

# Philosophy as a Way of Life and the Practice of Martial Arts

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## Introduction: The Practice of the Philosophy of Martial Arts

What is the philosophy of martial arts? To attempt to answer this question from the tradition of European philosophy is to severely limit the field of answers. Since the late eighteenth-century European philosophy has been a discipline more or less exclusively situated in universities and it is not immediately clear how this generally highly abstract and professionalised tradition can usefully engage with the embodied sweat and tumble which is the domain of the fighting arts. It seems likely that the perspective will be external, imposed, and critical rather than illuminating. And of course the practices the contemporary Occident identifies as “the martial arts” have their historical and ideological origins in the Orient; the west’s indigenous martial practices have all but disappeared from view. Given this, if we are to speak of the philosophy of martial arts we must at least extend our definition of philosophy to include oriental philosophy/spirituality. In fact, commonly understood, to speak of the philosophy of martial arts *is* simply to speak of some aspect of oriental philosophy/spirituality, generally some part of the Japanese and/or Chinese traditions of Shinto, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. But this approach is limiting too, though less obviously so. If we presume that the philosophy of martial arts is some subset of oriental spirituality while at the same time presuming that the martial arts (or in any event the true, best, or philosophically interesting ones) are those which are historically or philosophically proximate to some version of oriental spirituality, we have severely reduced the field of answers to our question. Or rather, we have in broad terms *already* answered our question and so have only left open to us investigations into the more or less interesting nuances of a presupposed subject.

In this paper I propose neither to approach the question by presuming philosophy to be a tradition or canon based in the occidental university, nor by presuming the philosophy of martial arts to be based in an already located series of traditions which originate in the Orient. Rather I shall approach the question from the perspective of the practice of the martial or fighting arts themselves. I shall do so with the idea that practices too can be philosophy. The question I will be answering then is this: What are the practices of the philosophies of martial arts? My understanding of philosophy as a practice will rely on the work of Pierre Hadot and his understanding of “philosophy as a way of life,” and on Foucault’s late work on “the care of the self.”

In the first part of this paper I will discuss this understanding of philosophy and establish the conceptual architecture on which this paper will rely. In the second part I will examine two of the major texts of classical *bushidō*, Takuan's *The Unfettered Mind* and Tsunetomo's *Hagakure*. This part will serve to juxtapose Greek and Roman systems of philosophy as Foucault and Hadot read them and *bushidō* systems of remarkably similar content. I will then, thirdly, examine the martial arts as they are practiced in the contemporary Occident. The second and third parts of the paper will then examine in their historical and contemporary situations some particular martial practices and in so doing provide the question of the philosophy of martial arts with a collection of historically specific answers. In doing this I will show, firstly, the historical continuity between the spirituality or *askesis* of Tokugawa *bushidō* and that of the martial arts as practiced in the contemporary occident, and secondly, the historical contingency of the relationship between martial arts and virtue.

There is a widely drawn distinction between the martial arts and “mere” martial techniques and fighting sports; “true” or “high” martial arts are held to have “spiritual or humanistic value” and so are distinguished from those which are “practiced merely for athletic prowess or street-smart fighting.”<sup>1</sup> In the terms of the Japanese martial traditions (on which, for purely practical reasons, this paper will generally focus) a distinction is often made between *jutsu* which is concerned with combat effectiveness, and *budō* which is concerned with spiritual and moral cultivation.<sup>2</sup> Despite warnings that this distinction is highly unstable or arbitrary it remains remarkably persistent, an effect of the double presupposition involved in defining the martial arts in the terms of oriental spirituality while at the same time defining the particular spiritually in terms of the martial practices: any practice which falls outside this predetermined circle is already understood in pejorative terms. And so, to invoke one recent example, though Damon Young encourages us to be wary of “reifying the distinction between martial arts (*budō*) and martial sports (*jutsu*)” his article on “Courtesy, Budō, and Japan” both presumes and concludes that “courtesy is essential to the martial arts at their best.”<sup>3</sup> As will become evident, one effect of this

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<sup>1</sup> John P. Keenan, "Spontaneity in Western Martial Arts: A Yogācāra Critique of Mushin (No-Mind)," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 16, no. 4 (1989): 285.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart McFarlane, "*Mushin*, Morals, and Martial Arts: A Discussion of Keenan's Yogācāra Critique," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 17, no. 4 (1990): 403; Cameron G. Hurst, *Armed Martial Arts of Japan: Swordsmanship and Archery* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), 1-6.

<sup>3</sup> Damon A. Young, "Bowling to Our Enemies: Courtsey, Budō, and Japan," *Philosophy East and West* 59, no. 2188-215 (2009): 188 & 192. The same prejudice is evidenced in most academic works on the martial arts: see for example Keenan, "Spontaneity in Western Martial Arts: A Yogācāra Critique of Mushin (No-Mind)."; McFarlane, "*Mushin*, Morals, and Martial Arts: A Discussion of Keenan's Yogācāra Critique."

approach is to “flatten” martial practices and consider the “high” and the “low” on the same level. I will do this not by showing that there is no distinction between *budō* and *jutsu* – I will continue to use the term *budō* for spiritual cultivation in the “traditional/oriental” mode and *jutsu* to designate forms of fighting technique – but rather by arguing that all forms of martial practice can be understood in terms of spiritual and ethical cultivation. In concluding I will argue that there is a merely contingent relationship between a training in the fighting arts and a training in virtue or morality and that even in the case of the “high” or “best” martial arts there is no reason for one to necessarily determine the other or for the form of spirituality present to in fact be morally estimable. Given this I will conclude by raising the question of whether the martial arts should in fact be practiced as such.

## I The Care of the Self; Philosophy as a Way of Life

Michel Foucault has become a major reference for the humanities and social sciences. This is largely because the thematic development of his *oeuvre* provides something of interest to a broad field of researchers and because his work is always part historical/empirical and part philosophical/theoretical. Foucault provides a broad range of conceptual tools with which to critically or descriptively engage with particular modes of subjectivity as they have been constructed historically and in the contemporary period. This paper will use Foucault’s “late” work, that which is exemplified by the *History of Sexuality* volumes two and three, and which considers systems of care for the self, systems by which the subject aligns himself to truth.<sup>4</sup> Less well known is Pierre Hadot who was a major influence on Foucault particularly in this period. Their work is thematically highly consistent: both Hadot and Foucault studied ancient philosophy and identified in it fundamental differences from philosophy as it has been conceived of in the Occident particularly in the modern period. Where modern philosophy has almost exclusively been a discourse generally located inside the academy, ancient philosophy focused on modes of life. The difference can be illustrated by the Stoic distinction between “*discourse about* philosophy and *philosophy itself*.”<sup>5</sup> Ancient philosophy was “a mode of existing-in-

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<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, vol. 2 (London and New York: Penguin, 1992); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Care of the Self*, vol. 3 (London and New York: Penguin, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford & Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1995), 266.

the-world, which had to be practiced at each instant, and the goal of which was to transform the whole of the individual's life."<sup>6</sup>

In Foucault's terms the foundation of ancient philosophy was the call to take "care of the self"; the relationship one ought to have with oneself is an ethical call: philosophy is the development of an *ēthos*, an individual character which is representative of one's values or beliefs.<sup>7</sup> This relationship with the self is an aesthetics of existence and the practices by which the care is carried out are "arts of existence" or "arts of living."<sup>8</sup> These practices provide the individual with techniques for operations on their own body, soul, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, and so provide ways in which the subject can transform themselves in order to attain a state of happiness, purity, wisdom, or perfection. That is, they are the intentional and voluntary systems of action or exercise by which the individual seeks to transform or create themselves, to make their lives into an *oeuvre* that carries aesthetic or stylistic values.<sup>9</sup> Philosophy is a practice which positions oneself in relation to truth. So understood philosophy is the form of thought that asks "what it is that enables the subject to have access to the truth, and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject's access to the truth."<sup>10</sup> Spirituality in turn is understood as the "search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on [themselves] in order to have access to the truth."<sup>11</sup> Philosophical dialogue is one of the practices by which this is done. But this is only one of a number of practices and its importance ought not to be overemphasised. Hence, the question of truth emerges not in the form of an abstract philosophical/epistemological question but rather in the form: "What is involved in the case of the subject and of the truth?"

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London and New York: The Penguin Press, 1994), 226; Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject : Lectures at the Collège De France, 1981-1982*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005), 2-3; Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London and New York: The Penguin Press, 1994), 263.

<sup>8</sup> Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," 262.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," in *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London and New York: The Penguin Press, 1994), 291; Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," 254-62; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, 10-11; Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, 268.

<sup>10</sup> Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject : Lectures at the Collège De France, 1981-1982*, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

And: What is the relationship of the subject to truth? What is the subject of truth, what is the subject who speaks the truth?"<sup>12</sup>

Foucault classifies the care of the self as having four modes that can be usefully understood to equate to the Greeks' four causes.<sup>13</sup> These form the theoretical architecture of Foucault's "late" work and will be central to the work of this paper. First, systems of care of the self show what is the aspect or part of the self, the "material" or "substance," that is concerned with moral conduct and with truth. Foucault demonstrates that, in a post-Kantian society, intentions constitute the salient aspect of the self; in Christian terms, it is desire; in contemporary society, it is feelings, love of a partner.<sup>14</sup> Second, the "mode" or "formal cause" provides a way in which the subject is incited to recognise their ethical obligations, for example: divine law, natural law, a cosmological order or rational rule, or by an attempt to give your life the most beautiful form possible.<sup>15</sup> Third, the "means" or "efficient cause" by which the subject can become ethical, the work which needs to be performed on the self. This is the self-forming activity of the care, the technologies of the self.<sup>16</sup> Much of the detail of Foucault's and Hadot's scholarly work focuses on particular practices, the technologies of the self themselves and on the varieties of *askesis*, spiritual exercises or disciplines, by which care is undertaken and by which the subject aligns themselves towards truth.<sup>17</sup> The study of the care of the self is then the study of *practices* or spiritual exercises by which philosophy operates as therapeutics, and which organise the subject in a particular way directed towards a particular truth.<sup>18</sup> Fourth, systems of care must show the "final cause" or *telos* that orients the system of care, the kind of being to which the subject aspires when they behave in a moral way, for example, to become pure, free, or masters of themselves.<sup>19</sup>

It is important also to note that the modes by which the self cares for itself are always historically specific. Much of Foucault's "late" work develops Hadot's studies on the historically specific manner by which philosophy has been a way of life.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Sharpe, "'Critique' as Technology of the Self," *Foucault Studies* 2(2005).

<sup>14</sup> Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," 263.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>17</sup> Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject : Lectures at the Collège De France, 1981-1982*, 46; Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, 82.

<sup>18</sup> Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject : Lectures at the Collège De France, 1981-1982*, 333; Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, 87.

<sup>19</sup> Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," 265.

In the first instance, Foucault shows the manner in which ancient philosophy undertook the care for the self by discursive reflection on the virtues and right conduct and their call for the cultivation of such things as wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage.<sup>20</sup> These systems developed into the care for the self as undertaken in the practice of asceticism such as Epicurean, Stoic, and early Christian ascetic practices. These practices included habitual self-reflection in the sense of exercises for committing to memory the things one has learnt.<sup>21</sup> They also included physical training in endurance and abstinence or privation. They included meditation, that is, training in thought alone. And they included training in imaginary and real situations, even if the situations had been artificially induced, for example, exercises in sexual abstinence, physical privation, and other rituals of purification.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the most famous of these practices is the Stoic meditation on death.<sup>23</sup> Foucault also notes the importance of writing as a technology: the taking of notes on oneself in order that they be reread at a later time; the writing of treatises and letters to friends in order to help them in their care of the self; and the keeping of notebooks in order to reactivate for oneself the truths one needed.<sup>24</sup> As the care of the self developed in the early Christian period, there came to be an increased emphasis on care as undertaken by the emergence of a new technology: the self as constituted through obedience, the sacrifice of the self and of the subject's own will, to a master or teacher.<sup>25</sup> This development saw a movement away from the practice of dialogues and towards the increased significance of the pedagogical relationship between the master and the teacher. Silence becomes important and truth is now found not in oneself but in the teachings of masters.<sup>26</sup>

In the following two sections this paper will use the conceptual architecture provided by Foucault to analyse the martial arts in their historical specificity. For Foucault, systems of care of the self are suggested or given to individuals in every civilization though there is no suggestion in Foucault that the *content* of the care is

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<sup>20</sup> Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," 229-230.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 227; Michel Foucault, "The Hermeneutic of the Subject," in *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London and New York: The Penguin Press, 1994), 101.

<sup>22</sup> Michel Foucault, "Self Writing," in *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London and New York: The Penguin Press, 1994), 240.

<sup>23</sup> Foucault, "The Hermeneutic of the Subject," 102-4; Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, 93-101.

<sup>24</sup> Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," 232; Foucault, "Self Writing."

<sup>25</sup> Foucault, "Self Writing," 246.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 235-8.

ahistorical.<sup>27</sup> I will in the next section examine the *askesis* of the martial arts by showing the resemblance between the systems of the care of the self as studied directly by Foucault and Hadot and that of Tokugawa *bushidō*: in terms of content the *askesis* which emerges is in fact remarkably similar. I will then in part three examine the *askesis* of the martial arts as practiced in the contemporary Occident showing both the continued use of *budō* and the incorporation of modern empirical aspects.

## II Tokugawa *Bushidō*

Rather than attempting a broad survey of the history of the martial arts I will instead focus on two particular texts from the Japanese martial tradition. The texts represent the central aspect of a canon which may be taken as emblematic of the practices of classical *bushidō* even if only in a normative and not descriptive sense, and even without claiming that there was one school called “*bushidō*” or that the Tokugawa samurai would have used the term to describe their ethos.<sup>28</sup> Study of these texts is warranted too by their continued influence on contemporary occidental martial arts: this aspect of martial practice will be taken up in the third part of this paper.

What can be understood in contemporary terms to be the Japanese martial arts began in Japan during the Tokugawa period which started in 1603 and continued until the Meiji restoration of 1868. This was a prolonged period of peace where the purely warlike side of the *bushidō* ethic, simple ideas of the warrior, loyalty, honour, courage, martial prowess, and parsimonious living began to be developed into a sophisticated theoretical and practical edifice. As the actual practice of warfare became historically distant the continued survival of martial practices required that they develop a new *raison d'être*.<sup>29</sup> Martial practitioners developed their practices in two complementary ways. First, physicians stressed their recreational and physical fitness aspects.<sup>30</sup> Martial techniques were adapted to become martial “sports” – though it is not quite clear if this modern term is easily applied to the activities of this period in Japanese history – and became professionalised forming major schools. Kata, a series of choreographed and stylised movements practiced either alone or in pairs became (and in many instances remains) the major pedagogical technique for the

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<sup>27</sup> Michel Foucault, "Subjectivity and Truth," in *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London and New York: The Penguin Press, 1994), 87.

<sup>28</sup> Cameron G. Hurst, "Death, Honor, and Loyalty: The Bushidō Ideal," *Philosophy East and West* 40, no. 4 (1990): 515 & 522.

<sup>29</sup> Hurst, *Armed Martial Arts of Japan: Swordsmanship and Archery*, 54.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-6.

training of dangerous techniques.<sup>31</sup> It was also during this period that martial arts began to be practiced for religious or quasi-religious purposes. Combat techniques began to be mixed with Confucian and Neo-Confucian scholasticism, and Buddhist and Taoist philosophic and religious practices. Martial arts began to be practiced in order that the adept discover or develop their innermost self, develop a heightened degree of mental awareness, and even achieve enlightenment in a Zen or Taoist sense.<sup>32</sup>

A series of three short texts, today published under the title *The Unfettered Mind*, clearly shows the merging of martial techniques with that of Zen theory and practice.<sup>33</sup> Written at the beginning of the Tokugawa period by Takuan Sōhō (1573–1645), a Zen monk, calligrapher, painter, and prodigious author, the texts were highly influential for the swordsmen of the Tokugawa period. Takuan shows the fundamental similarity of the mental compoment necessary for effective sword fighting, here meaning the maintenance of an “empty-mind” not fixed on anything, and that of Zen meditation. In the text the influence of the Zen koan is clear as is the Buddhist metaphysic of emptiness.

When the Zen priest at Kamakura, Magaku, was captured during the disturbances in China and was at the point of being cut down, he quoted the *gatha*, “with the speed of a flash of lightning, / Cut through the spring breeze,” and the soldier threw down his sword and fled.

Magaku meant that in wielding the sword, the infinitesimal time it takes lightning to strike, there is neither mind nor thought. For the striking sword, there is no mind. The attacker is Emptiness. His sword is Emptiness. I, who am about to be struck, am Emptiness.<sup>34</sup>

With the drawing together of meditative practices and technical training, martial training becomes a meditative tool.<sup>35</sup> In the first instance this linkage is instrumental: correct mental compoment is a means to good swordsmanship and therefore has martial value. Yet the text makes it clear that right-mindedness, the cessation of desire, the Buddhist fourth noble truth, is beyond martial prowess and is of the ultimate importance.<sup>36</sup> Here, as *bushidō* merged with Zen, the truth to which the subject is aspiring is that of the emptiness of all things, the manner of ascending to

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Catharina Blomberg, *The Heart of the Warrior: Origins and Religious Background of the Samurai System in Feudal Japan* (Kent: Japan Library, 1995), 187; Hurst, *Armed Martial Arts of Japan: Swordsmanship and Archery*, 53-81.

<sup>33</sup> Sōhō Takuan, *The Unfettered Mind: Writings from a Zen Master to a Master Swordsman*, trans. William Scott Wilson (New York and London: Kodansha International, 2002).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 79.



that truth, of converting or transforming the self, is that of meditation and of martial practice as meditation. In Foucauldian terms, right-mindedness can be understood to be the “substance” of the care of the self. The fourth noble truth, enlightenment, the cessation of desire, is the “final” cause. And meditation, either in its purely religious (perhaps monastic) form or here in the form of martial training, is the “means.”

Meditation may be to modern philosophy the most accessible example of philosophy as a practice and so the most easily represented as a practice of spirituality.<sup>37</sup> But it ought not to be taken as paradigmatic just because of this. There are many technologies available for care of the self, meditation is one, philosophical dialogue another, physical training another, and so too are practical exercises which include fulfilling the duties of social life and entail practical forms of behaviour.<sup>38</sup> And neither Takuan’s aspect of truth nor meditation as the means of coming to truth are stable across Tokugawa *bushidō*. There is a development within the tradition, and a hundred years into the Tokugawa peace the second major text of the tradition, the *Hagakure*, represents the care of the self in a subtly different manner, deemphasising the religious aspect of *bushidō* for the martial.

The *Hagakure* was dictated by Tsunetomo Yamamoto between 1709 and 1716.<sup>39</sup> It is an impassioned call for the reinvigoration of the samurai class with a *bushidō* spirit freed from academic Neo-Confucian rhetoric. Tsunetomo sought to make manly, self-asserting samurais out of what he felt were increasingly effeminate peacetime bureaucrats, to make them stern, reverential men, armed with self-composure and a firm mind, but also high-spirited and vigorous.<sup>40</sup> The development between this text and *The Unfettered Mind* is a development in terms of the ultimate truth by which the subject constitutes themselves: the manner of ascending to that truth is no longer understood in terms of a metaphysic of emptiness, rather it is understood as honourable conduct. The text is more Confucian in this aspect than Buddhist, though no less spiritual for this. The text, narrowly interpreted, is a philosophy of dying. More broadly construed it is a philosophy of honour and shame. Its opening passage is famous.

*Bushidō*, I have found out, lies in dying. When confronted with two alternatives, life and death, one is to choose death without hesitation. There is nothing particularly difficult; one has only to be resolved and push forward.

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<sup>37</sup> See: Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, 85-6; Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject : Lectures at the Collège De France, 1981-1982*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, 86.

<sup>39</sup> Generally translated as “in the shadow of leaves” or “hidden in leaves.”

<sup>40</sup> Blomberg, *The Heart of the Warrior: Origins and Religious Background of the Samurai System in Feudal Japan*, 177-179&189; Takao Mukoh, “Introduction,” in *The Hagakure: A Code to the Way of the Samurai* (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1980), 5&10&18.

While some say, 'death without gaining one's end is but a futile death' such a calculating way of thinking comes from conceited, citified *bushidō*. Pressed between two alternatives, one can hardly be sure of choosing the righteous of the two. To be sure, everybody prefers life to death; he tends to reason himself into staying alive somehow. But if he comes out alive without gaining his righteous end, he is a coward. Therein lies a crucial point to consider.

Conversely, as long as one's choice is death, even if he died without accomplishing his just aim, his death is free of disgrace, although others may term it as a vain or insane one. This is the essence of *bushidō*.<sup>41</sup>

The emphasis on meditation is still present although the truth by which the subject constitutes themselves has changed. To be ready to die at the right moment and in the right manner requires preparation, and for this the *Hagakure* advocates a close parallel of the Stoic meditation on death.<sup>42</sup> The *Hagakure* places supreme importance on dying, not on loyalty to the samurai's liege lord as might be expected. But it is because of their relationship to death that the samurai may, first, avoid shame – the *Hagakure* approves of honourable sword fights to keep a samurai from shame in truly unavoidable circumstances, even if such acts are in direct conflict with a retainer's obligations – and second, serve his lord selflessly and without encumbrance.<sup>43</sup>

Rather than conceiving of the relationship between lord and retainer as one bound by rules and codes, Tsunetomo conceives of it as a personal, emotional, perhaps even a sentimental, bond. "The retainer," he argues, "first of all has to hold his lord high in his mind with unflinching devotion."<sup>44</sup> That is, the text seeks to cultivate the relationship between samurai and lord by cultivating correct mental comportment and right emotion rather than by advising the samurai to follow a strict code. The correct mental attitude is linked to self-mastery and self-overcoming.

I know not how to defeat others; I only know how to win over myself. Lifetime pursuit knows no end; one has to find himself improved after each day's training, striving toward perfection for the entire course of his life.<sup>45</sup>

To conquer means to conquer one's allies. To conquer one's allies means to conquer oneself. To conquer oneself means to conquer the situation and turn it to his favour by his will power. Unless one's body and soul are hardened like steel to lead tens of thousands of samurais of his side, [one] cannot win a victory over the enemy.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Yamamoto Tsunetomo, *The Hagakure: A Code to the Way of the Samurai*, trans. Tako Mukoh (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1980), 35.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>43</sup> Mukoh, "Introduction," 5-9; Tsunetomo, *The Hagakure: A Code to the Way of the Samurai*, 35.

<sup>44</sup> Mukoh, "Introduction," 7; Tsunetomo, *The Hagakure: A Code to the Way of the Samurai*, 35.

<sup>45</sup> Tsunetomo, *The Hagakure: A Code to the Way of the Samurai*, 50.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

And finally the *Hagakure*, in its more Confucian aspects, is filled with advice on correct conduct:<sup>47</sup> from advice on care in remonstrating others;<sup>48</sup> advice on how to stifle yawns and sneezes the better to avoid looking foolish;<sup>49</sup> on the right consumption of alcohol;<sup>50</sup> on the maintenance of a robust masculine disposition;<sup>51</sup> on keeping from making incautious remarks;<sup>52</sup> on the consultation of others in pursuit of truth;<sup>53</sup> on the use of encouraging words and the provision of kindness to visitors;<sup>54</sup> on the careful use of words;<sup>55</sup> on looking habitually in the mirror in order to maintain one's appearance, as right appearance speaks of dignity and corresponding depth of character;<sup>56</sup> on not fearing failure;<sup>57</sup> and even on the regular use of a toothpick.<sup>58</sup>

In terms of Foucault's "four causes," we can understand that, for the *Hagakure*, it is a samurai's honour that is the "substance" concerned with moral conduct; it is the pursuit of *bushidō* which provides the "mode" or manner in which samurai recognises their moral obligations. The text provides advice on a host of specific techniques for the cultivation of correct mental comportment, self-mastery, and honourable behaviour. That is, it provides specific "means" by which the samurai can create themselves as ethical subjects. And finally the text provides an enormous number of concrete examples of the kind of subject, the "end," the samurai can aspire to in constructing themselves as an ethical subject.

For Foucault the specific forms of care for the self will always be historically situated and systems cannot be taken from one period and transplanted into another. *The Unfettered Mind* and the *Hagakure* were written during a period where in Europe the importance of the care of the self had been subsumed by moralities which were grounded in relations to others, where Christian self-renunciation was the norm and

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<sup>47</sup>This aspect too is evident, though less so, in: Takuan, *The Unfettered Mind: Writings from a Zen Master to a Master Swordsman*, 59-60.

<sup>48</sup> Tsunetomo, *The Hagakure: A Code to the Way of the Samurai*, 40.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 44&59.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-6.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 64&95.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

where the Greek precept “care for the self” had lost preference to the precept “know thy self.” Yet, between the Greek and Roman texts that Foucault studies and those of classical *bushidō*, there can be found a striking number of similarities even in the very practices themselves.<sup>59</sup> In both cases the technologies include practices such as meditation on death and habitual reflection on the actions of the self, physical and ethical training in real or imagined situations, the formation of relations of obedience or allegiance to a master, and self-sacrifice.

### III The Ascesis of Contemporary “Occidental” Martial Arts

The story of the way in which Tokugawa *bushidō* developed into the various “Japanese” martial arts with which the Occident is today familiar is complex and interesting. It is the story of the decline of the martial pursuits after the Meiji restoration, of the disarming of the samurai and so of the martial arts’ increasing focus on unarmed fighting techniques, of the restoration of some of the classical arts in the pre-war nationalist period, of the impact of the occupation which suppressed those arts which had most closely been associated with Japanese nationalism (but not of Karate which had developed in Okinawa), and of the development of the modern martial arts and the integration of the these arts into the west, in the first instance Karate but in its wake other styles such as Jujitsu, Judo, and Aikido.<sup>60</sup> And there is a parallel story to be told for the importation of Chinese martial arts. This importation of generally East Asian martial arts into the Occident has occluded the “native” martial arts – boxing, fencing, wrestling, and so on – such that today “the martial arts” are generally held to be synonymous with “east-Asian martial arts” and boxers, for example, tend to think of themselves as engaging in a sport rather than a martial art.

The contemporary Occident has a fascination with the martial arts. Clubs are omnipresent as are images of martial artists in popular entertainment. A very large number of people train or have trained in one or more of the many diverse martial styles available. Typically many varied justifications for this fascination are offered: practitioners will justify their art in terms of the desire to acquire some self-defence techniques; they will speak in terms of the health benefits they gain from training;

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<sup>59</sup> Young’s explication of Japanese *budō* in terms of Greek *ēthos* evidences this: Young, “Bowling to Our Enemies: Courtsey, Budō, and Japan,” 190-192. As does: Keenan, “Spontaneity in Western Martial Arts: A Yogācāra Critique of Mushin (No-Mind),” 286.

<sup>60</sup> John J Donohue, *Warrior Dreams: The Martial Arts and the American Imagination* (Connecticut and London: Bergin & Garvey, 1994), 33-51; Blomberg, *The Heart of the Warrior: Origins and Religious Background of the Samurai System in Feudal Japan*; Hurst, *Armed Martial Arts of Japan: Swordsmanship and Archery*; Donn F Draeger, *Modern Bujutsu and Budo: The Martial Arts and Ways of Japan*, vol. 3 (New York & Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1996).

they will offer some sort of philosophical or overtly spiritual justification; or they will speak of a love of physical competition. Broadly speaking contemporary martial artists situate themselves in terms of truth of their practice in one or more of three different ways. First, a style may construct the truth of its practice in terms of a direct lineage which descends from an idealised historical period. Martial arts legends or folk histories feed the idea of a “true” martial art. These legends constitute a means of interpreting the practices and of organising the behaviour of those who participate in them, and as such are of genuine interest to, for example, anthropologists and sociologists though we may note that purely in historical terms these stories are at best dubious.<sup>61</sup> Second, a style may construct its truth in terms of its effectiveness as *jutsu*. Often this justification will merge with the first and appeal to a legendary period where the style was actually used in combat; often it will appeal to effectiveness in the person of the style’s master or sensei; often it will appeal to effectiveness in the form of success in martial sports or other competitions; and in some styles it will refer to its effectiveness in actual street fights. Third, a style may align itself to a version of “traditional” *budō* often, as will be illustrated here, taken directly from the texts of classical *bushidō*.

At least in the popular mind the major reason that martial artists practice is for the purposes of self-defence: the basic truth towards which the practitioner comports themselves is that of remaining safe and maintaining their bodily integrity in times of danger. However these conceptions have a low explanatory power *vis-à-vis* those who engage in the practice at any level beyond short courses in self-defence. This understanding of the practices may explain why students walk into *dōjō* for the first time, but it does not explain why they keep doing so, often for very many years. This is largely because in terms of their use in *actual* combat the martial arts are extremely inefficient practices.<sup>62</sup> It is common knowledge that it takes several years of training, perhaps four or five hours a week, before any martial art begins to become useful in any sort of violent encounter or combat scenario. This inefficacy is accentuated by the fact that violent encounters of the sort where several years of training become functional are not particularly common, particularly for those who are even somewhat active in avoiding them. And of course it takes very many years, perhaps the better part of a lifetime, before an adept can attain an ability which is anything like the reputed lethal nature of the martial arts. Finally, most martial artists are peaceful people outside of the training hall. In fact one of the truisms associated with martial

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<sup>61</sup> See: Thomas A. Green, "Sense in Nonsense: The Role of Folk History in the Martial Arts," in *Martial Arts in the Modern World*, ed. Thomas A. Green and Joseph R. Svinth (Connecticut & London: Praeger Publishers, 2003); Stanley E. Henning, "The Chinese Martial Arts in Historical Perspective," *Military Affairs* 45, no. 4 (1981).

<sup>62</sup> Donohue, *Warrior Dreams: The Martial Arts and the American Imagination*, 27; Keenan, "Spontaneity in Western Martial Arts: A Yogācāra Critique of Mushin (No-Mind)," 286.

artists is that the more proficient a practitioner becomes the *less* likely they are to become involved in an actual fight and so have need of their skills.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless the perception that the martial arts are a functional way of enabling the practitioner to deal with violence is pervasive. It can be concluded then that,

while in the hands of an extremely gifted and experienced individual [martial arts] can be a devastating self-defence, for most practitioners, [it is] a type of physically demanding play-acting... it is a kind of combat simulation, but it is nonetheless activity that is extremely significant.<sup>64</sup>

So why *do* so many people engage in this sort of play-acting?

Donohue, in his anthropological study of the martial arts in the Occident, argues that the appeal of the martial arts lies in the fact that “fundamental questions of human existence” are “central to the problematic questions for contemporary culture, questions about power, the quest of control, the search for identity, and the relationship of the individual to the group.”<sup>65</sup> More significant than their physical element, and even as the martial artist professes to be engaged in a physical practice, for Donohue the martial arts represent attempts by individuals to generate a coherent and empowering worldview. They are an attempt to inject life with meaning, to develop mechanisms for relating to other subjects and to their world.<sup>66</sup> Donohue emphasizes the symbolic or aesthetic element of the practice of martial arts: to fit with western exceptions they “must be exotic, relatively rare, [and] have a high dose of mysticism.”<sup>67</sup> As I have noted, martial arts do tend to seek justification in legends or “folk histories.” They also tend to reproduce an Oriental aesthetic and thus are essentially mechanisms for the perpetuation of ethnic or aesthetic identities. We may note for example, that beyond the West’s current fetish for Asian scripts, it is not uncommon for martial artists to have tattoos which represent their allegiance to a particular style, philosophy, or *budō*. More substantively, within this “orientalism,” the martial arts often reproduce a quasi-*bushidō* philosophic/meditative system. The continued mass-market publication of texts such as the *Hagakure* and *The Unfettered Mind* is owed almost exclusively to their interest for contemporary practitioners of the martial arts. Yet, these practices serve an active social function, they are more than just “museums in motion,” and the rewards of training in them are, for the

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<sup>63</sup> Dale C. Spencer, "Habit(Us), Body Techniques and Body Callusing: An Ethnography of Mixed Martial Arts," *Body Society* 15, no. 4 (2009): 138; Donohue, *Warrior Dreams: The Martial Arts and the American Imagination*, 4.

<sup>64</sup> Donohue, *Warrior Dreams: The Martial Arts and the American Imagination*, 83.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

practitioner, intensely personal ones.<sup>68</sup> Without using Foucauldian theory, Donohue invokes with surprising precision a conception of the care of the self. For the practitioner, the martial arts are a means by which a personal identity is forged through significant affiliation to a system radically different to a prevailing western aesthetic or ideology. That is, the participant works to create themselves as a subject through meaningful identification with the rich cultural and symbolic truths that are present in these practices.

In so heavily stressing the inefficient nature of martial arts as combat techniques, Donohue is over-making an otherwise sound point. Rather than in terms of history, aesthetics, or philosophy, some styles expressly organise their practice according to the system's effectiveness as *jutsu*, a truth demonstrable in competition, in heavy sparring and, occasionally (though often this aspect is overlaid with a heavy symbolic or legendary aspect) in *actual* street violence. Young aggressive martial artists, just like young football players, in instantiating their identities through their practices, deliberately find their way *into* violent encounters; it is important to acknowledge that training in combat-oriented martial arts may lead the practitioner to *perpetrate* violent encounters rather than merely equipping them to *respond* to violence where they have no other choice.

We may take a contemporary text written about Kyokushin Karate and its founder Mas Oyama, as an example of a style that organises its truth in terms of combat effectiveness. In order to test his strength and establish the truth of his Karate, Oyama made himself famous by fighting bulls with his bare hands, apparently fighting fifty-two of them, killing three instantly. He travelled to the United States to display his style and there fought and won against 270 opponents.<sup>69</sup> Kyokushin continues to have a heavy emphasis on combat, particularly on heavy sparring and competition, and is justified as being an “art of life which teaches its practitioners to effectively defend themselves and others in times of personal threat.”<sup>70</sup>

Yet beyond pure physicality or *jutsu*, the style places overt emphasis on spirituality or *budō*, on the ability of the practitioner to master themselves by virtue of the practice. According to the text, Oyama's great power is not mysterious:

The so-called mystery of the art survives to a degree among those who know little about it. To someone who has trained however, the only real mystery involved is the positive transformation which takes place in their attitude through years of hard training. Put simply, they come to see life as a warrior [does] ... [The master's mysterious aura] is nothing more

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>69</sup> Cameron Quinn, *The Budo Karate of Mas Oyama: Philosophical Foundations of Japan's Strongest Fighting Art* (Brisbane: Coconut Publications, 1987), 46.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 25 & 65-72

than a reflection of what *anyone* can achieve with the same discipline to pursue a righteous path of training.<sup>71</sup>

With clear echoes of Tokugawa *bushidō*, in establishing its truth, emphasis here is ultimately placed on the “positive transformation” of the subject’s “attitude” repeating the move beyond mere fighting prowess to a “completely fulfilled way of life.” References to the master’s “aura” of “power and confidence” perpetuate, for example, the legendary stories of the Tokugawa period. The continued presence of *The Unfettered Mind*’s foregrounding of Zen meditation is, in contemporary practice, well represented in kata focused on, in the early stages, correct breathing, and later, on empty-mindedness. Beyond correct mental comportment, the positive transformation is represented in terms of honourable conduct, in terms of a “platform of righteousness and thoughtfulness.” “The true *karate-ka* is calm, courageous, alert, humble, happy, and healthy.”<sup>72</sup>

I do not want to suggest that, for martial arts to be practices of philosophy, they need to replicate Tokugawa *bushidō* with anything like exactitude or perpetrate any specific set of teachings found in the texts of that period. And obviously there is here too a divergence between the normative representations of the practice and the descriptive. Yet the key features of the care of the self seem clear: the martial arts as spiritual practices are systems by which the subject aligns themselves towards truth.

Kyokushin maintains a strong link between the truths of classical *bushidō* and of contemporary real-world effectiveness in violent encounters. Its *jutsu* is constructed in parallel with a “traditional” *budō* and, in this sense, Kyokushin’s rhetoric confirms the stereotypical notions of the place of “eastern spirituality” within the philosophy of martial arts. But there are contemporary combat-oriented martial arts which justify their *jutsu* with no reference whatever to an ongoing tradition of *budō* but do so in a distinctly modern, utilitarian, and empirical ethos. There are several examples I could use but I shall focus on the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) and on the style which has emerged from it as Mixed Martial Arts (MMA).

Founded in the early 90s for the cable TV market, the UFC emphasised the ferocity and ruthlessness of their fights. For the general public, the cage or octagon in which fights occurred, became “symbolic of the event’s bestiality, something which marketing companies took full advantage of ... words and images were all chosen to emphasise that this was the ultimate test of strength: two men facing each other in the ring without any rules.”<sup>73</sup> Copy-cat variants quickly mushroomed with diverse brand

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Maarten van Bottenbury and Johan Heilbron, "De-Sportization of Fighting Contests," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 41, no. 3-4 (2006): 260. See also: Spencer, "Habit(Us), Body Techniques and Body Callusing: An Ethnography of Mixed Martial Arts," 121.



names. For the martial arts community, the competition allowed fighters from many different traditions to compete against each other in very lightly regulated fights. According to martial arts periodicals, these “realistic” contests ushered in a new age in the history of the martial arts. The rapidly developing contests provoked a race for increased efficacy, and the octagon became a “locus of objectivity.”<sup>74</sup> The truth towards which the practice comports itself is that of empirical or quasi-scientific effectiveness and of the “reality” of no-rules fighting.<sup>75</sup> The widespread outrage at the brutality of the “revolting” or “barbaric” events fuelled interest though, for a while, it also threatened to prevent the events occurring. Organisers tightened rules outlawing head butts and the breaking of fingers, they introduced weight categories, and replaced the hyper-aggressive competition names with the milder “Mixed Martial Arts.”<sup>76</sup> MMA clubs proliferated, rapidly trading on the notion that of all the martial arts the style was the most effective in “real” fights. Today MMA is a recognised style. It integrates multiple styles including Brazilian Jujitsu, Muay Thai, Judo, wrestling, and western boxing.<sup>77</sup> This eclecticism operates strictly in the pursuit of effectiveness in competition or combat and with no emphasis on what may be recognised as *budō* or fidelity to an ongoing martial tradition.<sup>78</sup> It places no emphasis on kata or other ritualised aspects of more “traditional martial arts” but focuses instead on heavy sparring and fighting.<sup>79</sup>

The notion of the “reality” of MMA fights needs to be treated with some caution.<sup>80</sup> The emergence of the style was dominated by the need to provide a spectacle of violence to an audience whose expectations had been set by fictional representations of martial arts largely in film, while appeasing those who were horrified by the glorification of violence and sought to ban the events. This balancing act occurred in a commercial environment where US media companies were trying to

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<sup>74</sup> Greg Downey, "Producing Pain: Techniques and Technologies in No-Holds-Barred Fighting," *Social Studies of Science* 37, no. 2 (2007): 208.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*: 220.

<sup>76</sup> Bottenbury and Heilbron, "De-Sportization of Fighting Contests," 264.

<sup>77</sup> Spencer, "Habit(Us), Body Techniques and Body Callusing: An Ethnography of Mixed Martial Arts," 122; Downey, "Producing Pain: Techniques and Technologies in No-Holds-Barred Fighting," 208.

<sup>78</sup> Spencer, "Habit(Us), Body Techniques and Body Callusing: An Ethnography of Mixed Martial Arts," 127.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*: 137.

<sup>80</sup> Though I do not want to suggest that the *harm* caused in fighting – either in the ring or out of it – is not real I will in this paper insist on qualifying the “reality” of fighting.

exploit new markets not already dominated by established television networks.<sup>81</sup> The idea that the platform allowed martial artists of all and any style to enter into competition in an environment as close to unregulated as possible was a construction within this environment. As with boxing before it, the introduction of gloves paradoxically appeased the critics while at the same time heightening the spectacle of violence and (arguably) the risk of injury by encouraging fighters to strike rather than wrestle. Neither the safety of the fighters, nor the preservation of the “reality” combat were in fact important considerations. This is to say that the truth of MMA ought not to be privileged against the other truths which this paper has considered. It is naive to suppose that behind various cultural practices there is an “objective” truth of the nature of human violence which can be discovered in unregulated fights, whether they occur on dark streets or brightly lit cages.<sup>82</sup> Justifications then of MMA in terms of the truth of “real” combat and with no emphasis on *budō* ought not to be taken to evacuate this practice of its spiritual component. For those who train in MMA clubs, the practice remains an asceticism, a practice of the self. The specific technologies of the style, repetitive conditioning drills which instil technique and habituate the practitioner to the style’s very great physical rigours, and the submission of the fighter to the science of the coach or trainer, all orient the practitioner towards the truth of combat.<sup>83</sup> The physical training moulds the body of the fighter and in doing so constructs their subjectivity, impacting on how they see themselves and are seen both within and outside the MMA community. Training is integral to the fighter’s self-formation but so too is actual fighting. Dale Spencer argues that, within the MMA culture, one dimension of the signification of a fighter is in a widely accepted rite of passage which is a professional fight.<sup>84</sup> The style’s comportment towards the truth of “real” combat is such that an act of fighting itself becomes essential to the self-formation of the fighters:

For contestants the [MMA] events provided a rare opportunity to display their masculinity and their strength legitimately in a fight. The importance of the symbolic meaning of this ultimate test of virility is clear from the large number of men who signed up, willing to enter the ring for less than \$100.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Bottenbury and Heilbron, "De-Sportization of Fighting Contests," 270-1; Downey, "Producing Pain: Techniques and Technologies in No-Holds-Barred Fighting," 220.

<sup>82</sup> Downey, "Producing Pain: Techniques and Technologies in No-Holds-Barred Fighting," 207. See also p222.

<sup>83</sup> Spencer, "Habit(Us), Body Techniques and Body Callusing: An Ethnography of Mixed Martial Arts," 128.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*: 135.

<sup>85</sup> Bottenbury and Heilbron, "De-Sportization of Fighting Contests," 275.

The ultimate truth of the art is the “locus of objectivity” that is the ring.

The proximity here to cultures of masculinity and violence is neither incidental nor innocent. The importance of “body capital” in industries such as that of night-club security has been noted by both anthropologists and criminologists. Body capital here specifically is understood as comprising build and acquired technologies of the body. Body building, martial arts, and/or hard won experience in the industry are implicated in the social construction of competence.<sup>86</sup> The ethos here is a long way from that of the “high” martial arts: the truth of violence is understood in terms of ruthlessness, efficiency, and brutality. Here the rite of passage of “real” fighting happens outside of the ring or cage and generally without cameras to record the action.

What can be said then of the contemporary practices of martial arts? In terms of Foucault’s four “causes,” typically the contemporary martial arts may suggest as the “substance” honour or courage, physical integrity, or meditative calm or right-thinking. The arts may refer to the “mode” by which the martial artist recognises their moral obligations as being in allegiance to a continuing martial tradition within which the artist participates, to a quasi-*bushidō* ethical, religious, or philosophical system, or to the empirical truth of “real” fighting. Or they may identify with a heavily symbolic orientalism associated with their practices. Or the martial arts may speak of a moral subject who has attained mastery of themselves and others either by virtue of their combat prowess and discipline, or by their access to enlightened thought. Of course the martial arts provide a readily identifiable system of “means,” the technologies by which the subject works on themselves. Very heavy emphasis is placed on physical training including kata, or on “real” fighting either in a ring, cage, or “on the street,” and to training in imagined situations. And even in contemporary terms, the technologies include obedience or allegiance to a master or sensei, and to an ongoing tradition, sacrifice of the self, habitual reflection on the actions of the self and on meditation. Finally, they offer the “final cause” in the guise of exemplars, such as Mas Oyama, but more often in the readily accessible guise of the style’s instructor or sensei or in the guise of the subject of violence and masculinity located in cultures of violence.

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<sup>86</sup> Lee F Managhan, "Hard Men, Shop Boys and Others: Embodying Competence in a Masculinist Occupation," *Sociological Review* 50, no. 3 (2002): 335 & 342-4. See also Dick Hobbes et al., "Door Lore': The Art and Economics of Intimidation," *British Journal of Criminology* 42(2002): 359; Bottenbury and Heilbron, "De-Sportization of Fighting Contests."

## Conclusion: Morality and the Practice of Martial Arts

Damon Young holds that “courtesy is essential to the martial arts at their best”<sup>87</sup>: I am sure he would agree when I add that many other virtues are also essential. But it is banal in the extreme to point out that the martial arts are not always practiced at their “best” and that *budō* is often completely abandoned in favour of the sometimes brutal effectiveness of *jutsu*. In discussing the philosophy of the martial arts, it is often presumed that we have already taken *budō* as the subject of discussion; I have sought to avoid this presumption and have first understood the martial arts to be fighting practices *simpliciter* and only then inquired into the modes of asceticism involved in these practices. As I have shown sometimes the asceticism does involve a continued tradition of *budō*; this is however not always the case and ought not to be presumed to be.

I take as self-evident the deeply problematical nature of contemporary cultures of masculine violence toward which I have gestured. Perhaps highly accomplished martial artists *are* in fact paradoxically peaceable people but this paradox certainly does not apply to the cultures within which these exemplary individuals are often situated and within which the ability to inflict violence (*jutsu*) is itself taken to be laudatory and not the tendency also to be courteous or peaceable (*budō*). But even where *budō* remains central to a martial practice the sometimes problematical relationship between the martial arts and morality is not dissolved. A return to the example of classical *bushidō* illustrates this. In the adoption of Zen principles, *bushidō* did not take interest in the morality of an action itself, or in the consequences of the action, but rather maintained its focus on pure-mindedness. This was done for highly pragmatic reasons. “Warrior Zen” as the blending of Zen with *bushidō* has been called, rather underpinned the *bushidō* mentality in the sense that it encouraged the warrior to move resolutely ahead once he had made up his mind to act, whether that decision was rational or moral.<sup>88</sup> Fear led to hesitation and was a hindrance to mental composure and to swordsmanship. For the samurai who was prepared to die, there would be no feeling of uncertainty, fear, or hesitation. Such practices of the self largely dispense with awareness of ethical action in the world.<sup>89</sup> We may take note of the legendary practice of cross-roads cutting, the testing of a sword’s cutting power on commoners whom the samurai was not duty bound to protect, and the tendency for samurai to draw their swords and slay either each other or commoners for providing

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<sup>87</sup> Young, “Bowling to Our Enemies: Courtesy, Budō, and Japan,” 188 & 192.

<sup>88</sup> Draeger, *Modern Bujutsu and Budo: The Martial Arts and Ways of Japan*, 71.

<sup>89</sup> Keenan, “Spontaneity in Western Martial Arts: A Yogācāra Critique of Mushin (No-Mind),” 290.

an insult to their honour.<sup>90</sup> The actual extent to which the samurai were likely to “dispatch hapless peasants on the road” has been called into question – Japanese historians have only managed to find a few cases of this actually occurring – and perhaps the argument to the moral collapse of samurai Zen cannot be fully sustained.<sup>91</sup> However the continued proximity of the *bushidō* ideal to self-evidently problematic behaviour ought not to be dismissed lightly. The “widespread belief that the *bushidō* ideal is linked to the rise of Japanese imperialism, *kamikaze* attacks, suicide charges, and prison-of-war atrocities” is arguably justified even if not in its popular versions.<sup>92</sup> Even today ethos that places the subject’s honour above all else remain problematical.

The point is this: it is not possible to use the presence of a form of spirituality to separate martial arts at their “best” from those at their “worst.” I have argued that even at their most modern and most brutal martial arts are still forms of spiritual asceticism. Neither is separating martial arts which involve “traditional” *budō* in their spirituality sufficient to isolate the martial arts at their “best” from those at their “worst.” A critical evaluation of the spirituality itself is still needed and a practice is not *a priori* estimable simply by the fact that it can be interpreted in terms of an orientalist tradition of *budō*. Or, in the theoretical terms on which this paper has relied, for Foucault ethics as the care of the self is not sufficient for morality. Foucault argues that the care of the self takes ethical and ontological priority over the care of others. The care of the self is the grounding condition for moral relations with others, it is the enabling condition for the development of the moral subject.<sup>93</sup> But morality, rules of conduct, or other normative moral systems, are not reducible to the care of the self.

It is often thought that training in the martial arts is a training in virtue. The analysis of this paper shows that this is not necessarily so. It has done so by avoiding the circularity of defining the “true” or “best” martial arts by their estimable moral or philosophical content while at the same time defining the philosophy of the martial arts by its proximity to martial training. The effect of this has been to demonstrate that while it may be the case that a martial training is often conducted in parallel with moral training, and while it is often the case that the practice of martial arts really is a type of physically demanding play-acting and not in fact a training in violence, moral training and martial training are not necessarily connected. Moral systems are external

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<sup>90</sup> Blomberg, *The Heart of the Warrior: Origins and Religious Background of the Samurai System in Feudal Japan*, 56.

<sup>91</sup> Hurst, "Death, Honor, and Loyalty: The Bushidō Ideal," 522. See too: McFarlane, "*Mushin*, Morals, and Martial Arts: A Discussion of Keenan's Yogācāra Critique," 407.

<sup>92</sup> Hurst, "Death, Honor, and Loyalty: The Bushidō Ideal," 511.

<sup>93</sup> Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," 287&293.

to the martial arts not intrinsic to them and in fact, the philosophy of martial arts may have nothing to do with morality at all. I firmly agree that “courtesy is essential to the martial arts at their best”; I am arguing however that “essential” here needs to be read not as “intrinsic” but rather in terms of the normative moral claim “needed very badly.” Young finds the sources of martial courtesy in the three sources of the Japanese tradition, Shinto, Confucianism, and Zen. But he also shows the historical contingency of the relationship between these traditions and the martial arts themselves. I have done so too. The further point of my paper is that given the contingent relationship between martial arts and training in virtue, such moral training as is usually associated with the practice of martial arts may as well be sourced in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* or *On Liberty* and may in fact be better taught in the absence of a training in techniques of violence.

I began this paper by briskly declaring that to use occidental university-based philosophy to analyse the martial arts would be to carelessly impose one discipline on the other. I conclude by suggesting that philosophy understood as systems of morality (whether occidental or oriental) are in fact external to the practice of martial arts, that their union is contingent, and that the imposition of one on the other all the more essential for this contingency.

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