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In her book titled “Man and Values in Physical Culture: A Theoretical Study” Maria Zowisło deals with an extensive range of issues related to various forms of so-called physical culture. Although this book is an attempt at a philosophical synthesis of the issues discussed, it is, to some extent, interdisciplinary in nature. Therefore, only a team of experts comprising representatives of such diverse disciplines as philosophy and sociology of culture, history and pedagogy of sport and recreation, philosophy and ethics of sport and Olympism, etc. would be able to do her justice. It is not my aim to present a complete review of this book, but reflections closely inspired by it related to the concept of physical culture [Kosiewicz, 2019]. One of the chapters of Zowisło’s book is entitled “The Troubles with Culture”; I believe the similar title “The Trouble with Physical Culture” reflects the nature of the following considerations. Thus, I will successively discuss issues related to the term “physical culture”, the homogeneity of the area it defines and the fields of science devoted to it.

The author indicates the initial problem at the beginning of the first chapter, noting that “On the level of linguistic, categorical explication, the phrase <<physical culture>> seems internally contradictory” [Zowisło 2020, 11]. The author recalls the opinion of Julia Murrmann, who from a linguistic point of view, states that physical culture is “somehow an oxymoron – it consists of a noun and a contradictory epithet” [Murrmann, 2017, p. 73]. As Zowisło explains, culture refers to the world of the spirit, and physicality – to the world of nature, and that is why in the term “physical culture”, the predicate “physical” can be rightly contrasted with culture [Zowisło, 2020, p. 11]. I am convinced that it is this phenomenon that makes the term “physical culture” seem unfortunate. Let us note that the terms “physical culture science” and, to some extent, also “physical education” are also burdened with this paradox. But the very antinomianism of culture and physicality is not the only factor responsible for the peculiarity of the term in question. Note that the term “physical culture” functions differently than others composed of “culture” and the adjective that defines it. If it functioned as, for example, “logical culture” or “musical culture”, then the field it would refer to would be physics, and this is certainly not its reference. If, on the other hand it functioned as, for example, “mining culture”, it could mean either a working-class culture, or folklore accompanying sports competitions, such as, i.e., the chants of fans [Suarez-Orozco, 1993], which is, again, certainly not its main referent. Still, however, it remains unclear whether we are really dealing with an imperfection of the term “physical culture” or is it only an apparent paradox?

Taking up the problem of the relationship between physical culture and culture in a broader sense, the author states that “The thesis that physical culture is part of culture seems beyond discussion, after all, in the very name of this phenomenon, there is the word <<culture>>, indicating the superior genus whose specific variant would be physical culture” [Zowisło, 2020, p. 11]. This argument implicitly assumes that the adjective “physical” in the term “physical culture” plays the role of a determinator (in the sense proposed by Kazimierz Twardowski [Betti, 2019]), which, however, is probably not obvious, as we can see by looking at, for example, the term “bacterial culture”. The controversial issue, as the author writes elsewhere, is whether “mind sport” is a sport in the traditional sense of the word. Whoever denies this, treats the term “mind” in the term “physical culture” as a modifier, changing the meaning of the noun “sport”. With such an interpretation, “mind sport” would not be a sport at all, although it would certainly have some resemblance to sport, justifying its name. Thus, it is possible to understand “physicality” in the term “physical culture” as a modifier, and perhaps, this is the interpretation that some language users are guided by who do not treat “physical culture” as a part of culture (then understood more narrowly as spiritual culture), but rather as a separate, peculiar phenomenon, having some resemblance to the culture tout court. It is possible that such an approach to physical culture would be a generalisation of the po-
sition in the philosophy of sport defined as internalism [Lopez Frias, Monfort, 2015] and emphasizing the specificity, uniqueness, and distinctiveness of certain features of sport as an area of human activity.

However, the author does not take this path, considering physical culture to be “one of the segments of the superior family of domains of culture in genre” [Zowisło, 2020, p. 112]. Further developing this idea, the author proposes detailed etymological, hermeneutical and phenomenological considerations, pointing, on the one hand, to the rooting of man as a psychophysical being in nature, and, on the other hand, to the culturally conditioned perception of nature. Ultimately, it is stated that physical culture is “cultivating the body, culturally determined practices aimed at the well-being of the organism”, and thus, a specific form of human culture. Considering the role that the human body plays in these considerations (and on the methodological level, among others, body studies), one may wonder whether “body culture” would not be a more adequate term than “physical culture”. Here, however, there is a possibility of treating “body culture” as a superior concept, encompassing various forms of caring for the body, and “physical culture” as one of the forms of such practices, namely physical exercise [Myśliwska, 2010, p. 67]. Although such considerations may seem somewhat pedantic, nevertheless, they touch upon an important issue, which is all the more interesting that, as we will see below, both the content and scope of the term “physical culture” remain controversial; a similar difficulty will also apply to sciences devoted to physical culture.

Issues of nomenclature are not as important as problems related to the definition of the concept of physical culture. The above-mentioned description — “cultivating the body, culturally determined practices aimed at the well-being of the organism” — can be considered as providing its initial characteristics. Since physical culture is treated as a part of culture in genre (the definition of which the author deals with in a separate chapter), to complete its classic definition, it is also necessary to indicate its differentia specifica. The author’s review of various (phenomenological, axiological, pedagogical) attempts to indicate such a differentia specifica reveals great diversity: “The concept of physical culture is therefore just as fluid and ambiguous as the concept of culture” [Zowisło, 2020, p. 68]. In view of this diversity, no kind of consensus or synthesis of the views cited emerges from this review. The author’s position becomes crystallized along with the considerations as to the the scope of ‘physical culture’. They start with the observation that “the five-domain concept is considered to be the most classic, according to which physical culture is co-created by the segments of sports, physical education, physical recreation, tourism and physical rehabilitation” [Zowisło, 2020, pp. 79-80]. It turns out, however, that this enumeration is not universally accepted, and in the course of analyses, this list shrinks: The author excludes tourism from it (which is primarily “human spatial mobility, carried out primarily for cognitive purposes”) and physical rehabilitation (as belonging primarily to health culture). Ultimately, the author includes only physical education, sport and physical recreation as physical culture. This scope corresponds to the following characteristics: “their (...) essence and purpose is determined by physical activity (bodily and motor) practiced for the purpose of personal development, improvement, satisfaction or sports competition and its presentation for spectators” [Zowisło, 2020, p. 81]. The author uses essentialist terminology here, also pointing out that “the elements of these three types of physical activity are found both in physical rehabilitation and in tourism, but they do not define their essence” (emphasis F.K.), [Zowisło, 2020, p. 81]. However, bearing in mind the ambiguity of concepts such as culture, physical culture and, to a slightly lesser extent, particular areas included in physical culture, one may wonder whether the search for “essences”, with all the heuristic fertility of such searches, is not exposed to a certain arbitrariness. Is it possible to continue the procedure of parceling the initial, rich scope of “physical culture”? Is the indicated three-domain understanding of physical culture already so homogeneous that it falls under a common “essence”? An alternative approach to this problem could be a Wittgensteinian [Wittgenstein, 1986] analysis of the various affinities and similarities between different domains called physical culture. Although Zowisło’s study provides material for such a review, she consistently bases her deliberations on essentialism, which is probably related to phenomenological inspirations, especially visible in axiological considerations.

The hypothesis that speaking of the scope of the term “physical culture” we are dealing with a very diverse set of phenomena that cannot be reduced to a common definition leads, in turn, to considerations of the integrity of sciences devoted to this field. An understanding of physical culture sciences as a set of disciplines leads to the question of their uniformity, primarily methodological. Can one be a researcher in the philosophy of physical culture as such? An argument in favour of positive answers to these questions could be provided by the existence of a non-controversial, uniform theory, covering the totality of phenomena known as physical culture. One might doubt whether Zowisło’s book provides this kind of uniform theory or rather particular parts of the deliberations are, de facto, devoted to particular phenomena or their aspects (such as, for example, amateur sports, professional sports, physical education, recreation, etc.), and the unity of considerations is, to some extent, a matter of styling. The significance of this problem may undoubtedly be magnified by the fact that in the typology of sciences, “physical culture sciences” are not a commonly used category in the world, but rather

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1 An analogous problem also concerns, among others, philosophy: is there a uniform philosophical theory, or rather we are dealing with theories each time belonging to particular philosophical disciplines - ontology, epistemology, etc.?
is a local solution. In the English-language literature, in the context of sport research and physical education, the other terms, like Sport Science or Kinesiology are commonly used. Of course, such differences in the classification of sciences are not unique, but in the conditions of intensifying international scientific co-operation, the probable scenario seems to be the unification of classification systems in sciences. It is difficult to predict, especially with a certain institutional stagnation, the future of the category of “physical culture science” among the classification of sciences in Poland, but it seems that a gradual departure from this category is more likely than its expansion and dissemination in classifications used in other countries.

Due to the discussed tension between culture and nature, the possible improvement of the category of physical culture science could be related to the narrowing of its understanding to research devoted to the symbolic and axiological (ie “humanistic”) sphere. If we were to consistently treat physical culture as part of culture in genre, then the sciences of physical culture should primarily be a sub-field of cultural studies. Let it be noted that while “biomechanics of sport” is a term that does not raise any doubts, “biomechanics of physical culture” is even more paradoxical than “physical culture” itself. Such a humanistic understanding of physical culture sciences would be close to the practice of researchers studying the symbolic sphere of sport and related fields. It is no coincidence that this is the dominant subject of Maria Zowisło’s book. This book can also be treated as a continuation and extension of the issue considered in one of the author’s previous books, which is Philosophy and Sport. Horizons of Dialogue [Zowisło, 2001]. In the latest book Man and Values in Physical Culture. A Theoretical Study, this dialogicality also plays an important part – in the introduction to the book, the author emphasizes that her intention was to take part in a dialogue on physical culture by speaking from a philosophical perspective, understood as a standpoint complementary to pedagogical or sociological views [Zowisło, 2020, p. 8]. Regardless of the aforementioned interdisciplinarity of the work, philosophy is in the foreground, so perhaps the book’s subtitle (A Theoretical Study) could be — A Philosophical Study. In the following chapters of the book, one can find full confirmation of this openness to dialogue, but also – perhaps to some extent unintended – a tribute to philosophy as the queen of sciences. Therefore, I consider the following assumption of the author correct: ‘Perhaps philosophy stands at the top (...) of all sciences (including the physical culture sciences) that derive from it, either historically or in terms of scope and problems, and to which philosophy provides meta-science awareness and eidetic sensitivity, language, categorical, classification, ontological, epistemological and axiological decisions’ [Zowisło, 2020, p. 7]. Therefore, I believe that further development of physical culture sciences may be influenced, to some extent, by philosophical reflection, including the philosophical analysis of the problems that this concept raises.

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References:


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2 Regarding the system of classifying sciences functioning in Poland and the place of physical culture sciences in it, cf. [Jaczynowski, 2019].