Towards Pedagogical Warriorship: Aikido As Contemplative Education Through Relational Praxis And The Primacy Of Other

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ABSTRACT

As a practice that focuses on cultivation of self towards enlightenment, the Japanese martial art of Aikido approaches conflict resolution as an Art rather than combative training. In service to the cultivation of higher aims, path or Do in Eastern practice is ultimately about spiritual realization through cultivation of self, where one is ultimately guided towards harmonized relations between self and the entire life sphere and ecology of living. From the classical Western tradition, Aristotelian praxis, while grounded in similar ethical values towards developing ‘practical wisdom,’ has become overshadowed in Western epistemology by rationalism and empiricism, to the extent that the overemphasis on theoretical concerns represent a drift away from practical approaches to relationality and intersubjectivity. This paper suggests the praxis of Aikido, reflecting the Buddhist principle of interdependence, offers practical and philosophical insights into how pedagogy can become more humanized, open-hearted, relational and co-participatory, reflecting Levinas’ ‘primacy of Other.’
Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.
--Viktor E. Frankl (Man’s Search For Meaning)

Prologue:

There is a saying in the Japanese ‘way of the bow’ or Kyudo: ‘one who aims at the target hits themselves.’¹ The same admonition was expressed by ‘O Sensei’ Morehei Ueshiba, the founder of Aikido (the self-defense ‘Art Of Peace’) to his students: “I’m not teaching you how to move your feet; I’m teaching you how to move your mind!” (Ueshiba, Morehei; Stevens, John, trans & ed, 2002)

These teachings reveal an ethos that runs universal throughout Eastern thought: that technique or practice is in service to the cultivation of higher aims, path or Do is ultimately about spiritual realization through cultivation of self, where one is ultimately guided towards harmonized relations between self and the entire life sphere and ecology of living (Nakagawa, 2000). In Tibetan Buddhist discourse this is laid out as the ‘three fold logic’ of ground (emptiness or sunyata), path (mindful awareness practice), and fruition (egolessness, wisdom or prajna, compassion or karuna). (Trungpa, Chogyam; Lief, Judith L., ed.; 2013)

¹ As kyudo master Kanjuro Shibata Sensei XXI (a 20th generation bow maker) explains: "Kyudo is meditation. The main point of kyudo practice is to polish your heart, deeply. When someone hits the target, you can sometimes see happiness. In kyudo, you cut this happiness. That’s merely the enjoyment of ego. Whether you hit the target or not, whether you have a beautiful form or not, is not the true measure of your practice. In kendo, karate, judo, all these forms of fighting training, victory comes from cutting someone else. Kyudo is completely different. You cut yourself, your own ego. In this way, we can begin to create a peaceful world. We can make a big international Wa, a circle of peace the whole world over. That is victory!" (source: http://ny.shambhala.org/program-details/?id=52169)
Despite its outward appearance as a martial (combative) art that seeks to destroy or subdue an opponent, Aikido seeks resolution, a blending-with (though not merging-with) intention to restore respectful space and relational autonomy. As a practice that focuses on cultivation of self towards enlightenment, Aikido approaches conflict resolution as an Art rather than combative training, in the sense that “the art of the Master is no longer separated from her or his everyday living...living itself becomes an art” (Nakagawa, 2000, p204).

In Western philosophy, a similar moral (virtue) and ethical orientation is rooted in Aristotelian praxis, the notion of being guided beyond mere techne (craft) or poesis (production or making) to phronesis or ‘practical wisdom.’ Praxis is thus ‘informed action,’ infused with all the attendant focus on virtue, the ‘good’ and eudaimonia (virtuous individualized happiness within a collectively-minded virtuous civil society).

Where East and West depart, however, is in the drift away from Aristotelian ethics towards Western epistemology’s preoccupation with rationalism and empiricism. The need to ‘solve’ the ontological and phenomenological puzzle of intersubjectivity, for example, continues to drive theoretical debate from philosophy to cognitive science. As we shall see, in Eastern thought, the preoccupation with theoretical and

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2 Aikido was indeed the fruition of a personal integrative and reflective spiritual journey for Ueshiba. The art as we know it was born not exclusively from technical innovation or refinement; rather, it emerged from an epiphany of non-resistance and non-separation or interdependence with all of existence. After a brief challenge by a naval officer student, where Ueshiba—unarmed—deftly anticipated and evaded the challenger’s bokken (wooden sword) attacks, he expressed being overcome by a radiant realization in protecting both himself, and his attacker, from harm:

“...the source of Budo is God’s love — the spirit of loving protection for all beings ... Budo is not the felling of an opponent by force; nor is it a tool to lead the world to destruction with arms. True Budo is to accept the spirit of the universe, keep the peace of the world, correctly produce, protect and cultivate all beings in nature.” (Ueshiba, Kisshomaru, 1985)
philosophical Truths that can be universally determined and applied is supplanted by a more ethical and pragmatic focus on the achievability by individuals of cultivating awareness, and of transcending self-Other dualism in favour of interdependent relationships. (Yuasa, 1987; Ames, Kasulis & Dissanayake, eds., 1992). This might be most readily recognized in the ‘two truths’ theory of ‘middle-way’ of Madhyyamaka Buddhism of 2nd century BC Indian philosopher Nagarjuna, which posits a dialectical tension between relative and absolute Truth (in relation to the elusive empirical—or imperial--Truth of western rationalism). In other words, our existential and experiential understanding and way of living can be seen as the liminal space within the dialectical tension between what is and is workably knowable. In this sense, our relationship with the phenomenal world is less fraught with seeking to determine ultimate Knowing and Being, and moves more towards an ethical and empathic concern for what Buddhist teacher Thich Na Hanh calls “interbeing.” (Thich Nhat Hahn, 1998)

While both East and West can each fall into theoretical extremes of subjectivism-objectivism, the goal here is to find common ground through praxis. In the West, we find this liminal or neutral ‘ground’ of intersubjectivity in Merleau-Ponty’s entre-deux, Buber’s I-Thou; in the East, the ‘middle-way’ of Buddhist phenomenology and practice.

What might it mean, as Paulo Freire (1970, 2013) suggests, for us to transform education into a “vocation of becoming fully human,” and as such, have it exemplify ‘interrelationality’ from a shared value approach of Eastern and Western ethics? How might aligning with this social and pragmatic endeavour reflect for pedagogy--not only epistemologically, but humanistically—a return to what Aristotle laid out as the path towards virtuous, just and good society, towards individual and collective true happiness. It is practical here, then, to see common ground in Western and Eastern praxis: the Aristotelian path towards eudaimonia and Eastern enlightenment as sharing the goal towards ethical action and enlightened society.
Education As Revolution

As O’Byrne suggests, via examination of praxis (Arendt; Derridas) indeed, “the aim of education is to teach revolution,” (O’Byrne, 2005, p. 408) For Arendt, the professor stands in a liminal space between the protected vita contemplativa 3 of intellectual life, and public engagement. Derridas, O’Byrne points out, goes further, suggesting that in response to worldly crisis, the professor is a “scholar and educator and actor.” (O’Byrne, 2005) Either through an Eastern or Western lens on praxis, what holds, as we shall see, is that an educator is a priori a human being in motion, in feeling-space, with other relational knower-beings. As such, as an Eastern philosophical approach (and thus situated in how enlightenment might be achievable), the suggestion is that Aikido offers insight into a generally applicable way of knowing-being (rather, interbeing) beyond intersubjectivity through interdependence, in ethically informed and relational action: praxis.

In its highest form, Aikido is expressed through what the founder called takemusu aiki, the spontaneously flowing harmonization with all living beings, which ultimately left Aikido with no formal technique.

“A human being is a mirror of the cosmos. A human being is where the universal drama is being played out...The entire body of a human being is breath, a cosmic breath that seeks to transform this world.” (Ueshiba, Moriehei; Takahashi, Ideo, ed.; Stevens, John, trans., 2013, p. 67)

This paper proposes two functions: first as a kind of Aikido exercise in reconciling and harmonizing otherwise disparate theoretical and ethical perspectives of the Eastern and Western worldviews. That is, where both world-views might get mired in subjectivist and objectivist extremes of philosophy or phenomenology, what might it mean to regard pedagogy as an ethically-driven praxis of self-development,

3 Referring here to Arendt’s investigation of vita activa (life of work/action in The Human Condition, contrasted with her later critique of the vita contemplative (thinking, willing, judging).

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arendt/
towards the protection and liberation of all forms of life, one grounded in embodied intersubjective relational awareness?

Secondly, how is Aikido (in which the author has had a lifelong practice), a case study in practice towards embodied intersubjectivity? Bridging these two questions proposes to situate Aikido as a generalizable praxis of non-violence, if not a universal one, and thus invaluable as an Art of cultivated relational awareness for educators.

The bold invitation here is to explore through Aikido how pedagogy itself can be freed from a rationalist, instrumentalist approach, to one embracing a relational and emancipatory intersubjectivity of praxis.

**Warriorship: The Tender Fearless Heart**

What do we mean by ‘warriorship’ as it might apply to educators? Within the Buddhist tradition, enlightenment is expressed as *bodhicitta*, which is translated as ‘awakened mind,’ and as is applied here, more accurately as ‘awakened heart.’ The word *courage*, in fact, is rooted in the French word for ‘heart,’ *Coeur*, thus connoting not strict bravado or bravery, but to ‘be of heart.’ Tibetan Buddhist teacher Chogyam Trungpa describes this kind of awakening as ‘letting go of the fear of who we really are.’ One first connects with their own sadness, isolation and suffering to develop compassion then, “for the warrior, this experience of sad and tender heart is what gives to fearlessness...we are not talking about street-fighter level of fearlessness. Real fearlessness is the product of tenderness.” (Trungpa, and Lief;1988 p. 46) He goes on: “discovering fearlessness comes from working with the softness of the human heart.” (ibid, p 49)

**East Meets West: Spiritual Cultivation As Praxis**
What is being put forward in the context of this paper is that the Japanese art of Aikido, rather than being seen strictly as an intrinsically spiritual or metaphysical practice true to its shinto origins—nor certainly not limited to being a methodological practice of self-defense techniques (techne), offers a metaphorical and experiential model for praxis. Here, praxis is situated in Aikido in the aforementioned sense: as grounded in dialogic, tensional, ethical, embodied intersubjective interaction. As close as theories of intersubjectivity according to the entre-deux of Merleau-Ponty, or Levinas’ primacy of Other can take us, they reach their limit in terms of guiding us in ethical action. As Chinnery (2003) states, as helpful as a phenomenological theory of intersubjectivity is for educators, “the discussion inevitably comes round to the question, ‘So what do we do on Monday morning?’ – and, indeed, one of the biggest stumbling blocks in trying to get to grips with Levinas’s thought is that he offers no practical advice, no straightforward answers or prescriptions for practice.” (p. 5)

Aikido, while conventionally regarded as an art of tactical self-defense, is a dynamic, relational, and experiential model of contemplative awareness-in-action. It thusly offers practitioners across all walks of life a distinctly sophisticated and adaptive approach to cultivating self-actualization in daily life through embodied practice of non-resistance to conflict, developed reflexively and progressively through more emergent and nonreactive human responsiveness.

The proposition here is that Aikido represents a second-person model for intersubjectivity and interrelationality for contemplative education, and thus daily life. As regards second-person intersubjectivity, which presents an ‘inter-space’ between strictly first-person (constructed Self) or third person (constructed Other), Yuasa commenting on Tetsuro, asks: “What does it mean to exist in betweenness

As Gunnlaugson (2009) defines it: “second-person approaches to contemplative education involve exploring contemplative experience from an intersubjective position that is represented spatially as between us, in contrast to inside us (subjective position) or outside us (objective position).”
What Yuasa is addressing here is not merely a phenomenological problem, but a *methodological*, even ethical one.

The current trend towards adapting and integrating practices of mindfulness-based awareness within professional, educational and corporate settings has attracted pointed criticism for a bias towards inherent instrumentalist aims; that is, how mindfulness-awareness approaches can be applied within institutions to— inadvertently or deliberately—lead students, educators or workers to adapt to otherwise unsustainably stressful, unjust or unsafe conditions or structures of hierarchical alienation, competition, exclusion or compliance.6

In an increasingly complex and competitive world, what is required to move beyond mindfulness-based practices that risk abetting socially constructed patterns of materialism, exploitation, privilege or narcissistic self-absorption are approaches that are more collaborative, dialogic and relational. Cultivation of ‘inner’ traits of introspection, emotional labeling and self-regulation, stress reduction and so forth—while highly beneficial as interventions against self-harm or one’s own outward reactivity—don’t necessarily engage and shift the *relational* aspect of conflict or imbalances of power.

Freire (2000) says much of the same about pedagogy having become assimilated into supporting hegemonic power:

> “Functionally, oppression is domesticating. To be no longer prey to it’s force, one must emerge from it and turn on it. This can be done only by means of praxis; reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.” p.51

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5 Yasua guides us here that the Japanese term “between” (aida) connotes a physical sense of space, ‘between a thing and a thing,’ such that our “betweeness” implies our existence in a definite, spatial basho (place, *topos*, field). “Naturally,” he says this *basho* is not a position in a neutralized, physical space that obliterates any human significance; rather, it is the life-*basho* in which we find the interconnected meanings of the life-world.” (Yuasa, 1987, p38)

6 http://www.salon.com/2015/09/27/corporate_mindfulness_is_bullsht_zen_or_no_zen_youre_working_harder_and_being_paid_less/ and http://www.buddhistpeacefellowship.org/white-privilege-the-mindfulness-movement/?blm_aid=6718486
Though deeply rooted in metaphysical underpinnings (namely, the animism of Shinto, or kannagara no michi: “the continuous way of the gods”), Aikido is most outwardly seen in its expression by founder Morihei Ueshiba via the principles of Budo, or classical Samurai warriorship, the credo of which is--far from righteous or destructive conquest--the “loving protection of all living things.” Thus, Aikido can be simply understood as the cultivation of self through purification (misogi) from one’s inner aggression (victory as “victory over one’s own aggression”), towards an embodied spirit and presence of interdependence and compassion. As such, it holds much in common regarding enlightened conduct and ‘right living’ through the so-called eight-fold noble path laid out in Siddhartha Gautama’s initial teachings.

How then, does this relate to a contemplative awareness-in-action as regards intersubjectivity? Notwithstanding the deeply rooted spiritual or metaphysical essence of Ueshiba’s teachings of the ‘way’ of Aikido (e.g. tenchi, Aikido as bridging “heaven and earth,” the “divine and the manifest,” or as in Buddhism, “relative and absolute” existence) much can be drawn from the phenomenological and practical approach of resolving conflict through Aikido as the harmonization of the intra-psychic and inter-psychic in the face of real or perceived threatening encounter of Other. In the context of Buddhist contemplative practice of mindful meditation, meta-awareness of one’s reactivity leads to naturally arising wisdom (prajna) or ‘discriminating awareness’ and ‘skillful means’ (upaya) (Wallace, 2001) In the seamless blending of one’s movement with an oncoming attacker, the power, intent and ultimate completion of the aggression are neutralized in a spirit of protection of both nage (defender) and uke (attacker). This harmonization of opposites is expressed in Aikido as misubi; the timing as de-ai; and the proper spacing as ma-ai—relative distance, or “the joining of space, the harmony of emptiness.” (Saotome, 2013)

Aikido thus represents a praxis or path moving beyond mere conflict resolution to one of harmony through nondual awareness, and ultimately with nondual ‘pure
being.’ (Deutsch, Eliot, and Ronald Bontekoe, eds; 1997) As such, it offers invaluable insight and both metaphorical and experiential learning that can be adapted to other pedagogical practices towards fostering understanding and methodologies based on interdependence and cooperation.

A New World: From Irrelationality To Interdependence

The great *Axial Age*, as Karl Jaspers\(^7\), suggests, saw an unprecedented awakening regarding the relationship between individual awareness and enlightened society. However, as several have suggested (Clarke, 2015; Kasulis, ed., Ames, Dissanayake, 1992; Shotter, 2015; Yuasa, 1987) the Axial Age demarcated a subsequent departure from what could be called a more holistic view of *knowing, doing and being* (i.e. epistemology, methodology, ontology) that also delineated classical West from East approaches to the same. The former moved away from a paradigm begun in Socrates and Plato rooted in what could be boldly stated as *soteriological* concerns, to one more driven by empirical rationalism and objectivism, while the other continued to adapt and develop according to its foundations in a non-dualistic ontical worldview.

Clarke (2015)\(^8\), among others (Kuhn, 1962; White, 2013), holds that the tilt from holistic and *relational* ways of ‘knowing, doing and being’ toward the *propositional* Cartesian modes of rationalism and empirical objectivism as epistemology and ontology has dehumanized our world. This is not to suggest, as Clarke emphasizes, a clarion call to revert to romanticized ideals or metaphysics.

\(^7\) In his 1949 book *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (The Origin and Goal of History, Jaspers explores the what he considered an empirical historical “pivotal age” between 8\(^{th}\) and 3\(^{rd}\) BCE in the development of philosophy and later epistemological and ontological thinkers.

\(^8\) Clarke’s recent book *Knowing, Doing & Being* focuses on cognition, intersubjectivity and consciousness via neuroscience and quantum physics, through a historical philosophical and epistemological lens.
Clarke (2015) frames this historical and cultural diversion as the move (Western) towards emphasis on *propositional* knowing, away from (Eastern) *relational* knowing. The distinction between the two highlights, as Clarke and others (Kasulis et al, 1992) suggest, a sharp embarkation from concerns over what fundamentally and universally *is*, to what *functionally* *is*. Practically speaking, this orients the Western scientific *propositional* approach to focus on what can be empirically proven via *theory*, where the Eastern view suggests what is of more ubiquitous relevance concerns what can be known through *experience*. Where Western academic assertions relent from epistemological or ontological certainties due to subjective and unverifiable *individualized* experience, Eastern approaches *begin*; *knowing* and *being* are experiential, ontic and interdependent on the individual level (Kitano, in Yuasa, 1987)--where subject-object conundrum is suspended (Watts, 1961)-- and thus both accessible *and* empirical.

One may naturally counter then, has Western phenomenology not already extensively addressed intersubjectivity (i.e. Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas) to guide us to more humane approaches of social and ecological interrelation? As Chinnery (2003) argues, while Western phenomenology brings us closer to escaping the theoretical circularity that limits the subjective-objective conundrum of Western empirical investigation (e.g. the “mind/body problem”), it remains largely still *propositional*. Here she draws on Levinas’ primacy of ‘Other’ as a theoretical context in which to explore his ‘aesthetics of surrender’ through jazz improvisation. As a practical example, jazz improv offers a model to educators for creative, interactive, cooperative, collaborative and spontaneous *relational action*, through strategies and principles of practical, emergent, situational and humanized dialogic praxis. Jazz musicians who improvise are in *conversation*, in dialogue, in *play*. They are attuned and sensitized to a reciprocal and emergent arising of *possibility*.

Chinnery (2003) and Clarke (2015) situate a more human and relational form of intersubjectivity through *praxis*. Continuing from Aristotle’s vision of action-as-practical-wisdom allows us to evade the ontological subject-object circularity of
Western logic, moving into what Stewart & Zedicker (2000) frame as “dialogue as
tensional, ethical practice.”

As Kasulis, Ames & Dissanayake (1992) assert, this points to a vital and practical
contrast between Western and Eastern philosophical and epistemological
worldviews. Where Western inquiry turns in on itself with the indeterminable
‘mind-body’ problem, (where individual experience is inherently subjective, and
thus ‘unknowable’ as empirical Truth), Eastern traditions focus on mind-body as a
practical concern and, more significantly, as accomplishment. In other words, what
cannot be empirically validated via a rationalist Western approach (e.g., as universal
and constant for all individuals) is rather approached by Eastern traditions as
pragmatic: the mind/body is not a theoretical conundrum to solve but a individually,
empirically knowable and soteriologically practical endeavour guided by
psychosocial wellbeing, and mind-body, self-other transcendence (enlightenment).

How then do we proceed, returning to education as a social venture and Freire’s
“vocation of becoming fully human”? How and why is this relevant and applicable to
the modern educator and pedagogy itself? As Clarke (2015) suggests, what is
required is a recalibration, a return to “flow” between the propositional and
relational modes of knowing, doing and being. Clearly, this position raises several
philosophical questions. Does Western phenomenology, for example, not satisfy the
equalizing of the relational? What Chinnery (2003), and Rosch, Thompson & Varela
(1991) contend is that, while phenomenological inquiry brings us to a more
relational kind of intersubjectivity, it reaches its limits as “philosophy as theoretical
reflection.” (Rosch et al, p20)

**From Propositional To Embodied Knowing**

“A phenomenologically inclined cognitive scientist,” state Rosch et al, “reflecting on
the origins of cognition might reason thus: Minds awaken in a world....We reflect on
a world that is not made, but found, and yet it is also our structure that enables us to reflect upon this world (Ibid, p3). While Merleau-Ponty’s *entre-deux* or “middle way” opens up a ‘space’ in this circularity—between “a world that seems to be there before reflection begins...but that is not separate from us,” (ibid), and thus a space between self/world, inner/outer, Merleau-Ponty still runs up against the limitation of positioning science as “primarily unreflective” in that it “naively presupposed mind and consciousness.” Rather, they suggest (while still invoking Merleau-Ponty) the idea of *embodiment* (knowledge, cognition, experience), where embodiment has a ‘double-sense’: “…as a lived, experiential structure, and the body as the context or milieu of cognitive mechanisms (p. XVI). Further, they propose the word *enactive* in relation to cognition as both phenomenal and experiential, such that cognition “is not the representation of a pregiven world by a pregiven mind but is rather the enactment of a world and mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs (p. 9)

One can, particularly in Western scientific traditions, be given to extreme positions regarding cognition, science and ontology, where one polarity posits the Cartesian model of the disembodied mind that dispassionately observes the objective world; the other presents an almost exclusive subjectivism—that the world is merely constructed from perception alone, such as in the indeterminacy principle in quantum mechanics. (ibid)

The Buddhist “middle way” out of extremes or this “fundamental circularity” (Rosch et al, 1991) is represented in the Madhiyamaka tradition of Nagarjuna, which rejected the extremes of theism and nihilism. It is on this mutually shared premise of “middle way” that this paper presents a bridge between East and West as it concerns *praxis*. Western Phenomenology’s *theoretical* reflective aims towards determining an ontology of being, and in the East, Buddhism’s experiential prescription for abandoning the myth of a unified Self identity (and thus, some fixed separate ontological reality) find a shared purpose in exploring the relational. In attempting to study the immediacy of human experience *after the fact* through
theoretical reflection, Merleau-Ponty suggests, “it could not recapture the richness of that experience; it could only be a discourse about that experience (in Rosch et al, 1991). Rosch et al point out that Merleau-Ponty himself admittedly suggested that “his task was infinite.”

Thus, the recognition within cognitive theory of something approaching non-dual experience in the recursive liminality between—and inclusiveness of—cognizer and cognition., and Levinas’ ‘primacy of Other’ brings us closer to a more workable intersubjectivity (that is, one not completely undermined by the so-called mind/brain or subject/object problem). The recognition here is that we are intrinsically relational beings. “The world has made us,” as John Shotter (2015) says, referring to Miller Mair, “...we are of the world in that we only know of ourselves in relation to it.” (p. 1) Bringing beingness and relationality more into manifest form in this sense, Merleau-Ponty (1964, p. 93, in Shotter 2015) writes: “...my body [is] a spontaneity which teaches me what I could not know in any other way except through it.”

Shotter elaborates (2015) further on the distinction between the “Cartesian, geometrical or calculational forms of thought, and Wittgensteinian or poetical forms.” The former, says Shotter, commits people to a specific framework or theoretical position corresponding with reality. Conversely, the latter represents a kind of discourse or dialogue in which people make comparisons, “enabling them to sense both differences, as well as similarities.” (Ibid, p. 2). Here Shotter references Wittgenstein’s (1953) “language-game” and “forms of life” as internalized inquiries which can be “made clear poetically or metaphorically as required,” from which we “begin to deal with meanings...that can ‘move’ us in our very being-in-the-world.” (p2) This is crucially important in terms of how we engage the world, or rather, from what schema we engage the world. The Cartesian mode Shotter (2010; in 2015) refers to as “aboutness-thinking” from which “instead of focusing on the actual situation within which we are immersed, we turn away from it, and begin to think about it in already adopted, general terms.” (2015, p.3) The contrast, says Shotter,
approaches the task of “de-mechanizing and re-humanizing all our human practices...is to explore unique possibilities, relevant to this person, in this place, in this time, not to establish general, timeless facts. (p. 4; his emphasis) This is precisely, as he puts it “in relational rather than absolute terms.” (p. 5)

Nishida (in Yuasa; 1987) takes us further through his concept of “topos” or “bansho” (Japanese) as a “field of consciousness” inclusive of the cognizer and cognition. Nishida folds into an otherwise Western phenomenological approach the non-dualistic concept of Zen Buddhism as intersubjectivity, where ‘other’ (or any object of consciousness) becomes interdependent to our knowing/being within the field of consciousness. Much like Levinas then, my supposition here is that we are ‘called into being’ by the Other, since our knowable field of consciousness is inextricably relational.

The Contemplative Approach: Mind/Body Unity

In psychosocial terms—even existential—the internal struggle of the human being is between a biologically driven imperative for continued survival, and a psychological awareness of finitude; between striving and impermanence. Much psychoanalytic and Buddhist psychological discourse is attributed to the alienation of the idea of a “skin-encapsulated ego” separated from others and independent of the world—indeed, in isolated competition with it. (Watts, 1961). Hence, Watts sees (Western) psychotherapy and Buddhist contemplative practice as having the shared purpose of liberation. While it can be argued that these endeavours are inherently soteriological, thus setting them apart from objective, empirically-based science, Kapstein (Deutsch and Bontekoe, eds., 1997), writing about Buddhism discourses on ‘two truths’ theory (relative and absolute existence; conventional and ultimate truth) as it relates to sunyata (emptiness: ‘form is emptiness, emptiness is form,’ from the Buddhist Heart Sutra), suggests that all epistemology faces something of a two truths ‘dialectic,’ insomuch as: “we find ourselves confronted with the apparent dichotomy between the truth as we think we know it, and the possibility of
discovering that that cannot be the truth in fact.” This suggests, he says, that: “every science can be said to have its own soteriology.” (p.431)

**Praxis As ‘Way’ vs. Means:**

What does it mean then, to live through praxis, to see it as a new phenomenological engagement, embodiment and enactment from a cognitive phenomenological approach (Rosch et al, 1991), influenced by the Eastern concept of “oneness of body-mind” (shinjin ichinyo), first espoused by Japanese Zen master Esai (Yuasa, p28). Unification of mind and body does not mean in Eastern traditions that the two are inseparable, as Yuasa writes, but that “they ought to be inseparable as an ideal” such that the “‘oneness of body-mind’ means that when the dualistic and ambiguous tension in the relationship between the mind and the body is dissolved, and the ambiguity overcome, a new perspective—what may be called the disclosed horizon (Offenheit)—will come into view.

For our purposes here, Aikido represents the relational praxis of encountering the liminal space, the entre-deux that breaks the theoretical circularity of inner/outer, self/world—where we contact the ‘disclosed horizon’ in the emergence of Other as primacy (Levinas). Here, our ‘oneness of body-mind,’ our shinjin ichinyo takes on a praxis-as-primary, where our own resolution of mind-body duality is relationally cultivated through partner training, and spatial, embodied discourse.

**Why is practice important for an educator?**

Again, contemplative Eastern traditions such as Buddhism establish enlightenment (e.g. bodhicitta, or ‘awakened heart’) not as an empirically knowable ultimate Truth, but as an accomplishable goal; one that is identified and cultivated through experiential path--knowing, doing and being. A contemplative or “oneness of body-mind” practice (Aikido, yoga) will undoubtedly lead one to contact their habitual patterns of embodied emotions, thought and (re)action. Buddhist discourse
describes such psychosocial patterns as *conditioning*. Thus, to practice is to put one in contact with one’s *conditional* nature, providing opportunity for reconditioning, and thus to re-*enact* (Rosch et al), re-engage, repotentiate and reinhabit the life-space of the world, as a fully present interrelational being.

As Yuasa, in his chapter on Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsuro, asks: “What does it mean to exist in betweenness (*aidagara*)? What Yuasa is addressing here is not merely a phenomenological problem, but a *methodological* one. “If a characteristic of Eastern thought is that a lived experience of cultivation is the methodological route to enlightenment,” he asks rhetorically, “...this means that the very character of the dualistic mode in the relationship between the mind and body will gradually change through the process of cultivation.” (p.28) This passage describes the very essence of contemplative practice in Buddhism—to dissolve the illusion of substantive ego-Self through the phenomenal meta-awareness of observing and indentifying discursive thought and self-generative narrative as ‘I’ as flow of mental activity.

Where this represents cultivation at the *personal* level of practice, how then can we view Aikido as ‘do’ or path to cultivation through *relational* practice? How does one find reconciliation between the dualistic Self (*relative* truth, in two truths theory) and the egoless Self (*absolute* truth) *beyond* dialectical reflection, through *embodied* and *enacted* engagement with Other—in the ‘betweeness’ (*aidagara*) of spatial-*basho*? To follow is an explication of Aikido as the experiential, practical path of ‘harmonization’ of this (conditional) dualistic split.

Aikido, as explained earlier, is a Japanese defensive art developed by founder Morehei Ueshiba (b. 1883, d 1969). From its *Shinto* spiritual underpinnings, Aikido integrates many other martial forms, such as *jiujutsu, kenjutsu* (sword), comprising

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9 Yasua guides us here that the Japanese term “between” (aida) connotes a physical sense of space, ‘between a thing and a thing,’ such that our “betweenness” implies our existence in a definite, spatial *basho* (place, *topos*, field). “Naturally,” he says this *basho* is not a position in a neutralized, physical space that obliterates any human significance; rather, it is the life-*basho* in which we find the interconnected meanings of the life-world.” (Yuasa, 1987, p38)
a modern form of budo or warriorship. However, in it’s most popularized and widely adapted form, Aikido as we know it represents the culmination of spiritual awakening of the founder through his own experience, as told through the story in the prologue of this paper regarding his epiphany about non-dual existence, non-resistance, and the realization of “I am the Universe!”

The word aikido is self-revealing and descriptive. AI can be translated as ‘harmony’ or ‘to blend'; ‘KI’ represents life force, the Universe itself, or ‘universal love;’ DO means ‘way’ or ‘path.’ Seen as a living expression of the budo principle of ‘loving protection of all beings,’ Aikido represents a way of harmonizing oneself with all of creation; the cultivation/purification of oneself as to live in non-resistant interdependence with all living beings. Much like satori or enlightenment achieved in Zen meditation, where one’s ‘bare attention’ leads to the ‘pure being’ Nishida describes, Aikido involves a kind of ‘stripping away’ of the preconceptions of self/Other separation, of Self-defense, and provides a spiritual approach that suffuses the partner training with an ethos of mutual liberation, interdependence, and flowing intersubjectivity. Beyond any anachronistic setting in budo and samurai culture, Aikido is a thoroughly modern art that indeed emerged in its full form after the destruction suffered by Japan in WWII. Designated, when the founder described it as the ‘Art Of Peace.’ Aikido itself was borne of founder Morehei Ueshiba’s (b. 1883, d 1969) spiritual epiphany through not only mind-body unification, but also mind-cosmos unification: “I am the Universe!”

The training exercises in Aikido, while ultimately comprising infinitely variable and adaptable techniques for unarmed self-defense, provide a simulation of conflict

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10 This, following a challenge Ueshiba accepted, unarmed, from a naval officer student who attacked him with a wooden sword. Ueshiba’s famous epithet arose from his ability to effortlessly evade his attacker while simultaneously protecting him from harm—arising from an embodied non-duality with the flow of nature, the Universe, both conceptually and physically.

11 Aikido movements revolve around two general principles: in tenkan, one enters into the centre of an attack (in the attacker’s ‘place,’ accelerating the centrifugal or centripetal force; in irimi, the nage
through which the defender (*nage*) can learn to calmly, lightly, in perfect timing and stable posture, gain control of attacker (*uke*). *Ki development* in Aikido training (advanced by Koichi Tohei) uses mind-body coordination principles and exercises as a way of helping students grasp and cultivate the same kind of calm, stable and determined *states* of readiness, movement and effortless flow as the founder (*ones he was unable, through lack of pedagogical sophistication, to make explicit*). Partners team up through physical contact exercises of self-defense not to simply learn body-mechanics to overpower an opponent seen in Judo, Karate or similar martial arts, but to develop acuity of awareness of the aforementioned energy-field

or defender enters into the attack, redirecting *uke*'s force to cause them to turn. In either general counter-movement from the *nage*, the *uke* is—by the nature of his continued attack—forced to make *ukemi*: escape. In essence, this ultimately confronts *uke* with their own aggression. In its most advanced form, suggested Ueshiba, the attack is 'over before it begins.' Thus exists the axiom about Aikido that it is “winning without fighting.”

12 Koichi Tohei (b.1920–d.2011) was an early student of the founder, eventually becoming chief instructor and the first awarded the highest rank of 10th Dan. Tohei keenly observed that while many students were emulating the founders' movements, they were incapable of throwing and controlling their *ukes* with the same effortlessness. Ueshiba, it seems, was unable to transmit in a cohesive, accessible way, the deeply embodied esoteric spiritual principles--coupled with years of rigorous and highly integrated martial training—through a singular pedagogy. After the war, Tohei studied the principles of mind-body coordination of yoga-influenced teacher Tenpu Nakamura. He was soon to discern from Tenpu's approach that what Aikido students were unable to replicate from Ueshiba's movements (and what Ueshiba was unable—or unwilling—to explicate) was the founder's powerful *feeling*: his *Ki*.

In other words, what made the Ueshiba the embodiment of his own art, was his exquisitely tuned flow-state of mind-body unification, his capacity to move freely and in totally harmonized timing with an attack—in essence, to defeat the attack before it arose. After the founder’s death in 1969, Tohei began to adapt Ki Development into Aikido training, using mind-body coordination principles and exercises as a way of helping students grasp and cultivate the same kind of calm, stable and determined state of readiness and flow as the founder.

Tohei’s insights brought forward universal principles of mind-body coordination that could be studied and experientially embodied through training. He called this approach ‘Ki in daily life.’ (Tohei, 1980)
(Ki) within which the contact occurs. This goes beyond mere proprioception of one’s singular subjective movement and agency, to *inter*-subjective awareness and a *metaperception* of the field itself, indistinct from the *uke* and *nage* within it. In this sense, this ‘ki development,’ of sensing, joining and being inseparable-from Ki (universe; wholeness) is akin to Bohm’s idea of the implicate and explicate order—both are inextricably *enfolded*, or more accurately, (quantum) *entangled*. Ueshiba defined this dynamic as Love. For our purposes, we can recognize it as moving from *conceptual* intersubjectivity, to *engaged* and embodied intersubjectivity.
Listed below are the two sets of Ki Development and Ki Aikido principles.

**Four Principles Of Mind-body Coordination**
1) Think Of Your One Point
2) Completely Relax
3) Have a Light Posture
4) Extend Your Mind

**Five Principles of Mind-Body Coordination In Aikido**
1) Extend Your Mind.
2) Know your partner's mind.
3) Respect your partner's Ki.
4) Put yourself in your partner’s place.
5) Perform with confidence.

The first set of principles give students a method for effectively observing the nature of their mind manifest through their body state as regards stability, calmness and relaxation, while being tested for balance or reaction by their partner. For example, by thinking of one’s virtual centre at their abdomen, the ‘one-point,’ the mind and body align in a natural way to become ‘immovable’ *(fudoshin)*. Similarly, with these principles in place as embodied awareness and state-based calmness and relaxed movement, practitioners can engage in Aikido exercises in motion—attack and defense—with the relational aspects of Other (e.g. ‘respect your partner’s Ki’) as a means of blending or harmonizing their movement with the attack. In doing so, *aikidoka*[^15] are thus engaged in a kind of *co-phenomenology* and shared meta-awareness of dynamics that transcend dualism—that a lived experience of inseparability from the Ki field is not just *(basho)* field-consciousness shifting, but brings to fruition and a felt-sense the “oneness of body-mind” referred to in Zen training.

Through these explicit training and mind-body coordination principles, Tohei was able to introduce a more practical and explicit pedagogy for Aikido students to

[^15]: Those who train in Aikido
engage in *shugyo* without the singularly martial rigorous emphasized elsewhere, thus making it more accessible for all practitioners for integration into daily life.

While the *physicality* of Aikido training was made more adaptable by Tohei’s Ki development approach, the martial *spirit* at the centre of the art remained intact and emphasized. What is expressed here is the experience of *shugyo* as the enhancement of a student’s increased capacity for presence: *tada ima* (“only now...there is only this moment;” Saotome, 1993, p. 162) or *ichi go ichi e*, “one life, one meeting.” (Ibid-p. 173). Thus, *budo* training is not so much about preparation for the destruction of war, but the preservation of life, and the fearlessness of one’s indomitable spirit in engaging the liminality of life and death in any encounter. In the martial context of such a liminal (and martial) encounter, it is the calmness and concentration, the lack of opening (*tsuki*) in one’s Ki or any such “spiritual separation” that can leave one vulnerable to injury, attack or death. This liminality, as such, can be seen in the expression *sei shi ichi ryo*: “life and death are one.” (Ibid, p.165) Saotome writes:

“Standing on the edge of life and death, you cannot make a lie. Standing on the edge of life and death, your physical and your spiritual vibration can only speak the truth, and your deepest self will appear. A master understands this and he awaits an imbalance, an opening in the other’s defense. He surrounds the emptiness, the negative space in which to catch the enemy's spirit and vibration, with his presence.” (p. 169)

At its core then, Aikido is a spiritual path or *DO*, through *shugyo*, of cultivating mind-body coordination (calmness, readiness, relaxation, presence) in an embodied and *felt* sense through partner training, for the continuously lived experience of liminality (life-death; self-Other) in daily life. Training with a partner thus becomes a canvas of relational dynamics, a spiritual exercise in moving from singularity of subjectivity to relationality of intersubjectivity, in that any collision or physical resistance encountered in the techniques becomes a point of contact with one’s own Ego insularity and defense, and thus a point of learning for cultivating non-resistance and joining in and blending with the other.
As such, it can be glimpsed here in its technical and conceptual vastness, of which this paper can only begin to penetrate, notwithstanding as well that it is essentially an experiential practice. In the context of this discussion, Aikido in a sense transcends the ‘knowing, doing and being’ presented by Clarke (2005) to become a knowing-being as path, not methodology or means.

Epilogue: Transformative Pedagogy As Human Interconnectedness

While Western and Eastern philosophy share similar aims in terms of knowing, doing and being, what we have seen is that a preoccupation with an objectivist approach to epistemological and ontological investigation continues to dominate Western philosophical discourse, and can be seen to be in the way of liberating praxis from a still-theoretical consideration, to a pragmatic “tensional and ethical” one (Steward & Zedicker,). This is largely the result of the problematic theoretical circularity encountered in the subject-object split, despite voluminous advances in Phenomenology by Levinas, Buber, Merleau-Ponty and others, one that is seen rather, in Eastern approaches, as a pragmatic and achievable trait and task facilitated through cultivation of the Self: Easai’s “body-mind oneness.” In the principles and training of (Ki) Aikido and Shambhala Buddhism, examined here, one can see a soteriological ethos for enlightenment through ‘peaceful warriorship.’

As it concerns pedagogy, the discussion serves to humanize, as Freire challenges us, educators in their roles not only as pedagogues, but also as human beings tasked with the “tensional, ethical” praxis of leadership. More succinctly, this suggests leadership as exemplifying praxis, by privileging the relational over the instrumental, the humaneness over the objectivist and merely productive (techne). If indeed, as O’Byrne says, the function of pedagogy is to “teach revolution,” then as Freire says:
“A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice co-intentional education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators.” Freire, P 69

While Aikido is not presented here as an idealized or singular path to praxis, it does point the way to knowing-being through intersubjectivity as Do or ‘way,’ through non-violent presencing, interconnectedness, and as Levinas prompts, the primacy of Other.

Aikido thus represents a praxis or path moving beyond mere conflict resolution to one of harmony through nondual awareness and intersubjectivity, and ultimately with nondual ‘pure being’ (Deutsch, Eliot, and Ronald Bontekoe, eds. 1997) As such, it offers invaluable insight and both metaphorical and experiential learning that can be adapted to other pedagogical practices towards fostering understanding and methodologies based on interdependence and cooperation.
References


