correspond to a completely real change, and it is true to the degree in which it alludes to the deformities of modernity. In this sense, what we might have are 'symptoms' of a situation that implies more incompleteness than out-datedness.

It is within this context of ambivalence between awareness of rupture and rupture per se, between neo-modernity and post-modernity that, *mutatis mutandis*, our analysis is directed at what might be Olympic values in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

If we recover the relationship between a 'multi-compatible' Olympism and the idea of dynamic and multi-dimensional modernity, a systematic analysis seems to be productive for the objectives of this study. The general hypothesis that I intend to prove is that the elements that characterize the rise of neo-modern consciousness is also manifested in the Olympic Movement itself. In this sense, it is in the mapping of the 'symptoms' proposed by Rouanet that we find support here in the presentation of our hypotheses.

*First symptom:* Within the economic sphere, according to some authors, we have passed from an industrial to a post-industrial society; that is, one that is endowed with a new mode of production characterized by an increase in the services sector and the valuing of information. Others believe that capitalism has reached a post-imperialist stage known as multinational, but without significant changes in the mode of production.

*First hypothesis:* Today, the Olympic Games are also a huge transnational corporate business<sup>2</sup>. An analysis of the economics of the Olympic Games by Holger Preuss (2000) shows that the "Olympic Games product" has been sold as a franchise based on its global scope, corporate identity and ideology. This commercial effort has been supported by big sponsors desirous of bolstering the value of their name brands.

However, this movement has not been made without internal and external reactions, a fact that has raised and increased criticism of the Movement to a high level. At any rate, such evidence points to the entry of commercial logic into the organization of the Olympic Movement at the same time in which it is related to its own values.

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<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of the International Olympic Committee as a transnational organization, see Donald Macintosh & Michael Hawes, "The IOC and the World of Interdependence", *Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies*, 1 (1991), pp. 29-45.

*Second symptom:* Within the political arena, power in post-modernity has become more diffused. If on one hand silent indifference has increased regarding control, class, ideology and power, on the other hand civil society has become a political actor in and of itself. Thus, universality loses while specificity gains, since the universal has come to be seen from the local. Likewise, we have seen a dislocation of the meaning of democratization within the ambit of the state towards other forms of social organization such as schools and companies. Hence, even though in many social spaces the rules of the democratic game are not applied *stricto-sensu*, a more democratic 'climate' has become a requirement.

*Second hypothesis:* The current internal organization of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and its practices reflect a reactive adjustment to the contemporary demands of democratization.

Since 1981, the IOC has gone through a process of internal 'democratization' that is essentially based on the principle of increasing the participation of its various entities (national olympic committees, international sports federations and confederations, and athletes). The crisis of credibility that arose from the corruption scandal of its members in 1999 has increased this demand, incorporating the concepts of transparency, representativeness and external control into the idea of greater participation by its actors. Within this context, athletes' participation on all the commissions of the Committee, the creation of an ethics commission with independent members, a limitation on mandates and the accepting of institutional representatives, among other measures, have exemplified the search for a more democratic structure of the IOC<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the initiative by Jacques Rogge, current president of the IOC, to present athletes elected directly to the IOC's Commission of Athletes in the closing ceremony of the 2004 Athens Games seems highly significant.

*Third symptom:* Within the scientific arena, post-moderns have questioned the criteria of legitimacy and acceptability of scientific knowledge, because one may notice a fall in the belief in the universal emancipating character of science. Thus, although the criteria of acceptability continue to be basically the same, legitimization has become more and more pragmatic.

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<sup>3</sup> An analysis of the process of democratization of the IOC was made by the author of this paper in Otávio Tavares, *Esporte, Movimento Olímpico e Democracia: o atleta como mediador* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation: Universidade Gama Filho, Rio de Janeiro, 2003).

*Third hypothesis:* The Games are the sports event par excellence, in which, in practice, the limits of the understanding of what is legitimate for increasing performance are experienced.

One could say that the advent of modern scientific training (1960s) corresponds to the loss of the innocence of high performance sports. If the Nazi attempt in 1936 to demonstrate Aryan superiority through sports (besides being subordinate to political objectives) occurred fundamentally by means of training *conditions*, research on human physiology and its impact on sports training focused on *methods* as a form of superiority. That period inaugurated the application of scientific knowledge to the area of sports as a threat to human dignity. In this sense, all sports professionals find themselves daily facing choices about the legitimacy of scientific knowledge developed and applied to increasing human performance. The guiding reasons and values for making such choices, however, have changed over time. First of all, due to competition between the large ideological blocs during the Cold War, and, subsequently, due to a mosaic of national and commercial interests, and even the desire for glory and individual recognition, a string of athletes, physicians, trainers and sports managers have 'extended' the limits of sports ethics to their own advantage.

Curiously enough, there is already a consensus concerning the damage to one's health caused by the demand level of high performance sports, but there have been no serious attempts to limit them. On the other hand, the debate on the use of doping in sports is nothing more than a moral debate, in which the threat to the 'sports spirit' and 'Olympic values' is regarded with more conspicuousness than the relationship between physical exercise and health (Tavares 2002). It is not surprising that within this context the Games have surfaced as the principal scene of the debate, in which the legitimacy of Olympic sports has been questioned in light of the IOC's disposition to truly combat doping. It is there that the tension between the ethical limits consensually given and the private reasons for using (new) methods for improving sports performance are more and more illustrated. Last century's fragmented morality set the basis for a more and more pragmatic use of scientific knowledge in the area of sports.

*Fourth symptom:* The moral sphere has been impacted by secularization and rationalization in the modern world. Nonetheless, although one could say that the disconnection of ethics from

religious thought has contained the seed of pluralism, the contemporary process seems to be that of a decrease in the submission of desire to reason, with morality losing strength because of its atomization.

*Fourth hypothesis:* When placed within the perspective of recipients, Olympic sports have begun to be valued more for the esthetics of competition and ceremonies and less for their intrinsic traditional values.

As was observed above, Olympism may be also understood as a combination of romantic and illuministic values. This combination of ideas has projected a marked, almost hegemonic influence on the positive manner in which we evaluated the practice of sports during a good part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of Pierre de Coubertin's biggest efforts has been to define the positive values that sports should exemplify and the way in which such values should be transmitted. This has led his interpreters to identify a *right* and *true* way to practice sports. This has been close to a true institutionalization within the Olympic Movement, of which the rule of amateurship has been its most visible aspect. The debate that took place during the 1960s and 70s concerning the issue of including segregationist countries exemplified the problematic side of Olympism as a supposedly universal doctrine, but it did not keep a movement from trying to prevent the participation in the 1996 Games of countries that did not give equal treatment to women, based on the argument that such was a universal right (Atlanta Plus).

We have therefore witnessed the rise of a multiplicity of forms of sports practice and forms of organization, regulation, localization and, especially, objectives. Just as its constitutive and identifying elements vary, the adjectives defining it (educational, alternative, radical, leisurely, performance-related, nature-related, etc.) have grown in number, thus configuring evidence of its fragmentation process. Actually, a serious debate about sports no longer seems possible unless we go through a process of first clarifying our terms. That is precisely why many authors classify sports as *polysemical* (Heinemann & Puig 1991). Hence, the "empire of individual decisions"<sup>4</sup> could mean two serious changes within the area of sports preferences: the

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<sup>4</sup> Antoine Prost, "Fronteiras e espaços do privado", in Phillipe Ariés & George Vicent, *História da vida Privada* (São Paulo: Cia. das Letras, 1992), p. 101. In this respect, Prost in the same text pointed to the increasing success of individual sports as well as to the phenomenon of the invention and democratization of new sports in the second half of the century.

atomization of sports practice values and the predilection of individual and alternative sports to the detriment of traditional team sports. Within the Olympic environment such evidence is already apparent in the adoption of 'extreme' modalities and/or those involving contact with nature as in beach volleyball, mountain biking and snowboarding as part of the Games' itinerary as a way to modernize them and meet new demands.

*Fifth symptom:* Within the realm of art, post-modernism has been characterized by a dilution of the boundaries between erudite culture and popular culture, and by the fragmentation of languages. With the loss of reference points, post-modern art is situated in an eternal present, because it does not have a project for the future, and its past, replete with citations, is inauthentic.

*Fifth hypothesis:* The esthetic aspect of the Games has been demonstrated as an example of the changes in contemporary esthetics. Their opening and closing ceremonies more and more celebrate the local to the detriment of the universal, symbols in place of meanings, and their increasingly inauthentic rituals.

The Olympic ceremonies are the product of a gradual development of concepts intended to endow them with a ritual and singular character. Although Coubertin had in some way anticipated the 'long durée' concept in their historiographical production (Tavares 2000), in the case of the modern Games no one could seriously mean the renewal, rebirth or reform of the ancient Olympics. The modern Games certainly echo the ancient ones, but it is not possible to establish a pattern of continuity that represents the same ideas and motivations of the original epoch for contemporary society and its cultural expressions. The result is that the classic past of the modern Games is itself essentially inauthentic.

Actually, as revisers of the Olympic ceremonies have already suggested, Coubertin's main objective has been to develop elements that might contribute to building a feeling of singular belonging and commitment among the athletes (Moragas et al. 1995). This seems to be the most plausible explanation for his *religio athlete*. This thesis has won support in works of an anthropological character, which analyze the Olympic ceremonies as a modern secular ritual

(Klausen 1995). The ceremonies have more than anything else displayed themselves as a show and only subconsciously as a form of communication and veneration. If the progressive influence of television and the use of the Games' ceremonies as a strategy for promoting the site-cities and the countries that host the games have gradually transformed these ceremonies into a spectacle, then it is not surprising that in research done on Brazilian and German athletes who participated in the Sydney Games, one could perceive that what stood out for most of them was the "*glamour of the party*" rather than the rite of passage (Tavares 2003). What we have witnessed, then, is an ambivalent ceremony that waivers between rite and show, between ceremony and party, between historic continuity and cultural change. It is not surprising that this *mélange* of symbols and meanings has been simultaneously the stage for lyrical singers and rock stars.

If all these hypotheses are true, the Olympic Movement itself has been subject to this reconfiguration of modern values. In light of what has been observed, it seems to me that it is possible to affirm that the symptoms of neo-modernity are also detectable within the Olympic environment. Thus put, it is necessary to take another look at the possibility of a growing paradoxical tension between cultural origin and contemporary changes. Within such a context, I propose that the elements of the past enable us to glimpse the near future.

#### 4. Olympic values in the 21st century, a continuum between continuity and change

Looking back, DaCosta's (2002) affirmation seems pertinent concerning the aporetic nature of Olympism. According to this author, Olympism is intrinsically supported by paradoxical choices whose nature derives from their declared objectives. This attitude is already the foundation of Coubertin's intellectual work, since it seems to be supported by the theoretical landmark of eclectic philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For Lamartine DaCosta, Olympism must be analyzed starting from the theoretical landmark of Victor Cousin's eclectic philosophy. As one of the schools of thought present on the French intellectual scene of the last century, eclecticism seems to be effectively defined as a 'key' to understanding the inner logic of Olympism. Just as the eclectic school commends the building of knowledge from legitimization through experience, Olympism would be built upon a deductive treatment, through the eclectic combination of various elements in search of universal acceptance, legitimized by history or by facts. See Lamartine DaCosta, "O Olimpismo e o equilíbrio do homem", in Lamartine DaCosta & Otávio Tavares, *Estudos Olímpicos* (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Gama Filho, 1999), pp. 50-69.

Since its formative years, the Olympic Movement has lived with the need to articulate competition and education, individual and nation, sports for the elite and sports for everybody. It is clear that over the years and with the growth of the Games, new foci of tension between its stated objectives and values have arisen. The possibility of considering the impossibility of finding answers to these projected oppositions characterizes what may be called *aporia*; that is, the conflict between opposite yet equally conclusive opinions regarding the same question. Thus, the potentially aporetic nature of the contrast between the modern origin of Olympic values and the stated neo-modern symptoms have historical bases on the recurring tension between 'new problems' and 'traditional' prescriptive positions.

In fact, since its founding, the Olympic Movement has gone through crises that have placed its ability to survive to the test. The reasons that have enabled the Movement to remain united and functional are complex, but in theory one of its main centripetal forces has been Olympism itself, since it too may be understood as an ideological form that integrates and gives identity to the Olympic Movement (Tavares, 2003).<sup>6</sup>

However, this would not in itself guarantee the permanence of the Olympic Movement or its relevance if this ideological form were rigidly constructed and/or interpreted. I would propose that more rigid understandings and applications of Olympic values and their eventual transformation into dogmas are the product of their interpreters and successors on the IOC. If this process has completed an important historical stage as Alfred Senn (1999) has demonstrated, the recent leadership of the IOC has maneuvered for a more flexible and pragmatic interpretation of Olympic values, a fact which has brought them somewhat intuitively close to the intellectual positions of Coubertin himself. Although Samaranch's years as president of the IOC (1980-2001) still require more in-depth analysis, it appears to be possible to say that they were successful at maintaining the absolute value of the Games while maneuvering before political pressures, boycotts, financial problems and ethics. In practice,

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<sup>6</sup> The concept of Olympism as an ideological form is based on theorizations about the function of the integration of the ideology present in the work of Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretação e Ideologias* (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 1983).



this has meant a process of adjustment in light of new demands, and which has necessarily entailed the maintaining of their universal identity.<sup>7</sup>

Within this intellectual and historical context it is not surprising that it is possible to identify an aporetic pattern in the criticisms and interpretations of Olympic values and their practical consequences without obtaining completely satisfactory answers. For example, for pointed critics of the Olympic Movement such as John Hoberman (1995), Olympism is viewed as a 'paradox', because the Games "generate completely contradictory experiences".<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, it seems possible to reject analyses that vary from the nearly dogmatic acclamation of Coubertinian propositions to the preconceived rejection of both values and organization of the Olympic Movement. If the theory of Olympism as a pluralistic and eclectic construct is true, then mono-dimensional analyses of Olympic values appear to lack validity.

It seems clear that both the historical experience and the origins and intellectual characteristics of the formulation of stated Olympic values point to the validity of an interpretation situated within an epistemological context of *continuum*. Within such a context, phenomena understood as contradictory or paradoxical come to be analyzed from a perspective of opposites that have some sort of mutually dependent relationship. Thus, the interpretive possibilities are set within a process of reconciliation between opposites and not mutually exclusive choices. In light of the evidence, the rigid discussion of the elements and arguments for or against the supposed distortions of sports take on a new level of analysis by adopting the *continuum* concept rather than the establishing of dilemmas that are rarely supported on the intellectual structure that favors the idea of eurhythma (fair measure, proportion, balance).

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<sup>7</sup> In practice, this singular identity is not determined by the level of competitiveness attained or by the fact of being an international multi-sports competition, but principally by its stated values. Other competitions, such as the Games of the New Emerging Forces (GANEF) in the 1960s, or the Friendship Games in the 1980s, have disappeared despite the ambition of competing with and/or replacing the Olympic Games, since they had neither their historical identity nor their association to values.

<sup>8</sup> An analysis based on empirical data on the different interpretations of Olympic values and their practical consequences was made by Lamartine DaCosta. A study conducted by this scholar with 'Olympic scholars' resulted in determining their oscillating attitude between choices and the search for balanced interpretations in light of the 1999 IOC crisis. See Lamartine P. DaCosta, *Olympic Studies: Current Intellectual Crossroads*, pp. 117-197.

Actually, this arrangement, in which the phenomena are situated between polarities along the *continuum* and are adjusted case by case, seems to have been suggested by Coubertin himself. The idea of oscillation between references as a characteristic of the historical process has a central place in Coubertin's epistemological conceptions: "... the law of the pendulum applies to everything" (DaCosta 2002:19).

According to Aristotelian tradition, if the possibility of solving aporias is given by their articulation with broader totalities as a means of reducing their problematic content, the conceptual model of *continuum* appears to be functional. Thus, its own aporias articulate the ambivalence between a rupture and an awareness of the rupture of the modern project, a fact which helps in the understanding of the possibility to detect neo-modern symptoms in the Movement itself to the degree in which it is reconciled with its own historical time. Historically speaking, the model of this *continuum* has had its polarities occupied for many years by the concepts of 'idealism' and 'realism', a fact which would correspond to the formative and consolidation years of the Olympic Movement (Seen 1999). Today, its symptoms indicate 'continuity' and 'change' as new principal poles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, symptoms that could be viewed as a re-appropriation of the former polarity. All in all, as the reactions to the 1999 IOC corruption crisis have shown, the search for reconciliation between continuity and change is the central axis from which one can think about Olympic values in the contemporary world.

To sum up, it is impossible to say what Olympic values will be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Looking ahead, their pertinence and social relevance, and by extension the Olympic Games as we know them today, will be exactly as we can confirm and define them to ourselves as a culture or society, 'theaterizing' our collective myths and history. Like other cultural phenomena, they may fall into disuse and disappear – it is impossible to predict their future. However, we can be sure that before anything else they still are a meta-narrative, and therefore a form of reading the changes of the little-clear world in which we live.

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## Olympic values in the 21st century: between continuity and change

Olympic values may be narrowly tied to the 20th century and its values. Although sports had their beginning in the 19th century, they may be affirmed to have assumed their virtually universal popular character in the 20th, particularly in the second half.

In the lecture, the author attempts to analyze the so-called 'Olympic values' as a form of expression and possible configuration of humanism and western modernity. In the second part, from a review of what has been discussed regarding the change and/or crisis of values that guide the contemporary world, he attempts to examine facts that might indicate a possible reconfiguration of Olympic values. Finally, he analyzes how the intellectual fundamentals of Olympism itself have furnished us elements to think about the permanence and relevance of Olympic values in the 21st century within a context of continuity and change.

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