

A QUESTION ABOUT THE PHILOSOPHY OF MARTIAL ARTS: SPECIAL FORUM

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General reflections about the philosophy of martial arts

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Abstract:

Philosophy of martial arts – what it is? A new philosophical sub-discipline? From the perspective of the philosophical anthropology of martial arts and of martial arts humanistic theory the author presents his reflection on pathways of warriors from eastern Asia. He also refers to other theoretical concepts of martial arts philosophy, and especially their normative ethics.

The philosophy of martial arts is both a practice of selected axionormative systems, determining lifestyles and a description of the internalization of certain values. The Pathways of martial arts (such as Japanese Budo) constitute a huge axiological potential and universal cultural heritage from which today's physical education pedagogy should draw.

There is an emerging philosophical sub-discipline as a result of warriors pathway anthropology. Finally, it is a superior theory for the area of knowledge and scientific disciplines described as 'martial arts sciences'.

Problems and perspective

Is there – in an academic sense – a philosophy of martial arts? Maybe it is just the specific psychology of *Budō* [Lind 1996]¹ and the philosophy of ancient China in its multiple forms and applications? Is the philosophy of martial arts born in the Far East only a manifestation of the ethical and religious systems dominant there, such as Confucianism, Buddhism or Taoism?

Matsunaga *et al.* [2009: 16] write on the philosophy of *Budō* in this way: "Budō, the martial ways of Japan, have their origins in the tradition of bushido – the way of the warrior. Budō is a time-

honoured form of physical culture comprising of *jūdō*, *kendō*, *kyūdō*, *sumō*, *karatedō*, *aikidō*, *shōrinji kenpō*, *naginata* and *jūkendō*. Practitioners study the skills while striving to unify mind, technique and body, develop his or her character; enhance their sense of morality; and to cultivate a respectful and courteous demeanour. Practised steadfastly, these admirable traits become intrinsic to the character of the practitioner. The *Budō* arts serve as a path to self-perfection. This elevation of the human spirit will contribute to social prosperity and harmony, and ultimately, benefit the people of the world".

Budō philosophy, in terms of Velte and Matschke [2007] is reduced to ethics and aesthetics, the basic concepts and short biographies of important figures in the world of martial arts. Among these figures there is such master as Akiyama, Shirobei Yoshitoki [Velte, Matschke 2007: 126], who practically dished Taoist philosophy of softness and flexibility creating *jūjutsu* (*Yōshin-ryū* school). Ran out of there main divisions - anthropology, axiology, epistemology and ontology.

Specialists in various martial arts and their philosophy can at least point to the pedagogical

¹ But later the same Werner Lind writes on the *Transzendentalphilosophie* that exist by I. Kant (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*) and by the philosophy of a way [Lind 1999: 621-622]. He [Lind 1999: 480] points out that philosophers and men of science should be guided by a sense of moral responsibility for their research and publications. Do not exceed the limits of morality. So the pursuit of truth should be combined with the desire for wisdom - the same as in the Wisdom philosophies of ancient Greece, the Far East and e.g. in E. Fromm's *biosophy* [Fromm 1976; Lind 1999: 164; Cynarski 2007].

values² present in the educational systems of martial arts [cf. Sato 1998; Gomaratut 2011] or the descriptions of the ethical codes of the European knights and samurai [Nitobe 1993; Maroteaux 2007; Piwowarczyk 2007]. The aesthetics of martial arts are analysed under the categories of beauty [Wróblewski 2012] and expression [Tokarski 1989; Klens-Bigman 2002]. Both the aesthetics and ethics are mixed here in a specific way, just as the philosophy of life is mixed with its practice and physicality is mixed with spirituality [cf. Cynarski 2012a; Wróblewski 2012]. The philosophy of martial arts is described according to the authors' knowledge and beliefs, for example from the Korean-American perspective, as was done by Daeshik Kim and Alan Bäck [2000]. An interesting synthesizing vision is presented by Stanisław Tokarski, a philosopher and orientalist, who is at the same time an excellent *judoka* [Tokarski 1989]. In his opinion, various Asian martial arts and the combat sports derived from them are dynamic forms of expressing the philosophy of the East.

The author has formulated a theoretical concept to identify the general principles of a humanistic theory of martial arts for which he has adopted a (Central) European perspective – as in the title of the main thesis: *The theory and practice of martial arts from a European perspective* [Cynarski 2004]. The author has built a philosophy of, respectively, Japanese, Far Eastern and general martial arts, modelling it largely on the theoretical structure of Józef Lipiec's philosophy of Olympism [1999]. He has done this to consider the puzzle within the bigger picture and in an attempt to interpret the issues of ever growing conceptual ranges [cf. Hetherington 1996].

This concept has been recognized both within the physical education world and by professors teaching the philosophy of sport [Kosiewicz 2007; Jirásek 2007; Jirásek, Hopsicker 2010]. Stanisław Kowalczyk called this concept and the philosophical considerations of martial arts an "Oriental philosophy of sport" [Kowalczyk 2010] whereas S. Tokarski (as a reviewer) considered formulation of system anthropology of the warrior's pathway or anthropology of martial arts as valuable [Tokarski 2012].

Michael Kearney [1996] describes a universal peasant culture, as a perspective on "global anthropology". Meanwhile – the culture and tradition of the Knights of Bushido (the warrior's pathway) represent a unique form of axio-normative systems in human history and were formulated

at a much higher level of the development of the human spirit [cf. Halbbrook 1974; Maroteaux 1995; Sasaki 2009].

Cynarski's anthropology of martial arts comes from the general anthropology of mental and physical progress. It is an extended version of a previously formulated humanistic theory of martial arts. The final shape of *Anthropology of martial arts* [Cynarski 2012a] was influenced by a reviewer S. Tokarski, as mentioned above. Thanks to this, the concept takes the achievements of many Polish and foreign authors into greater account. It is still a rather European perspective, because of its mentality, the availability of materials and research results [Cynarski 2004, 2006], rather than a fully objective one. The latter is indeed quite impossible to achieve.

Author's own concept

Prof. zw. Dr hab. Ewaryst Jaskólski was one of the first Poles who studied the values of martial arts from the point of view of pedagogical usefulness [Jaskólski 2000]. This same Professor in the editorial review one of my books, wrote: "Professor W. Cynarski is a great expert on views of education in the East. The Philosophy of *Budo*, as a tool, is perhaps better-known to him than anyone else I know" [Jaskólski 2006]. Then another *Prof. zw. Dr hab.* Stanisław Kowalczyk, a philosopher at the Catholic University of Lublin, introduced me in his book, "Elements of the philosophy and theology of sport" as a representative of one of the two main streams of the Oriental philosophy of sport [Kowalczyk 2002]. It has been further highlighted in the second edition of this important book [Kowalczyk 2010: 22, 94, 97]. Using the name 'Oriental philosophy of sport', the philosophy of East Asian martial arts is hidden, but it was about the assignment of this kind of philosophical reflection to a more general sense of the philosophy of sport.

They were basically assessments of my achievements in creating the foundations of the philosophy of martial arts in the years 2003–2004, when the epistemology and methodology of research, ontology and axiology of (mainly) Far Eastern martial arts were necessary for the creation of their general theory. So in a philosophical and sociological, anthropological, cultural and pedagogical perspective a "humanistic theory of martial arts" was created [Cynarski 2004]. I created this concept, modelling it on the theoretical concept of the philosophy of Olympism created by *Prof. zw. Dr hab.* Józef Lipiec [1999], a philosopher from the Jagiellonian University.

² These educational applications were indicated by J. Kano (1860–1938), E. Jaskólski, M. von Saldern and many others.

In connection with the analysis of achievements in the widely understood sport philosophy I was mentioned in a few foreign works as an important representative of the Polish philosophical sub-disciplines [Jirásek 2007; Jirásek, Hopsicker 2010]. My achievements in this field are mainly analyses of the symbolism of the ethos and symbolism of Japanese *Budō* and the tradition of *bujutsu* – martial arts. Another philosopher of physical education Prof. zw. Dr hab. Jerzy Kosiewicz – quotes me as the author mainly interested in the sociology and philosophy of martial arts [Kosiewicz 2007, 2010: 231-235]. Prof. Kosiewicz wrote among other things: “Cynarski goes back to the philosophy of culture and humanism in versions of Cassirer, Fromm, Eliade, and also refers to the universality of J. Kuczyński, a modern personalism and integral anthropology, and at the same time to the religious and philosophical thoughts of the Far East. (...) Formulated by Cynarski the Oriental philosophy of sport and the philosophy of the martial arts pathways (not just those from the Far East) are essential components created by the same researcher as a humanistic theory of martial arts. At the same time a consideration from the epistemological and axiological, social and anthropological perspective is interesting for modern human philosophy and the philosophy of physical education in particular” [Kosiewicz 2007: 22-23].

The philosophy of martial arts is sometimes called the Oriental philosophy of sport and is described under this name [Obodyński, Cynarski 2004]. The humanistic theory of martial arts, including in it the concept of the philosophy of martial arts mainly refers to the trend of this philosophy associated with the ethos of the warrior culture. Other streams of the Oriental philosophy of sport relate to – according to Kowalczyk [2002: 16-17] – environmentalism and Taoism or Zen philosophy.

I am trying to develop this humanistic theory of martial arts on the one hand into the anthropology of martial arts, on the other – into a general theory of martial arts. The mentioned anthropology is the anthropology of the warrior’s pathway, the philosophical and cultural anthropology of martial arts [Cynarski 2009b, 2012a, c]. It is based on the concept of the human psyche and physical progress [Cynarski 2000]. The step towards the creation of a general theory of martial arts is the work entitled *Martial Arts Phenomenon – Research and Multidisciplinary Interpretation* [Cynarski 2012b], which is a result of international research by the Idokan Poland Association.

In my work I described both a general canon, developed from the principles of *Bushidō* and

Budo Charter, as well as from various philosophies or ideologies, schools and different martial arts organizations (*aikidō*, *idō*, *jūjutsu yōshin-ryū*, *shōtōkan karatedō*, *kyokushinkai*, *taekwondo*, *zendō karate*). I do not see that there is any comparison between martial arts and combat sports because of the different aims of practitioners. So there are different philosophies, and different varieties of martial arts, but academic reflection on this research can be called the philosophy of martial arts. This philosophy can be compared in some respects to the ancient Stoic philosophy [Cynarski 2012a: 166-183, 2012b: 76-94].

How to determine one’s own approach towards this philosophy in a nutshell? I would generally describe the Epistemology of martial arts as a psycho-physical path of practice, introversion and intuitive knowledge, and at the same time self-discovery by the individual in training. The proper explication of this phenomenon with no experience at the appropriate level (the issue of a long-standing practice) is difficult or completely impossible.

Ontology explains some of the basic common entities and concepts that exist here. From an anthropological perspective the human being, personal, physical and psychological is interesting. The body here is not undervalued but bodily practice is related to the path of spiritual development. The pursuit of perfection affects both the skills of hand-to-hand fighting and of wielding weapons, as well as the morality and the pursuit of full humanity.

The axiology of other cases is sometimes different. For example the *idōkan yōshin-ryū* system is similar (in terms of ethics) to radical humanism of Fromm and the Christian personalism. In other martial arts schools, the focus is sometimes more on utilitarian, health or environmental issues.

The convergence of the biographies and views of eminent people in martial arts is also interesting. These people have devoted their lives to their life-long passion, and have passed on their knowledge, attained after years of confirmed mastery and with authority by teaching and publishing [Cynarski 2012c]. The philosophical anthropology of martial arts describes a man on his way to psychophysical progress.

Other concepts

The philosophy of martial arts is variously defined. In American periodicals devoted to the philosophy of sport there are articles about ‘martial arts’, or the keyword ‘Eastern sports’ [Vander Zwaag 1984]. Some authors use the term **Oriental philosophy of sport** [Kowalczyk 2002, 2010; Obodyński, Cynarski

2004]. Regardless of the definition of (name), and far more importantly are the different approaches hidden within the philosophy of martial arts and a variety of content.

The American philosopher Allan Bäck, and the Korean martial arts expert Daeshik Kim [Kim S. 2010], interpret the philosophy of martial arts **as an understanding of the meaning of the way of meditation practice, including mental and physical exercise.** They write about the ethics of martial arts, following the rules etc.. A “*Way to go*” is the way of practice that is combat training, daily training [see Kim D., Bäck 2000]. This pair of authors here present the development of their earlier ideas about the meaning and philosophy of martial arts [cf. Konzak Nov 1990; Massanori Oct 2001]. This is actually a (receptive-interpretive) Korean-American perspective.

George Ivan Petrotta, hapkido and taekwondo teacher (8th dan), doctor of philosophy and theology, fits within this perspective and describes in his study *Philosophy of Martial Arts* the ideas and principles, of the Hwarang canon. There is interesting wording as martial arts are both art and science [Petrotta 2010]. However, there is no own design nor analytical instrumentation of the content.

At the same time, another martial arts expert and philosopher – Seamus Mulholland OFM took a few steps further. His work was modestly entitled: *Philosophy and the Martial Arts*. The author is a philosopher, a Franciscan, holder of 8th dan degree in *shōtōkan* karate and 6th dan in *battōjutsu*. He does not write explicitly about the philosophy of martial arts. First he shows that martial arts is a pathway. In turn, this “pathway” (martial art), as a philosophical discipline, concerns understanding the truth, the reality of life and practice. In his opinion, it is a no less valuable way of being in the world, it is different from the religious one, and it is a no less valuable perception of the world, than in the Western philosophy. **Being a man of martial arts, the individual identification itself** is – as Mulholland explains [2004] – **confirmation of the existence of their philosophy.** So, firstly, self-knowledge and knowledge by introspection, internalization of rules and self-identification are crucial. Secondly, the most important thing is the man himself. Thirdly, if the author read Mulholland in a proper way, the practice of martial arts is associated with life and the art of living (the way of peace), which gives a practical sense of the philosophy of martial arts [cf. Habersetzer 1999].

The understanding of martial arts is similar to the one made in the humanistic theory of martial arts, as presented by Charles H. Hackney [2010],

who develops the concepts of the neo-Aristotelian philosophy of Alasdair C. MacIntyre [1984] in relation to martial arts. He uses such ethical concepts of Aristotle, as *arete* (virtue). The way of martial arts improves the man who follows it. It ensures the satisfying of the needs of the body and spirit. However, the concept of *eudajmonia* is to be understood not so much in the meaning of Aristotle himself, but rather in the approach of Socrates and Plato – the satisfaction of a dignified life, full of virtue, filled with noble conduct. Practising martial arts leads to becoming a better person – a moral improvement, personal development and more correct social relations. Does it not however require limiting the scope of the term “martial arts” to ethical systems?

Roman Maciej Kalina [1996] created the praxeological *philosophy of self-defence*, from which derived the same author’s “theory of combat sports”. In the praxeological approach the problems of subjectivity, efficiency and ethical actions, bravery and chivalric ethos are described [cf. Kalina 2000; Harasymowicz 2003; Tokarski, Sikorski 2011]. Here, the central term of the whole concept are “fighting” and “combat sports.” Of course, fighting is interesting for some other authors, too [e.g. Binhack 1998; Wai-Po Tang 2002; Kosiewicz 2010].

There is also a philosophy of *idō* (perpetual motion), initiated by Dr. Wally Strauss [Cynarski 2009a] and adopted by a group of today’s warriors of the pathway. This philosophy unites new *Budo* with European chivalric ethos, ethics of brotherhood and personal self-realization.

On the other hand, Fritjof Capra [1982], speaking in favour of the new-system paradigm creates an image referring to the ecological philosophy of Taoism. It is a specific approach for *taiji quan* and “internal” styles such as *kung-fu (neijia)* with Taoist provenance. Environment and cosmic harmony take first place, and rivalry in sports in general, is “not an option”. Close to this approach are focused “mind-body problem” and esoteric aspects [cf. Förster 1983; Maroteaux 1995; Nagatomo, Leisman 1996 Aug].

Summary

The philosophy of martial arts is variously defined. In American periodicals devoted to the philosophy of sport there are articles about ‘martial arts’, or using as a keyword term ‘Eastern sports’. Some authors use the term ‘the Oriental philosophy of sport’. Regardless of the definition (name), and far more important are the various approaches and

variety of content hidden within the philosophy of martial arts

Within the philosophical anthropology of martial arts and the humanistic theory of martial arts a selection of the values of today's warriors of the Eastern Asia pathway has been set out. The pedagogical implications of the use of a variety of axiological traditional martial arts have been proven in many countries, but to the greatest extent in most East and South East Asian countries (China, Japan, Korea and Thailand). The philosophy of martial arts is both the practice of selected axio-normative systems, determining lifestyles and a description of the internalization of certain values. There is also an emerging philosophical sub-discipline resulting from the anthropology of the warriors' pathways. Finally, it is a superior theory for the area of knowledge and scientific disciplines described as *martial arts sciences*.

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Ogólne refleksje o filozofii sztuk walki

Słowa kluczowe: sztuki walki, filozofia, teoria ogólna

Abstrakt

W perspektywie filozoficznej antropologii sztuk walki humanistycznej teorii sztuk walki autor przedstawia wartości dzisiejszych dróg wojowników Azji wschodniej. Nawiązuje też do innych teoretycznych koncepcji filozofii sztuk walki, a zwłaszcza ich etyki normatywnej. Pedagogiczne konsekwencje zastosowania bogactwa aksjologicznego tradycyjnych sztuk walki zostały sprawdzone w wielu krajach świata, ale w największym stopniu w krajach Azji wschodniej i południowo-wschodniej. Drogi sztuk walki (jak japońskie Budo) stanowią wielki potencjał i ogólnoludzkie kulturowe dziedzictwo, z którego dzisiejsza pedagogika kultury fizycznej powinna czerpać.

Filozofia sztuk walki jest zarówno praktyką wybranych systemów aksjonormatywnych, warunkujących style życia i opisem stanu internalizacji określonych wartości. Jest też powstającą filozoficzną subdyscypliną, jak powstająca teoria antropologii drogi wojownika. Jest wreszcie nadrzędną teorią dla obszaru wiedzy i zespołu dyscyplin naukowych określanych jako *martial arts sciences*. W szczególności daje możliwość praktycznej aplikacji poprzez różne ujęcia pedagogiki sztuk walki.