

SUMMARY OF MIGUEL MESTANZA'S THESIS

Miguel Mestanza, former President of the Spanish Bridge Federation (1993-1997), presented a doctorate thesis on the subject of '**Bridge: Culture, Science and Sport**' in the Faculty of Humanities of the Spanish San Pablo CEU University in Madrid on 16 March 2007. Miguel Mestanza got the highest *cum laude* qualification for a doctorate thesis in this University.

The idea of preparing such a thesis was based on his conviction that it was important to bring to the knowledge of the University, a source of didactic possibilities, the unknown world of culture and science attached to the game of Bridge which he discovered during his research career.

As far as culture is concerned, Mestanza raises the question of the relation between Culture and the game in its origin. The game belongs to human nature, either rational or not. And the human being, using reason and knowledge, gives form to the game and converts it into culture. Huizinga used to say that the game is not culture, but that culture derives from the game.

The Greek culture presented amusement and entertainment, including games and musical and artistic activities such as theatre, as essential components. This was an important way to achieve education, the '*paideia*'. Another essential target was the culture of competition, consubstantial with any form of Greek culture.

Rome saw the culture of universality as essential. The '*ludus*', which replaced '*paideia*', had the same meaning but was more universal since it was applied to games, persons and places.

In the Middle Ages, culture became individual, according to regions or feuds. The games were local. In order to escape from the barbarians, universal culture took refuge in the monasteries. But because it was expanding, it returned to its previous form, although with the added component of teaching.

The invention of playing cards coincided with the beginning of the Renaissance, when creative culture gave rise to new games, among which the predecessors of bridge, known in the British Isles from 1526 under the name of *triumphus hispanicus*. Such denomination shows that the origin of this game was derived from cultures other than the British one, probably Arabian, brought to the Iberian Peninsula and from here taken to the British Isles by merchants and soldiers during the period of the marriage of Henry the VIII and Catalina of Aragon. This could explain the severe homilies of the Anglican Bishop Hugh Latimer against 'a game coming from Catholic Spain'.

This game soon received the influence of the culture of the country which welcomed it. In the British Isles the game became known as *Whist* because it was played in silence. The game spread throughout the country and was mentioned by Shakespeare in 1602 in 'Anthony and Cleopatra'.

Little by little, during the Enlightenment period, several matters that gave rise to various cultures had to be studied and public cultures were obliged to be regulated. The first Whist Treaty was prepared by Thomas Hoyle and published in 1742.

Sociology, the science of social phenomena, facilitated the diffusion of Whist through social relations together with the improved means of communication developed during the Industrial Revolution. Whist was soon known and practised in France and also in USA, to where it had been taken by the puritans of Mayflower. A Whist Club was founded and new formulas were created in order to attract more participants to the game, such as duplication and the Mitchell and Howell movements.

The science of empiric culture permitted the creation of a series of card-playing technical rules which became popular, such as the *Deschappelles coup*, the *Bath coup*, the *Wien coup* and the *Rule of 11*.

The culture created by political absolutism gave rise to the new concept of sport based on physical exercise, as a consequence of English colonialism and German nationalism. It was incorporated into British education with the aim of producing 'sportsmen', a prototype of the admired colonial military. In Germany the so-called *turnen* games were held, their aim being to prepare athletes for guerrilla warfare against Napoleon. With French support, this concept led to the restoring of the Olympic Games in 1896, with the exclusion of non-physical games.

Last but not least, linguistic culture introduced the most typical innovation into our game. In fact, the studies on language initiated by Leipzig and Hume influenced Whist and contributed to introducing the spoken language into the game, as was the case in the so-called Boston Whist. Later, following the works by the Americans Morris and Pierce and the European Saussure on semiotic language as a preparatory stage, bidding was adopted at the end of the 19th century, giving rise to modern Bridge.

During the 20th century, the Greek cultures of the spectacle and of 'agon' (competition) were developed and strengthened. Bridge became a spectacle and also a remarkable means of competition.

Last but not least, Bridge adopted the cyberspace culture and Internet contributes to its diffusion through the countless number of competitive hands played by people all over the world who have never met and will never meet personally.

The game and art are also related. Since ancient Greece both expressions go together; the link being the human impulse which leads to pleasure being a means to escape from the material world. Kant dealt with this question as a master in search of the beautiful and the aesthetic. Such impulse, which is after all the culture of leisure, connects everything which aims at this movement of emancipation: play, art, literature, theatre, etc. Ortega Y Gasset designated the impulse which leads the 'traveller' to mental autonomy as 'aroma', and wisely stressed that art and play '*van de consuno porque tienen la misma oriundez*' (are convergent because they have the same origin).

Science can be defined as knowledge acquired by observation and reasoning. It is obvious that the scientific nature of Bridge could be justified by only these two aspects. The major difficulty in accepting science in bridge comes from Empiricism, which imposes a set of tested principles which can be experienced by observation. In accordance with this criterion, only the exact sciences can be considered as *sciences*; all others - ethics, moral, those derived from natural law and, obviously, philosophy - falling outside this concept.

The Rationalists had a different view. Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz and others claimed that the intellect is capable of recognizing reality, regardless of experience.

Finally another concept: Karl Popper, considering Einstein's work and conclusions, believed that knowledge acquired by experience cannot lead to certitude, but only to probabilities.

In conclusion, one can state that science covers not only technical and exact knowledge but also moral and natural knowledge, in which games are included.

Bridge respects the principles of Empiricism and can be considered a science fulfilling both requirements with its discipline and structure.

There is no doubt concerning Mathematics. Arithmetic, geometry, the rules of percentages and probability calculation are sciences. The same is true regarding the rules of the game, which have been formulated on the principles of exactitude.

Philosophy finds the truth of a syllogism as a result of the certitude of the premises.

Law not only encompasses the terminology of Bridge (auction, contract, promotion, sanctions, etc.) but also the regulating of the players per se as a consequence of the cards which they have in their hands.

There is a science involved in the structure of Bridge: the semiotic language of signs and symbols in the auction and in card playing. As with any other language, semiotics has semantics based on the ascription of meanings, the exactitude of which can be tested. There is also the relation of signs and syntax that can only be explained in a scientific way. There is still the schematic elaboration of systems in language that can be tested and continuously subject to revision.

During the 20th century, democratic culture influenced the IOC (International Olympic Committee) to open the door to a broader definition of sports. Today, the Olympic Charter today the Olympic ideal as 'a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and spirit'. Undoubtedly, the intellect is one of the qualities of the body. Based on that reality, the IOC, following the same treatment given to the game of chess, recognized the World Bridge Federation, on 15 June 1995, in Budapest. This recognition was reconfirmed in Seoul in 1999. Therefore Bridge is a sport, since the WBF, the object of which consists in the administration of Bridge, is recognized by the IOC.

Miguel Mestanza opens here a parenthesis to criticize the fact that, the Spanish Supreme Sports Council, CSC, expressed, in March 2005, the opinion that recognition by the

IOC still needs reconfirmation and cannot therefore be accepted as such in Spain. Among the arguments, Mestanza mentions that the Olympic Movement Report 2005 includes the WBF in the list of Federations recognized by the IOC, and also the fact that Spain has adhered to the Olympic Charter since 1991, which makes it official in the whole country.

The last part of Mestanza's thesis underlines the benefits of teaching Bridge in schools and universities as a means of fulfilling the social role of the game in the formation of a person's character. Its practice contributes to strengthening the memory and to widening the ethical and philosophical sense of life through the values of self-control, concentration, decision-making, moderation and balance, together with the discipline and rigour which are inherent to competition.

Besides these formative aspects, bridge has a great cultural and scientific value which normally attracts no attention. Following the principle of 'global teaching', it is important to stress them. For instance, when mentioning the fact that bridge is science, why not explain its empiricism? When recalling the origins of bridge, why not mention the historical and social circumstances of the period? When teaching the rules of the game, why not evoke the Lightning? When bringing attention to reasoning, why not explain the logic and the Aristotelian and stoical syllogism? When studying the bidding and the card playing, why not connect them with the language of semiotics? And ... so many more teaching and formative possibilities which are put at our disposal by bridge.

To society it is important that schools and universities make good use of everything connected with culture and science, and for bridge it is important to have access to such forums. Why not try to harmonize both interests?