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THE IDEA OF GREEK OLYMPISM AND ITS HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL VARIATIONS

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Annotation. *Olympism is originally a philosophy of life of the ancient Greek, an ethical attitude in accordance with which he asserts himself in the space of social and cosmological relations. The essence of such relations is the struggle, rivalry of opposing principles, their mutual denial, as well as their unity, which is accomplished in compliance with the eternal laws, and therefore - justice. Greek identifies himself as the subject of this justice, as a factor in the world formation. Rivalry, agonality is an element that penetrates all spheres of Greek life. It is significant that it is accented as an effort directed to the outside world, requiring athleticism, the manifestation of which serves as the basis for Greek self-affirmation. The Greek is looking for a situation that requires maximum activity from him, and as such finds the rivalry of man with fate. Here, a person in the external plan of events is always doomed to lose, but in which internally he can triumph: to remain a Greek, a man who enthusiastically affirms life even in its most tragic manifestations, who does not kneel before fate. It is also significant that of all the interactions in which the Greek is included, it is sport that acts as a competition in which the agonal situation is presented most visibly, concentrated and clearly and which therefore can act as a ritual, by making which a person gets the opportunity to fully experience the situation of true self-realization. Indeed, sport intensifies two basic aspirations of a person: to actualize the experience of personal uniqueness and at the same time – a feeling of complete identity with those people who are open to him in direct and (or) indirect contact. Sport is the ultimate individualization in complicity and the ultimate complicity in individual realization. It puts a person before the need for the most complete coordination of his fundamental aspirations.*

Keywords: *Agon, Olympism, Sports competitions.*

Olympism and agonality

It is common knowledge that Agon is a Greek word. Agon is a struggle, a contest. The irrepressible desire for rivalry permeates all spheres of the social existence of the ancient Greek, is the basis of his self-identification and self-affirmation, which have distinct *external* forms here. (“An individual’s unity and Greek’s self-consciousness, - says M. Bakhtin, - were exclusively public; man was completely on the surface, in the most literal sense of the word” [1].) It is significant that in this case the agonality itself is considered by the Greek deeply *metaphysically*: this is not just the external form of what is happening, but its *internal* essence - both at the *interpersonal* and

at the *cosmological* level, and it is the first view, according to F. Nietzsche, that serves as the basis for the second one: “The contest-idea of the Greek individual and the Greek state is transformed into universal application so that now the wheels of the cosmos turn on it” [8]. The life of the world as a whole, its movement is a *competition* of certain *basic* principles antagonistically opposed each other; in particular, in Empedocles - this is "Filia" (Love) and "Nykos" (Enmity). It is fundamentally important that from the struggle, namely in it, as F. Nietzsche notes, commenting on Heraclitus, eternal justice is founded, "*all formation arises*" [8]. The struggle is the life of the *Cosmos* and,

accordingly, the birth of a situation of predictability, orderliness and clarity of the picture of the world in conditions when *Chaos* does not stop its destructive work. This process is ubiquitous. At the level of social existence, however, it appears in a special way, since it is realized with the *volitional* participation of a person who acts here as a “*meeting place*”, where “the primal essence comprehends itself in a person in the same act in which a person sees himself rooted in it” [14]. All this is *Greek agonality* in its holistic representation. With regard to the *Olympism*, it is that internal attitude and the contribution related to its realization, which a person makes to the agonal process: to clarifying and asserting of the law of the life of the world, to *bringing justice*, and finally, to self-realization.

The *Olympian* in the Greek understanding is first and foremost the *Deity* living on Olympus. Typically, however, that it has a human appearance and, like an ordinary, earthly man, lives according to the *laws of the Cosmos*, into which he is materially *physically* included. “Here gods belong to the world, like people and matter do” (R. Guardini) [3]; and “*the laws of physics are the dictates of fate*” (A. Whitehead) [11], so fate is the destiny of not only man, but also of God. However, the *Olympian-god* cannot be defeated by fate, since he is immortal. He is basically *distanced* from fate, and therefore does not truly meet it – by contact, *bodily*. But it inevitably follows that the main contradiction and the major problem of self-realization is *the problem of complementation of life and death*, and, in fact, the *problem of justice* of the world in which a person acting as a factor of such complementation must leave, this issue is out of Divine reach, and therefore his role in the life of the world is not absolute, and his responsibility for what is happening is relative. *Man*, as a mortal being, is in a different position: he is *bodily* immersed in the very flesh of the world, and therefore he will always be defeated by fate in the physical plan. However, this is precisely why, unlike God, he

is an active and effective participant in the formation.

It is his, and not *Deity's*, being in the world that promotes the complementation of opposing principles, the realization of a higher law, and the fulfillment of justice. *Heroism* is accessible to him: he can overcome fate in its most fatal manifestation and provide it with the opportunity to be a factor in affirming the truth of life and its meaning. *Only a mortal can be a hero*. (J. Heyzinga: “In Greece, the concept of “hero” is placed alongside the concept of “deceased” [13].) And Greece, with all its attention to the gods, nevertheless, *first of all*, honors its *heroes*.

Competition with fate is the fairest and the most honest contest. Therefore, the competition in which the winner is determined most objectively and honestly, *and that is the sporting agon*, is the most *fateful* for the Greeks. It determines who is *truly an Olympian*, who is “the best Greek,” and not just “the best athlete” (K. Jaspers) [16]. Potentially, and under certain circumstances it's quite realistic, sport places a person in front of fate, and therefore receives the meaning of a *top-ranking competition* for participants. By virtue of this, a sports agon provides a person with maximum *enlightenment of consciousness*; the truth of the world, permeated by a fatal contradiction, which only man can and ought to fully resolve, is revealed to the Greek. *Sport* provides a Greek with high worldview (essentially *metaphysical*) competence, which is a premise for his competence in all other areas of social life, which ensures, it should be noted, that Greek civilization as a whole has an unusually high socio-cultural productivity and a special place in history.

Olympism in the European Middle Ages

The European Middle Ages significantly changes the metaphysical situation of human presence in the world. Its foundation is *Christianity*, and on the whole, it does not perceive the Greek agonality and both glory and external success associated with it as

something morally significant. “Be the last and be the servant of the last,” says the Gospel [Matthew 20:5]. However, the Gospel also says another thing: “But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.” [Matthew 19:30], and also: “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” [Lk.18:14]. Thus, the value of primacy is not canceled, but only receives a new, more expanded interpretation. Life as a unity of opposing principles in Christianity is a confrontation between the *divine* and the *sinful*. Moreover, the essence of sinfulness is already in separation itself, estrangement from the divine - a consequence of the fatal *fall of man*, and everything that is done by man not by feeling divine is sinful in the future. It should be noted that the disunity with God experienced by man is here as much a basic event as in the case of the Greek, his estrangement from the primal essence (from *arche*), which forms the basis of the Cosmos. The difference is that in the first situation, Absolute is given to man as an external reality, while in the second one - above all, as an internal reality. The paths by which a person overcomes the stated disunity are not identical in general. In Greece, on the way of cognition and rationalization of the world, he strives to bring it in accordance with the state of his sovereign Self. As for Christianity, actively suppressing the sinful in himself, a person aims to bring his Self in accordance with the essence of the Divine. His prayer is the appeal of a fallen and repentant person to God. This is repentance, which, however, is not only the bitterness of *self-denial*, but also the joy of a person *finding* and confirming his true Self. “The paradox of any self-denial, notes P. Tillich, is that it must assert itself in order to be able to deny itself” [10]. This paradox has its continuation and development: prayer, actualizing the divine in a person, opens up the opportunity for him to become an *equal* participant in it, to have and defend his own opinion in dialogue with God, even to object

to him, which leads a person (at least in a tendency) to *apostasy*. (S. Kierkegaard: “The one who fought with the world became great from the fact that he defeated the world, and the one who fought with himself became even greater by defeating himself, but the one who fought with God became the greatest of all. So they fought on this earth: there was one who defeated everyone with his power, and there was one who defeated God with his powerlessness” [6].)

Prayer begins with self-denial, but ultimately becomes *self-affirmation*, gives a person strength, increases his independence, and this gives rise to a tendency to change the basic vector of volitional activity, to turn it towards the *external* world, the transformation of which becomes from a certain moment for a Christian as urgent matter as the transformation of the inner world. By virtue of this, as J. Heyzing states, within the boundaries of Christianity, “an arrow of conscience can indicate deeds within a broad scale - from complete non-resistance to swearing” [13]; and P. Tillich notes that “the conservative tendency of official churches could never completely suppress the revolutionary element in the symbol of the Kingdom of God” [10]; finally, the Gospel itself says: “The kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it” [Matthew 11:12].

The *agonal process*, therefore, appears in the Christian tradition in a special way. On the one hand, this is an *internal* rivalry between the divine and the sinful, the complementation of which is ensured by a person in prayer repentance. Here powerlessness turns into a kind of power. On the other hand, we are faced with an active *external* opposition to the undivine world, which, generally speaking, takes a person beyond the basic metaphysical situation in Christianity, endows him with this kind of *independence*, which acts (potentially in any case) as a factor in distancing a person from God and, therefore, the factor of *sinfulness*. Yet another paradox, but it is here

that the *ultimate* situation for the Christian is produced: in the *external* world, for the sake of the victory of the divine over the sinful, a person puts himself in danger of becoming open to the sinful. The fate of man is thus at stake again. *And this is also Olympism*. However, as it is obvious, not antique one. In the latter, a meeting with fate is a physical act happening *here and now*, while in Christianity the openness to sinfulness in question is not completely fateful for a person, since the fulfillment of his fate as a *bodily being* is postponed until the Second Coming of Christ. And this situation produces special conditions for the *existence of sports* agonality, which differs from the Greek one, which is manifested in the forms of sports activities that are cultivated today.

Agonality in Eastern culture

In Eastern culture, the life of the world is also presented to man as a confrontation and unity of opposite principles, and man himself also enters as an agent and carrier of such unity. But the confrontation here does not have a radically antagonistic, sharply conflicting character, in fact, it is a friendly confrontation (Atman - Brahman, Yang - Yin). The task of man is to completely go beyond the *dualistic* perception of the world. (T. Suzuki: "When everything exists within your big mind, all dualistic relationships drop away." [9].) *Competition* (and equally comparison and evaluation) are often interpreted here as something *completely unacceptable*. (D. Krishnamurti: "All what exists is only when there is no comparison at all. Then there is no contradiction and, therefore, there is no conflict" [5].) A person here does not seek to realize himself actively - neither in the external, nor in the inner world (neither Greek, nor Christian). The path to the sought is *self-deepening*, a transition to a *transcendental, meditative state*, which, however, also requires *volitional effort*, which means *self-actualization* of the subject. But the will here is specific in relation to its western version. It is aimed at solving the problem of *direct*

complementation of the external with the internal, which gives rise to a meditative state. Here, the will, encountering the *external* (or in the other case, the *internal*), is initially oriented towards actualization of the internal (accordingly, the *external*) component in it, which is always open to a person to a greater or lesser extent in an integral act of perception. Each feeling penetrates into another and undergoes a "changeover" at the same time, changes its character, which weakens the volitional effort in its both external and internal manifestation. The will of active change is transformed into a will of *non-interference (wuwei)*. The contradictory nature of this situation is that the enlightenment sought and the corresponding self-affirmation are all the more significant the deeper the self-absorption is, which, however, in the extreme case is in a sense a person's loss of self (me-ness): partial - in ordinary meditation, or complete - in extremely deep (*parinirvana* [4]). And the corresponding volitional effort is also a special kind of Olympism. At the same time, the conditions for *sports* agonality here, as is obvious, are essentially minimal, in any case, if you try to connect these conditions with the basic features of the meditation act as such.

It is fundamentally important, however, that the self-affirmation in question in real life cannot be a kind of uninterrupted, one-quality, sequentially developing process in the right direction. A person who systematically practices meditation exercises must inevitably alternate them with others related to the need to solve practical problems of everyday life. The problem of a change of occupation, which takes place here, is, in fact, *central* for an eastern person. Its radical solution is to enter meditation and stay in it forever, which in the cosmological plan can be regarded as an act of *self-realization* in its full-scale version. However, in the general case, the path to nirvana is a long one, and not everyone is able to go it all the way to the end. In fact, here we have the problem of *martial arts* - their philosophy and practice. It is known that *the*

first thing that a person who is faced with a conflict external situation is oriented here is *avoiding the conflict*. If, however, this is not possible due to circumstances, then a person who has entered into a conflict must prove himself so as not to weaken the possibility of being in a meditative state - neither during the conflict itself, nor after its completion. A prerequisite of one and the other, in turn, is a high ability for *dynamic meditation*, which, in fact, is emphasized in the practice of martial arts. It should be noted that the effectiveness of actions in this case is assessed significantly differently than in a *modern sports* competition: here the dominant orientation remains on *transcendental* self-realization, on meditation, which, however, it should be noted, being self-valuable, is also a prerequisite for high motor skill - a circumstance conducive to that so that the person's stay in the conflict is short-term, which, as is understandable, is important. In sports, however, orientation to *external* self-affirmation is basic, and harmonious (in fact, near-meditation) states associated with high-tech performance of motor actions are most often applied to the performer. The situation as a whole here, however, depends on the existential-semantic content that the performed action has for a person. It is noteworthy, in particular, that the largest representatives of eastern meditation practice in the 20-21th centuries often consider the meditation state not as an end goal, but as a springboard, on the basis of which a person carries out socially significant achievements: S. Vivekonanda - "Every Indian should become a giant capable of turning mountains with the power of his intellect" [2]; Sri Aurobindo - "with the help of integral yoga it is necessary to transform human nature and society as a whole" [15]; and etc.

On the possibility of complementation of agonality options

The question of fundamental importance in this connection is: can one consider the *antique attitude* to an agonal situation, within which a person resists fate, to be one of the

acceptable options for this kind of target orientation? - Probably, yes. It is interesting that in Greece itself, contemplation and the corresponding *enlightenment of consciousness* is considered in much the same way as in the East, as *the highest state of personality*, and the "situation of the complete presence" of a person (according to M. Mamardashvili, is a cross-cutting idea of Greek philosophy) is a *full-scale harmony* in which the whole world which is open to the perception of a given person is integrally represented, as well as the fact of a person's complicity in the achievements of this world. Therefore, an *eastern* person, in the case of adopting the *ancient* man's point of view, according to which the orientation to approval in the outside world implies in the extreme case a meeting with fate, could, without fundamentally changing his historical and cultural identity, take the position of a *Western* person. Similarly, for a *Westerner*, it is possible, maintaining his original historical and cultural status, to take the position of an *Easterner* (or approach to it) if in his *outwardly oriented self-affirmation* he acquires an orientation toward ultimate reality and discovers a commitment to it, in which the motive of maintaining harmony of the world will be emphasized. (In our days, it should be noted, this is not typical for a Westerner.) It is noteworthy that today there is an attempt to consider exactly the Greek model as a starting point in the search for *common foundations* of the cultural world as a whole. M. Heidegger emphasizes: "Any understanding of modernity can arise and take deep root only if, in the dialogue with Greek thinkers and their language, it takes root in this soil of our historical being. Such a dialogue is still awaiting its beginning. He is barely prepared; and he himself, in turn, is a precondition for an inevitable dialogue with the East Asian world" [12]. What M. Heidegger offers in general terms, in fact, offers P. Coubertin in the case of sports. We urgently need new, more metaphysically well-founded ideas about the

basic contradictions of the existence of the world and the ways of their complementation, we need a new agonality and a new idea of

Olympism. And sport plays an essential role here.

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