

Qualitative Enquiry of Aikido Practitioners from different levels to the Philosophical Discussion between Arts and Sports - The Case of Aikido in-between

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Abstract

This paper is made of two parts. The first part of it gives out briefly the qualitative findings of 23 Aikido practitioners, from different levels, conceptualization of Aikido from other sports, in the setting of “Art/War and Not Sports” category and their view point of Aikido from these perspectives. The second part discusses these findings within themselves, with Aikido Literature and with Philosophy of Sports Literature mainly concerning the discussion between Best and Wertz on Sport and Art.

Key words: Aikido, Philosophy, Martial Arts

Introduction

“Do practitioners of Aikido approach Aikido as a sport or art?” is the main research question that leads to philosophical discussion in this paper. From the open-ended answers of participants this question is constructed. Whether Aikido is an art or sports and how competition plays a role in this discussion are presented from the view-point of out participants. The review and analysis of documents revealed Art/War and Competition as a category and the following labels reveal that category.

In this section we will try to figure out the participant perspectives on Aikido as an art of war and as sports. We have combined the two labels (is an art of war / is not sports) for a better understanding.

In the formal definition of Aikido, Aikido is defined as a martial art. In addition to being an “art of war”, it is at the same an “art of harmony” and also an “art of love”. It can be suggested that this is a strong differentiating point of Aikido. In fact, participant perspectives reveal that only 5 out of the 23 subjects indicate that Aikido is a war activity, In addition, only 2 indicate out of 23 that Aikido is not a sports. Those two people also mention that it is an art of war at the same time. An advanced participant, T.K., explains this point as follows:

	SUBJ	Art of War	Not Sports	Not Having Competition	Not having winning Losing
ADVANCED	B.I.	X			X
	B.O.			X	
	E.K.			X	
	I.C.			X	
	T.K.	X	X		
total	5	2	1	3	1
INTERMEDIATE	B.A.				X
	B.K.				X
	E.A.				
	E.K.	X	X		
	E.B.				X
	G.B.				
	H.M.				
	K.C.				X
	S.S.	X			X
	U.H.				X
	C.Y.			X	X
R.Y.				X	
total	12	2	1	1	8
NEW BEGINNER	G.A.			X	X
	M.A.				
	N.Y.				X
	E.A.			X	X
	G.G.			X	
	H.A.				
total	6	-	-	3	3
	27	4	2	7	11

Table 1: Category of Sports and Arts Table

Aikido in reality is not a sport at all. At first sight I had this deception that it is a sports and come to Aikido because of that. But after some time I understand that Aikido is far more than a sport, as something above sports... Aikido is definitely an art that changes my perception about life, helps me in overcoming my ego, and changes my standing in life.

None of the new beginners mentions this side of Aikido as a differentiating character. S.S., an intermediate practitioner, argues: "According to me Aikido is an art. It is like life. It is an art that includes conflicts. It is an art of understanding life and an art of being in harmony with it."

Aikido and Martial arts

We have combined these two labels for a better understanding and a better discussion because in the philosophy of sports these two discussions go hand in hand. In the formal definition of Aikido, Aikido is defined as a martial art. Moreover, it is an "art of war", and at the same it is an "art of harmony" as well as an "art of love". Several books are written on this subject. It might be suggested that this is a strong differentiating point of Aikido from other sports. However, participant perspectives indicate that only five out of 23 practitioners conceptualize Aikido as a "war activity", which is quite interesting. Among these five practitioners, there were no new beginners; new beginners do not see Aikido as a "war activity". Again, very interestingly only two people out of 23 indicated that Aikido "is not sports"; one was an intermediate practitioner and the other one was advanced. Those two people also mentioned that it is an art of war, which shows an

internal soundness at the same time. This implies that in the eyes of these people Aikido is not a sport, it is an art of war.

In the Aikido literature, Ingalls's (2002) study results show that participants start to "expand and to do things: (b) mentally/academically that they would not have thought about doing before (e.g., read more about Aikido, other martial arts, cultures, and religions)." (Ingalls 2002 p.97) In Lantz's (2002) study on family therapy and martial arts, which we already mentioned in earlier sections, the author claims, "In this study Aikido is included as a martial art." Lantz found "with at least four months" the following themes: "self-defence, self-confidence, physical vitality, concentration, respect, friendship, moral development, spirit, training for life, grades, respect for life, and the importance of the martial arts instructor." In another study, Scott (1989) explains why he chose Aikido:

The martial arts, in this case Aikido, serve as a model for human transformation. Unlike Western sports practice, the Aikido model includes the balancing of mental, physical, emotional, spiritual, and fraternal aspects of the student. (Scott, 1988, p.19)

Moreover, Newton (1996) explains why he chose Aikido in the following way: "Aikido is within the frame of the Eastern martial arts which have the tradition of do, where it is expected that one's practice and one's life are to be interwoven. This is in contrast with the Western sport of fencing." (Newton 1996 p.4) This is very similar to Scott's explanation. Faggianelli (1995) actually found it as a theme,

Theme: # 7: Aikido and psychotherapy stem from the same source, love. As aikido is a synthesis of a martial art and a spiritual practice advocating love and peaceful resolution of conflict, psychotherapy practice is deeply affected by this view. (Faggianelli, p.98-99)

Everywhere Aikido is conceived of as a martial art. As we have quoted earlier, Ueshiba—the founder of Aikido—states, "But most importantly, extending in the martial arts indicates the process through which concrete, physical practice extends a person into the spiritual realm." I underlined the terms concrete and physical practice. However, how much concrete and physical practice extends the spiritual realm is my first question. It is not my question, but the question for practitioners as well, which they have in mind. The literature on Aikido definitively agrees that Aikido is a martial art.

A second question then arises: "What is the relation between art and sports?" This is a philosophical question that is very much discussed in the Philosophy of Sports.

Sports & Arts

The main discussion on sports and art comes from two distinguished philosophers: Best, in his book "Philosophy and Human Movement" (1979), and Wertz, in his book "Talking a Good Game" (1991). Here, we will start with Best and his 1980 article entitled "Art and Sport", where he gives an answer to Wertz. Best is very straightforward "I contend that no sport is an art form." (Best, 1980, p.69)

A distinction is important for this discussion between purposive sports where "there are a variety of ways to achieve the purpose"; on the other hand, an "Aesthetic sport is one which the purpose can be specified only in terms of the aesthetic manner of achieving it." (Best, 1980, p.71) Best gives a very good example of a sunset: It is not necessary, since clearly all or most physical education activities are not primarily, if at

all, of aesthetic interest; it is not sufficient, since most phenomena which are of aesthetic interest (such as a sunset) are obviously not part of physical education (Best, 1980, p.72)

The second distinction in Best is this: *“there is a tendency to differentiate purposive and aesthetic activities in terms of competition.”* It is a misconception, for Best, to equate aesthetic activity with competition. He gives the example of Korean violinist Kyung Wha Chun’s statement, which is also important for Aikido, made after winning one of the best prizes. *“It was one of the worst experiences of my life, because competitions bring out the worst in people.”* For Best, this is what Wertz misses. According to Best, this problem can easily be overcome by making the distinction between purposive and aesthetic sports *“recognizing there can be competition in both activities”* (although it can bring the worst).

Wertz in his book *“Talking a Good Game”* gives his ideas on Best by first praising Best’s claims, *“Our notion of art is far richer than just the notions of representation and expression”* (Wertz, 1991, p.178) According to Wertz, the philosophy of art begins with these concepts and the relationship of sports to them must be mapped out. Wertz also straight-forwardly explains his idea, *“At the outset I want it to be clear that I do believe that sport (or at least some of it) is or can be art”* (Wertz, 1991, p.178) On Best, Wertz argues, *“Best’s view of art is what Jacques Barzun has described as art from ‘the classical -sector, gilt-edged, consecrated art.’ Best reiterates an ‘old dogma of art’”* (Wertz, 1991, p.179) Wertz gives the Living Theatre example where audience can also become players. Furthermore, Wertz gives the example of a baseball player.

It is quite possible that in pursuing artistic goals (like a baseball game) an athlete might well incur failure in his/her sport’s end. (defined by the non-artistic goals-points, runs, goals, .etc.) This suggests that art may be tangentially present in these sports but not necessarily that sport is art” (Wertz, 1991, p.183)

From this argument, Wertz moves on to discuss symbolical things that make something art even if it is actually a sport. When a tennis match is played in Wimbledon, it is symbolical and it is art. He also asks, *“Could village cricket be art?”* For Wertz, *“Usually village cricket is not art. But under appropriate circumstances it could be”* (Wertz, 1991, p.183)

Wertz gets into the Best’s line of argument on the distinction between “aesthetic” and “artistic”. The aesthetic value of a game is perceived in the visual value alone whereas its artistic value is based on history, context, etc. Unlike Best, Wertz thinks that the spectacular aspect of sports cannot be ignored. He asks, *“Why then do we build stadiums, arenas?”* and continues, *“It may not be the principal goal of sports but it is one of the principal goals of sport (i.e. Aristotelian goals).”* (Wertz, 1991, p.186) For Wertz, *“categories like art and sport change by the very fact that people who employ these categories apply them to different objects”* (Wertz, 1991, p.187)

On the claim that I make a claim about Aikido, from Best’s argument about life and art, Wertz makes a cunning claim as well. *“Best claims that life issues that make up an imaginative work of art have no analogue in sport. In other words sports have no content or subject matter. But why not?”* (Wertz, 1991, p.189) Wertz here gives a very clever example of body-builders, who shape their bodies like a sculpture from ancient Greece. Wertz continues with the example of a gymnast: a former student of his performed gymnastics with the music *“The Lord’s Prayer”* and made his movements

accordingly.

Another point they disagree on is that while Best claims that sports do not represent anything, Wertz argues that they do. He gives examples that also come to my mind. Jessie Owens's four gold medals in the Nazi Olympics (1936) gave strength to Americans. Wertz then asks, "*Can athletes be expressionists in their play?*" (Wertz, 1991, p.194) Wertz gives the example of Boris Becker, the 1985 Wimbledon champion, whose play revealed sadness and remorsefulness, according to journalists, after learning about his grandfather's death at the break of a game.

Wertz believes that Best's general argument is too narrow. At the same time, however, he thinks that he opened up things too much. He summarizes his argument as "*My argument is that a sporting event may be a symbol or it may in fact function as a symbol at a certain time under certain circumstances but not at others.*" (Wertz, 1991, p.196)

After seeing those distinguished philosophers and their lifelong argument and seeing their respect for each other—it is a very good example of philosophy—I would like to take the argument and apply it to Aikido. I partly agree with Wertz. In Aikido, certain techniques have names that sound "crazy" or "un-understandable"; e.g., "Kokyu-ho" means "breath of world" and "Tenchi-nage" means "heaven and earth technique". In the technique tenchi-nage when the attacker holds both of your hands (left and right from front), you lower one of your hands toward the ground while raising the other one up in the air. At the same time, you take the control of his center by stepping a foot toward him. During the first ten years of my Aikido practice, it did not mean much to me. I just performed it, raising one of my hands up to the point that Sufi dervishes (followers of Rumi or Mevlana) do. Then, searching for its meaning, I realized that their meanings were not the same. There are other similarities between Sufi dervish practice and classical Aikido practice. When the Sufi Dede (chief of dervishes, who is older) comes to the Dergah (ritual place), he makes very small movements at the center of it. This is also what I experience in Aikido. Tamura Sensei or Shihan (which means "aware of all directions") does the techniques similarly with minimum movements. As your level of Aikido and years of practice increase, this is what your Sensei wants to see in you. This may not be a totally mutually exclusive metaphor; however, it is a metaphor that I have built from my own experience.

There are other articles written on the point of art and sports as well, which I will mention very briefly. Cordner (1988) discusses both Best and Wertz, and gives his view on the point. Platchias (2003) in his article entitled "Sports is Art" argues against Best through Kantian aesthetics. In another article, Young (1999) discusses it from a Heideggerian point of view. In order to defend my thesis, I want to discuss in more detail an article of the distinguished philosopher Allan Bäck (2009), entitled "The way to Virtue in Sport".

Bäck starts with the claim that the idea that sports develop moral virtues is supported by many philosophers; nevertheless, he thinks that sports might promote more vices than virtues. He claims, "*Moreover there are other activities that actually do provide the benefits claimed erroneously for sports: the traditional martial arts.*" (Bäck, 2009, p.217) Bäck continues by giving brief definitions of both: "*A sport is a form of play involving a contest or competition, typically measuring physical things*" and "*A (traditional) martial art (Japanese: Budo; Korean: MooDo) is a 'way of do' or method*

of enlightenment on the human condition through the ritualized practice of techniques designed to neutralize violence.” (Bäck, 2009, p.217)

For Bäck “*martial arts are not sports*”. He states, “*war is serious not playful business...Yet! Unlike Western combat traditions, Eastern ones alloyed the combat with a quest of non-violence and spiritual enlightenment*” (Bäck, 2009, p.217); and continues with his arguments against certain martial arts, “*In contrast, a martial art sport like Olympic Taekwondo stresses the game of competition. Its goal is to win the athletic contest. The training here places little emphasis on combat applications, ritual or formal patterns.*” The point that Bäck makes here I totally agree with. When competition is involved in martial arts or any arts, as Best suggested with an example, things become worse.

The martial art training (bugei) evolved from merely being jutsu (skills) to being also “do” (Chinese: Tao): ways to enlightenment. As the military application of martial arts waned in modern times, the focus shifted from jutsu to do, from skill to art. Many martial practices changed their names accordingly: jujitsu became judo; kenjutsu became kendo.” [Aikijitsu became Aikido, but why did he not mention it?]

Bäck summarizes different views of sports and makes his point as follows: “*defining sport as a mutual quest for excellence fits all modern sports.*” (Bäck, 2009, p.221) However, as we will discuss in the writings of Parry below, this is not always the case. Bäck then discusses his argument in the context of dangerous (I prefer risky”) sports and states in response to both Russell (Russell, 2005) and Fischer (2002), which is important for us, ...still they both have a better than average chance of acquiring certain values or virtues through the practice of dangerous sport. So we have the dilemma either we pursue this dangerous path or we lessen our chances for excellence..Yet I will argue that this is a false dilemma: there are other options, other ways to acquire those same virtues. The option I will explore is training in martial arts. (Bäck, 2009, p.224)

On this point I totally agree with Bäck. After a quick examination of virtues of sports in the section ‘Virtues of sports: Empirical Data’, Bäck states, “*For despite the common claim, the evidence given in studies in the social sciences is that sport does not produce a good moral character. On the contrary, it tends to produce a bad one*” (Bäck, 2009, p.226)

Then, Bäck shifts back to martial arts again and discusses the empirical data on martial arts as well as the moral character of martial arts. He claims, “*Outside of Korea and other Asian countries the decline in the moral character of martial arts competitors has already been noted by many involved.*” (Bäck, 2009, p.228) This important and interesting fact presumably proves why the founder of Aikido insisted that Aikido stays away from any form of competition. Bäck cites the trainer of the U.S. Olympic Taekwondo team: “*I don’t train martial artists, I train athletes*” and states they are not interested in self-defence but winning.”

Bäck thinks that “*A lot of things are lost. Traditional martial artists are good people well grounded. They have good morals, good ethics, good family values, and are aware of culture and society.*” (Bäck, 2009, p.228) I cannot agree with Bäck, I think that Bäck misses the fact that Aikido still remains as a traditional martial art without competition and still preserves the values Bäck considers as “lost”.

Bäck then proceeds to an argument on Aikido that is germane to our purposes. He

writes:

Above I have claimed that a martial art as traditionally practiced is not a sport. To be sure, there is martial art, sport. A martial art can be practiced as a sport. It is a physical activity and we can arrange contests and make rules to judge who is more proficient at this or that aspect of the sport: breaking; speed of strikes; expertise in the formal patterns (kata; poomse [in Aikido there is only simple Katas in weapon training]) On the Olympic level we have judo and taekwondo. Yet many martial arts traditions [like Aikido] reject the sport competition. And even sparring (jiyu-kumite) just for practice. Here I am focusing on martial arts, not on martial art sport. (Bäck, 2009, p.229)

Bäck's theory is contextualised as follows: "First, a martial art is not removed from ordinary life." This was also one of the labels in this thesis, as we have discussed before. "Hence virtues and vices gained in martial arts practice will tend to transfer more easily to ordinary life than sport practice." This label was inherent in the properties of Aikido. "Applicability to Life" was a label in our open-ended question.

Bäck also claims: Martial art schools hardly ever have philosophy lectures – or listen to papers like this one. [The dojo I train with 150 people did.] Rather, in the spirit of Zen Buddhism, the practitioners are supposed to gain some sort of practical wisdom and spiritual insight via the physical practice itself" (Bäck, 2009, p.230)

Discussion & Implication

I partly agree with Bäck on this point. Although it might have stemmed from Zen Buddhism, Aikido has nothing to do with religion. It is like football. Football originated in England; but there is also Brazilian football, European football, etc; Yet all are football. It is the same in Aikido. I have practiced in many dojos and been to many other ones. I have seen dojos following Zen Buddhism; however, following Zen Buddhism is not necessary. On the spiritual insight I agree with Bäck because this thesis showed that the "inner development" and "harmony" labels are shared among Aikido practitioners.

Bäck also divides martial arts into three stages. At the first stage, there is violence and injury, however, "*the third and final stage resembles Gandhi's ahimsa: the total elimination of or absence of violence and struggle.*" (Bäck, 2009, p.232)

In parentheses, Bäck states there is still doubt in his mind: "*(Of course there remains the empirical issue, whether or not the martial arts actually have all the characteristics described in their traditions.)*" I think we do not have doubt for Aikido, as a result of this thesis (given its limitations). The practitioners' responses to the open-ended question of conceptualization of Aikido revealed "inner development" and "love and respect" as properties of Aikido,

Finally, Bäck makes the point on which we built our thesis: that at the beginner and intermediate levels Aikido is a sport, whereas it is an art at the advanced level. For our thesis we take Bäck's following argument: ... a sport remains cut off from the serious business of real life as it is a type of play. It focuses on artificial contest. [This sentence we ignore since it is Aikido with no contests] In contrast martial art is not a type of play. Rather it supports the serious part of life—and its transcendent contests. It has no winners or losers, [as we will discuss in the next label] just as life ultimately does neither. The martial arts have a meditative and spiritual tradition of a sort that Western sports lack. (Bäck, 2009, p.232)

From my point of view, it is in the form of play that I take Loland and McNamee's definition of sports for granted: "if voluntarily engaged in sport games-keep the ethos of the game if the ethos is just ..." (Loland and McNamee, 2000, p.69) In Aikido, beginners and intermediate students are learning the practice. It takes a lot of time in martial arts even to learn the basic movements. For that reason, the attacks in the beginner and intermediate levels are semi-real, meaning that they are not that serious as long as the practitioner learns the basic movements. Therefore, at the beginner level Aikido is a sports game, voluntarily engaged in, whose ethos is what we discussed in "inner development". It took its ethos from the code of Samurai.

We can prove this point with the meaning of the black belt as well. In Aikido there are only two belts (white and black) in order to prevent "belt wars". The black belt in Aikido means "Sho-Dan". Sho in Japanese means beginner. It shows that you have just begun training Aikido. The black belt practically means that you have learned all the forms. Now you are going to practice them with "reality". This reality we have mentioned above.

From those aspects, Aikido at the beginner and intermediate levels is a sports game; only at the advanced level is it an art. I would like to end this discussion by again quoting from Bäck: "One might continue to wonder whether the Way of the martial arts is the best way, especially due to some side effects of the intermediate level on many practitioners." (Bäck, 2009, p.234) This also proves our point about the "intermediate" because it is a transition level to reality. When they are not properly trained by the instructor, many practitioners give up at this level. We would like to end like Bäck by a quote from Spinoza: "The path to virtue is as difficult as it is rare." (Bäck, 2009, p.234)

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Aikido techniques are frequently referred to as waza (which is Japanese for technique, art or skill). Aikido training is based primarily on two partners practicing pre-arranged forms (kata) rather than freestyle practice. The basic pattern is for the receiver of the technique (uke) to initiate an attack against the person who applies the technique—the *shite* or *tori*, or *shite* (depending on aikido style) also referred to as *uke* (when applying a throwing technique), who neutralises this attack with an aikido technique. [1]. Uke must attack with a strength and speed appropriate to the skill level of the tori; in the case of beginners, this means an attack of far less severity than would be encountered in a real-life self-defense situation.

Contents. 1 Training techniques. In addition to the aesthetic nature of the arts of aikido and qualitative inquiry, and the habitus that is learned in and through group-work, another resemblance concerns the relations between teaching and practice. In line with performative hermeneutics, one could say that the days of the representational are over: when we teach aikido we practice the art (and vice versa), and when we teach qualitative methods we perform qualitative sensibilities (and vice versa: when conducting an in-depth interview, we also teach our informants how one conducts an in-depth interview).

A situated approach Aikido is a modern Japanese budo (martial art), developed by Morihei Ueshiba between the 1920s and the 1960s. Ueshiba was religiously inspired to develop a martial art with a "spirit of peace." Aikido emphasizes using full body movement to unbalance and disable or dominate an attacking opponent. Aikido has a significant spiritual element; students are taught to center themselves and to strive for absolute unity between the mind and body. Training is often free-style and involves engagement with Aikido Principles presents the principles and basic concepts of aikido—deeply rooted in Eastern philosophy and the refined ideals of the samurai. It's not a technical manual, but an exploration of the thoughts and theories at work in aikido practice. It's divided into three parts. The first one deals with aikido ideas of finding the peaceful solution, of doing away with conflict, and how to enjoy aikido practice to the fullest. The second part presents the basic Japanese concepts at work in aikido, such as *do*, the way, *ki*, life energy, *tanden*, the center, the polarities of *irimi/tenkan* and *o*

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Contents. 1 Training techniques. Aikido and Physics, an exercise in relativity. 1 Ueshiba's experience in all martial arts while simultaneously founded on the principles of buddhism and taoism, Aikido was unique in that its aim was not war but peace. Ai-ki-do-the way of harmony between man and (nature's) energy-is more. The very nature of Aikido, lacking a real fight between two opponents, allows us to bypass the details of a biomechanical analysis and deal directly with general quantities. Moreover, it pulls us towards a relativistic perspective. This connection was particularly apparent in the case of Aikido, a Japanese martial art founded in the first half of the twentieth century.

Qualitative And Philosophical Enquiry of Aikido Participants From Different Levels, Conceptualization of Aikido as Different From Other Sports: Mind And Body Perspectives. Baris Sentuna. Aikido as a Somato-Spiritual Praxis For Constructive Handling of Social Conflict: A Survey of Aikido-Practitioners' Workplace Conflict Styles. To date, most studies regarding the social-psychological effects of martial arts and combat sports (MA&CS) on young people focus on measuring effects without considering mediating factors. The aim of the present study was to analyze three mediating factors that might be influential when examining outcomes of MA&CS for youth (i.e., the type of MA&CS, participants' characteristics, and social background). Aikido is the art of taking another person's attack and neutralizing its effectiveness by redirecting it in a peaceful and nonviolent way. Aikido was born out of a combination of Morihei Ueshiba's mastery of different martial arts and his philosophical views. Aikido allows a person to deal with an attack or issue while considering the safety of the attacker. The goal of Aikido is a nonviolent end to a confrontation. In our dojo at Aikido in Fredericksburg (and related locations in Stafford, Spotsylvania, Louisa, and Caroline), we have many students that have practiced other martial arts. They come to Aikido for a variety of reasons including safe training, personal growth, and the fact that Aikido lets one calibrate their response to a situation. Differences in the manner in which aikido practitioners in Japan and the United States represented their understandings of aikido reflected the teaching emphasis observed in the respective cultures. It was concluded that aikido instructors represented the values of their own culture in the context of aikido training, and thus served as important mediating forces influencing the meaning which practitioners generated for aikido.

(1) How is the instruction and practice of aikido in the United States different than the instruction and practice of aikido in Japan? (2) What differences, if any, exist between what aikido means to practitioners in the United States and Japan?