

PHILOSOPHY

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Martial arts: travel and purpose

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Abstract

Problem. From the perspective of the philosophical anthropology of martial arts, the problem of purpose was raised through martial arts. In particular varieties these are different roads, travels and travellers. What does it look like from the perspective of teleology? **Method.** The hermeneutic method was used to understand the sense of structures or character formations. Texts, signs and symbols are examined in search of their deeper meaning. The contexts covered were: 1) codes in which a given sign or their team operates; 2) social, historical and cultural systems; 3) contexts of circumstances of the current existence of the signs.

Results. In the essay, the conceptual language was established, the teleological canon was presented, and a series of examples was given. Symbolism comes from the various cultural contexts and different historical periods of the countries where individual martial arts were born. In general, the advisability of sports is significantly different from the advisability of following the ways of martial arts in their traditional understanding.

Conclusions. The diversity of goals and senses of martial arts paths results from their multiformity. Sometimes the pursuit of internal harmony (mind-body and soul) and with the world of nature or in social relations is most emphasized. Very often the main goal is to improve your character, self-discipline and self-improvement. Sometimes it is only about getting a package of utilitarian skills.

Introduction

In the field of philosophical anthropology of martial arts, we are particularly interested in man – actor, participant and subject who practices martial arts, studies, cultivates, trains and fights, follows the “sword path” and lives according to certain rules. It is a conscious or unconscious form of asceticism, like many other forms of physical culture. However, in the light of the definition adopted in the Humanistic Theory of Martial Arts and in the General Theory of Fighting Arts, it is a way that goes beyond the area of physical culture. According to the definition, we understand ‘martial arts’ as: a historic category of flawless methods of unarmed combat fights, and the use of weapons combined with a spiritual element (personal development, and also in its transcendent sphere) [Cynarski, Skowron 2014]. In turn, ‘combat sports’ are forms of fighting arts with sports rivalry [cf. Cynarski 2019]. Combat sports that have entered the path of Olympic competition, especially judo and taekwondo, participate in the ethos of Olympicism [Firek 2016]. However, they gradually lose their original, spiritual character. Paradigms of sport sciences, sports psychol-

ogy and didactics begin to dominate them [Arziutov *et al.* 2016]. That is why many martial arts experts are reluctant to refer or even reject sporting competition.

In particular varieties of traditionally understood martial arts we find different varieties of spirituality. For example, in the internal style of *WingTsun kung-fu* by K. Kernspecht [2014] there are accents on psychology of self-defence and development of inner energy in *qigong*. In *Zendo-ryu karate-do* by D. Schmidt [2002-2003, 2004; cf. Mor-Stabilini 2013] – a focus is directed to practicing Zen Buddhism. Otherwise it can be a form of physical culture with reference to Christian values and spirituality [Williamson 2002]. It can be interpreted 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. It is the way of practice that is combat training, daily training [Kim, Back 2000]. In general, “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” [Cynarski 2013: 5].

The perspective of Christian anthropology and personalism prompts us to combine “practical philosophy” with the concepts of responsibility, virtue and duty. The goal of human life is identified with its meaning [Mylik 2012]. Moral conduct distinguishes man and humanity, and this is what should be protected in the situation of postmodern threats of anthropological regression. One of the possible ways is the application of homocreative arts, such as individual disciplines of Japanese Budo and other martial arts paths [cf. Szmyd 2013a; Nakiri 2015; Martinkova, Parry, Wagner 2019]. The achievements of personalists (as K. Wojtyła), radical humanists (as E. Fromm) and creators of new trends in pedagogy (as W. Pasterniak and A. Szyszko-Bohusz) translate into the pedagogical application of personalistic human philosophy by educating young people, which is why they can serve – as a pedagogical medium – traditionally understood martial arts [cf. Szmyd 2013a, b; Cynarski, Blazejewski, Pasterniak 2016: 43-168].

In this essay we adopt anthropology in a triple sense – human philosophy, cultural anthropology and Kant’s theory of wisdom (moral anthropology) [cf. Durozoi, Roussel 1997: 15]. Anthropology of martial arts, which is a development of the Humanistic Theory of Martial Arts, is based on a personalistic foundation and treats people holistically [Obodynski 2009; Cynarski, Obodynski, Zeng 2012; Zeng, Cynarski, Xie 2013: 9-54]. This is in line with the assumptions of the new paradigm in the humanities, according to which reductionist approaches should be avoided. Man and his psycho-physical being should be treated systemically, as should social relations and other human relations with the surrounding world [cf. Cynarski, Blazejewski, Pasterniak 2016]. The numerous dimensions of human life (health, needs etc.) and functional dimensions: processual (becoming), temporal (changes in time) and contextual (also social and cultural contexts are changing) should be taken into account. The issue of purposefulness of human actions is interesting here.

The author tackled the problem of purpose through martial arts. They are actually different roads, travels and travellers. What does it look like from the perspective of teleology? The hermeneutic method was used to understand the sense of structures or character formations. Texts, signs and symbols are examined in search of their deeper meaning. Contexts were taken into account: 1) codes in which a given mark or their set operates; 2) social, historical and cultural systems; 3) contexts of circumstances of the current existence of the mark.

Teleology

Teleology, as a science of purposefulness and purpose, helps us understand the sense of this path of a warrior – be it the old one who fought for life or death, or today’s

martial arts student. In a way, it is a journey and its participant appears as a kind of pilgrim. Martial arts tourism (also multiform [cf. Kubala, Cynarski, Swider 2019; Cynarski 2020], which is travelling for martial arts studies, learning or teaching them, is a specific manifestation. But what are the goals of today’s martial arts warriors?

Road/way – *dō*, is a concept present in many types of martial arts, in the names of systems, styles and schools. The category of “ways” in Chinese culture probably derives from the Chinese Tao, the basic concept in Taoism, as in the “Book of Way and Virtue” (*Tao Te King / Daodejing*). It is a similarly moral path or a set of martial arts paths (Japanese *Budō*) [Baka 2008; Nakiri 2015]. A term related to meaning is the method (Greek *methodos*). There are various paths here to achieve championship. Physical and technical mastery is relatively easy to achieve. After about ten years of systematic exercise, you can significantly strengthen and improve the body and master even complex techniques of its use in combat, as well as the use of various traditional weapons – from stick to firearms. However, this is only the tiger level. The levels of the dragon and the phoenix require mastery of the spirit, i.e. emotional and mental self-control. But this also does not exhaust the sense of achieving mastery.

In the traditions of many East and Southeast Asian countries, the primary goal of practicing martial arts is to become a better person. Fighting skills are one of the stage goals. Winning in sporting competitions is possibly a kind of training test. First of all, the adept is to become a better person and more useful to society. Codes and ethics help in this way to improve humanity. The master teacher sets an example for his students. He should be more of a tutor and guide, not just a trainer.

In Christocentric martial arts, such as the Pszczyna School of Martial Arts (from Pszczyna, Poland) or the *Signum Polonicum* fencing school (Zawiercie, Poland), the Gospel orientation is emphasized [Sawicki 2012]. Jesus Christ is here the Way, the Truth and the Life. The Roman Catholic faith and the Polish Catholic Church have protected Polish national identity for centuries. Hence today’s references to Christian spirituality in martial arts currently practiced in Poland. Similarly, Ukrainian Combat *Hopak* refers to Orthodox Greek Catholic spirituality [cf. Pylat 2018].

Elsewhere, spirituality is based on the traditions of Zen Buddhism (as in *karate Kyokushin* or *Zendo-ryu karate-do*), Taoism (various *taiji quan* schools) or Shintoism (*kenjutsu* fencing schools from Katori and Kashima monasteries). For *Muai Thai*, the foundation of spirituality is Hinayana Buddhism, for G. Funakoshi’s *karate-do* it was Confucianism, and for Morihei Ueshiba’s *aikido* – the *Omoto-kyo* sect, combining elements of Shintoism and Buddhism. In addition to these general orientations of religious provenance, the “spiritual path” in any case is influenced by the main master and leader of the organization, if he plays the informal role of a spiritual *guru*.

So Oyama [1979] encouraged his students to take up difficult challenges, hard training and hard contact fights. They should imitate his path to the “Pole of Truth”, as the name *Kyokushin* can be translated. On the contrary, Ueshiba [1997] recommended rejecting aggression and fighting in the name of the principle of universal love.

Religious factors and principles of social ethics (like Confucius’ teachings) are not the only interpretation of the values and goals of a given path. The cultures of warriors developed the canons of dignified and honorable conduct. These are the cultural patterns of European Christian knighthood, the principles of *kshatriya* (caste of warriors) in India, the ethics of fighting in China or the *butoku* (knightly virtues) in Japan. It can be hypothesized, though difficult to verify, that the later ethos of warriors was derived from the principles of Indo-European Aryans, Slavs (Lechites) and Scythians, or also Celts [cf. Cynarski 2018].

Practice (training) goals in various schools and martial arts organizations are very diverse. Commercial considerations mean that in some cases one does not enter the world of values, beliefs and morals at all; probably in order to receive the largest number of “clients” – religious different denominations and non-religious, usually with a liberal-leftist orientation dominating in Europe. Then there is a reduction of goals to only the training, mercantile offer – you pay and you have. Only the skill level is important, which in the case of extreme commercialization also ceases to be the most important. Commercial teaching requires the good sales of this service to stay in the demanding capitalist market.

In general, different goals also apply to different ways, which will be discussed below.

1. Pathway of Fighting

If combat is the only way or goal to reach a higher level, the main focus is on it. It can be a “real fight” in self-defence or in uniformed services, or a conventional, sporting fight. It is then a collision of two personalities, or in a fight in self-defence – sometimes several on one. In this way, training and mental resistance, the level of technical and tactical skills, intellect and knowledge are checked. A number of factors determine the outcome of the fight. On the warrior’s path there are other dimensions of combat than just the physical one. The warrior makes decisions of moral significance, which is related to the use of direct violence. But he also fights in the sphere of emotions and in the spiritual sphere, choosing everyday between good and evil.

Taking up difficult challenges is the domain of a brave man. This courage is taught in the effort of many years of training, in battles with demanding opponents, in various exercises of character and personality. Such long-term asceticism (regular, often daily exercises in

the atmosphere of discipline and self-discipline) prepares you to cope with various life situations, including very difficult ones. It gives “clout” against adversity and allows you to solve further problems. At least that’s the assumption. Sometimes, however, someone goes the way of a warrior looking for shortcuts and cheating. Such a path leaves a rather negative personality.

2. Perfectionist attitude

Daily training is an intrinsic value [Kim, Back 2000]. Broadly understood perfectionism requires constant work on oneself, constant self-improvement, striving for individual and universal values. We improve our skills, practice self-control, strive for a functional body and mind, as well as a state of internal harmony. To become a Grand Master means to achieve further degrees and titles, technical and masterful, up to the highest, honorary. This requires not only mastering the physical (own body) and technical (fighting techniques). The highest technical level is described by the Chinese-Japanese tradition as the tiger level. Usually it is 5 dan and the Japanese title *renshi*. Higher degrees and titles are super technical (meta-technical). So no exam or skill demonstration is usually required. Decisive is the achievements of teaching and popularizing, i.e. knowledge and ability to communicate it, promoting subsequent students to instructors and teachers of martial arts, especially “good name” – an undoubted moral attitude. As in the old elite groups, honour and shame decide about the behaviour. There are no special control institutions. However, everyone knows (or at least should know) that cheating is not tolerated among masters of the highest rank.

The highest level captures the mythical power of the Chinese dragon and phoenix. These special symbols refer to the wisdom and power of the spirit, as well as to immortality. In the traditions of warriors, the divine attribute of immortality could have been achieved by the hero-warrior. The highest degrees and championships refer to these symbols. To “see the Chinese dragon and phoenix closely”, the author undertook trips to China, Japan and other East Asian countries. It was a historical and cultural context – places like the Shaolin Monastery, the Beijing Imperial Palace, or the Shogun Palace in Tokyo [Cynarski 2020]. But more important here was more than 40 years of practice under the guidance of several outstanding masters-teachers.

Tora-no maki is the level of tiger. The student achieves mastery in technique, great strength and efficiency. Above is *kyoshi*, the master of the Chinese dragon’s spiritual strength. The grand master with the title of *hanshi* (top grades 9-10 dan) has already a level of immortality, available to few [fig. 1]. But he also passes his knowledge of life experience to subsequent adepts who strive for the level of tiger. And for it to remain,

and not just the famous name, it must still exercise its body weakening with age. Because the symbols are not universally and identically understood in different parts of the world, for many nations the role of the mythical phoenix and Chinese dragon, for example, is played by an eagle, when the tiger is replaced by a lion – a manifestation of physical strength.

3. Different philosophies

Heraclitus already saw struggle and war as a factor of change, efficient or even divine; war makes people gods and slaves. Indeed, the bravest – heroes – remained heroes and gods (such as the Aryan Mitra). According to Heraclitus, the aristocracy chooses immortal fame as the supreme value, while the masses are bustling “like cattle” around all worldly goods. In turn, for Aristotle, a nobleman “justly proud” risks his life for great things, because he knows that it is worth living at all costs [cf. Zuk 1996; Zowislo 2001: 26-42]. The philosophy of conflict and struggle focuses on fighting, sometimes losing man. He (or she) also makes glorious or sometimes shameful choices. The ancient stoics have already proposed an assessment. In their opinion, things worth choosing are divided into: 1) spiritual (talents, memory, mental acuity,

advances in knowledge); 2) bodily (efficiency of sensory organs, life); 3) external (having children, parents, human love, recognition, good descent, and moderate wealth). Good is worthy of striving for them, while *proegmena* (that is, things worth choosing) are only worth accepting. Actions aimed at good are an expression of virtue, and *proegmena* oriented – only appropriate. Spiritual values are given priority over bodily ones, because the soul is the proper human value. Similar to stoic concepts are found in philosophical Taoism and in today’s concepts of philosophy of martial arts [Cynarski 2007].

The philosophy of living in harmony with Tao and nature represents the Taoist trend, where we also find the idea of self-improvement [cf. Baka 2008]. Here, however, the issues of energy circulation in the body and health, balancing and harmonizing opposing energies, and caring for ecology are more often emphasized. Fashion for such an issue causes the necessary virtue to be lost in parallel. *The Book of the Way and the Virtues* is, after all, the main text left to us by master Lao Tzu [2001].

Spiritual dimensions of martial arts are sometimes taken into account by researchers, as in M. Maliszewski’s field studies [1996]. He described numerous varieties of martial arts as meditation systems. In fact, some *karate* schools recommend meditation exercises [cf. Oyama 1979; Schmidt 2004]. However, equally often psychologi-

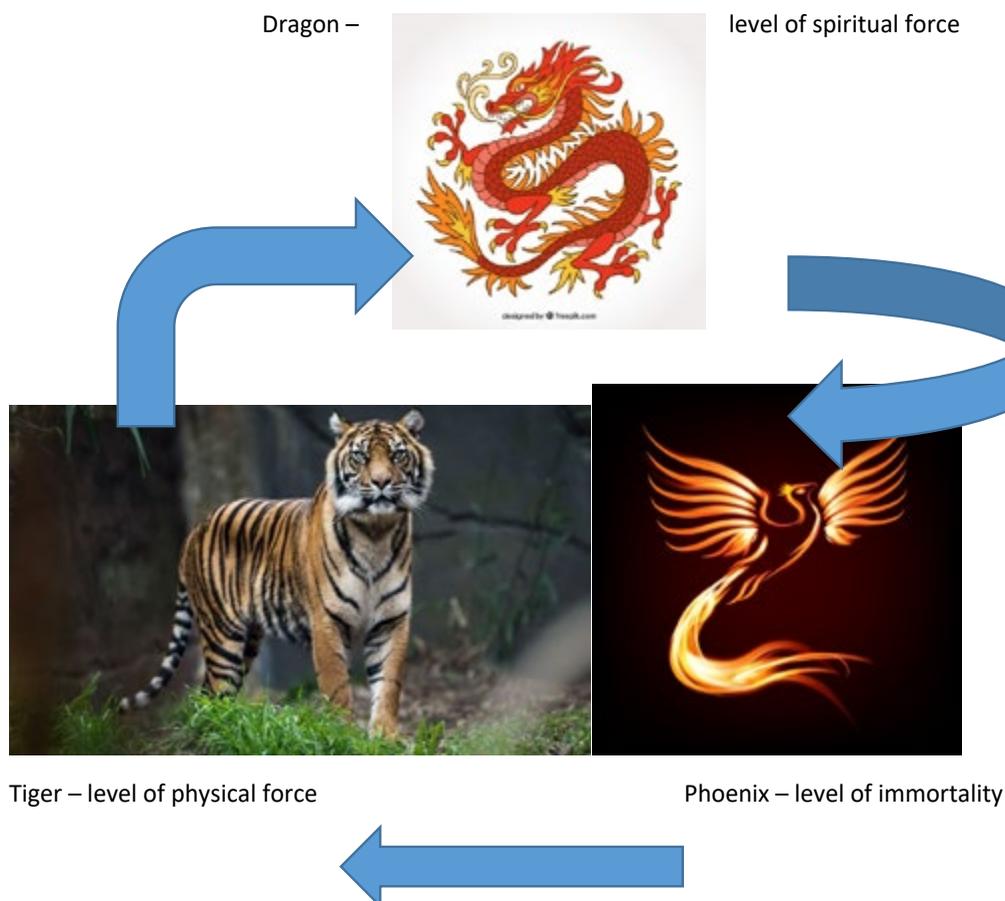


Fig. 1. Symbolic dimension of the martial arts' pathway

cal methods are used instrumentally in training warriors and athletes [cf. Pasterniak, Cynarski 2013; Tiwald 2013]. Psychology mixes here with philosophy, and its practical applications are more like the psychology of competitive sport than the magical and religious preparation of a warrior for a fight to the death.

Complementing the traditionally understood martial arts is their sportiness. The rivalry paradigm has already been adopted by Chinese *wushu*, which is called the culture of adversaries [Dai, Lu 2019]. However, here, according to many masters-teachers, there is a great danger of martial arts losing their purpose, essence and sense [Mor-Stabilini 2013]. They cease to be the path to higher values and become sport. Sporting successes and popularity are becoming new goals. Instead of other ethos values, an Olympic idea is proposed, which is otherwise noble.

There are also attempts to combine classical forms with modern training methods, a certain canon of the philosophy of martial arts with a universal ethos of nobility, the achievements of generations of masters from East Asia and masters of martial arts born in Europe. The manifestation of this phenomenon is the *Ido* philosophy, developed in the Idokan organization in a triangle: Central Europe, Eastern Asia, Australia [Cynarski 2017]. The cases of outstanding European masters of Japanese martial arts from outside this organization confirm the fact that their own philosophy of life is very much in line with the ethos of *Ido* [cf. Maroteaux, Cynarski 2002-2003; Czerwenka-Wenkstetten, Cynarski 2008; Strauss, Slopecki 2014].

Conclusions

The diversity of goals and senses of martial arts paths results from their multiformity. Symbolism comes from different cultural contexts and different historical periods of the countries where individual martial arts were born. Generally, the purposefulness of sport disciplines, which were created on the basis of martial arts, significantly differs from the purposefulness of following the ways of martial arts in their traditional understanding.

In different ways, the accents on values and goals are spread in different ways. Sometimes the pursuit of internal harmony (mind-body and soul) and with the world of nature or in social relations is most emphasized. Very often the main goal is to improve your character, self-discipline and self-improvement. Sometimes it is only about acquiring a package of utilitarian skills and sometimes / often their commercial use.

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Sztuki walki: podróż i cel

Słowa kluczowe: antropologia, filozofia sztuk walki, turystyka sztuk walki, droga wojownika, duchowość, cel drogi

Abstrakt

Problem. W perspektywie filozoficznej antropologii sztuk walki podjęto problem celu w drodze sztuk walki. W poszczególnych odmianach są to różne drogi, podróże i podróżnicy. Jak to wygląda od strony teleologii?

Metoda. Zastosowano metodę hermeneutyczną w rozumieniu wydobywania sensu struktur lub twórców znakowych. Badane są teksty, znaki i symbole, w poszukiwaniu ich głębszego sensu. Uwzględniony konteksty: 1) kodów, w których dany znak lub ich zespół funkcjonuje; 2) społeczne, historyczne i systemów kulturowych; 3) konteksty okoliczności aktualnego zaistnienia znaku.

Wyniki. W eseju ustalono język pojęciowy, przedstawiono kanon teleologiczny, podano serię przykładów. Symbolika pochodzi z różnych kulturowych kontekstów i różnych okresów historycznych krajów, gdzie narodziły się poszczególne sztuki walki. Najogólniej, celowość dyscyplin sportowych znacząco różni się od celowości podążania drogami sztuk walki w ich tradycyjnym rozumieniu.

Wnioski. Zróżnicowanie celów i sensów dróg sztuk walki wynika z ich wielopostaciowości. Niekiedy najmocniej akcentowane jest dążenie do harmonii wewnętrznej (ciało, umysł i dusza) oraz ze światem natury lub też w relacjach społecznych. Bardzo często celem głównym jest doskonalenie swego charakteru, samodyscyplina i samodoskonalenie. Czasem zaś chodzi tylko o zdobycie pakietu użytecznych umiejętności.