

TARABANOV ARSENY

Department of Philosophy, Chair of Philosophical Anthropology, Saint-Petersburg State University (Russia)

Therapeutic ethos and martial arts

Submission: 15.07.2010, acceptance: 16.10.2010

Key words: therapeutic ethos, disciplinary spaces of culture, culturally ritualised body experience, cure-demolition ambiguity

Abstract: In order to conceptualise martial arts within humanistic paradigm we ought to overcome the obstacle of a destructive vision. There seemed to be an obvious contradiction of the therapeutic ethos (cure and revitalisation) and the martial arts ethos (mortality and demolition) is in its origin European historically limited attitude.

Comparative research based on a multi-cultural approach will merely discover unity of the “therapeutic” and “martial” in many traditional cultures (Indian, Chinese, Japanese cultures). The contradiction of therapeutic ethos and martial arts ethos was institutionalised in the process of historic dynamics by generation of special cultural ‘disciplinary spaces’ [Foucault 1975] - ‘spaces of clinic’ and ‘spaces of casern’.

The authentic vision of ‘therapeutic ethos’ should deal with a concept of culturally ritualised ‘body experience’ which is indeed a practical manifestation of the ‘cure-demolition ambiguity’ (tai chi practices, chi kung etc)..

Introduction

While conceptualising martial arts within humanistic paradigm we ought to overcome the obstacle of a destructive vision. Significant steps in this direction (understanding martial arts as a socio-cultural phenomenon of the humanitarian essence) have already been undertaken [Obodynski 2009; Cynarski, Obodynski, Litwiniuk, Sieber 2009]. There seemed to be an obvious contradiction of the therapeutic ethos (cure and revitalization) and the martial arts ethos (mortality and demolition) is in its origin European historically limited attitude.

Comparative research based on multi-cultural approach will merely discover unity of the “therapeutic” and “martial” in many traditional cultures (Indian, Chinese, Japan cultures). The contradiction of therapeutic ethos and martial arts ethos was institutionalized in the process of historic dynamics by generation of special cultural «disciplinary spaces» [Foucault 1975], «spaces of clinic» and «spaces of casern».

The authentic vision of «therapeutic ethos» should deal with a concept of culturally ritualised «body experience» which is indeed a practical manifestation of the «cure-demolition ambiguity» (tai chi practices, chi kung etc).

The problem of martial arts Ethos

In order to comprehend even the possibility of existence of therapeutic ethos within the martial arts practices we have to distinguish the very martial arts ethos (especially in Eastern martial arts) as the origin of further struggling, communicative, therapeutic and other social practices. Such a distinction among the other ethoses should be the activity of cultural reconstruction. The researcher has to analyse a specific martial arts culture in the society and at the martial arts particular institutions and how relevant is to the training and development of the involved persons. In any case, it is necessary to have the first look at how martial arts used to be taught during the history of ancient Asia. The Asian methodical tools (Asian, generally referred to oriental, which is so commonly misunderstood by the profane public, but also referring to the entire Asia and Asian countries and Asian cultures, including both central and western Asian cultures, such as Persian culture, Indian culture and others, of preserving, instructing and promoting martial arts used to be practically blended and selective. Students according to authentic cultural patterns were manually picked by their instructors (masters) and these instructions were ultimately done behind closed doors or closed gates of the dojo. The teaching process differed greatly from the contemporary Western vision. First of all, there were no such

points as the student's rights.

Students had to submit and accept the teacher's method both in studies and in everyday life and for the most part, they (the students) became part of the family or household of the masters and the School as special disciplinary space. We can discover here great difference in comparison with similar European disciplinary places [Twemlow, Biggs, Nelson, Vernberg, Fonagy 2008]. The Western concept of martial arts education was much more military engaged and was developed beyond family relationships. In Asia students had a very important role in the spreading of the particular martial art in surroundings, yet at the same time, they had to go through a process of character building and skills development. They were not able to doubt their teachers and never challenged their instructors. Some schools even housed students much like a dormitory in their territory and in a way a family was formed as a result of this close relationship. Even though the relationships were close, the humility and respect level were never overlooked and violated not only by students but even by their tutors. The primordial concept was that students appointed to the teachers to learn, and if the teacher chose them to be a part of their own school or even as a private student, the students faced the hard and even outrageous challenges and examinations which were premised to them by their mentor. Teachers gave and students appreciated it. Teachers spoke and ordered and students obeyed. Previous centuries martial arts in Asia were generally a distinct and separate culture all by itself. As a result of all this, bonding between students and teachers was very much a part of the culture and discipleship was at its highest level. Society in general, looked up to the schools that disciple pupils and martial arts were then a way of life. This manifestation of disciplinary procedures as way of life cultivation provides martial arts ethos with its specific features: therapy-improvement and struggling-competition.

We can see during the last fifty years, much of this genuinity of martial arts have disappeared, particularly within the Western hemisphere, more specifically in the United States. Martial arts are not a way of life anymore for the most part and general masses view martial arts as source of irrelevancy at worst and a place that is mainly good for children to play and have fun at best. They have passed on the responsibilities of leadership and self and family protection and preservation to their children instead. All of this is mainly due to the negative and destructive vision due to a common point of view to the attitude of martial arts. Movie industries withdraw martial arts of any therapeutic ethos by portraying martial arts as violent, aggressive,

perverted or at best as a escape from the actual reality to the fantastic way of life. In most places it has become a fitness type of an activity, without involving deeply into the very process of martial art advancing. It is the sort of entertainment where students just show up to their classes and talk with other students or the instructors and learn a few katas and forms and run out at the end their session, and consider themselves proficient in an art of effective self defence. Also ridiculous and far from an authentic tradition is contemporary Belt System which has totally expanded. It is not just a colour of belt that supposedly signifies the student's level, but also the number of stripes or markings on the belt that supposedly challenges the student's progress. Tiresome and continuous memorization of the katas has completely wiped out the uniqueness and the primal message of martial arts, which is and should be "combative arts of self defence". The other negative feature of martial arts culture cultivated in the United States and impending therapeutic ethos setting is the level of violence that is associated and packaged within the martial arts training halls. Cruelty, Anger, spontaneous Aggression and overall negative habits is what sells and unfortunately forms the mass public vision accompanied with a lack of information about the authentic martial arts. The traditional martial arts ethos has in its origin an ambiguity of demolition and creation. In the consequence the presumption of the governing of ability to cause human damage was accompanied by similar physical activity with therapeutic and social welfare purpose.

In the western urbanistic and modern cultural context this ambiguity has failed and the only intention of martial arts were and still are the personal protection, protection of the family and the protection as cultural practice in general. It is a natural habit to learn to protect oneself from the criminal invasion of any kind morally attached as overcoming of the evil in a particular society. Self-protection and Self Defence is a right of all men, women and children but it appears as a set of scheduled movements included in a daily routine and should be governed in special institutions. Sometimes this fundamental human right may contradict some Civil Society Institutions and even Power structures [Ngok 2005].

The right to self-defence seems to be fundamental, but it is one of the martial arts ethos manifestations. Therapeutic problematics should be certainly excluded in western embodiment. But the only heritage of traditional martial arts in deed of self cure is practice of self-discipline activities. In order to learn the art of self-defence, one must learn the art of self-discipline. Self-discipline in

western socio-cultural tradition was deeply analysed by a German fundamental thinker N. Elias [1969, 1982]. In his interpretation self-discipline is a result of civilization process. This process occurs as shift of external compulsion to inner compulsion and self-discipline. In Europe this process took some centuries and reshaped everyday life of the majority of people and social groups. In a comparative paradigm we can interpret Eastern martial arts as patterns of another civilization process succeeded to the same achievement - personal self-discipline and self-control.

Martial arts and therapy: towards a new synthetic unity

Contemporary Martial Arts Therapy is aimed to the exploiting of martial arts as an alternative or additional therapy for the numerous medical disorders of the different origin. These practices include treatment of both somatic and mental disorders. There is a plenty of the research works in this area [Lu, Kuo 2006; Payne 1997; Chen 2002; Syska, Jasiński, Kalina 2004; Friedman 2005 and others].

An important issue with martial arts therapy in a psychological context is the ultimate distinction between a therapeutic approach and a martial-strategic approach in the coaching. While martial arts evolution into present combat systems such as judo, krav maga and combat sports such as kickboxing, wrestling, mixed martial arts, the therapeutic dimension of martial ethos was completely missed. Many contemporary instructors and martial arts institutions teach only martial or combative techniques, shifting activity to struggling and demolition with miserable attention to therapeutic or philosophical, spiritual or socio-cultural issues. Generally, students may only be trained how to fight with an exception of traditional martial arts curricula, with total ignorance of the specific somatic experience which is able to perform some other social everyday practices [Theeboom, De Knop, Wylleman 2008]. All these cultural context features can be interpreted as the specific therapeutic factors. So in martial arts advanced training, studying of the very art excluding traditional, authentic ethos patterns fails any therapeutic benefit, and is able to contradict with personal psychological health. Meanwhile martial arts therapy within the most of nowadays approaches is unsuitable for self-defence or competitive needs also as a consequence of lost of the primordial martial art ethos.

Another important area is the problem of whether martial arts training promotes particular

public sphere or intercommunication social space creating new communities especially among the youths and adolescents. Martial arts therapy activities appear as treatment only within such interrelated spaces. And here we come in touch with the other question if martial arts activities in groups perform something which differs greatly from the other sorts of sport events. Can we indeed deal with a peculiar therapy?

It is necessary to have here comparison groups to evaluate treatment efficacy compared to control (combat sports) or even general fitness (i.e. martial arts therapy vs. aerobics vs. combat sports). Also within this investigation it is important to distinguish various types of martial arts and combat sports effects able to be identified as therapeutic both in mental and somatic dimensions.

The other point is a question of promoting or cultivating aggression and delinquency among adults and children [Nosanchuk, MacNeil 2006]. Here we come in touch with two opposite positions, the first of them points towards an aggression exhausting model where practising a martial art wastes practitioner's emotional energy in the training process. Such an exhausting training turns the trainee in a socio-positive person presenting him as mentally healthy one. The other position is based on a social learning theory, and considers martial arts as practising violent activities and consequently reinforces violence in a person and conditions them to be more aggressive and hostile outside of their activity. The concept of aggression management seems to be relevant to the contemporary civilization of "total, democratic servitude" [Marcuse 1964]. In this sense Martial Art Therapy occurs as a special practice of bringing to general social order spontaneous aggressive manifestations of personalities and social groups. Obviously, therapy here is not more than a common idiom. The therapy as an achievement of coherence. The necessity of such restrained activities is evident in conditions when the authentic martial art ethos is lost.

Conclusion

Therapeutic ethos was inseparably connected with martial arts during all the humankind cultural history. Cultural diversity of martial arts in traditional societies was a very effective embodiment of therapeutic ethos simultaneous to the traditional medical practices. Another important point to consider is the question if contemporary Martial Arts Therapy can be highlighted as rebirth of traditional therapeutic ethos related with socio-

institutionalised violence. Indeed we can mention contemporary Martial Arts Therapy as for the first hand practice of social control and violence restrain and only for the second hand as authentic therapy.

References

1. Chen D. (2002), *Using Tai Chi Metaphors to Increase Creative Practice*, "Journal of Clinical Activities, Assignments & Handouts in Psychotherapy Practice", vol. 2(2), pp. 12-21.
2. Cynarski W.J., Obodyski K., Litwiniuk A., Sieber L. (2009), *Exemplification of the Process of Institutionalisation of Far Eastern Martial Arts* [in:] W.J. Cynarski [eds.], *Martial Arts and Combart Sports - Humanistic Outlook*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, Rzeszow, pp. 83-89.
3. Elias N. (1969), *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 1: The History of Manners, Oxford: Blackwell.
4. Elias N. (1982), *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 2: State Formation and Civilization, Blackwell, Oxford.
5. Foucault M. (1975), *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*, Gallimard, Paris.
6. Friedman H. (2005), *Problems of Romanticism in Transpersonal Psychology: A Case Study of Aikido*, "The humanistic psychologist", vol. 33(1), pp. 3-24.
7. Lu W.A., Kuo C.D. (2006), *Comparison of the Effects of Tai Chi Chuan and Wai Tan Kung Exercises on Autonomic Nervous System Modulation and on Hemodynamics in Elder Adults*, "The American Journal of Chinese Medicine", vol. 34, no. 6, pp. 959-968.
8. Marcuse H. (1964), *One Dimensional Man*, Beacon, Boston.
9. Ngok Ma. (2005), *Civil Society in Self-Defense: the Struggle Against National Security Legislation in Hong Kong*, "Journal of Contemporary China", vol. 14(44), pp. 465-482.
10. Nosanchuk T.A., MacNeil M.L.C. (2006), *Examination of the Effects of Traditional and Modern Martial Arts Training on Aggressiveness*, "Aggressive Behavior", vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 153-159.
11. Obodyski K. (2009), *Anthropology of Martial Arts as a Scientific Perspective for Research* [in:] W.J. Cynarski [eds.], *Martial Arts and Combart Sports - Humanistic Outlook*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, Rzeszów, pp. 35-50.
12. Payne P. (1997), *Martial arts: The spiritual dimension*, Thames and Hudson, London.
13. Syska J.R., Jasiński T., Kalina R.M. (2004), *Training of modern gymnastic and dancing forms with elements of self-defence as a way of decreasing anxiety and aggressivity*

of women [in:] J. Szopa, T. Gabryś [eds.], *Sport training in interdisciplinary scientific research*, Faculty Management Technical University of Czestochowa, Czestochowa, pp. 265-273.

14. Theeboom M., De Knop P., Wylleman P. (2008), *Martial arts and socially vulnerable youth. An analysis of Flemish initiatives*, "Sport, Education and Society", vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 301-318.
15. Twemlow S.W., Biggs B., Nelson T., Vernberg E., & Fonagy P. (2008), *Effects of participation in a martial arts-based antibullying program in elementary schools*, "Psychology in the Schools", vol. 45(10), pp. 947-957.

Terapeutyczny etos i sztuki walki

Słowa kluczowe: etos terapeutyczny, dyscyplinarne przestrzenie kulturowe, kulturowo zrytualizowane doświadczenie ciała, niejednoznaczność „leczenie-niszczenie”, panaceum rozbiórki dwuznaczności

Streszczenie

Konceptualizacja sztuk walki w humanistycznym paradygmacie powinna przewyższać przeszkodę w postaci destruktywnej wizji, w której terapeutyczny etos (leczenie i rewitalizacja) oraz etos sztuk walki (śmiertelność i zniszczenie) wydają się być ze sobą sprzeczne według historycznie ograniczonego stanowiska europejskiego. Badania porównawcze oparte na wielokulturowym podejściu odkrywają jedynie związek „terapeutyczny” i „waleczny” w wielu tradycyjnych kulturach (np. w Indiach, Chinach i Japonii). Autor odwołuje się do książki M. Foucaulta, który pisał o relacjach społecznych, religijnych i prawnych pensjonariuszy różnych miejsc odosobnienia np. więzień, szpitali psychiatrycznych czy zakładów poprawczych. W artykule autor opisuje także rolę nauczyciela i ucznia oraz przedstawia różnice w traktowaniu sztuk walki na Wschodzie i na Zachodzie. Porusza on także problem traktowania współczesnych sztuk walki nie tylko jako sposobu obrony, sportu czy sposobu spędzania wolnego czasu, ale także jako terapii. Według autora prawdziwa wersja „terapeutycznego” etosu powinna zajmować się kulturowo zrytualizowanym „doświadczeniem cielesności”. Etos ten w rzeczywistości jest praktyczną manifestacją „wieloznaczności leczenia i zniszczenia”. Terapia poprzez współczesne sztuki walki może wspomóc leczenie licznych zaburzeń natury medycznej. W artykule poruszona jest także kwestia promowania przemocy w sztukach walki i ich nie zawsze pozytywny wizerunek w mediach.