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## **The Ideological Myth of Aikido** by David M. Valadez

There is no such thing as Aikido. That is to say, there is no singular entity, either in terms of practice, application, theory, or philosophy, that one can readily identify as “Aikido” and that will draw a consensus of affirmation from every aikidoka or even from a majority of aikidoka. This is true regardless of the attempts made by one institution or another, or the attempts made by one person or another, to posit Aikido as unified and thus they as a delegate of that whole. Such is the natural result of the art’s unusual history, which is a history that lends itself to great variation in ways that the histories of other arts often do not or cannot. When people speak of Aikido, they are speaking of their Aikido. When people teach Aikido, they are teaching their Aikido. When people practice Aikido, they are practicing their Aikido. Any attempts to suggest otherwise have to be exposed for the political and/or economic undertakings that they are. Any attempts to suggest otherwise have to be understood as a turning toward ideology and a straying from the Way, which is beyond such things.

Ideology confuses knowledge with being. This is why it equates and mistakes the manipulation of being with power, and thus power with knowledge. Through a play on words, ideologues seek to invoke “the real,” “the authentic,” “the evolved,” “the early versions,” etc., in order to uphold a difference they claim to negate at the very second that they posit it. This difference is the difference between an essence and that thing which is claimed to carry that essence. The essence, by which things like “the real” or “the true” come to be known, is that thing which connects and nullifies all differences. The essence, it is thought, comes to be considered the object of knowledge. Yet, when the essence is upheld as the object of knowledge, one is admitting something important at the very moment that one comes to deny that significance. On the one hand, such a position admits that the object of knowledge (i.e. essence) is not identical to the actual object (i.e. manifestation) since it declares that the former is only a part of the latter. Thus, the essence is not everything. On the other hand, such a position also denies what it has admitted by reducing this difference between two objects (i.e. the essence or the object of knowledge, and the manifestation or the actual object).

In the admission, there are two distinct objects. There is the “real” object (i.e. the essence), which exists outside the subject and independent of the process of knowledge, and there is the process of knowledge or the actual object (i.e. manifestation) that is clearly distinct from the object of knowledge (i.e. essence). In the practice of ideology, there is no longer more than one object, but this position will fluctuate in its determinedness according to how it suits the political, cultural, personal, and/or the economic investments of the person practicing such ideology. That is to say, through ideological thought, difference is wiped

away or subsumed at the very moment that it is meant to support all variations, and/or variations are posited or pronounced as they are needed to denounce any particular difference. In this way, Aikido federations come to distinguish themselves from other Aikido federations as they make note of miniscule differences that become “visible” in light of an essence under which they each politically congregate, while at the same time they are able to ignore major differences among their own members according to that very same essence.

What is most confounding is not the play on the word “real,” which is only a mask, but the play on the word “object.” It is the word “object” (i.e. “Aikido”) which upholds the fraudulent unity amidst a series of denials and self-serving actions. In the fraudulent unity, the fraudulent delegate finds his place and his voice. From an illegitimate platform, which is illegitimate because it does not exist in reality and because it is denied as soon as it is posited, the false delegate speaks for all that is “right” in the name of all that is “right.” By such actions, his cruelty, his hatred, and his individual lusts for power hide themselves behind a mask of apparent objectivity or behind an apparent absence of emotional attachment. Thereby his worse affronts against civility and against humanity, even affronts against the very tenets of his own imaginary platform (e.g. “Aikido honors peace and harmony.”), hide his straying from the Way under a cloth of “righteousness,” “responsibility,” “honor,” and even “charity.”

This attempt to describe ideology for what it is, how it works, why it works, and why those who participate in it are doing so at the very moment that they deny such a role, is not meant to say that we should reject our critical faculties once and for all. I am not suggesting that all abuses of power result in critical thinking or that all critical thinking leads to an abuse of power. Nor am I saying that parties with differences, even opposing views, should not enter into reasonable discussions where conclusions and decisions will be made. I am not advocating a rejection of critical thinking. I am no advocate of remaining without judgment. I am only reminding us that judgment requires soundness, and soundness requires reason, reason requires valid investigation, valid investigation requires intimacy, and intimacy makes space for civility. Being critical, and learning how to be critical, is part of the practice of self-reflection, and thus then of self-cultivation.

However, when we practice ideology, we rob ourselves of the possibility for sound judgment. This happens because ideology makes no room for intimacy and thus for civility. Abhorring intimacy, and seeing civility as irrelevant, ideologies only feign at making decisions and/or at putting things on the table for discussion. Rather, ideologies are in place to resist change, to support the political status quo, and thus to inhibit any new decisions from being made. This it does through a cultic surrendering to the dogma that holds that all decisions that need to be made have already been made a long time ago. The practice of such superstition requires a closing of one’s mind and thus a rejection of any intimacy that may lead to an opening of one’s mind. Understanding it as an unnecessary or as a risky exposure to aggression and/or insurgency by the Other, ideologies negate intimacy and the chance for civility at a structural level. Ideologies hold to policies and dogmas by reducing the Other to the role of attacker – someone both incapable of intimacy and unworthy of intimacy. Alternatively, sound judgment, which may very well manifest itself in a rejection of many particular points of view, selects its course of action and thought not by a reduction of the Other but by an expansion of oneself. Sound judgment will always involve an opening of oneself toward the Other. When we come to define our Aikido, we should make use of sound judgment, not ideologies.

Sound judgment will always advocate the following: Decisions are more valid when they are based upon a firsthand experience that is coupled with sound logic and reasoning; Decisions based upon sound logic and reasoning but void of experience can be considered valid but are considered less valid than the former; Decisions based upon or grounded within ideologies are invalid. In other words, if one truly wants to understand what is going on in another’s Aikido, one exposes him/herself adequately to the experience. If

one cannot do that, one should enter into a valid reasoning process. If one cannot do that, and if one is opting to enter into the use of emotional language, and/or ideological discourse, one will obtain very little information and thereby one's judgment will have little chance of being sound. With the latter, one is only primed to practice various forms of hostility. Prejudice, which is the antithesis of intimacy, is what one will mostly rely upon, and thereby the chance for civility will decrease greatly. Though it is seldom practiced in the Aikido world at large, civility should be a primary concern for any person treading upon the Way. Therefore, ideologies, especially our own, must be exposed for what they truly are and how they are truly working.

As a final caveat, we should note: Definitions for Aikido will always be inadequate. They will always be inadequate because they will always be worthless. If we are pressed to define our art, we should note that the process of its continuing development is all that marks it. In noting that, we should realize that we have in the end defined nothing. Thus, we may never be more accurate in describing Aikido than when we say, "It does not exist."