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Morally Incompatible? An Analysis of the Relationship Between Competitive Sport and International Relations at the Olympic Games

Cesar R. Torres

The Olympic Games are a multinational and multisport event with unparalleled global allure. As athletes from more than 200 countries convene to compete, they are guided by the “Fundamental Principles of Olympism,” which call for a mutually acceptable quest for excellence through challenge. Critics of Olympism claim the zero-sum nature of competitive challenge promotes extreme patriotism and international animosity rather than cooperative spirit. In light of this criticism and the resilience of the Olympic Games, this paper considers the proposition that athletic competition is incompatible with the goals of the Games, but ultimately rejects that view and provides two policy recommendations to allow the Olympic Games to realize their full potential as a global assembling event.

The Olympic Games are a multinational and multisport event with unparalleled global allure. Indeed, no other event in the world, sporting or otherwise, compares in the broad range of attention that the Olympic Games attract. To exemplify this, consider the case of the 2008 Olympic Games held in Beijing: all but one of the 205 National Olympic Committees (NOCs) that existed at the time of the Opening Ceremonies sent athletic delegations. Whether with just one athlete as in the case of Nauru or 639 athletes as in the case of China, NOCs and national governments consider representation at the Olympic Games as legitimizing their presence in the international *communitas*. Notice that not even the United Nations (UN) commands such level of membership, commitment, and involvement. The more than 4.5 billion television viewers that followed the efforts of the more than 10,500 athletes from all over the world, and the fact that more than 100 sovereigns and heads of governments and states were present in Beijing provide another measure of the Olympic Games' import.¹

Cesar R. Torres is an Associate Professor in the Department of Kinesiology, Sport Studies, and Physical Education at The College at Brockport, State University of New York. He is the president of the International Association for the Philosophy of Sport (2009–2011).

Arguably, what draws so much attention to the event is “the vision inspiring and framing the Olympic Games, which seems to cast a wide net by reaching people of diverse national, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds.”² Pierre de Coubertin, who founded the International Olympic Committee (IOC) at the dusk of the nineteenth century, called this vision “Olympism.” His writings as well as the IOC’s enunciation of Olympism make clear that its most salient feature is the pursuit of moral values. The *Olympic Charter* explicates this moral dimension in its “Fundamental Principles of Olympism,” which defines it as “a philosophy of life” that blends “sport with culture and education” in order to “create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.”³ Moreover, the goal of Olympism is presented as placing “sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.”⁴ Although the precise meaning of Olympism is often debated, it is understood as a secular, humanistic, egalitarian, and cosmopolitan vision emphasizing “values such as holistic human development, excellence, peace, fairness, equality, mutual respect, justice, and non-discrimination.”⁵

Noticeably, Olympism proposes to advance the moral values it propounds through competitive sport. Indeed, the IOC believes that competitive sport is a potent social practice to foster Olympism. Thus, the Olympic Movement places enormous importance in the Olympic Games. As the IOC unambiguously puts it: the Olympic Movement “reaches its peak with the bringing together of the world’s athletes at the great sports festival, the Olympic Games.”⁶ However, among the several reasons the Olympic Games are criticized is their emphasis on competitive sport. The criticism is that the athletic competitions at the Olympic Games promote feelings of extreme patriotism and international animosity rather than the promises of Olympism.⁷ Critics point to instances of reprehensible behaviors towards opponents throughout the history of the Olympic Games to strengthen their point. The cases are plentiful. Paradigmatic examples from past Olympic Games include the nationalist clashes between the Americans and the English in 1908 that were most visible during some track and field events, the bloodied water polo match between Hungary and the Soviet Union in 1956, and the refusal of an Iranian judo player to compete with an Israeli counterpart in 2004.⁸ Whether the outcome of preexisting enmity and rancor or not, the criticism is that the Olympic Games’ inherent competition either creates, aggravates, or gives expression to these feelings or fails to appease these feelings, nurture mutual understanding, or promote international relations. For this view, competitive sport is simply incompatible with the tenets of Olympism.

The condemnation of the Olympic Games because of the confrontational element of the social practice at their core reflects the view that, as George Orwell put it more than half a century ago, “At the international level, sport is frankly mimic warfare.”⁹ In other words, for the critics, the Olympic Games are destined for failure because of the very structure of

competitive sport. In light of this criticism, and the resilience of the Olympic Games, the goal of this paper is to examine the persuasiveness of the argument advancing that *qua* moral project Olympism is incompatible with competitive sport. Contrary to Olympic skeptics, I will maintain that competitive sport is fully compatible to advance Olympism's moral values. To do so, I will begin by briefly characterizing the nature of competitive sport and its central purpose. This will allow me to respond to the critics but also to make a principled defense of the Olympic Games as a cultural phenomenon that in spite of their serious problems have the potential to, as Coubertin said, "provide a happy and fraternal meeting place for the youth of the world, a place where, gradually, the ignorance of each other in which people live will disappear."¹⁰ Finally, based on this defense, I will provide two policy recommendations to realize more fully the potential of the Olympic Games as a global assembling event.

The Olympic Games and Competitive Sport

The relationship between the Olympic Movement and sport is symbiotic. Unsurprisingly, the self-professed goal of the Olympic Movement "is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practised in accordance with Olympism and its values."¹¹ Nevertheless, it is not just sport that is at the core of the Olympic Movement but rather competitive sport. This is obviously palpable at the Olympic Games. The distinction between sport and competitive sport is made and recognized by the IOC itself. For instance, the *Olympic Charter* specifies that one of the IOC's roles is "to encourage and support the organisation, development and coordination of sport and sports competitions."¹² Thus, it is necessary to explore the nature of both sport and competition to make a case that competitive sport has the potential to advance Olympism's internationalist moral program.

As a species of games, sport is grounded in its constitutive logic. As such, sport is characterized as an artificial test established and regulated by a set of rules. The rules of games, as Torres explicates,

lay out the goal to be achieved, the spatio-temporal conditions and equipment allotted to pursue the goal, and the means allowed to do so. Interestingly, the means restrict use of more efficient means in favor of less efficient means. To put it differently, by restricting the means permitted to solve the goal of games, the rules make accomplishing the goal more difficult than it would be if there were no restrictions.¹³

The restrictions of the means permitted to solve the stipulated goal constitute the "artificiality" of games, which provides these activities with their constitutive uniqueness and charm. In the sport philosophy literature, the artificiality behind games is known as the "gratuitous logic." The acceptance of less efficient means to accomplish the stipulated goal for the sake of the activity it creates makes games what they are.¹⁴ In other words, games are activities in which the obstacles established by the rules are accepted for the sake of overcoming them. Unlike other games, what characterizes

sport is that the rules prescribe the use of less efficient “physical skills” to accomplish the stipulated goal. In sport, the rules are designed principally to test proficiency in overcoming obstacles through the implementation of physical skills. By establishing a delicate balance between a specific goal and the means prescribed and proscribed to accomplish it, each sport secures that relevant physical skills and prowess are tested and advanced.¹⁵

The artificial test of physical skills established and regulated by the rules of each sport provides the foundation for competition. As R. Scott Kretchmar explains, a contest involves “doing the same kind of thing in an attempt to show difference in the direction of superiority.”¹⁶ Notice that while the test provides the foundation for competition, it is independent from the latter. Thus, “whereas the structure of the test is only evaluative, the contest is both evaluative and comparative.”¹⁷ That is, a test taker would learn whether she can pass the test successfully or not, however, contestants would learn whether they can pass the test successfully or not and simultaneously how their performance compares to the performances of their opponents. While in competition, contestants not only share the same test but also attempt to differentiate themselves in terms of their ability to determine skillful superiority. Clearly, at the heart of competitive sport resides the attempt to establish skillful superiority and, hence, compare the contestants’ relative proficiency in the set of highly specialized physical skills demanded by the rules that create the test. Within the sport philosophy literature, there is a wide consensus that this represents the central purpose of competitive sport.¹⁸

An important upshot of this approach to competitive sport is, as Kretchmar indicates, the recognition that “the transition from test to contest is the change from human singularity to community.”¹⁹ As shared tests, contests are, unavoidably, communal affairs. Accordingly, Robert L. Simon contends that “competition presupposes a *cooperative* effort by competitors to generate the best possible challenge to each other” and that competitive sport is better defined as “*a mutually acceptable quest for excellence through challenge.*”²⁰ Much in the same vein, for Kretchmar, the mutuality inherent in competition requires a commitment by contestants to improve each other’s performances.²¹ More encompassing, J. S. Russell argues that it presupposes “duties to foster a context of competition,” which basically obliges contestants to maintain and promote the defining skills and excellences of their sport.²² That is, their attempts to establish skillful superiority imply a common interest in those skills and excellences. This common interest, in turn, is informed by considerations of moral equality. On the contesting field, contestants come together to form testing families and, at least *de facto*, if not fully willingly, recognize themselves not only as members of the same testing family but also as being entitled to the same concern and respect. In competitive sport, contestants are inextricably bound to each other, for example, as basketball players, footballers, or swimmers. What contestants share is more powerful than what separates them. As members of their testing families, the will to win is dependent on and expresses their mutual concern with the gratuitous logic of their respective sports.

Critics typically underline the zero-sum qualities of competitive sports. They reason that since competitive sport logically allows only one side to emerge victorious, it is grounded in a binary either-or logic in which what the winner takes is necessarily unavailable to the loser. “Thus, under the zero-sum view, the structure of competition, which pits one side against the other, disconnects contestants more than it unites them.”²³ Simon explains that understood in this rigid binary way, competition “can be thought of as participation in sports contests with the intent or major goal of defeating an opponent.”²⁴ What follows from thinking that such is the primary goal of competitive sport is that opponents are conceived as mere instruments or impediments to accomplish one’s desired goals. This not only overly stresses the confrontational character of competitive sports but also fosters an instrumental view of opponents that facilitates neglecting them as equals at best and abusing them in different forms at worst. As Drew Hyland explains, the desire to beat opponents generates a willingness “to treat members of the opposing team not as fellow human beings and athletes but as enemies—as objects to be defeated without regard for their rights as human beings.”²⁵ It comes as no surprise that the zero-sum view of competitive sport is presented by the critics as incompatible with the values of Olympism and unable to transform the Olympic Games, as Coubertin said, in a “fraternal meeting place for the youth of the world.”

The problem with the zero-sum view of competitive sport is that it neglects its inherent mutuality. It goes without saying that competitive sport possesses zero-sum qualities (most notably, the determination of winners and losers), but this neither means that contests are just about determining winners and losers nor that they are naturally or by necessity conducive to different forms of alienation.²⁶ Numerous instances contradict this minimalist view of competitive sport. For a small but significant sample, consider the noble actions of the athletes who have been honored by the International Fair Play Committee.²⁷ However, regardless of any suggestive list of competitive sport at its best, what is relevant here is that its structure does necessarily include cooperation and mutual recognition. This, in turn, facilitates the quest for excellence and the measurement of relative abilities that characterize competitive sport. As Torres and Hager argue, “opponents reciprocally cooperate to catalyze their efforts toward excellence and determine athletic superiority—the conspicuous telos of competitive sport.”²⁸ Perhaps, the Latin roots of the word competition should not be lost. *Competitio* means to question and to strive together. As Hyland remarks, competition

is a questioning of each other *together*, a striving *together*, presumably so that each participant achieves a level of excellence that could not have been achieved alone, without the mutual striving, without the competition.²⁹

In an important sense, competitive sport suggests “both human plurality and common testimony.”³⁰ Testimony of a necessarily communal effort towards excellence, athletic and otherwise. In competition, sportspeople are radically united in their striving together by bearing witness to their same-

ness while simultaneously attempting to show relative superiority over their opponent. The tenets of Olympism are fully compatible with competitive sport's inherent mutuality of excellence. Even more, it is probably because of this characteristic that competitive sport is the social practice chosen by the IOC to materialize its goals.

That Olympism is fully compatible with competitive sport's inherent mutuality of excellence does not mean that every contest at the Olympic Games is guaranteed to materialize its foundational values. What it means is that Olympic competition has the potential to do so. Indeed, when Olympians "foster a context of competition" and strive together towards excellence, the Olympic Games fulfill their moral promise most satisfactorily. This suggests that instances of reprehensible behaviors towards opponents are not causally connected to Olympic competition but rather represent, and should be considered, faulty cases. In other words, competitive sport and, thus, Olympic competition is not destined to degenerate into alienation. At its best, Olympic competition provides an occasion to honor the central purpose of competitive sport and advance the values of Olympism. That Olympic competition on occasion leads to alienation is not an indictment of the symbiotic relationship between Olympism and competitive sport but rather of the alienation caused by the zero sum view of the latter. Clearly, a zero-sum view of competitive sport is both inconsistent with Olympic ideals and an impoverished view of competition. Faulty cases of Olympic competition should be denounced and condemned as such while the conditions that facilitate its emergence should be attended to. On the contrary, examples of successful Olympic competition should be commended and publicized, and the conditions that encouraged it should be replicated. In addition, the Olympic community should be educated on what competitive sport logically entails.

The Olympic Games and International Relations

As a multinational and multisport event, the Olympic Games exude the mutuality inherent in competitive sport. Part of their appeal resides precisely in what might be called the politics of mutual recognition. Since, as seen previously, the structure of competitive sport necessarily includes cooperation and mutual recognition, agreeing to participate in the Olympic Games implies a willingness to recognize all participating NOCs and to cooperate with their athletes on the competitive playing fields. The force of the cooperation and mutual recognition at the Olympic Games is most noticeably demonstrated, if symbolically, during their Opening and Closing Ceremonies. The Opening Ceremonies Parade of Nations, in which each national delegation marches into the Olympic stadium preceded by a placard with the nation's name and its flag, serves as a process in which nations recognize each other and state, even if only implicitly, that they are prepared to interact with each other. The Closing Ceremonies procession, typically led by a placard with each participating nation's name and its flag in a single line behind whom march the athletes intermingling without formal grouping by nationality, serves as a process in which nations reaffirm, again if only

implicitly, their mutual recognition and celebrate their interaction. As John J. MacAloon explains,

To be a nation recognized by others and realistic to themselves, a people must march in the Olympic Games Opening Ceremonies procession. To march in those ceremonies, a people must enter into communication and conformity with the requirements of transnational Olympic organizations and participate in the more universalizing forms of sport.³¹

Although the Closing Ceremonies differ from the Opening Ceremonies in that the former reduce the function of national symbols, it could be argued, following MacAloon, that both juxtapose national and international symbols. As he aptly puts it for the latter, “The procession and arrangement [of national groups] on the field expresses a cooperative unity, though a unity of ordered segmentation.”³² The Closing Ceremonies, by intermingling the athletes after all their flags have entered the Olympic stadium, manifest sport’s mutualism, which necessitates conformity to a common set of rules. This procession, expresses “the bonds of friendship and respect transcending barriers of language, ethnicity, class, and ideology that the athletes are said to have achieved during the festival.”³³ In other words, the Opening and Closing Ceremonies embody mutual recognition, which equips them with their global symbolic power. Probably this is what Coubertin had in mind when referring to these events as the “festival of the human spring time’, uniting . . . all the nations of the world.”³⁴

This is quite important, for whatever the theoretical framework used to understand international relations and its connection to sport, the issue of mutual recognition of states and national organizations (governmental and non-governmental) is at the center of the international *communitas*.³⁵ A relevant difference between the Olympic Games and other international organizations and events is that the *de facto* recognition in the Opening and Closing Ceremonies is punctuated by actual cooperation in the sport competition. Unlike other international forums such as the UN, whatever the history and sentiments nations might have towards each other, their respective sport representatives necessarily cooperate with each other in competition. While membership in the UN and marching in the Opening and Closing Ceremonies “is the *sine qua non* of world recognition as a bona fide nation-state,”³⁶ Olympic competition goes beyond mutual recognition and represents actual interaction among nations. Punctuated by the values of Olympism, Olympians come together in competition to powerfully express the global human *communitas*. In other words, as a moral project in which competitive sport features prominently, the Olympic Games symbolically express “the humankindness necessary and available for all men and women” and constitute “a final display and emotional ‘proof’ that patriotism and individual achievement are not incompatible with true internationalism but are rather indispensable to it.”³⁷ The international relations at the Olympic Games allow nations to recognize and interact with each other. This, in turn, requires nations to recognize each other in their differences and interconnection.

If the Olympic Games' politics of mutual recognition make the event appealing, the dialogical opportunities such mutual recognition generates make it even more so. As William J. Morgan elaborates, international sport festivals such as the Olympic Games help "to pry open a space of interlocution in which national stereotypes can be hashed out and contested."³⁸ What Morgan contends is that the structure of international competitive sport recognizes all participants as legitimate interlocutors and facilitates meaningful dialogue among nations. Indeed, the comparative element in competitive sport calls sportspeople, and nations, into intercultural conversation. Since there is no particular direction assured for this intercultural conversation, it can serve to interrogate pre-existing assumptions and images. MacAloon, thus, emphasizes that the "Olympic Games create a sort of *hyperstructure* in which categories and stereotypes are condensed, exaggerated, and dramatized, rescued from the 'taken from granted' and made objects of explicit and lively awareness."³⁹ The possibility to call into question these categories and stereotypes is what gives the Olympic Games, and the ensuing narratives, their dialogical leverage.

The narratives made possible by the Olympic Games invite, and perhaps demand, that sportspeople, and nations, confront the "other," which in no small measure demands an inward look to confront ourselves. In this process, as Torres reasons,

people can educate themselves not only about foreign cultures but also about their own. The more people are exposed to, study, know, and understand other countries, the more they know and understand themselves. This knowledge and understanding can help in dealing with domestic and international problems, and simply help people to treat each other more justly.⁴⁰

It is important to stress that the sensible comprehension of "otherness" and "ownness" is not guaranteed by the intercultural interaction promoted by the Olympic Games. However, these dialogical opportunities and the ensuing potential critical engagements among nations they bring about are as valuable as is the role of ambassadors and other diplomatic efforts even if they occasionally fail. Perhaps this is the reason athletes and coaches are frequently said to be unofficial ambassadors of their nations. Encouraging intercultural interaction and enlarging the conversational space is an honorable goal. To a significant degree, the credibility of the Olympic Games resides in recognizing all nations as conversational equals and providing a unique dialogical platform in and through which they narrate and negotiate their stories. Since this is done among equals in intercultural exchange, these narratives engage the "other" in a variety of ways, are not controlled by any particular nation, and, thus, preclude a monological structure. Of course, there is always the risk of misrecognition and misrepresentation. Yet, this is a risk worth taking because the alternative is at best indifference or carelessness and at worst non-recognition. Moreover, through the readily comprehensible and powerful social practice of competitive sport, the Olympic Games provide opportunities to counteract such misrecognition and misrepresentation. Disbanding the Olympic Games would eliminate the

possibility to recognize other nations as equals and show reflective regard for them as much as ourselves through competitive sport and the narratives it facilitates. To put it in a different way, the interlocution at the Olympic Games provides not only the opportunity for intercultural exchange but also necessitates the justification, to ourselves and others, of our moral beliefs and actions.

The “we” at the center of competitive sport and the Olympic Games is amenable to a pluralism of meanings, “a pluralism founded on the dialogical premise that the world is richly multicultural largely because many of the people within it are likewise.”⁴¹ As Morgan argues, this pluralism is valuable because of the intercultural relations and interaction diverse people find in their shared social practices.⁴² What is seen here is the idea of the global human *communitas*, that Coubertin called true internationalism, which “understands cultural differences as an enduring and marvelous feature of the human landscape and argues that world peace depends upon the celebration of human diversity and not the eradication of it.”⁴³ Obviously, Coubertin thought that the Olympic Games were the most appropriate avenue to promote true internationalism, arguably because of its power to generate spaces of interlocution.

This discussion points to the need to deepen the politics of mutual recognition at the Olympic Games and the dialogical opportunities it generates. What follows are two policy suggestions to do so. First, the Olympic Program, which refers to the sport competitions officially held during the Olympic Games, could be modified to include more non-Western sports. As it stands, the Olympic Program is overwhelmingly dominated by sports developed in the West and the very few that did not were adjusted to mimic typical Western ways of organizing and participating in sport. The inclusion of non-Western sports in the Olympic Program could foster cultural diversity, comprehensive inclusiveness, and an enriched space of intercultural dialogue. A more balanced Olympic Program would mean cultural recognition, inclusion, and validation. If accompanied with a concerted educational effort, a multicultural Olympic Program “could also advance the more than a century old idea that the Olympic Games were created to recognize each other in our differences, which in no small part are expressed in and through the multiple sports practiced around the world.”⁴⁴ A pluralism of sports could multiply the pluralism of meanings referred to above. At the same time, this educational effort could emphasize not only the connection between competitive sport and the Olympic Games but also what it entails and requires to flourish. Educated about the values of Olympism, the public could more easily understand why a reformed Olympic Program invites us all to learn about the multiple and diverse ways of the world.

The Olympic Village offers another possibility to deepen the politics of mutual recognition and the dialogical opportunities it generates. According to the *Olympic Charter*, the Olympic Village has “the objective of bringing together all competitors, team officials and other team personnel in one place.”⁴⁵ Since the early 1930s, every edition of the Olympic Games has had such a meeting place. In consonance with Olympism’s ideology of global

human *communitas*, the Olympic Village is meant to facilitate intercultural interaction among “the youth of the world,” to use Coubertin phraseology. The notion is that living under the same roof facilitates mutual recognition of and interaction with the “others” of the world. That is, more than an accommodation center, the Olympic Village signifies a meeting place for the human community. To facilitate *communitas* experiences, the IOC requests that Organizing Committees prepare “a programme of cultural events which must cover at least the entire period during which the Olympic Village is open.”⁴⁶ However, the Cultural Program has had a marginal role at the Olympic Games and most of the contact among athletes, officials, and personnel are generated spontaneously.⁴⁷ By contrast, the Cultural and Educational Program of the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) was at the heart of the recently launched event. The YOG’s Cultural and Educational Program had more than 50 activities, which were meant for athletes to “interact and build friendships with other young people from around the world” and to “celebrate the Olympic Movement and the diverse cultures of the world.”⁴⁸ Logically, most of the activities were held at the YOG Village for it

is the heart of the Youth Olympic Games and a privileged place for participants to rally and share their experiences and cultures among themselves and also with their relatives and youth communities through digital means of communication located in [the] digital media centre.⁴⁹

Following the example of the YOG, the Cultural Program and the Olympic Village could be designed to actively engage their residents to interact with each other as well as learn about and from each other. This, of course, should not replace the rich and complex spontaneous encounters that typically happen in the Olympic Village but rather multiply them with a conscious educational effort centered on the values of Olympism. MacAloon maintains that the Olympic “Games were designed to provide predictable *communitas* experiences on a broad scale.”⁵⁰ If the Olympic Village becomes Olympism’s hub of international and multicultural conversations on Olympism, then it could play a more vital role in advancing the predictability of these communal experiences. Subsequently, enlightened about competitive sport and Olympism, Olympians can extend and amplify those conversations well beyond their short residency in the Olympic Village into their local communities. None of this will bring dramatic changes to international relations but surely opens up opportunity for intercultural discourse as well as passage between relevant differences and appreciation of those differences.

Conclusions

I have argued that competitive sport is a social practice suited to advance the goals of Olympism. This is the case because competitive sport is informed by and presupposes the basic moral considerations of equality, mutual recognition, and cooperation. The inherent mutuality in competitive sport implies a collectivity that perceives itself as a “we” in which all of its mem-

bers are recognized as cooperating equals worthy of fair treatment. Given the moral foundation of competitive sport, it is no surprise that “Coubertin’s Olympism [has] the ambitious goal of making a contribution to social justice generally.”⁵¹ It is no surprise either that for Coubertin, Olympians, and seemingly all of those who embrace Olympism, are compelled to conceive of competition as “superimposed on the notion of mutual assistance.”⁵² In addition, the competitive mutuality at the center of the Olympic Games not only allows nations, and individual contestants, to recognize and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences but also opens up unique dialogical opportunities.

These spaces of interlocution signify the global human *communitas* and promote intercultural interaction. Perhaps, the passionate debates in academic, journalistic, and political circles surrounding the preparations, hosting, and legacy of the 2008 Olympic Games held in Beijing serve as a poignant case in point. Regardless of whether the IOC’s decision to award the event to the Chinese city is approved or condemned, it is undeniable that the discussion necessitated and generated, for example, reflection on the role of China in international affairs as well as on its past and recent history. This, in turn, demanded that interlocutors reflect on their own history and role in international affairs vis-à-vis the rising power of China. The point is that the Olympic Games cut open a fertile terrain for interaction in which cultural differences and similarities are recognized, confronted, and dealt with. As Mark Dyreson argues, paraphrasing Benedict Anderson, “The appeal of the Olympic Games is that it . . . holds out the possibility for the creation of an international ‘imagined community.’”⁵³ Although the cultural interaction promoted by the Olympic Games does not ensure change in the political and social realities of the international “imagined community,” it points to a possible human horizon.

I have also maintained that the dialogical opportunities brought about by the Olympic Games could be bolstered by purposeful policy changes, for example by reforming the Olympic Program and the way the Olympic Village is structured and managed. The analysis here does not suggest that the Olympic Games run free of unsavory moments, are well governed, or actually accomplish their stated goals. However, it does suggest that at their best, the Olympic Games can potentially advance the lofty values of Olympism. If mutual recognition and international conversation count for something, the Olympic Games still have something morally important to offer to the international *communitas*. Such an offer should neither be overrated nor underestimated.

Notes

¹ For facts about the 2008 Olympic Games, see *Olympic Review* 69 (2008).

² Cesar R. Torres, “Results or Participation?: Reconsidering Olympism’s Approach to Competition,” *Quest* 58, no. 2 (2006): 242.

³ International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter* (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2010), 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵Torres, "Results or Participation?: Reconsidering Olympism's Approach to Competition," 242.

⁶International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 11. The Olympic Movement refers to "organisations, athletes and other persons who agree to be guided by the Olympic Charter" (Ibid., 13). Its main constituents are the IOC, the NOCs, and the International Sports Federations. In addition, the Olympic Movement encompasses national sports associations, clubs, athletes, referees, and officials. According to Olympic authorities, the Olympic Movement "is the concerted, organised, universal and permanent action, carried out under the supreme authority of the IOC, of all individuals and entities who are inspired by the values of Olympism" (ibid., 11).

⁷Brian Martin argues that one of the main problems with the Olympic Games is that they "are exclusively competitive" ("Ten Reasons to Oppose All Olympic Games," *Freedom* 57, no. 15 [1996]: 7). Former IOC president Avery Brundage complained in 1959 that journalists typically overemphasize competitive sport's features in detriment of the goals of the Olympic Movement (see Alfred E. Seen, *Power, Politics, and the Olympic Games* [Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1999], 127). Brundage's complaint implies that too much attention to the former is inimical to the latter. In addition, many authors and activists criticize and condemn the Olympic Movement as a whole. Among the most eloquent critiques figure John Hoberman, *The Olympic Crisis: Sport, Politics and the Moral Order* (New Rochelle: A.D. Caratzas, 1986). For one of Hoberman's latest indictments of the IOC see his "The Olympics," *Foreign Policy* 167 (2008): 22-28. Helen Jefferson Lensky and Andrew Jennings, among others, are also prominent critics of the IOC (See Helen Jefferson Lensky, *Olympic Industry Resistance: Challenging Olympic Power and Propaganda* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008]; idem, *The Best Olympics Ever?: Social Impacts of Sydney 2000* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002]; idem, *Inside the Olympic Industry. Power, Politics, and Activism* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000]; Andrew Jennings and Clare Sambrook, *The Great Olympic Swindle: When the World Wanted Its Games Back* [London: Simon & Schuster, 2000]; and Yv Simson and Andrew Jennings, *The Lords of the Rings: Power, Money and Drugs in the Modern Olympics* [Toronto: Stoddart, 1992]). While I acknowledge that there are additional criticisms to the Olympic Games, Olympism, and the IOC's mission, in this paper I will focus on the value of competitive sport to foster Olympism. It is worth noting that the critique of competition at the Olympic Games could be seen as part of a larger condemnation of competition in society. Alfie Kohn is among the most ardent opponents of competition (see his book *No Contest: The Case Against Competition*, rev. ed. [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992]).

⁸There are multiple accounts and analyses of these events. For an introductory history of the Olympic Games, including the 1908 and 1956 incidents, see Allen Guttmann, *The Olympics. A History of the Modern Games*, 2nd ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002). For the 2004 incident see "Olympics: Notebook; Iranian Judo Champion Refuses to Face Israeli," *The New York Times*, August 14, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/14/sports/olympics-notebook-iranian-judo-champion-refuses-to-face-israeli.html> (accessed November 1, 2010).

⁹George Orwell, "The Sporting Spirit," in George Orwell, *Shooting an Elephant and other Essays* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1950), 152.

¹⁰Pierre de Coubertin, "The Neo-Olympism. Appeal to the People of Athens (November 16, 1894) Lecture Given to the Parnassus Literary Society at Athens," in *Olympism: Selected Writings*, ed. Norbert Müller (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2000), 537. Some of the problems identified by Olympic critics include, but are not limited to, commercialism, the gigantic proportions of the Olympic Games, the use of banned performance enhancing drugs and methods, corruption, and the gulf between Olympic ideals and standard practices within the Olympic Movement.

¹¹International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 13.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Torres, "Results or Participation?: Reconsidering Olympism's Approach to Competition," 244.

¹⁴See Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper. Games, Life and Utopia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978) for a detailed analysis of the distinguishing characteristic of games.

- ¹⁵ See Cesar R. Torres, "What Counts As Part of a Game? A Look at Skills," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 27 (2000): 81–92.
- ¹⁶ R. Scott Kretchmar, "From Test to Contest: An Analysis of Two Kinds of Counterpoint in Sport," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 2 (1975): 28.
- ¹⁷ Cesar R. Torres, "The Danger of Selectively Changing the Rules in Youth Sport. The Case of the Strike Zone," *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance* 81, no. 5 (2010): 30.
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- ²⁶ For a philosophical analysis of alienation in competitive sport, see *ibid.*, 42–47.
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- ³⁴ Pierre de Coubertin, "The Educational Value of the Olympic Ceremony," in *Olympism: Selected Writings*, ed. Norbert Müller (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2000), 600.
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⁴⁵ International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 79.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ See Beatriz Garcia, “Comparative Analysis of the Olympic Cultural Programs and Management of Barcelona 1992 and Sydney 2000,” in *Bridging Three Centuries: Intellectual Crossroads and the Modern Olympic Movement*, ed. Kevin B. Wamsley, Scott G. Martyn, Gordon H. MacDonald, and Robert K. Barney (London, Ontario: The University of Western Ontario, 2000), 153–158 for an analysis of some Cultural Programs.

⁴⁸ International Olympic Committee, *Youth and Olympism. Olympic Studies Centre Content Package* (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2010), 10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵⁰ MacAloon, “Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies,” 267.

⁵¹ Russell, “Broad Internalism and the Moral Foundations of Sport,” 62.

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