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Preserving Moral Recognition in the Face of Aggression: Aikido as a Practice of Physical Intersubjectivity

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1. The Moral Imperative of Aikido

The Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba Sensei, liked to describe the martial practice that he created and taught as being a path of reconciliation, empathy, harmony, love and the like. In a statement that is fairly representative of his thinking on this matter he says:

Aikido does not rely on weapons or brute force to succeed, instead we put ourselves in tune with the universe, maintain peace in our own realms, nurture life, and prevent death and destruction. The true meaning of the term Samurai is one who serves and adheres to the power of love. (Stevens 1992, 45)

Needless to say, it seems odd to claim that a *martial* discipline can be a path to harmony and peace. As the name implies, martial disciplines have both historically as well as in the popular imagination taught practitioners techniques for killing other people. Even if we look, for instance, at Yagyū Munenori's distinction between life-giving and death-giving sword, the life-giving sword was still a sword that killed – but in support of a moral order, rather than out of fealty to one's feudal lord.

We shall shortly have an opportunity to look more closely at how Aikido might be said to “nurture life.” To provide some preliminary orientation, though, I will limit myself to just a few brief observations that will help to introduce this idea. First, with few exceptions, Aikido techniques are designed to respond to, rather than initiate aggression. Without an attacker, Aikido techniques are for the most part nonfunctional. They're certainly no good for breaking boards or bricks. Fundamentally, the art is

defensive. Second, the techniques in Aikido are designed to make it possible to control aggression with a relative minimum of harm to the aggressor. In principle, if not necessarily in practice, the techniques of Aikido – when properly executed – should allow the defender to protect not just herself but the attacker as well.

While the competent practitioner *need not* seriously injure an attacker, Aikido techniques still can be used to inflict very serious damage, if one chooses. Applied with violent, destructive intent, they can yield commensurate results. Thus it is not the techniques of Aikido alone that ensure minimum harm is done to the attacker, but rather the intent of the practitioner as well. And, so, it becomes vital that the practitioner respond in a manner commensurate with the nonaggressive ethos of Aikido. As a result it becomes necessary for the practitioner to cultivate a certain kind of moral character. Yukio Utada Sensei, my first teacher, described this endeavor in terms of “wearing away the ego” – which I understand now to mean putting aside the egocentric striving that so frequently leads to conflict. As we heard above, the Founder spoke of such character in terms of the cultivation of love. In another statement representative of this idea he says:

All life is a manifestation of the spirit, the manifestation of love. And Aikido is the purest form of that principle. A warrior is charged with bringing a halt to all contention and strife. (Stevens 1992, 41)

To practice Aikido as the Founder thought it ought to be practiced, and as the great majority of practitioners also say it ought be practiced, one must empty oneself of the propensities for violence, competition, and self-aggrandizement that arise in one’s psyche. It is further supposed by the community of practitioners that training in Aikido will support the development of the appropriate moral & psychic dispositions.

Thus Aikido can be understood as a way of harmony in two respects. First, the techniques make it possible (in principle) to protect both defender and attacker – this is physical harmony between individuals. Second, the practitioner seeks to cultivate a character that will enable her to apply the techniques free of destructive intent – this is psychic, or spiritual harmony within the individual. The obligation to cultivate both forms of harmony is what I shall refer to as the moral imperative of Aikido. In what follows I would like to examine the intersubjective structure of this martial discipline. This examination is based very loosely on Jürgen Habermas’s *Theory of Communicative Action* and is guided in particular by his distinction between instrumental and communicative structures of interaction. I shall treat ordinary interpersonal violence, when one person attacks and seeks to do harm to another, as an instance of instrumental action in which one person (the attacker) seeks to carry out his will on another (the object of violence). I shall suggest that the physical techniques and moral discipline of Aikido make it possible for the object of violence to resist this imposition *not* just in the sense of physically impeding the attack (though this is part of the story) but also in the sense of preserving a basic structure of moral recognition.

In the next section I shall review a pair of concepts central for the discussion, first describing the general contours of ordinary moral recognition and then turning to what I’ll call the *attack situation*, where one person withdraws moral recognition and seeks instead to control, intimidate or harm another. Following this review, I’ll then examine the communicative structure of the act of attacking.

2. Mutual Moral Recognition & Attack Situations

I understand the situation of mutual moral recognition to be the default orientation of social actors who engage with one another in pursuit of some shared goal or activity.

In such a situation people recognize themselves in others, a recognition that is rooted in felt similarities based on blood kinship, shared language and culture, shared experience or whatnot. Within this orientation the self perceives both self and other as abiding by a shared set of normative expectations as well as a shared world interpretation. Mutual moral recognition typically also includes a further set of shared commitments: non-maleficence (refraining from mutual harm), cooperation, concern for the well-being of the other, sometimes a particular conception of a well-lived life. Mutual moral recognition is the stance that social actors typically adopt toward one another while they are going about everyday life- indeed, it is the stance that makes everyday social life a viable concern.

An attack situation as I intend the term is one in which at least one person has abandoned this framework of moral recognition, fails to recognize others as entitled to moral consideration, and seeks to do violence to one or more of these others. Having said this, some qualifying comments are necessary right away. Combat has often been ritualized in such a way that it might be appropriate to consider it a form of mutual moral recognition, despite the fact that warriors involved seek to do violence to one another. Chivalry in the medieval West, or *bushido*, the Samurai code, are examples of elaborate moral and ritual frameworks within which combatants maintain recognition of one another as moral persons even while trying to kill one another. So a situation in which one person is attacking another need not entail that the stance of mutual moral recognition has been abandoned.

It is for such reasons that the kind of attack situations with which Aikido is concerned might be called *unregulated*, by which is meant that one person has abandoned the stance of mutual moral recognition and instead regards the other as an

object to which no moral recognition is due. Rather than recognizing the other as a person like oneself, the other becomes Other. Typically, such situations emerge because the attacker supposes himself to have been wronged or harmed in some fashion – or else to be facing an immediate threat of wrong or harm – and supposes the object of attack to be the offender responsible for this wrong. Or, if the attacker has not been wronged himself, the object of attack is nonetheless perceived in some sense to be *in the wrong* and the attacker *in the right*, justified in initiating the attack.

The Other is also typically held responsible for precipitating this shift from mutual moral recognition to the situation of objectification, as I will also call it. The wrong warranting the attack can be as trivial as you please - clothing, hairstyle, a word, a glance. The attacker nonetheless construes the situation as one in which the actions of the other justify his resort to violence and thus as one in which the object of attack deserves this response.

Let me introduce here another caveat. The concepts of mutual moral recognition and the attack situation have been presented above as if they are clear, distinct, and mutually exclusive. It sounds as if the options for interacting with other people are limited to just these two possibilities, and more to the point, as if mutual moral recognition completely excludes any tendency to objectify others as well as the slightest hint of aggression. Similarly, the attack situation has been presented as a kind of mirror opposite to the situation of mutual moral recognition: as presented, it would appear that not the slightest trace of moral recognition is to be found in those circumstances when one person attacks another. As descriptions of actual human interaction, such binary contrasts are obvious and dramatic oversimplifications. Social interaction will always consist of some mixture of these two orientations, as well as numerous others

that I have left out of the account entirely. But oversimplifying and highlighting the difference between these two patterns of interaction will make it a little easier to elucidate the communicative structure of the act of attack, which is what I try to do in the next section.

3. Attack as a communicative act

To understand how Aikido techniques allow a defender in an attack situation to maintain the stance of mutual moral recognition we need to look more closely at the transition from recognition to objectification. What happens, in effect, is that in an act of attack the attacker proposes a change in the definition of the situation – from moral recognition to objectification. This might seem a peculiar way to construe the matter. Normally we don't understand an attack to consist in proposing a definition, but rather in imposing violence on another. Often enough this is the case. But the practice of Aikido offers the opportunity to resist such an imposition and in such a way that we begin to notice a communicative structure to the attacker's action.

Although on the surface an attack looks simply to be an imposition, I would like to suggest that it also amounts to an invitation by the attacker to the object of attack to abandon the stance of mutual moral recognition and to replace it with mutually objectifying stances. The attacker initiates by (re-)interpreting the situation as one in which there is no perceived kinship between self and other, in which the attacker perceives himself to have in some sense been wronged, and so is justified in withdrawing moral recognition from the other and instead treating that other as an object. The condition of feeling himself to have been wronged, the withdrawal of moral recognition and objectification of the other all serve to justify the attacker's resort to violence. This set of beliefs and attitudes – or some set like this one – *defines* the

situation for the attacker, and by bringing them to bear on the situation the attacker invites the object of attack to reciprocate.

The suggestion here is that the attack embodies the attacker's proposal to define *both* himself and the other in terms of a framework of wrong, objectification and justified violence. Defined in this way, the situation makes a series of options available to the defender. The attack in effect invites the defender select one of these options. I identify four, but there may be more. One is to submit – to accept the attacker's self-definition as a wronged party, to endure the violence meted out, and to endorse the terms of reconciliation (if there are any). Flight is a second option, which in the context of human interaction usually confers the social role of the vanquished, possibly that of coward. A third option for the object of attack, not always recognized, is to bluff – to respond to an attack, or the threat of attack, with a display that might convince the attacker that the cost of following through will make an ill bargain of any benefits that might be gained by continuing.

The fourth option, of course, is violent self-defense - the option with which the martial arts are most commonly associated. Worth noting is that this kind of self-defense typically leads very easily – almost inevitably – to reciprocal adoption of the framework of wrong, objectification and justified violence. The trope in martial arts literature and cinema, of course, is that the defending protagonist is the one who has been wronged and whose violence is genuinely justified, and that the attacker is deluded or despicable. Regardless who is wronged, the framework remains in any case one of mutual objectification. It is a curious feature to note here that just as mutual moral recognition depends on reciprocity, so the instantiation or establishment of mutual

antagonism in an attack situation also requires reciprocal agreement to its defining conditions.

The practice of Aikido, as I am interpreting it, is constructed on the insight that the defender need not accept the attacker's invitation. The defender can refuse, in other words, to endorse the proposed redefinition of the situation as one of hostile mutual objectification. She thereby commits herself to maintaining a stance toward mutual moral recognition. This is what the physical techniques and moral discipline of Aikido are meant to make possible.

To avoid confusion, I need to distinguish between different possibilities for refusing the attacker's invitation. We are all already familiar with one of these possibilities. This comes prior to actual attack, when one person recognizes another's aggressive attitude or hostile intent. At this point we can endeavor to reason with the other, to negotiate a settlement, try to placate the other's anger, or otherwise prevent the attack from taking place. Such efforts to dissuade by non-threatening means are not what I have in mind when I speak of "declining the attacker's invitation", though these efforts are perfectly compatible with the moral imperative of Aikido. The other possibility, the one that I have in mind, arises once the attack has *already* been launched. At this point, there is no further opportunity for persuasion or negotiation. The attacker in effect initiates a kind of ultimatum game – "choose from among these four options!" the defender is, in effect, told. The techniques of Aikido allow the defender to refuse the invitation to join that game, *even* when the other player has insisted on initiating it, and instead to maintain a stance toward mutual moral recognition.

It might seem peculiar to call it a stance toward *mutual* moral recognition when one party has already withdrawn such recognition. I'm not entirely sure that it does make

sense to use this description, but I'll suggest here how it might. I think that we can treat the defender's stance here as a performative assertion of a kind of counterfactual proposition. By declining the attacker's invitation and persisting in the mental stance associated with mutual moral recognition, the defender asserts her readiness to comport herself according to the same set of everyday moral commitments that ordinarily regulate day to day interaction – despite the fact that these conditions do not fully obtain at the moment. Among these moral commitments, recall, are non-maleficence and concern for the other's well-being. This stance is unilaterally upheld, but by maintaining it the defender holds out the possibility that the *genuinely* mutual moral recognition of everyday interaction may be restored in the aftermath of the confrontation. If people involved in an attack situation engage in mutual objectification the outcome quite easily can, and quite frequently does result either in death or in bodily harm sufficiently severe to damage or destroy the possibility of future reconciliation. Declining the invitation to mutual objectification is an expression of the defender's conviction that fully mutual moral recognition can be and should be restored.

However we construe the commitment to *mutuality* in this stance, the key issue is that the defender does not consider the attempted violence as authorization to engage in reciprocal violence and does not take the attacker to be an object from which moral recognition has been withdrawn. The physical techniques of Aikido enable a person to adopt this stance. How this is the case is what I will turn to next. It is here that we come to another dimension of intersubjectivity – this is the idea that the techniques of Aikido involve a practice of physical intersubjectivity. Here we must also stop talking and start practicing, because the awareness I shall be speaking of must be experienced before any talk about it might be understood.

[Break for training.]

The Center to Center Connection

Now I'd like to say a few words about what I hope you may have felt as a result of our brief training session. First, I wanted you to get a sense for *grounding*. As the name implies, this is the process by which the defender's connection to the earth's surface enables her to safely receive and blend with an attack. Next is this idea of *connection* with the attacker, the points of physical contact by means of which the defender is able to read the attacker's intention, flexibly respond to it, and lead him to a condition of imbalance and disorientation. *Leading* is the process by which the defender redirects and reconfigures the energy of the attack in such a way that the attacker is in effect rendered incapable of continuing his aggression.

These three practices – grounding, connecting and leading – are at the heart of functional technique, where by *functional* is meant technique that allows the defender to protect not just herself but the attacker as well. By maintaining a grounded stance or posture the defender is able to receive and blend with an attack, establish a connection with the attacker's body. This connection makes it possible to establish body mediated awareness of the attacker's strategic intentions, by which I mean the particular and shifting physical strategies by which he seeks to pursue the broader goal of controlling, intimidating or harming the object of his attack. Connection begins with the physical reception of the attack and depends for its success on a grounded or stable basic posture. Grounded posture and connection make possible the ongoing reconfiguration of the energy of the attack such that the attacker loses balance and stability, which neutralizes his capacity to continue the aggression. As the defender establishes body

mediated awareness of the attacker's intentions, physical technique allows her to respond in a way that preserves the physical integrity of the attacker as well as the possibility of reestablishing mutual moral recognition in the aftermath.

Earlier I suggested that the attacker in effect proposes to redefine the social situation encompassing himself and the other as one of wrong, objectification and justified violence – a proposal that the attacker and object of attack shift from a situation of mutual moral recognition to one of mutual hostile objectification. The object of attack is in effect invited to accept this proposed situation definition by adopting one of the four options that it makes available – submission, bluffing, flight, or defensive combat in an attitude that reciprocates the attacker's objectification. As we have seen, however, the object of attack need not accept the attacker's proposal. The body mediated awareness embedded in physical technique, I now suggest, makes it possible for the defender to unilaterally maintain a stance toward mutual moral recognition while protecting both herself as well as the attacker.

Having just said these things, they must immediately be qualified. Body mediated awareness is a condition necessary for responding to an attack in a manner embodying the moral imperative of Aikido. But it is not a sufficient condition. Effective application of technique in *any* martial art – particularly in the grappling arts – will depend on body mediated awareness of the opponent's particular strategic intention. Such awareness can serve both the goal of success in competitive encounters as well as the aim of controlling, intimidating or harming another. By itself body mediated awareness of another's strategic intentions cannot sustain the moral imperative of Aikido. The basic disposition not to accept the attacker's proposed situation definition and instead to sustain moral recognition, and further, the capacity to sustain this disposition in the

face of aggression, depends fundamentally on the defender's cultivation of a particular frame of mind. We can get a sense for the contours for this frame of mind by looking at its origin in the Founder's own practice. Following that, we can consider what it means for ordinary mortals.

4. The Mystical Origins of the Moral Imperative

The normative commitment that I call the moral imperative of Aikido can be traced back to the Founder's experiences of mystical insight. These have been fairly well documented (Stevens, 1987), so I will not dwell on the particulars. For our purposes, what counts is what Ueshiba Sensei learned from these experiences. As so often is the case with mystical experiences, what he learned was that all things are connected, that all beings are in some fundamental sense kin. From the martial arts perspective this mystical perspective raises some interesting puzzles. The enemy, the attacker who seeks to do one harm, is the paradigm case of the Other. A resolute ontological duality is fundamental to the relationship of attacker and attacked – the distinction is between self and the Other, with the two being separate, unrelated, and opposed. There is also a moral duality in which – as we saw above – one perceives oneself as, in some sense, being right, good, or justified, and the attacking Other as wrong, bad, or unjust. These dualities are not what *cause* or *precipitate* conflict. Usually the proximate cause is some particular desire for some particular state of affairs, realization of which someone else is impeding. But the ontological duality of self and other and the moral duality of right and wrong are ultimate causes, conditions for the possibility of conflict. Remove them and the ground for conflict evaporates.

This is what happens in mystical experience. From the nondual perspective of such experience the enemy is recognized to be, in some sense, identical to, indistinguishable

from, or essentially connected with the experiencing self. Further, the enemy is seen to be right, good, and justified, as well as wrong, bad, and unjust, while the self is seen to be wrong, bad, and unjust as well as right, good, and justified. In mystical experience, both the ontological and normative dualities that structure aggressive confrontations & the desire to do harm to another drop away and the enemy is discovered to be friend, kin, and, ultimately, self. It is because Ueshiba Sensei had directly experienced this nondual perspective that he would say things like “harming another is harming oneself”.

Thus the experience of the mystical unity of the cosmos posed for the Founder the challenge of creating a martial practice that acknowledges the ultimate kinship of defender and attacker. The solution Ueshiba Sensei proposed was first to modify the *jutsu* he had learned so that they could be applied with minimal harm to the attacker. But he also modified the goal of martial training. Victory in combat with an enemy was no longer the primary goal. Instead, it became victory over the egocentric propensities in one’s own self that give rise to conflict in the first place. This is the principle of *masagatsu agatsu*, “true victory is victory over oneself” (or, “true victory of self-mastery”). The development of appropriate self-mastery allows the Aikido practitioner to maintain the stance of mutual moral recognition in response to an attacker’s aggression. Victory over oneself is the condition necessary for the defender to use the body mediated awareness of the attacker to protect rather than to harm the attacker.

5. Masagatsu agatsu

The founder asserted that the capacity to respond to attack with love and compassion was bound up with the idea of *masagatsu agatsu*, “true victory that is victory over oneself”. In this final section I would like to consider what “victory over oneself” might mean. It is here that we will find one further dimension of

intersubjectivity associated with the practice of Aikido. To see this dimension it will help to return to the pair of fundamental dualities that are posited by an act of attack. One, recall, is ontological: I am not that Other. The other is moral: I am right (or good) and that Other is wrong (or bad). We saw just a moment ago that the Founder of Aikido experienced a dropping away of these dualities during his mystical experiences of interrelation with all existing things. These experiences were what inspired him to create a martial practice that cultivated love and supported life.

Mystical experiences are direct, immediate, and visceral realizations of the interconnections among existing things – often also interpreted as direct experiences of divinity. The religious interpretation of the experience need not concern us here. For our purposes two other things are relevant. First, such experiences are typically not available to most human beings, particularly not to secular minded moderns. Second, despite their infrequency, we have reliable testimony from those undergoing such experiences about the ontological and moral insights they make available. This testimony allows us to reconstruct, using the language and concepts of the modern, scientific worldview, the fundamental insights revealed directly in such realizations. In what follows I will briefly present one way we might approach this reconstruction. I hope this way to show how a highly abstract structure of intersubjective awareness is fundamental to the moral imperative of Aikido.

Consider the widespread and largely uncontroversial idea of the social construction of the self. The basic idea is almost certainly familiar to everybody in this room. Selves – or personalities, if you will – do not enter the world ready-made, but instead require a period of development. This development takes place in the context of a network of physically, affectively, and linguistically mediated interpersonal relations. This network

of relations, we say, constructs the self – provides the social, cultural, and linguistic materials out of which a self is formed as well as a normative scaffold that regulates the interpersonal relations driving this process of development. If a developing person is deprived of some part of this context – if a person is raised in silence, for instance, or if the normative structure regulating the interpersonal relations is deformed or collapses – the process of development will undergo commensurate changes. These fundamental contours of human development remain in place, with certain modifications, for adults as well. When core features of an adult’s social context are changed, the person changes with it. If the changes are sufficiently drastic or far reaching, the adult can develop various kinds of psychological pathology or breakdown in identity. (Though the philosophical and cultural traditions of the west tend to downplay this possibility.) The interpersonally mediated formation of self is a lifelong process.

This idea of the social construction of the self shows that to think of the self as a distinct, separate and unconnected individual is, in important respects, false. Similarly, to *experience* oneself as distinct, separate and unconnected is in important respects a pathology or a delusion. A large portion of the world’s major philosophical and religious traditions endorse these insights in one way or another and teach that a great number, if not all, of humankind’s ills arise from our propensity to think and feel this way.

Let us now return *masagatsu agatsu*. I want to suggest that “victory over self” consists just in cultivating a robust recognition of the intersubjective constitution of the self. In what sense? Well, at a first intuitive glance, we can see that the degree to which a person’s interaction with other people is guided by the basic supposition that he is distinct, separate and unconnected from them, this person is likely to feel less inhibition

about simply asserting himself over against others. Insofar as a person supposes that he does not (and, further perhaps, should not) depend on others for his very existence, then this person has already taken a large step toward an objectifying stance toward others. The separate and disconnected self is – almost by definition – an egocentric self, a self that pursues its own interests to the exclusion of others. The extreme case of this kind of self is the psychopath.

We can cash out this initial intuition by returning to the earlier analysis of the communicative structure of the act of attack. When a person is attacked, she faces the choice of accepting the attacker's proposed definition of the situation and adopting one of the four response options that this definition makes available. Violent self-defense is one of these options, and choosing it is to complete the transition from a situation of mutual moral recognition to one of mutual hostile objectification. If we understand *masagatsu agatsu* to consist in cultivating a robust awareness of the intersubjective constitution of self and – as a natural extension of that insight – the interconnection of existing things, it makes sense to suppose that this awareness will dispose a person toward seeking some alternative other than mutual objectification and violent self-defense. The physical techniques of Aikido, remember, are not in themselves sufficient to ensure that the defender is able to adhere to the moral imperative of Aikido. A robust awareness that one's self is inextricably interconnected with others lends support to the effort both to cultivate as well as to act with concern and compassion for another. In this way an awareness of the intersubjective constitution of self helps ensure that the body mediated awareness of physical technique is used to protect rather than harm. *Masagatsu agatsu* is victory over the self that fails to honor its interdependence with other people and, ultimately, with all living things.

Okay, so where are we now? Well, we were lead to a discussion of “victory over self” because the body mediated awareness of the other that is embedded in the techniques of Aikido does not by itself ensure that the defender will be able adhere to the moral imperative of Aikido – the imperative to protect both the self and the attacker. What else is needed? The capacity to respond to an attack with concern for the attacker’s well being. How are we to understand this capacity? The Founder called it “victory over self”. What does this “victory over self” mean? On the interpretation I am offering – not the only possible interpretation, I want to emphasize – it means that the defender must keep in mind that, ultimately, (defending) self and (attacking) other are not distinct, but fundamentally interconnected. Okay, how is *that* going to help? Someone is coming after me and I’m supposed to be thinking about metaphysics? That seems pretty obviously stupid – and that little bit of stupidity points to one further step in the discussion.

I just offered a partial philosophical reconstruction of the mystical insight into the interconnection of self with others, hinting that this basic pattern of thought could be extended to include interdependence with all things. This is the metaphysics we’re supposedly thinking about while the other person attacks. Except, we can’t be thinking. Even a moment’s reflection makes this clear. Once attack has been initiated, we can’t think. There is only time to respond. And here we come to the crux of the problem, a crucial dimension of the moral discipline required by the moral imperative. To develop a fuller grasp of this dimension, we return one last time to the dualities structuring the attack situation – but now we consider them from an evolutionary biological point of view.

One, the duality of self and other, is arguably a condition for the possibility of sentient life. Finding something to eat and avoiding becoming something else's meal would seem to be impossible without the capacity to distinguish between self and other. Thus to find oneself under attack must almost inevitably elicit a host of deep, evolved reflexes associated with the primordial urge to evade and resist being subject to predation. These reflexes are quite literally built into our DNA.

As for the second constitutive duality, the very existence of human social order depends upon the distinction of right and wrong. This duality pervades the waking lives of most humans most of the time, and may also play a role in some mammalian social systems. It isn't hard to see how the social conflicts humans are typically embroiled in arise because members of opposing sides all think themselves to be right, good and just, and the others to be wrong, bad and unjust. This propensity to "devalue the opponent" leads us to another feature of evolved social species, which is that social status makes a crucial difference for an animal's well-being. A wide range of stress related hormonal differences have been identified between low and high status animals – including humans. Low social status has been clearly linked with worse life outcomes.

Competitive efforts to achieve higher rank in a social hierarchy – status competition – is a widespread, though not ubiquitous, feature of mammalian social lives. It has certainly long been a part of human social life. Because the outcomes of status competition have had such an important selective effect for species of social mammals over their evolutionary history, individual animals tend to take such struggles quite seriously. This competition often results in aggression and violent attacks, and to be on the losing end of one of these confrontations could mean a reduced quality of life for the loser. As a result, the impulse to respond aggressively to a group member's attack will be built into

the DNA of some evolved social species as solidly as the urge to resist and evade predation.

The point of these observations is to illuminate our intuitive certainty that cultivation of a “robust awareness” of the interdependence of self and other will have to mean something more than just *knowing* something to be true and *believing* that one’s judgments and actions ought to be guided by this knowledge. In the breach, confronted with the immediate fact of verbal or physical assault, mere knowledge dissolves and the automatic reflexes of an evolved life form spring into action.

This intuition has been abundantly reinforced in the past few decades by research in psychology showing that human cognition and social behavior run on two separate systems (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Bargh & Ferguson, 2000; Zajonc, 1980) One, the controlled system, is the domain of ordinary conscious awareness and rational thought. This is the system at work when we do math in our heads, imagine a warm summer’s day in the middle of winter, and try to convince friends and colleagues to do things our way. The cognitive operations associated with the controlled system are relatively slow, effortful, and intentionally directed; they require focused attention and are available to conscious introspection. The other is the automatic system, also helpfully known as the “adaptive unconscious”. (Wilson, 2002) Cognition in this system is fast, effortless, and not intentionally directed; it requires no attention and its operations are largely inaccessible to conscious introspection. An obvious and uncontroversial example of such automatic processing is the work of the visual cortex as it turns light waves received by the eyes into our consciously experienced visual field. More controversial and uncomfortable – especially for philosophers, it seems – is the idea that the cognitive

processes involved in interpreting social situations and making practical judgments also for the most part operate automatically.

The distinction between these two cognitive systems highlights the task that faces a practitioner seriously committed to the moral imperative of Aikido. One may cultivate an understanding of the intersubjective constitution of the self and the interconnection of existing things via the controlled system of cognition, but this knowledge and any associated beliefs are unlikely to have any effect in the breach. If these philosophical insights are to enable the person subject to attack to respond with concern for the attacker, then they must have been trained into the body's automatic systems in such a way that the defensive reflexes of an evolved life form have been overridden or displaced.