

The background of the cover is a white marble with dark, veined patterns. Overlaid on this are several white, circular rings that resemble the Olympic rings, arranged in a pattern that suggests the five rings. The rings are slightly overlapping and have a soft, glowing appearance.

Heather L. Reid

The Ideas and Ideals behind the
Ancient and Modern Olympic Games

OLYMPIC PHILOSOPHY

Olympic Philosophy

**The Ideas and Ideals behind
the Ancient and Modern
Olympic Games**

Heather L. Reid

Parnassos Press
2020

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Ολυμπιακό Πνεύμα

Πνεύμα θεών αθάνατο, το τρισχαριτωμένο,
κάτελθε και προσκύνησε, στη γη σε περιμένω,
της Ολυμπίας την καλή, των αθλητών πατρίδα,
στην ομορφιά πιο ζηλευτή άλλην εγώ δεν είδα!

Με ιδρώτα την πότισαν των αθλητών οι άθλοι!
Της αρετής βλαστήματα, σαν της ελιάς τα άνθη,
καρπό πολύ θα δέσουνε, θα δώσουν νέο λάδι,
τον κότινο των αθλητών κι αγνής αγάπης χάδι.

Της θερινής της πυρκαγιάς οι καυτερές οι φλόγες
δεν ήταν τόσο δυνατές, μαζί κι ας ήρθαν όλες,
να σβήσουνε τη λάμψη σου, την έμπνευση τη θεία.
Σαν Φοίνικας, στην τέφρα σου ζητάς αθανασία!

Πάρε φτερούγες των αετών, των αθλητών μύθους,
πάρε Διός Ολύμπιου θεόρατες κολόνες,
και πύργωσε την κεφαλή, στύλωσε το κορμί σου,
αγκάλιασε την Αρετή, σαν κόρη κι αδερφή σου!

Χρήστος Κ. Ευαγγελίου



Olympic Spirit

Spirit of immortal gods, most beautiful and blessed!
Descend, for we await you by Cronion's naked crest,
In glorious Olympia, motherland of athletes,
Beauty greater in my life, I've not and never will see.

Irrigated with the sweat from athletes' holy struggles,
Virtue here will bloom again, like your ageless olives,
Fruit will weigh their branches down and they will give new oil,
To massage the athletes' skin and crown the victors' toil.

That summer's cruel inferno, the hottest of her flames,
Never could be strong enough to take away your fame,
Even though they stripped you bare, your godlike spirit shines,
Like Phoenix from the ashes, you beam eternal life!

So take the wings of eagles, your athletes' famous strength,
And like your temple's columns, bear this heavy weight.
Straighten up your back, and raise your head with pride,
Embrace again sweet Virtue, your sister and your child!

Christos C. Evangeliou

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Guide to Olympic Studies Topics

In discussing Olympic philosophy this text addresses many issues in Olympic Studies. Most of these are listed in the subject index. In addition, chapters focused on popular topics are listed here.

Commercialism

Chapter 7. Olympic Sacrifice

Chapter 16. What Counts as an Olympic Sport?

Doping/Performance-Enhancing Technologies

Chapter 15. Performance Technology and Olympic Fair Play

Chapter 16. Athlete Agency and the Spirit of Olympic Sport

Education/Role Models

Chapter 4. Olympic Athletes as Heroes and Role Models

Chapter 9. Coaching for Virtue in Olympic Sport

Globalization/Multiculturalism

Chapter 15. Olympism as a Philosophy of Sport (240-245)

Chapter 22. Olympic Sport and Globalization

Peace/Politics

Chapter 20. The Political Heritage of the Olympic Games

Chapter 21. Olympic Sport and its Lessons for Peace

Religion/Religious Tolerance

Chapter 5. Racing toward Truth in Ancient Olympia

Chapter 7. Olympic Sacrifice

Social Class/Economic Disparity

Chapter 6. From Aristocracy to Democracy at the Olympics

Chapter 17. The Ideal of Justice and Olympic Reality

Spectacle/Spectatorship

Chapter 11. Athletic Beauty in Ancient Greece

Chapter 12. Virtuous Viewing of Olympic Athletes

Women/Gender

Chapter 6. From Aristocracy to Democracy at the Olympics

Chapter 11. Athletic Beauty in Ancient Greece (177-180)

Introduction

My first attempt to explain Olympic philosophy came when I was still in college during the run-up to the 1984 Los Angeles Games. I was a serious cyclist, exasperated with the nationalistic rhetoric in the local newspaper, so I wrote a letter to the editor of the *Santa Barbara News Press* arguing that the Olympic Motto, "*citius, altius, fortius*," did not mean "faster, higher, stronger," than the USSR, but rather "faster, higher, stronger" than I have ever been before. An athlete's goal, I tried to explain, was the same as her competitors': improvement. We were not trying to destroy one another, but rather to push one another toward the mutual goal of excellence.

Although I made it to the final qualifying races in 1984 and 1988, I never did make the Olympic team. Eventually, I stopped racing and focused full-time on my studies. I never stopped trying to understand and explain Olympic philosophy though. In fact, when I was invited to teach "Olympic Ethics and Philosophy" at the International Olympic Academy in the fall of 2019, I looked back through my publications and realized I had written more than enough to fill a book. This is that book.

My understanding of Olympic philosophy is supported by three pillars: my personal experience as an athlete, my academic expertise in ancient Greek athletics and philosophy, and my enthusiasm for the ideals that inspire the modern Olympic Movement. I believe that the ideas and ideals behind the ancient and modern Olympic Games can imbue sport with meaning and value, not just on a personal level but also socially and globally.

Sport is not intrinsically meaningful and victory has no intrinsic value. What makes the Olympics meaningful and what gives value to sports of all kinds is the ideas and ideals that human beings express through them. The inability to understand or articulate those ideas, furthermore, leaves us with cold, often instrumental explanations for sport. We say it is a way to stay healthy, a form of entertainment, or a means to financial reward. But those of us who love sports, who have lived the life of an

athlete, who catch ourselves thinking about games and goals to the exclusion of much more important things, we know that sports—and the Olympic Games in particular—are so much more than that. The essays in this book attempt to explain why.

The initial essays focus on the Olympics ancient Greek heritage. To explain the power of the Modern Games, which have endured for more than 100 years, we need to examine the ancient Olympic festival, which lasted for more than 1,000. It was the rich mythology of heroes, the beautiful poetry of Pindar, the idealistic philosophy of Plato, the potent politics of democracy, and the graceful elegance of athletic sculpture that combined in ancient Greece to create a culture centered on the concept of *aretē* (excellence). Athletics became the centerpiece of that cultural conspiracy and the Olympic Games became its primary celebration.

The founders of the Modern Games, likewise, were trying to promote more than sports and fitness when they revived the Games toward the end of the 19th century. They were trying to revive those ancient Greek ideals in the form of a “philosophy of life” that would come to be called “Olympism.” Although their philosophy may better reflect the beliefs of the European Enlightenment than Plato and Aristotle, it engages important and enduring ideas from ancient Greece that not only sustained the 1,000 year history of Olympia’s Games, but have also had remarkable success as the guiding principle of such a complex and multicultural organization as the Olympic Movement.

What makes the Olympic Games special as a sporting event is the philosophy that guides them. I have spent the better part of my career trying to understand and explain that philosophy because I believe it can bring the best out of sport and the human beings who practice it. It is my hope that these essays will help others to understand Olympic philosophy and thereby to preserve and promote the positive power of sport today and in the future.

Syracuse, Sicily
October, 2019

