

Practicing Ethics

Harmony Ethics and Martial Arts

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It is undeniable that knowledge of various ethical theories, no matter how extensive, is insufficient when it comes to the question of actual ethical living. The former does not guarantee the observance of said theories, and admittedly, nowhere do these theories claim to have the capacity to do so. Thus, the problem of the existence of a chasm between theory and practice remains. The author believes that ethical living has to come from within an individual, imposed as it were, by the individual upon the self, in order to actualize an ethical society. However, the question of whether virtue can be taught also lingers in the background. The answer seems to lie in personal subjugation to a formal practice. This is possible through actual training in ethical living, and it is argued that an individual can be trained in actualizing virtuous action by way of training in budo or traditional martial arts. The main purpose of the presentation is to offer a perspective of the traditional martial arts as a practical and viable ethical alternative, based on the premise that training in martial arts is actually training in ethical living by the very nature of its practice, given specific recommendations. It paves the way for an ethics of self-care comparable to that of the Greeks, as it develops in a martial artist a “disciplined”, hence ethical, self.

There is no dearth in academic discourse when it comes to ethical theories. Theories of right and wrong, good and bad, ought and ought not, and other normative binaries abound, the basis of which are questions that have been raised and speculated upon since the time of the ancient Greek philosophers. Common in ethical discourse are classifications of moral actions, such as those considered having inherent value, or those which are valuable because of some perceived benefits. But amidst all these concepts, philosophical ethics has always been concerned with explaining “what the correct criteria are for determining moral right and wrong, or what things, including qualities of character, are truly good” (Holmes, 1998, p. 11). Perhaps this is the reason why familiarity with theories, such as Kantian ethics, consequentialism, and discourses on virtue, does not necessarily guarantee a more ethical individual. Such a reflective stance is indicative of Western philosophy’s speculative tradition. But it is clear that at its base, this intellectual assent does not equate with changed behavior. Normative ethics needs to be actualized through instruction in order for the moral principles to cross over into the social space. This perceived gap between theory, on one hand, and practice, on the other, is the background against which the present discussion is contextualized. The basic claim in this paper is that martial arts training can serve to bridge that gap, that its practice can be one of ethical training. This claim is shown by examining a concept of harmony as a theoretical underpinning for non-competitive or non-sport martial arts, and then teasing out its application on an institutional level. Such a view involves the acknowledgement that institutional factors do play a significant role in affecting behaviour, to the point perhaps, of modifying it. The relations of power inside a dojo or training hall lend themselves well to what is often referred to as the “spiritual” nature of martial arts: the aspect of training that somehow influences and shapes a person’s attitude and behaviour as regards social relations. In referring to the ethics of self-care, Michel Foucault notes that “the postulate of this whole morality was that a person who took proper care of himself would, by

the same token, be able to conduct himself properly in relation to others and for others" (Rabinow 1997, p. 287).

It is interesting to note that Gichin Funakoshi, the founder of the Shotokan style of karate, views his martial art as having the aim of developing character, as opposed to viewing it primarily and exclusively as a combative set of skills. "My conclusion was that the ultimate aim of both karate and sumo was the same: The training of both body and mind" (Funakoshi, 1975, p. 81). True enough, there are current practitioners of various martial arts attesting to a kind of "transformative" element in the martial arts: criminal elements becoming responsible citizens, ill-tempered individuals becoming caring persons, emotionally weak fighters becoming matured practitioners, and other such accounts. This present discussion attempts to open the space for this aspect of martial arts practice. The first part of the discussion deals with a brief description of martial arts training. The second part analyzes how martial arts training can be considered training in ethical living by taking a look at how martial ethical principles are manifested in training. The third part then discusses the key concepts that must be present in martial arts training in order for the latter to be considered training in ethical living. It should be noted at the outset that in discussing the martial arts in relation to *budo*, the author has in mind the arts that originated primarily in Japan and China, but in examining the *concept* of *budo*, it should be understood that all martial arts are governed technically by the principle of harmony.

The Principle of Harmony

An ethical framework basically answers the questions of the *good* and the *right*: that is, questions of value and obligation. While these are fundamental questions and legitimate concerns in ethics, the author would venture to state at this point that martial ethics is more concerned with operationalizing certain moral codes as the governing principles of conduct and behavior. Hence, the ethical individual is

one who has disciplined himself/herself according to the codes of conduct prescribed by an ethical framework. Ethics, in this sense, thus refers to the capacity of an individual to govern oneself vis-à-vis his or her fellow humans in the public, and therefore, ethical, space.

The *good* is essentially proper conduct. The *right* is virtuous action. From these two concepts, an ethical framework is made viable. It is proposed that the underlying principle in this framework is the principle of harmonious action and awareness.

The notion of harmonious thought and action can be understood in two ways: first, harmony, as an ideal, is made possible by a disciplined and conscious act of decision-making; second, it may take a considerable amount of discipline to maintain harmony in the face of adverse conditions. Put in another way, the concept of harmony can be thought of as both an ideal and a principle, and this makes the concept quite tricky, unfortunately. In both interpretations, self-discipline is seen as a necessary ingredient in the attainment and pursuit of harmony. In karate, for example, there is such a concept as the “one hit principle” governing all strikes. Sometimes referred to as the “one hit kill”, it teaches that all strikes delivered by a karateka (karate practitioner) must be strong enough and effective enough to stop an opponent. But how is this to be understood in light of the karateka’s refusal to initiate an attack? This is the context within which harmony is thought of as an ideal, a condition or relational state of affairs that is characterized by the continual effort to subdue conflict and restore peace. Harmony as a principle, on the other hand, is reflected by the fact that the karateka refuses to be the source and cause of conflict, and that should conflict arise, the karateka seeks to end it as soon as possible. Such is the philosophical background of this mindset.

The moral precept that “Man should act harmoniously” obviously entails a whole gamut of interpretations, and consequently, questions and problems. What is harmony? Why should harmony be understood as having inherent ethical value? In answer to the latter question,

harmony is understood as a principle that is inherently good for the simple reason that ethics, in its basic sense, refers to proper relations with others in terms of proper conduct. It is an operative principle because it is the basis of moral actions. Thus, the ethos in this sense, is one in which the dominant moral code is harmonious living. Without reverting to either Confucian or Taoist concepts, it is fairly easy to understand the value and significance of harmony as an operative principle. In both public and private relations (relations with others, relation with self, external and internal actions, etc.), the efficient and economical way is often that which is most harmonious. By "efficient" and "economical" is meant that which has the least resistance and the least expenditure in physical, emotional, social, and resource terms. In ethical theory, what is virtue then, but the promotion of harmony? In this sense therefore, harmony is not a result. Rather, it is a principle that underlies ethical theory and practice, one that is characterized by balance and non-resistance in almost all areas in life, and the result of such harmonious/virtuous actions is the resolution of conflict in its broadest sense. Given the apparently universal application of the principle, it can be argued, and it is in fact the claim being presented here, that perhaps, the answer to the basic question, "*How ought I to live?*" is simply, "*Live harmoniously.*" In other words, harmonious living ought to be a way of life. It is in this sense that harmony ethics differs from most other ethical theories. As a matter of discourse, harmony ethics has more to do with problematizing the actualization of ethical relations, and less with clarifying the concepts used in moral philosophy. It is only to serve the purpose of this discussion that the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of harmony is presented and examined, hence falling under the conventional treatment of ethical theories. Theory-wise, harmony ethics differs in defining the *good* and the *right* in terms of the principle of harmony. On the other hand, in attempting to define these concepts, the discourse of harmony ethics is no different from the conventional theories in ethics. Neither is it different from such theories insofar as addressing questions of value

and obligation. It is not meta-ethics, although it can be subjected to such an inquiry. If a term is to be forced upon this discourse, perhaps the closest would be to classify it as practical ethics.

As outlined earlier, one important problem in ethical theory is that there is no direct way to *bring to fruition* what *ought* to be done, if one is armed only with *knowledge* of what ought to be done. What is needed is a way to either force an individual to follow what ought to be done (which in essence is no longer done out of a sense of moral responsibility), or to train this individual to make or choose the moral course of action. Obviously, the second option is the ethically desirable position, notwithstanding the third, though personally undesirable, option to simply wait for the individual to choose the right course of action by himself, or herself as is often the case with conventional moral theories. While it may be argued that the reason why societies have laws in the first place is to force an individual to follow what ought to be done, experience shows that even with laws, people still commit all sorts of immoral and unjust acts against their fellowmen and women. Further, to do what ought to be done because of the threat of the law does not make a choice any more moral than it is. In order for an act to be considered an act of moral worth, it has to come from within the individual, resulting from one's own volition. This is where training comes in. At this point, it is necessary to stipulate certain uses of the terms "training" and "teaching". The term "train" is used to imply a much more demanding factor of internalization, carrying with it an expectation that the learner will use what is learned on an intuitive or perhaps, instinctive level. To "teach" implies demonstrating that which is meant to be imparted, with no explicit demand for internalization. Put in another way, teaching has to do primarily with knowledge transfer and acquisition, while training goes beyond it in the sense that whatever knowledge is transferred or acquired needs to be internalized and made part of an individual's volitional capacity.

Given this distinction, it is noted here that to be taught ethical principles and theories does not guarantee, or at the very least offers

the least likelihood that the person will choose the morally correct choice. In comparison, the fact that an individual who was trained to choose a morally responsible choice, or at least was exposed to actual ethical conduct, while not guaranteeing any such certainty that s/he will choose what is morally responsible, will offer some likelihood that s/he will choose what ought to be done on the basis of being trained that way. It is at this point that this exploration into alternative ethics will proceed to a discussion of the nature of martial arts training as training in ethical living.

Martial Arts and *Budo*

Martial arts are fighting systems characterized by body movements that are specifically designed for physical combat, either with the use of weapons or with bare hands and feet. The origins of the martial arts are highly speculative and undoubtedly vague for the simple reason that there is no single fighting system that came forth as a complete system. Neither is there a single set of movements that can lay claim to the label “martial art”. Michael Rosenbaum wrote extensively on the subject of the history of martial systems in both the East and West in his book, *Kata and the Transmission of Knowledge* (2004), where he made the point that *kata*, the pre-arranged sequence of movements in a martial art, was ultimately borne out of a need to “preserve and pass on knowledge of battle-proven techniques that could be used at a later date when the need warranted” (p. xvii). In other words, martial systems are a result of continuous refinements of numerous movements both through practice and actual combat.

Traditional martial arts, as opposed to modern martial arts, are least concerned with competition. “Traditional” in this sense does not refer to the *koryu*, the more ancient martial systems studied solely for combat.¹ These older arts were later modified to focus less on war and more on self-development, and came to be known collectively as *budo*, “*bu*” literally meaning “to stop a spear”, and “*do*” meaning “the Way”, hence, the Way of stopping a spear. The shift from solely combative

training to the more introspective training is also manifested, though at the risk of being simplistic, by the terms used to refer to such practices: *Bujutsu*, or “martial art”, became *budo*, or “martial way”. Thus, *jujutsu*, the art of *ju* or suppleness, became *judo*, the Way of suppleness; *kenjutsu*, the art of the sword, became *kendo*, the Way of the sword; *kyujutsu*, the art of the bow, became *kyudo*, the Way of the bow; *iaijutsu*, the art of sword-drawing, became *iaido*, the Way of sword-drawing; *aikijutsu*, the art of the harmony of *ki*, became known as *aikido*, the Way of the harmony of *ki*. The influences of Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist thought on Chinese and Japanese martial arts cannot and should not be denied nor ignored. Focusing on historical Japan, the shift from *koryu* to *budo* came at that point in their history when the Tokugawa period gave way to the Meiji Restoration. The old political structures then defining the *bushi* or warrior class were modified to an extent that the samurai who composed this warrior class soon found themselves without purpose or meaning, for the warrior’s life was all that they knew. There was no longer any need for their kind, thus, the conceptual disorientation that occurred among these warriors. They began to turn to the mystical realm in order to find solace and meaning, ushering the eventual shift from a purely military and combative understanding of the practice, into a more philosophic one.

Martial arts are often associated with Zen Buddhism, but the “Do” element in martial arts is more rooted in the Taoist notion of the Tao. It is interesting that “Tao” is also sometimes rendered as “The Way” or “The Path”, signifying the absolute nature and singularity of the practice. In daily life, the Tao is primarily characterized by an attitude of non-strife, non-resistance, and non-confrontation, an attitude that demonstrates its deep roots in the principle of harmony. In contemporary martial arts practice, “Do” is often translated as “way of life”, and a number of martial artists rather simplistically reduce the Tao to a lifestyle. Such an understanding seems bereft of a conceptual grasp of the Tao, but one that seems surprisingly more

consistent with the discipline practically. Traditional martial artists keep practicing their techniques repeatedly because it is, literally, a “way of life” for them. However, this is to miss the notion of the Tao as the Way to Enlightenment, an idea that pervades the frameworks of Confucian and Taoist thought. For the purpose of this discussion, it is the concept of *budo* that is important, and not the historical *budo* per se. It is the idea that a specific practice does not merely have physical value, but spiritual import as well.

It may be said that the significant difference lies on the purpose, that even though the two concepts are similar in appearance, they differ on the purpose for which they are practiced. These are what can be referred to as “traditional martial arts” in contrast to modern, sport-oriented disciplines. At its base, the former concerns itself with the knowledge and mastery of the self through practice, while a purely sport-oriented practice can perpetuate itself solely on the basis of competition, pursued for its own sake. Mastery of the self can be seen as the ultimate goal of *budoka*, or practitioners of *budo*. The actual practice appears for the most part to be a strictly physical enterprise, but behind the physicality lies the mental and spiritual aspect of the art.

What could be seen as a challenge to the viability of *budo* as a universal principle of practice is the fact that the notion of the Tao is rather far from the consciousness of most Filipinos. A case in point is *arnis*, the stickfighting tradition of the Philippines. *Arnis* is not framed within a system that parallels either the Taoist or Confucianist philosophies. Neither is it currently practiced as some sort of “way” towards Enlightenment, unlike some of the traditional martial arts of East Asia. Instead, *arnis* is practiced because of its practicality and efficiency, qualities that derive from it being a weapons-based system. The number of *arnis* styles in the Philippines points to the fact that Filipinos are more inclined towards innovation and improvisation, building upon the old or classical forms and coming up with new

systems. Hence, the practice is informed not by any religious framework (although a number could be seen adopting Christian elements, such as having a strike named “Tagang San Miguel” [St. Michael’s Strike]) but by some principle of pragmatism. How then, can the *budo* concept be made consistent with *arnis* practice? First, it should be noted that Filipinos can appreciate the idea of a martial way of life because it is a palpable part of Philippine culture. Philippine society has been marked by conflict even during the pre-Hispanic period, as evidenced by slave-raiding practices and other such inter-tribe conflicts. Second, as a physical practice, *arnis* is also governed by the principle of harmony. Consisting of various patterns of strikes with a weapon, usually a cane, *arnis* practice is characterized by repeated drills of strikes and counterstrikes. It thus lends itself well to the concept of the martial as training for both body and mind.

The training in martial arts involves the cultivation not just of the body, but the mind and spirit as well. The “body” refers to the physical self, the “mind” is the intellectual center, and the “spirit” can be understood to refer to an individual’s will. The body is developed physically through a series of drills involving body movements, particularly through the techniques of the art. Intellectual cultivation in martial arts training refers to the development of awareness, or enlightened state of mind, as it pertains to one’s assent to his or her personal responsibility towards oneself, towards others, and to one’s surroundings. This becomes possible through the observation of the training norms as prescribed through rules and regulations. The individual’s will is in turn developed through hard and rigorous training. Hence, martial arts training seeks to develop an individual of good moral character, but with the will that is strong enough to force the body to follow. This is done through daily practice, as the practitioner interacts with other practitioners. It can be said that theirs is an “ethical interaction” in a controlled environment for the following reasons: the norms that are set down as the *dojo* (training hall) rules and regulations are constantly challenged and put to the test because of the risky, even potentially dangerous nature of martial arts practice; and it is



Figure 1. The author, demonstrating a lesson in aikido.



Figure 2. The author giving out instructions during an aikido class.

a place where the prospect of hurting someone as well as getting hurt as a result of “care-lessness” (lack of consideration for others and for the self, lack of concentration, etc.) is a very real possibility. It is for these two realities of training that a mindful consideration of others, at the very least, becomes necessary.

A typical class session begins with a formality like bowing, first to the training hall, then to the teacher, and then to the other practitioners. Practice then commences, first with preliminary exercises, then proceeding to the day’s lessons (Fig. 1). Teaching is done with the techniques first demonstrated by the teacher and then tried by the students, both individually and in pairs or even groups (Fig. 2). The session ends with the same formalities as that in the beginning. Such is a typical class, the specific details of which may vary in some ways in different arts.

What then, is the relationship between the actual practice of the martial arts, and ethics? The answer lies in the principle of harmony as the good, expressed in virtuous actions. Martial ethics is manifested in two general ways: (1) in an explicit manner, through the enforcement of the rules and regulations, and (2) in an implicit way, in the form of the techniques of the art itself. These manifestations revolve around the key concepts of harmony and centeredness, conflict resolution, and practice, all of which are meant to lead to the development of a moral character.

The Rules and Regulations as Ethical Mechanisms

The *dojo’s* rules and regulations (see Appendix A for an example of such regulations) function to establish a prescribed norm, and the practitioners are expected to manifest their compliance through an exemplary mode of conduct. It is noticeable that the fundamental essence of a good majority of the rules is meant to mirror one’s respect and consideration not just for oneself, but for the other practitioners as well, including a mindful consideration of the *dojo*. Put another way, the rules and regulations drive home the point that an individual

is responsible for his or her actions as it affects others and his or her surroundings.

As the student becomes more and more familiar with the norms, s/he is expected to observe proper conduct, as well as enforce the rules and regulations. Implicitly, enforcement is done by the simple observance of the codes, thereby reinforcing the norms. Explicitly, the instructor and the senior members administer control by literally pointing out and bringing to the offender's attention the infraction displayed. A certain degree of punishment is entailed by a failure to comply with the prescribed code of conduct (see Appendix B). In-class punishments may be in the form of additional physical demands, such as pushups, knee-walks, running, etc. The reason behind such disciplinary measures is not simply for the sake of punishment, but more importantly for the formation of a specific type of individual, one in whom discipline is internalized and, later on, manifested. While conditioning does play a part, what soon enough coerces an individual to observe a proper attitude in training (aside from the hierarchical structure of discipline) is the prospect of being responsible for inflicting any injury, as well as being responsible for getting injured himself or herself. This realization is brought home by the fact that the techniques of traditional martial arts are potentially lethal, making the latter prospect frighteningly real. The consequences of unmindful actions (needless horseplay or roughhousing) are therefore serious. More importantly, this explains why trivial displays of arrogance and pride have no place in the *dojo*: these types of behavior are precursors to serious injuries. A conscientious practice of the arts is not for the sake of plain aesthetic enjoyment, but for a responsible fulfilment of one's ethical duty to another individual. This conscientious practice is necessary and more valuable than merely conditioned practice, however. If the practitioner is merely conditioned to act or conduct oneself in a specified manner, the action loses moral worth because it is merely a reactionary, and not a responsive act. The latter involves a conscious and volitional choice, hence making it a moral act.

The rules and regulations, therefore, not only set the norms to be followed, but also reinforce the ethical principles² espoused by the arts. In this sense, virtue is neither inborn nor simply acquired through influence; it is gained by hard and strict training, imposed as it were, by the institution that is the *dojo*.

Martial Arts Techniques and Practices as Ethical Expressions

A noteworthy point is the fact that the traditional martial arts literally contain their own distinct philosophies. The system follows a logic that reflects its own philosophy, and the actual ethical content is embodied in the movements themselves. The philosophical and ethical content of the art has physical expressions and manifestations. A good number of the techniques employed by various arts show a direct correlation with the art's philosophy, but what is noteworthy is the presence of harmony as a common technical principle across martial arts. The *aikido* technique of *iriminage* (Figure 3), for example, involves evading the initial attack while simultaneously going with the flow of the attack in order to redirect it. In the process, the defender ends up turning, and almost facing, in the same direction as the attacker, manifesting in a most explicit way, the philosophy of harmony, that of "looking at the world through an opponent's eyes." On a more subtle manner, the *bong sau* or "wing block" in *wing chun kung fu* is not really a "block" in the strict sense, because it is executed by using the forearm, folded like a wing, to redirect a blow downward and to the side (Figure 4). The *payong* or upward block in *arnis*, is also not a block in the strict sense, because it is done with the stick slanted at an angle to let the opponent's weapon slide off to one side harmlessly (Figure 5). To literally block an attack is not very efficient and economical, because not only will the martial artist need to expend an incredible amount of energy to stop an attack short, it is also dangerous because an attack that is stronger than a block will almost always find its way to the intended target. Instead of "blocking" in the sense of "stopping" an attack, redirection is often the preferred response. Hence,



Fig. 3. The author executing an *iriminage*.
(Photo shows fellow martial artist, Andres Nicolas, Jr., assisting the author.)

as mentioned earlier, the efficient and economical way is often that which is most harmonious.

From the simple act of bowing, to the more strenuous application of potentially deadly techniques, these practices are laden with ethical significance. The act of bowing upon entering the mat area promotes the proper frame of mind, one that stresses a focus on the practice at hand. To engage others in potentially dangerous training and practice without a conscious awareness of what one is doing, is morally irresponsible, to say the least.

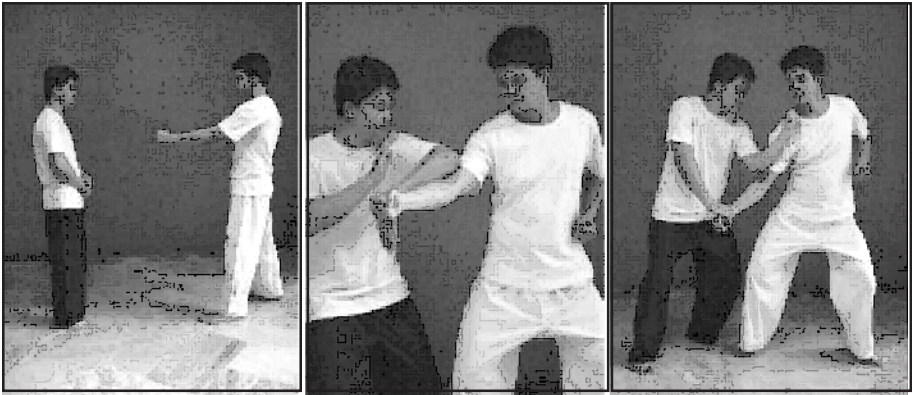


Fig. 4. The author shown defending against a straight punch using *bong sau*.



Fig. 5. The author (right) shown executing a *payong* or upward block and a counter.

To sit in *seiza*, that is, to sit on the ground with the legs tucked beneath the buttocks, is a rather uncomfortable position if held for long periods of time, such as when meditations are done in this position. This develops a different kind of endurance, one that might be referred to as motionless endurance, as opposed to a kinetic type of endurance that one develops in a discipline such as running. It also develops a strong will, as it seeks to endure the discomfort and even pain, of sitting in *seiza*.

Some martial arts teach *ukemi*, or the art of receiving a technique. In more simple terms, it is the skill of being sensitive to a technique being applied, and taking a fall in order to protect oneself from injury. This can be difficult to develop; one must be relaxed, sensitive, and yielding, but without mental and physical collapse. Such requirements are important conditions in receiving any throw or technique. To perform and execute proper *ukemi* for one's practice partner is also indicative of the ethical content of a martial technique. One cannot practice a technique properly without the partner knowing how to receive the technique in a manner that is just as proper. Thus, an individual's development also rests on another individual's capacity to offer a chance for development. Consequently, the one who was given a chance to execute the technique bears the responsibility of his or her training partner's safety. It can be seen then, that such a relationship necessitates a serious consideration of every element as a significant part of a larger whole, and that this practice demands self-control and self-governance on the practitioner's part.

The above are but some of the physical manifestations of martial ethical principles. It is important to note that the *budoka* is constantly confronted with the demand to examine the way she or he engages others during practice. This self-directed disciplinary gaze results from the realization that one's development in the art is rooted in the development of others. In knowing oneself, the practitioner is given insight into knowing others. Aikido sensei Mitsugi Saotome wrote in his book, *The Principles of Aikido* (1989), that:

Aikido teaches a simple secret: the development of a better life is dependent on bettering yourself. Aikido offers no miracles except the

miracle of your own existence and your human potential. Remember that you are a part of the universe. To ruin your life or waste it is to ruin a piece of the universe.

It can be argued that such a responsibility lies not only in the province of aikido but in most other martial arts. It is immediately apparent how the notion of harmonious living is intimately connected with the responsibility of right living. Indeed if one sees oneself as part of a larger whole, the responsibility for the self becomes a responsibility that involves others in society. Using Foucault, the point is expressed thus:

...I believe that among the Greeks and Romans – especially the Greeks – concern with the self and care of the self were required for right conduct and the proper practice of freedom, in order to know oneself... as well as to form oneself, to surpass oneself, to master the appetites that threaten to overwhelm one.³

Foucault notes how the ancient Greeks did much to emphasize the importance of an ethics of self-care, that is, the mastery of the self in order to develop a self-governing individual. In a similar light, *budo* seeks to develop individuals of moral fortitude and character by way of physical practice. There are three main reasons why it is being argued here that the *budo* concept is comparable to the Greek notion of self-care. First, the *budo* concept manifests the idea of self-governance. The attitude of the Greeks reflected an implicit connection between the ability to govern oneself and the ability to govern others. If one is unable to control one's own passions, for example, this person is hardly considered a candidate for governing others. In the martial arts, this notion of subduing the self finds expression in the constant attempt to develop control over one's body and mind. Martial arts practice is a very disciplined practice, demanding intense attention and submission of will. Second, the care of the self as the prerequisite to proper relations with others finds expression in martial arts practice, as pointed out in the preceding section. It is in caring for the self that the individual learns to relate with others properly. In the martial arts, to consider the training partner's well-being is highly esteemed. One can only

imagine the horror of breaking a surgeon's hands or a musician's wrists because of a carelessly delivered joint lock. Not only is the training partner deprived of the ability to continue practice, the person is likewise deprived of the ability to practice his or her profession, a condition that can hardly be ignored. Third, the Greek concept of a regimen as a "whole art of living" (Foucault 1984/1985) is parallel to *budo* as "Do", a way of life. In the same manner that the Greeks considered physical exercise to be simply one part of a regimen, so also do martial artists consider martial arts as a part of life that is not removed from daily activities. However, there is a difference in terms of the role played by such physical activities. In the Greek regimen, physical training is meant to develop the physical body, and the mind is developed by a different activity that is meant for intellectual growth. In *budo* training, on the other hand, one activity suffices for the development of both body and mind, a view that is different from the Greek concept of regimen.

There is a sense in which a person who engages in a practice that is characterized by the infliction of pain on another and still be perceived as an ethical individual, is paradoxical. But it is easy to notice a parallel claim for sports. Sports are said to develop character, sportsmanship, camaraderie, and other such qualities deemed virtuous. Yet sporting events are characterized by conflict. It is a "con-test," the testing of oneself against another. More significantly though, it is doubtful that sport was conceived for the purpose of character development, except perhaps in the context of the modern Olympic Games as conceptualized by Pierre de Coubertin. The ancient Greek games, strictly speaking, had no such explicit concern for character development. Between modern sports and *budo*, therefore, it is the latter that has as its purpose the creation of a "good" character. Jigoro Kano, for example, founded *judo* with the intent to instill a refined character in the practitioner. *Judo*, of course, is rooted in *jujutsu*, once more illustrating the shift from the purely combative form of the *koryu*, to *budo*.

The Key Elements of Ethical Training in the Martial Arts

It should be recalled that Western philosophic ethics is concerned with examining, identifying, and clarifying the *good* and the *right*, along with other concepts pertaining to moral conduct. Insofar as harmony ethics is concerned, the fundamental meaning of the *good* and the *right* are teased out as proper conduct and virtuous action, respectively. Both can be understood as bringing to the fore the significance of having the theory cross over to practice. The question that needs addressing is, “What elements should be present in martial arts training in order for the latter to pave the way for ethical living?” The answer seems to lie in the manner of training, because it is in training where proper conduct and virtuous actions are tested, given the extreme form of social interactions that take place in that setting. If virtue is the promotion of harmony, then the latter should be given emphasis in training. If the *good* is proper conduct, then it ought to manifest itself in how practitioners relate with one another inside the training hall. *Budo* training places an emphasis on character development, and it is able to do that through an emphasis on the related concepts of harmony, conflict resolution, and repeated practice. It must be emphasized at the outset that the aforementioned concepts need to be cultivated as an attitude in order for the martial artist to effectively employ them. This “cultivation” is what makes martial arts training effective in paving the way for the development of an ethical subject.

Harmony

The principles of combat show the importance of harmony, both in movement and in attitude. The principle of harmonious distance, the principle of both physical and mental centeredness,⁴ and the principle of using grounded, natural body movements (which are seen as movements that are in harmony with nature), demonstrate how the concept of harmony permeates the fighting arts. Executing any technique without a proper grounding on basic combat principles is likely to fail, or difficult to execute effectively, at best.

Aside from the combat principles, a number of martial techniques, especially those that focus on joint-manipulations, demonstrate a reliance on harmonious movements to make the techniques work. The old *judo* saying “push when pulled, and pull when pushed” is not a mere romantic image that is used to offer a degree of profundity to the martial arts. Rather, it is a very practical martial concept that uses the principle of non-resistance. It is non-confrontational, as it seeks to resolve conflict in a constructive, that is, in a relatively safe and harmless, manner. The ideal that some martial arts strive to attain is the “loving protection of all things,” including one’s attacker. Translated in combat terms, it is of the highest ethical level if one is able to end the conflict without inflicting any harm to the attacker while successfully defending oneself. Central to the principle of non-resistance is then, is the understanding of the attacker and the attack. Harmonious relations are emphasized in training through the techniques themselves, and through social interactions inside the *dojo*.

Conflict Resolution

It is also a noteworthy point that the techniques are designed⁵ to end any confrontation swiftly and efficiently, effectively ending conflict preferably even before conflict begins. The use of the techniques is meant to maintain and protect order and harmony, through the resolution of conflict. As mentioned in the preceding section, the goal is not simply to destroy the opponent but to put a constructive end to the conflict. The method by which this is done is not through sheer imposition of force, but rather through rendering the attack harmless, even useless.

Going back to the combat principles, it becomes apparent that conflict resolution is the foremost goal of the martial arts. By harmonizing with the attacker and the attack, the fight can be ended even before it begins. While this might appear to be too much of a cliché, the practical applications of this view rely essentially on the point that harmonizing with one’s “opponent” and resolving the conflict can refer to any form of exchange between the participants:

physical, verbal, psychological, etc. This shows martial arts techniques in their broadest sense, encompassing both the physical and the non-physical. By understanding the “other side”, so to speak, one can have insight as to how the conflict can be handled, and consequently ended constructively. This is akin to critical thinking in the sense that one’s arguments are to be examined vis-à-vis the counter-argument. In combat terms, knowing what the opponent is capable of doing will give insights on how to deal with the attack, and how to end the confrontation.

Practice

During training, beginners are watched over and led carefully, not only for the proper techniques, but also for their control of the execution of techniques. In being taught to gain control over their execution, they are in essence being taught to govern their actions, consequently, themselves, since too intense an application can result in the injury of one’s practice partner, while a lack in the same area may end up in the failure of the technique. This self-governance is seen as the prerequisite to ethical conduct. A practitioner who is unable to control his or her technique is considered an inferior practitioner, because the lack of control only shows the practitioner to be lacking in self-mastery. A superior practitioner on the other hand, is one who can control even the degree of pain she or he wants to inflict on another individual. The latter shows and necessitates a high level of skill, and one who is able to do so manifests an equally high level of self-mastery. This becomes possible only through strict and rigid training, involving both martial and training techniques that have the potential to be lethal.

What is important at this point is to realize that an ethical individual is one who is able to govern oneself, relating properly with others and with one’s surroundings. This internalization of ethical principles becomes possible through endless training, as it is unlikely to reach a level of mastery without the appropriate attitude, in this

case, an ethical disposition. As the *budoka* strives for mastery of the art, she or he slowly develops the necessary character, assuming that the training conditions are conducive, for ethical conduct.

Conclusion

It is admitted that numerous points have not been touched in this present paper: discussions on combat sports, details on specific techniques and art-based philosophies, and individual teaching and learning methods. Notwithstanding that omission, what is argued here is simply that traditional practice of the martial arts can be a practice of ethics, given the central principle of harmony as the operative ethical principle. In order for this to be actualized, certain elements need to be emphasized in training: harmony, conflict resolution, and practice. An emphasis on the above concepts entails implicit and explicit instruction on both the techniques and the combat principles behind the techniques, but most especially on the proper attitude and frame of mind necessary for the successful execution of the physical techniques. It can thus be said at this point that martial arts technique is no longer to be understood as limited to the physical movements, but as a set that encompasses the non-physical as well. As such, the significance of martial arts training as a possible way of actualising ethical principles becomes apparent. Further, the possibility of producing individuals of good moral character becomes viable, as martial arts training can be institutionalised through various programs. Whatever the form this institutionalisation takes, if the key elements of training are present, then martial arts training is training in ethical living.

Appendix A. *Aikido Dojo* Rules and Regulations

1. Be punctual in all your scheduled classes.
2. Be presentable and keep yourself as well as your uniform(s) clean.
3. Keep your nails and toenails short. Remove all jewelry, pins, clips, or any hard/pointed objects before entering the mat area to avoid injury.
4. Bow before entering and leaving the mat area. If the training is in session, ask permission from your instructor(s) in order to be excused.
5. The martial arts training hall (*dojo*) mirrors the spirit of all the practitioners. Therefore, always keep the *dojo* clean and respectable. Do not loiter in the mat area without your uniforms on.
6. Always address persons of higher ranks as “Sensei”, “Sir”, “Ma’am” or “Madam”.
7. Be mindful of your actions. Keep in mind the safety of your practice partners. You are responsible for each other’s safety and development.
8. Practice seriously with the intent to learn, but practice with humility, patience, love, and respect for others.
9. Learning needs an open mind. A teacup that is already full can no longer hold more tea. You should therefore, “empty your cup” in order to learn. If you only seek to assert your own way of thinking, you will learn nothing and thus remain ignorant of the wisdom that others might offer.

(Note: The set of rules and regulations indicated here is the set used by the author when he taught the martial art *aikido* at a local *dojo*.)

Appendix B: *Lapunti Arnis de Abanico International's* Regulations on Infractions and Penalties

Offences warranting a 3-month suspension:

1. Disobedience
2. Drunkenness
3. Untidiness
4. Mischief

Offences warranting a 6-month suspension:

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Arrogance | 5. Denial |
| 2. Disorderliness | 6. Deceitfulness |
| 3. Negligence | 7. Rumour mongering |
| 4. Libel | 8. Lack of discipline |

Offences warranting a 1-year suspension:

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Oral defamation | 5. Uncontrolled temper |
| 2. Abuse of authority | 6. Destructive criticism |
| 3. Discourtesy | 7. Destruction or Damage to property |
| 4. Physical infliction | 8. Grave misconduct |

Offences warranting expulsion from the school:

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Threat | 6. Uncooperative |
| 2. Conspiracy | 7. Extortion |
| 3. Intentional Provocation | 8. Swindling |
| 4. Insubordination | |
| 5. Inappropriate assembly | |

Notes

¹ It should be noted however, that relative to the *koryu, budo* is considered “modern”. Thus, when “traditional” is used in this paper, it is always in relation to the “sport-oriented” disciplines.

² Generally, it can be said that *budo* upholds several virtuous qualities: benevolence, loyalty, courtesy, wisdom, sincerity, honesty, and piety. The seven pleats of the *hakama*, a pair of pleated, loose pants worn by the Japanese symbolizes these seven traits.

³ Foucault, *The Ethics of the Concern for Self*, in Rabinow, p.285.

⁴ The principle of centeredness is understood as a consciousness or awareness of one’s relation to everything, perhaps better understood as a state of *zanshin*, literally “continuous awareness”, the unwavering attention to one’s surroundings.

⁵ This helps explain the reason behind the deadly nature of the techniques. Though born out of a combative environment, the experience with any such technique presumably promotes a further appreciation of life in general.

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