

How Does the Olympic Flame Exist?

A flame is lit in a cauldron to start off the opening ceremonies of every Olympic Games. This flame evokes applause, tears, and joy throughout the audience of athletes and bystanders whether present at the ceremonies or not. Yet flames – of what we are led to believe is similar chemical composition – are lit every day, and fail to inspire such a response. These flames are known to be ordinary, but the Olympic flames are known to be extra-ordinary, recalling to the mind the memory and spirit of the first Olympic Games in Athens. This same essence of every Olympic flame is what leads us to identify the flame lit in Vancouver with an Olympic flame lit many years ago. In order to explore this idea, we must first determine in what way a human being may perceive an Olympic flame or any object outside of himself, and in what way the object can be said to exist.

A human being is composed of two distinct elements, the body and the mind. This dichotomy is evident as a result of one's ability to reason or use the mind despite inactivity of the body. The body is composed of matter and is in direct contact with the external world, while the mind cannot directly interact with the body's surroundings. Faculties of reason associated with human beings such as the faculty of judgement and understanding are housed within the mind only. Thus, information from the outside world must somehow be brought through the body and presented to the mind in order to make even the simplest decision. For this purpose, a bridge exists between the body and the mind, known to us as the senses. By use of the senses the mind may learn to know objects and the surrounding world.

As Berkeley believed, any object is granted an existence only by the mind of the perceiver. When I encounter an object that I was previously unaware of, my senses make measurements and acknowledgements that are called sense data. This combination, when

introduced to my mind, is immediately assigned a meaning by my judging faculty. Assigning a meaning to such sense data marks the moment at which my mind grants the object existence. Take, for example, a sheet of paper. Previously unknown to me, my senses would compile information regarding the colour, texture, width, and so on of the object. As my mind became aware of these properties, it would assign an idea, purpose, or meaning to such a compilation. The association of meaning to a compilation of sense data is the sole way to bring the sense data into existence as an object. An array of different sense stimulations, without being brought together by an idea, cannot be said to have a distinct existence, much less be understood. The most easily accessible example of the process of assigning meaning is naming something. My mind now attributes the name – a sheet of paper – to the image of a white rectangle of certain size and smoothness that my senses presented to my mind. The name represents meaning. It is only and entirely present within the confines of my mind. It is clear that the meaning of this sheet of paper is generated within my mind through interpretation and judgement of presented sense data. The idea also cannot effectively leave my mind. This is evident from the believed discrepancy in the understanding of different colours. Though I understand a certain shade to be under the name blue and associated with ideas like the sky, I can never be certain that by describing this meaning to another human being, I will be giving him the exact same association of sense data-to-idea that is present in *my* mind. The meaning of an object is something that is within my mind, which gives the object existence, and thus must be understood as its essence.

By relating this understanding of the existence of any object to that of an Olympic flame, we gain insight into this particular flame's ability to inspire such an emotional response. When the Olympic flame was lit at any Opening Ceremonies, the humans who perceived the flame moving and emitting light and heat assigned to these perceptions the idea of the spirit of the first

Olympic Games. The sensible properties of the flame, in such context, became secondary to the essence that it was assigned by the minds of the audience. How can an object continue to exist without a human being's ongoing perception of its sensible properties?

When an object is removed, or once my senses no longer communicate sense data describing it to my mind, I am still very aware of its existence. The idea that my thought had attributed to the sense data of the object, its essence, is entirely independent of the senses once it has been established, and thus remains in my mind even without the presence of the object or its sense data. This is called memory.

My idea of the Olympic flame lit in Vancouver is no longer dependent on my senses. As soon as the flame was put out, or its properties were removed from my senses, its existence became sustained only by my memory of it, that is, the meaning within my mind that had been attributed to the flame as its essence. To my mind, the flame only exists in its essence. The essence that had been granted to the flame by my mind is an idea of athleticism, spirit, competition, national pride, and the like. My mind carries the idea of the flame as a symbol of the very first Olympic Games and all that they stood for.

We may now compare the flame lit during the Olympic Games opening ceremonies in Vancouver to any other Olympic flame lit in history. Their existence continues, as the identical symbolism or essence attributed to each flame lit during the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games indicates that the flames are the same, regardless of their chronological or spatial separation. Each Olympic flame is put out at the end of the Olympic Games, yet remains in our minds as a symbol.