

Wojciech J. Cynarski

A Christian and the martial arts path

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PHILOSOPHY

WOJCIECH J. CYNARSKI

Chair of Cultural Foundations for Physical Education, Tourism and Recreation,
University of Rzeszow, Rzeszów (Poland)
Contact e-mail: ela_cyn@wp.pl

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Abstract

Background. The and cultural anthropology of martial arts, and the Humanistic Theory of Martial Arts constitute the framework for this study.

Aims and Objectives. A series of research questions was posed: Can one talk about universal principles and values in respect of the Way of the Warrior? What does it mean to be a noble man especially today? How does this issue relate to Christianity? What is the point of fighting, of developing a sense of self-improvement and of attaining mastery? Material and Methods. The answers to these questions are sought through an analysis of a number of sources and studies, a broad discourse involving literature and long-term observations in the international martial arts environment. Results. One can talk about universal principles and values in respect of the Way of the Warrior. They are generally universal, as long as it is in a moral way and the main objective is seen as the improvement of character and the pursuit of mastery in the art of humanity. A deeper meaning of Taoism in the sphere of ethics, is related to the truth revealed in the Gospel. Conversely the “Anti-Way” is the cult of power and violence, or of turning to magic and sorcery or an attempt to return to pre-Christian cults. And what does it mean to be a noble man, especially today? A noble man has to follow the moral path of truth and other positive universal values which do not contradict the Ten Commandments and the Gospel.

Conclusions. What is the point of fighting, of developing a sense of self-improvement and of attaining mastery? It is an ascetic practice to achieve multidirectional development and a striving for mastery in the art of living to become a better person. However, for supporters of the Anti-Way it means only learning or teaching specific fighting skills, or the fight itself and of demonstrating one’s superiority. The right “Way of the Warrior” is consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church and other Christian denominations (except in a few cases of the “Anti-Way”).

“The Lord is with you brave warrior”
[Judges 6,12]

Introduction

‘Martial arts’ is a concept that arose within European culture; they are defined differently in different theoretical perspectives. Other terms are used such as: combat sports, fighting arts, combatives, oriental sports, etc. [Cynarski, Skowron 2014; cf. Martínková, Parry 2015; Nakiri 2015]. From the perspective of the Humanistic Theory of Martial Arts and the holistic anthropology of martial arts [Cynarski 2004, 2014] the following definition is used here: martial arts are a historic category of flawless methods of unarmed combat fighting and the use of weapons, combined with spiritual elements

(both personal development and in the transcendental sphere) [Cynarski, Skowron 2014]. What are the ideological foundations of the martial arts, known today in Japan as *Budo* (military ways)? Is it the “Way”, which is an echo of the “philosophy of the way” by Lao Tzu or completely different martial paths [cf. Lao Tzu 2001; Martínková, Parry 2015; Nakiri 2015]?

As in the case of the roots of European sport, the origins of Asian martial arts were similarly linked with their local religions as the cultural cores of their place of birth. The Games of the ancient Egyptians or Greeks were held within the framework of local cults. Similarly, sumo wrestling was held to honour the deities of the Shinto religion (the way of the gods). Buddhist and Taoist monks were the teachers of Chinese warriors. In turn European knighthood was strongly associated with Christianity [cf. Cynarski 2004; Piwowarczyk 2007]. In

the case of knighthood it was a stronger relationship than that of the *samurai* with Buddhism or Shintoism [Takagi 1984].

Can one talk about the universal principles and values of the Warrior's Way? What does it mean to be a noble man, especially today? How does this issue relate to Christianity? What is the point of fighting, of developing a sense of self-improvement and of attaining mastery? The answers to these questions are sought through analyzing a number of sources and studies, a broad discourse [Krippendorf 2004] and long-term observations in the international martial arts environment.

Richard King [1999] critically assesses the myth of objectivity in Gadamer's hermeneutics and 'cultural studies'. He indicates errors and inaccuracies in the descriptions and explanations of cultural issues in relations between the West and the Far East. So what are the chances of getting closer to the truth in the description of the social and cultural facts? In the author's opinion, this should be rather like putting together a jigsaw puzzle of knowledge via a broad, multidisciplinary approach [cf. Hetherington 1996; Cynarski 2004].

An ontological understanding of human existence is relatively important and sometimes crucial for these kinds of searches. That is how we understand mankind – the human being. A holistic approach was adopted which treats a human being as a psychophysical, personal being, endowed with free will, making conscious decisions, but acting through his body. This is the understanding of man in the anthropology of martial arts [Kowalczyk 2002, 2009]. "The human body is an ideal meeting place for theology and science because it displays the fullest spectrum of the manifold wisdom of God" [Van der Meer 2001: 39]. The human body is to be respected. But it would be wrong to reduce man only to his/her body. The sense of physical exercise in this perspective, also gains a psycho-physical dimension. In particular, when the asceticism of exercise for personal improvement is a consciously made decision, then a spiritual sense becomes dominant.

The anthropology and ontology (both philosophical and religious), of Taoism is consciously omitted and it is just the philosophy of the human Way which is of interest here. Incidentally, Confucius also advocated the procedure in accordance with the Way of Heaven.

Results I. New interpretation of the Taoistic philosophy of the Way

1a. What is the deeper meaning of Taoism, or the science of the Way (and virtue)?

The basis for some of the martial arts practised today, is philosophical Taoism, initiated by Lao Tzu. The Ancient Master (Lao Tsy, 6 CBC) is the author of *Tao Te Ching*

(Daodejing) [Lao Tzu 2001]. The key concepts here are Tao and Te, or the "Way and Virtue", just as they were for the Stoics [Cynarski 2012].

Virtue means obedience to God – working only in harmony with Tao, known as the attitude of "wuwei". "In the beginning was the Word", the Gospel of John (1) – *Vox Domini*, in translation, e.g. in the Japanese version it is translated into: "In the beginning was the Tao".

Virtue (*Te*) is the manifestation of divine energy, divine spirit (Holy Spirit?). Lao Tzu was similar to St. Francis of Assisi in the way of being "organic", i.e. close to nature, understanding nature and especially the meaning of the human way of life. However the notion of a personal God cannot be found in Lao Tzu's philosophy.

On the other hand, the Way is a method, practice, experience. The Way (Tao) is a striving for harmony with God, rather than the mixing of good and evil, as Taoism is alleged to do, according to some people. The yin-yang sign refers to proto-elements: plus and minus, rising and falling, masculine and feminine elements in nature, rather than right and wrong.

Chi (Chinese *qi*, Jap. and Kor. *ki*) – is simply a breath and the resulting energy. It is not some magical or esoteric power. Harmony of movement and breath (good coordination) has a beneficial effect on the circulation of energy in the body. When an appropriate level of concentration on the work being done is added, the movement is achieved with the use of this *chi*, as it is poetically known by the people of East Asia. The language of energy is used to describe mental states, but everything can be explained in a rational manner, without recourse to supernatural powers.

Moral goodness in life requires a realization of universal values [Szoltysek 2015: 207], which are consistent with the laws of nature. Selfish actions that are contrary to the moral order or the broadly-understood ecology (social and natural) are an anti-way. This can manifest itself on a micro scale, in direct relationships, or on the scale of international and political relations (political violence against neighbouring countries).

Understanding the philosophy of Taoism helps in a conscious study of *taiji quan* or *qigong* [cf. Feng Youlan 2001; Kozminski 2006], in particular in relation to health. But it may also be helpful in other forms of physical exercise, e.g. jogging. Taoism teaches the avoidance of the effort and all excesses. Thus, for example, one should run at a steady pace and not for long distances. It is better to exercise regularly for a long time, using loads which are not too strenuous for the body.

1b. Completion of Peter Jahnke's research programme

Mahatma Gandhi was not the only one who accepted the *non-violence* of the Gospel of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. A similar philosophical and religious search was

made Peter K. Jahnke (1936-13.08.1995), the reformer of karate. The continuation of the research programme (in the understanding of Imre Lakatos [1995]) is based here on an attempt at a new reading of the meaning of Jahnke's. Perhaps this activity involves going one step further than this German thinker.

Zendo karate tai-te-tao [Jahnke 1992], in translation is: "The way of meditation – the way of the hand of peace", in other words the Virtue of the "Great Way" is a universal (universalist), idea of self-improvement through physical, moral and spiritual asceticism and meditation.

The second form of this masterly direction of karate is called the *Tao-Te*, or the Way and Virtue, as in the *Tao Te Ching* (Daodejing) [Yu *et al.* 2015]. It is clearly a moral way, without the need for domination (the rejection of rivalry), imposing however a duty of service and support for others, especially the weaker and needy.

Jahnke referred to the Gospel's "sword of justice" in conjunction with the "Law of Great Love". The name of God in the Old Testament, Jehovah, is translated as Love. Incidentally love is the bedrock of many positive values [Szoltysek 2015: 199-200]. Here, in Jahnke's terms, even *ninjutsu*, the art of being invisible, is in service to goodness to protect the most vulnerable and in need. The sword symbolizes law and justice, the power to defend the weak and self-defence.

Overall, among the universal values, we can distinguish between the positive and negative ones:

- Sincerity, "the way of truth", as a rejection of lies and deceit – acceptance of lies;
- Sincere admiration and envy;
- Honesty and dishonesty;
- Nobleness and meanness;
- Kindness and malevolence;
- Justice and injustice;
- Courage and cowardice;
- Fidelity and infidelity (betrayal);
- Humility and pride;
- Selflessness and selfishness [cf. Szoltysek 2015: 200-201].

They are either qualities or attitudes manifested in activities. The formation of character begins with fidelity to the truth, which is consistent with the Gospel. The warrior's way should be simple, such as sword fighting and as such should be a way of learning, where the primary meaning is to discover the truth.

The names of the five technical forms of *Zendo karate tai-te-tao* also emphasize, in their name, the universal and humanistic values of this way of meditation/contemplation – *Tao* (the Way of Heaven), God, and transcendence:

- *ikkyu kata jindo-te* (Jap. *ik* – first; *kyu* – student, level student; *jindo* – humanism, literally "the way of man"; *te* – hand, hands, or "virtue"),
- *nikyu kata jin-te* (*ni* – second; *jin* – man, in Confucianism the principle of "Zen" also applies to humanity, kindness to another human being; "man's virtue?"),

- *shodan kata tai-te-tao* (the first form of mastery "the way of the hand of peace"; or "peace on the road of virtue"),
- *nidan kata tao-te* (the second form; "the power of Tao" or "the way and virtue"),
- *sandan kata tai-te-jutsu* (third dan form, "the technique of the way of the hand of peace", or "the method of the way of asceticism").

It is worth mentioning that the principles of softness, harmony and water operating in *ju jitsu*, (adaptation) come from Taoism, but they apply only to battle tactics. In contrast, Lothar Sieber's idea of *tai-te-jutsu*, the "art of the hand of peace", refers to Peter Jahnke's idea [cf. Sieber 2013; Slopecki 2015]. The art of *taiji quan* is also an art of peace [Raimondo 2012].

Results II. The way which is not in conflict with the teachings of the Catholic Church

What kind of "way" is meant? *Tao* (in Chinese "The Road/the Way") in Chinese or Japanese translations of the Gospel means "the word" – "In the beginning was the Tao" (Prologue of the Word in the Gospel of St. John, 1). Perhaps the Way (Tao Dao; Kor. 'do' Jap. 'dō') of the ancient Chinese sages and Japanese masters of Budo is not too far from the Gospel's Way of Truth? Shouldn't we look for grains of Truth in the spiritual heritage of different cultures (*Vaticanum II*)? There is the Way of Virtue in Taoism ("The Book of the Way and Virtue" – *Tao Te Jing* by master Lao Tzu); the Way of Heaven in Confucian social ethics (Confucian instructions to behave in accordance with the Way of Heaven); there is also the Way of the Gods, or the Way of the Soul – in the tradition of *Shinto*. In every case, this is a reference to Heaven/the Heavens and divine power, but understood differently [cf. Olszewski 1995].

Inazo Nitobe encouraged the connection of Bushido (the way of the noble warrior) with Christianity, because, in his opinion, there is no contradiction between knightly virtue (*butoku*) and the duties that arise from the Christian religion [Nitobe 1904, 1993; Cynarski 2001]. The ancient historic codes of honour of warriors already included rules of conduct. In particular the ethos which rejected the principle of revenge and suicide, in its humanised version, was a set of ethical norms and universal values [cf. Nitobe 1993; Cynarski 2015].

Similarly (although much earlier), the understanding of struggle in the Old Testament has changed into the Christian knightly custom [Galkowski 2013]. The ethos-related and Christian foundations of sport create its educational value [Dziubinski 2014: 41-49]. Martial arts can be considered within the term of a widely-understood sports and humanistic culture.

What is the meaning of fighting? This is above all a test of skills and emotional self-control. In addition

to a physical fight, there are other areas of fighting, for example the spiritual fight [Sieber, Cynarski, Litwiniuk 2007]. Overcoming one's own weakness is the main point of self-improvement on the set Pathway. And what is the point of mastery? Mastery is also understood as a whole. One needs to be a master in the ways of humanity, which simply means being a good man, as well as an expert (in knowledge and skills), teacher and educator.

In addition to these general principles derived from the knightly traditions, the ideal of a valiant and noble man remain. A cowardly person cannot be noble, because he/she is not capable of taking risks on important issues. Risk, for the sake of novelty-seeking is stupidity coming from selfishness. However, in special circumstances, a noble man fights (a fair fight, in defence), whereas a coward runs away or starts to cooperate with the enemy (betrayal and shame).

The European knightly tradition, and in particular the Polish heritage of martial arts [Zablocki 2000; Sawicki 2011, 2012; Cynarski 2014, 2015], is closely linked with the Christian, Roman Catholic religion. It is cultivated in historical fencing. Generally, sport is sometimes used in youth organizations (*Vide* Salesian sport [Dziubinski 1998, 2014]). Some schools and martial arts organizations refer directly to Christian principles, as does Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (School of the Gracie Family), Pszczyńska School of Martial Arts, “Signum Polonicum” and some American schools [cf. Williamson 2002; Kisiel 2005; Sawicki 2011, 2012].

Champions of boxing and kick-boxing, such as George Foreman, Marek Piotrowski, Andrzej Golota and Tomasz Adamek, are zealously-Christian men [*God's cheering* 2000: 67-70; Foreman, Abraham 2008]. This also applies to judo champions such as Beata Maksymow (4 dan) [*God's cheering* 2000: 146-147]. Also, a number of top-ranking *karate* and *jujutsu* masters (10 dan and *Hanshi* title holders) consider the Ten Commandments as a major moral signpost [Sieber 2013; Slopecki 2015]. In individual cases the situation certainly differs.

It is obvious that the master teachers of martial arts can be of different religions, for example Buddhist [cf. Nakiri 2014], which is quite common in Japan, though they are a minority among the European instructors and leaders of martial arts. However, among martial arts and combat sports practitioners of Asian origin from south-eastern Poland (Podkarpacie province) the Catholic faith is more prevalent than in a control group. That is to say that this kind of religion is indicated higher in the hierarchy of values, according to Rocheach's scale. It seems that practising martial arts (*karate*, *taekwondo*) does not take young people away from the Christian faith, but it might be said, quite the contrary [cf. Cynarski 2006; Bylina 2010].

At its core “the Way of the Warrior” is not associated with any particular denomination, so it can be adopted by the followers of different religions. Intrinsically, however, it contains significant potential resulting from the

ethical codes of the honourable warriors of ancient cultures [Kowalczyk 2010: 21-22, 94, 97; Kosiewicz 2010: 232-235]. Because of the wealth of ethical, educational and utilitarian values contributed by them, martial arts are now being practised all over the world by people of different cultures and religions. Among others martial arts are practised by the Swiss Guard who protects the Pope [Ponczek 2007].

Idokan Poland Association, the IPA (including the European Nobility Club), established the idea of the Homo Creator Nobilis and developed the philosophy of *Ido*. The “Noble and Creative Man” is to be a warrior of the Truth, a knight for modern times and the person who complies with the ethos of nobility in today's commercialized world [Cynarski, Litwiniuk, 2005; Cynarski 2013]. The IPA's patron saint is St. Michael the Archangel. On the other hand, the humanistic theory of martial arts indicates the existence of an “Anti-Way”, which is the opposite of the ideal Way.

Results III. The anti-way

An anti-way is the cult of power and violence [Cynarski 2004, 2006]. Militarism, imperialism and totalitarianism are manifestations of the anti-way. The cheating and fraudulent behaviour used in politics and military strategy was never considered a sign of the noble way. The tradition of spies and assassins (e.g. *shinobi*, *ninja*) is only seen in a positive light in mass and popular culture. In social reality the *ninja* clans have always lived on the margins of society. Terrorism and all kinds of terror are examples of the anti-way.

Another example of the way violating natural laws is by turning to magic and sorcery and attempts to return to pre-Christian cults: the so-called *neo-pagan movements* [York 1995]. Occasionally it is combined with the practice of martial arts. *Ninjutsu* (martial art of *ninja*) from its beginnings was particularly linked with esotericism [Morris 1998; Lung, Prowant 2001].

Magic is popular in post-modern society and is the most common, regardless of martial arts. Textbooks on white and black magic [Niessen 2009: 122-123] are published; they do not however contain references to the pathways of martial arts.

Taoist, Hindu or Buddhist meditation is a method of psychological preparation for the warrior in some martial arts [Maliszewski 1992]. For the followers of these religions it is a form of prayer, whereas for people of other denominations, e.g. for Christians meditation exercises are a moment of silence during training, a variant of relaxing exercises or for improving the ability to concentrate. No one is required to pray to any specific deities, and bows at the ceremonial beginning or end of a training session are an expression of respect for the school and for generations of former teachers.

Discussion

Kendo and *kyudo* in particular are combined with the practice of Zen [Jordan 1997: 219]. However, Japanese religions constitute a multiform conglomerate of sects including Shinto, Buddhism and others [Jordan 1997: 186-205, 210-219]. These various religions provided the basis for the creation of certain forms of martial arts in their original versions. Taoism, Buddhism or Confucianism provided the warriors of eastern Asia with a set of principles of normative ethics [Simpkins C., Simpkins A. 2007; Baka 2008; Bolelli 2008; Shahar 2008]. Today, however, martial arts are taught on a global scale without any religious ties [cf. Cynarski 2006].

The idea of looking for threats to Christian spirituality in martial arts [cf. Zwolinski 1995] was dismissed quite a long time ago [Cynarski 1998a, b, 1999; Cynarski, Litwiniuk 2005]. Untrue opinions which were damaging to the environment of martial arts probably resulted from a lack of full understanding of them.

On the other hand, the possibility of combining martial arts philosophy with Christian theology is still being sought [cf. Nitobe 1993; Castro de, Oropeza, Rhodes 1994; Olszewski 1995; Cynarski 2001; Williamson 2002]. It is sometimes sufficient to adapt to the local (e.g. Japanese) conceptual language and symbolism [Sobon 1995]. Generally, however, similarities are limited to normative ethics and anthropology.

Perfection in the control of the body and the richness of movement in fighting techniques translate into a specific axiology of martial arts [Szymanska, Trzcinski 1994]. General ethical and utilitarian values are here complemented by a deeper sense of long-term training. This can be explained by the concepts of humanistic psychology (self-creation, self-realization) or as a contemporary manifestation of an ascetic pattern of physical culture [Obodyski, Cynarski 2003] which means that practising martial arts is the Way to moral and spiritual improvement.

Conclusions

Can one talk about the universal principles and values of the Warrior's Way? Yes, they are generally universal, as long as it is a moral way and the main objective is seen in the improvement of character and the pursuit of mastery in the art of humanity. The deeper meaning of Taoism, or the science of the Way (and virtue) is akin to the Truth revealed in the Gospel, especially in the field of ethics. What of the relationship between "the Way of the Warrior" and Christianity? This way is not in conflict with the teachings of the Catholic Church and related churches, except for a few cases of the "anti-way".

What is the point of fighting, of developing a sense of self-improvement and of attaining mastery? It is an ascetic practice to achieve multidirectional development

and a striving for mastery in the art of living to become a better person. However, for supporters of the Anti-Way it means only learning or teaching specific fighting skills, or the fight itself and of demonstrating one's superiority.

And what does it mean to be a noble man, especially today? A noble man should follow the moral path of truth and other positive universal values, which do not contradict the Ten Commandments and the Gospel (the ethos of chivalry and Christian values).

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Chrześcijanin i droga sztuk walki

Słowa kluczowe: sztuki walki, etyka, etos, religia, chrześcijaństwo

Abstrakt

Perspektywa teoretyczna. Ramy teoretyczne dla niniejszego studium współtworzą filozoficzna i kulturowa antropologia sztuk walki oraz Humanistyczna Teoria Sztuk Walki.

Problem i cel. Postawiono serię pytań badawczych: Czy można mówić o uniwersalnych zasadach i wartościach drogi wojownika? Co to znaczy być człowiekiem szlachetnym, zwłaszcza współcześnie? Jak się to ma do chrześcijaństwa? Jaki jest sens walki, sens doskonalenia się i mistrzostwa?

Materiał i metoda. Na powyższe pytania poszukujemy odpowiedzi w drodze analizy licznych źródeł i opracowań, szerokiego dyskursu literatury przedmiotu i długoletniej obserwacji własnej w międzynarodowym środowisku sztuk walki.

Wyniki. Można mówić o uniwersalnych zasadach i wartościach drogi wojownika. Generalnie są one uniwersalne, dopóki jest to moralna droga a główny cel upatrywany jest w doskonaleniu charakteru i dążeniu do mistrzostwa w sztuce człowieczeństwa. Głębszy sens taoizmu, czyli nauki o Drodze (i cnocie) pokrewny jest – w sensie etycznym, w sferze etyki - Prawdzie objawionej w Ewangelii. Natomiast „antydroga” jest kultem siły i przemocy, sięganiem do magii lub próbą powrotu do kultów przedchrześcijańskich. A co to znaczy być człowiekiem szlachetnym, zwłaszcza współcześnie? Człowiek szlachetny ma podążać moralną drogą prawdy i innych pozytywnych wartości uniwersalnych, niesprzecznych z Dekalogiem i Ewangelią. Wnioski. Jaki jest sens walki, sens doskonalenia się i mistrzostwa? Jest to ascetyczna praktyka dla wielokierunkowego rozwoju i dochodzeniu do mistrzostwa w sztuce życia – staniu się lepszym człowiekiem. Jednakże, dla zwolenników „antydrogi” będzie to jedynie uczenie się lub nauczanie konkretnych umiejętności walki, bądź sama walki i wykazywanie swej przewagi. Właściwa „Droga wojownika” jest niesprzeczna z nauką Kościoła katolickiego i pokrewnych kościołów chrześcijańskich (poza nielicznymi przypadkami „antydrogi”).