

What can Philosophy and Martial Art bring to each other?

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This article proposes an elucidation of the respective and mutual contributions of martial art and philosophy. Wisdom can be conceived as an unrestrictive limit of martially artistic and philosophical practices, in ways which are independent from etymologist conceptions, if conceived in undichotomistic, unessentialistic, and unsubstantialistic ways. Dichotomies are not required as boundaries to account for the limits of knowledges and practices. Essences are not required as unificatory immaterial standards of (instances of) moves, techniques, and practices. And substances could not be required as atemporal and aspatial grounds of the practice and its philosophy. Thusly, problems related to the confusions of dimensions of opposite events (notably differences between agonisms, antagonisms, and oppositions) can be addressed in coherent, sensitive and efficient ways. Unsubstantially, unessentialistically, undichotomically conceived, that wisdom is a desirable and unrestrictive limit of philosophical and martial practices is unproblematic and truly renders achievable a contemporarily egalitarian, liberatory, democratic, antisexist, antixenophobic scientific and artistic conception of the mutual contributions of martial and philosophical practices. Bodies and souls can find both the techniques and the objectives of their applications in the ways of martial arts and philosophies. Martially and philosophically artistic practices can mutually contribute to education to (contemporary) democracy.

Introduction

The practices of philosophy and martial arts are, at least to some extent, mutually independent: philosophical and martially artistic practices do not necessarily imply each other, or at least not necessarily in the same senses. For very different are (at least some) philosophical practices from a common sense use and conception of the word philosophy as an ideal set of principles to which an individual and a collective mind should conform oneself (by contrast with, and as for example, Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as an elucidatory activity (2023, Preface, 4.112), or Deleuze's and Guattari's conception of philosophy as creation of concepts (2005 p. 10)). And very different are (at least some) martially artistic practices from a common sense use and conception of martial arts as fight (by contrast with practices of martial artists, as for example the ones of the practitioners of Taiji Quan or Iaido). Yet martial arts can be distinguished according to their philosophies only to an extent in the sense previously defined, as for example one philosophy of martial arts is that individuals liberate themselves from rules through their internalization; philosophies of martial arts are often shaped by constitutive paradigmatic achievements as Judo or Yoseikan Budo, and philosophical reflexions and elucidations about martial arts can contribute to better think ways in which some forms of life are both martially and artistically shaped (and this, maybe apparently paradoxically, without defending *militarism* and without making an *apology of violence*, a point which is explainable only to an extent by the development of martial arts as sports during the XXth century, as such conceptions of martial arts existed before the development of martial arts as sports, as Aikido).

Less than attempting to answer to the traditional philosophical question of the essence common to each and every martial art, whose answerability *should* itself be called into question (for important reasons, relative to philosophical and practical difficulties internal to 'essentialism', which includes most commonly used concepts of essence, but also relative to the evolution and the development of some martial arts as sports during the last century), I will pose and address the

question of the respective and mutual contributions of martial art(s) and philosoph(y/ies): *what can philosophy and martial art bring to each other?*

For, to suppose that we could understand such relations through an account of superficial similarities, as agonistic (qua *aggressive* rather than *combative*), or antagonistic (*hostile*) aspects of martially artistic practices are often assumed as the most important ones¹, both by philosophers and martial artists, to tell about each others' practices, will not prove more helpful than attempting to understand the mutual contributions of martial arts and dances through the comparison of their superficial aspects. Deliberately coordinated bodily movements are involved by at least some of these practices which are similar in this respect, but such comparisons do not suffice to distinguish, for example, the texture of a move from the ordinary mechanical execution of a complex movement. Routines and moves display dimensions, present internal consistency, textures, depths. Many practitioners of many practices have experienced the insufficiency of the affirmation of the similarity of two practices in order to reach an understanding, when relevant, of their mutual and respective contributions (Yes, a Tao or a Kata is *like* a dance, and?). And sometimes the misunderstanding of the relevance of a comparison of aspects and dimensions of practices is expressed by the affirmation that the one is not the other, or that the two are distinct (Yes, Karate is not dance, and?). And yet sometimes practical and conceptual knowledges are truly achieved by means of comparisons of relevant aspects and dimensions of these practices (Yes, hands can be considered to have sharp edges, as karatekas do; the move of cutting with a katana can be considered as similar to the move made with a fishing rod, as yoseikan budokas do), and although in a sense we could not be surprised about such realizations, we nevertheless can understand and progress in our practices, conceptually and practically by means of such comparisons. That both arguments and combats can be won in various and diverse ways, by means of application of techniques is a common place of common sense.

1 Notably with the increasing mediatization of spectacular ultra-violent fights and the development of industries dedicated to fighting, as those of UFC or MMA.

A reflexion about the mutual contributions of martial arts and philosophies thus needs to integrate both the historical, independent ,and autonomous developments of philosophy as professional, and of martial arts as sportive, *without neglecting* that artistic dimensions are internal at least to some martial and philosophical practices, and could most probably be developed both out and with any. In order to produce such reflexion, I shall proceed by first proposing some preliminary elucidations, some clarifications about the concept of practice, so as to integrate the primacy of practice to provide an adequate account of the mutual contributions of martial arts and philosophies. Dichotomic conceptions indeed tend to lead to the forgetfulness of the fact that “theory”, maybe contingently necessarily, but *not* conceivably *only* contingently necessarily, is intertwined with practice, and that scientific theories, but not just scientific theories, result from a practice, that of “theorizing”.² I accordingly will then propose an account of the centrality of the concept of wisdom for philosophical and martial practices. Unsubstantially, unessentialistically, undichotomically conceived, that wisdom is a desirable and unrestrictive limit of philosophical and martial practices is unproblematic and truly renders achievable a contemporarily egalitarian, liberatory, democratic, antisexist, antixenophobic scientific and artistic conception of the mutual contributions of martial and philosophical practices. Bodies and souls can find both the techniques and the objectives of their applications in the ways of martial arts and philosophies. I finally will propose an even more untraditional and unconformist account of the mutual contributions of martial arts and philosophies by arguing that without involvement or dependence with respect to universalism, the oppositive conception of necessary necessity and contingent contingency, which goes together with the sublimated opposition between the wishes of reaching or renouncing control, is an expression of undue abstractionism and can and should be reconceived so as to elucidate that

2 Lewandowski for example presents and argues in favor of a *constraint theory of sport*, that he applies to Boxing (2022, Chapter 6) and MMA (in Holt and Ramsay (2022, Chapter 4). Although the conception presented in the present article is independent from the constraint theory of sport, this conception is entirely compatible both with the importance of a reflexion about constraints in sportive practices, and with the importance of the integration of the security of the practitioners in the evolution of martially artistic and sportive practices. Notably, the development of ways for techniques to become more safely applicable can sometimes render obsolete earlier versions of these techniques, and of their applications.

one central mutual and respective contribution of martially and philosophically artistic practices is education to (contemporary) democracy.

1. The Primacy of Practice

Languages display conceptual means which are sufficient to distinguish some aspects of practices of martial arts. Yet there is no such thing as an equivalence of the conceptual means that can serve us to distinguish such aspects across languages. As one remarkable example, the triple distinction between antagonisms, agonisms, and oppositions is differently accounted for in distinct languages, such as English (which includes the verbs “to fight”, “to combat”, “to wrestle”, “to struggle”, “to confront”), French (which includes the verbs “(se) battre”, “combattre”, “lutter”, “(se) confronter”), and Turkish (“dövüşmek”, “savaşmak”, “güreşmek”, “mücadele etmek”, “karşı çıkmak”). Although there is no such thing as a reason to think that distinctions made in a language cannot be made in another, there is, conversely, no such thing as a (would-be) sort of (direct) equivalence of these verbs and of their meanings across languages (On this, see also Laugier, 2000, pp. 137-143). Further, it is unclear that the establishment of an artificial set of equivalence across languages could both enable to account for distinctions of aspects of practices of martial arts across languages, and exhaustively solve epistemological difficulties that reflexion about martial arts can serve to solve. Linguistic variability indeed does not respond to the sole means and ends of the practices of martial arts, however deeply-rooted antagonistic, agonistic, and opposite practices are in forms of life³. Although the comparison of (martial) arts with languages is a deeply beneficial one, one that can serve us to account for the differences of martial arts, notably according to the multiplicities, diversities and complexities of the practices each involves, this comparison itself can render difficultly intelligible their not inherently linguistic aspects as well. After all and notably, not

3 Contrary to reductionistic readings of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (2023, chapters 3-4; Sahlin, 1977), achievements rendered possible by the theory of evolution are not based upon the primacy of such antagonistic, agonistic, opposite practices in forms of life, no more than the opposite.

each and every martial art involve lethal techniques. The difficulties in translating and expressing the triple distinction between antagonisms, agonisms, and oppositions – which are not without loss reducible to each other, across languages, are related to difficulties in translating and expressing another triple distinction, between art, war, and sport, and the correlative conceptions of the events which count as their instances (artistic, martial and sportive). For indeed, local confusions of concepts and contexts, elucidated on the background of another language, and, confusions of the dimensions of opposite events between at least two persons (as for example involved and manifested by the triple distinction between “fight”, “combat”, and “brawl” in English) do happen.

As a result, from the outset, nothing precludes that practices of philosophy and martial art can be mutually contributive. But to delineate and elucidate senses in which such practices can be mutually contributive involve to call into question the relevance of psychologism to think and account both for the mutual distinctions and eventual contributions of these practices. Basic dualisms can eventually serve to account for some aspects of practices, but even traditional conceptions (which are not psychologistic in a contemporary sense), and which grant foundational primacy to dualisms, tend to call into question the maintainability of these dualisms to account for basic unities, such as the one of lives. One traditional solution has been to present tensions involved by dualisms as constitutive (as the one of the Yin and the Yang, convoked notably by Ueshiba, 2017, p. 74). And contemporary psychologisms often merely provide an improved reinterpretation of these or similar dualisms (one of which is that of the mental and the physical). But such displacement, although sometimes practically efficient, does not render achievable understandings of the eventual mutual contributions of philosophy and martial art across languages and forms of life. Quite the contrary, the tentative efforts of reducing the diversities of behaviours, forms of life, to dualistically-explainable-events, both tend to generate epistemological difficulties, and render difficult, if not impossible, to pose and address contemporary epistemological difficulties of reflexion about martial arts. In a word, although reflexion about martial art practices involves the

criticism of fraudulent misconceptions and false-claims about martial arts (on this see the remarkable book of Boztepe, 2017, Chapter 2), another difficulty is to account for the eventual mutual contributions of philosophy and martial art. To achieve such elucidation, we need to distinguish both philosophy and martial art from common sense misleading (pre)conceptions.

We can thusly first distinguish philosophy from a common sense (pre)conception, according to which “philosophy” is only conceivable as and reducible to some sort of ideal set of principles (and propositions, sentences in the grammatical sense) to which an individual and a collective mind should conform oneself. On this ‘conception’, ‘philosophizing’ starts and ends with the ‘possession’ of *the* right set of principles to which one should conform one’s action. Such affirmation may seem surprising, as the history of philosophy has been pervasively shaped by such paradigmatic and constitutive achievements of philosophers, and notably in early Greek philosophy, whose study and sometimes practice can still be relevant (the criticism of hybris for example, is still of relevance both to understand and criticize the consumeristic developments of our societies with their unecological consequences). Nevertheless, thinking and practicing such important achievements (an aspect which also matters to think the history and the development of martial arts), could not be dependent upon a *closure clause*. Other ways of conceiving philosophy\ies and its\their practices have already been mentioned (see also Cavell’s remarks about philosophy, 2002, 14’50”-15’50”). Similarly, martial art can also be distinguished from a common sense (pre)conception according to which “martial art” is to be conceived and is reducible to some sort of beating (in the *litteral*, not metaphorical sense) skill or disposition that an individual or collective mind could obtain. According to this (pseudo)conception, “practicing a martial art”, “disposing of a martial art” and “disposing of a skill of beating” could supposedly be equivalent. Obviously, such precisions might, to some of us, seem unnecessary or even caricatural. However, if we realize the extent to which such (pre)conceptions and caricatures shaped: the development of martial arts, the reception of martial arts by philosophy, by societies, the presentation of martial arts in movies, novels, and other

cultural productions, the depth of the problem and the relevance of these preliminary clarifications should be clear. Sheer display of violence or its representations are often presented as equivalent with practices of martial arts (notably online), aggravated by the meliorative presentation and the spectacularisation of aggressive behaviours during pre-fight events (notably those of UFC and MMA).⁴

On the background of the mutual elucidations of common-sense (pre)conceptions about philosophy and martial art, a first remark that can be made is that making the philosophy of martial arts is not, and should not be assumed to be equivalent with proposing some sort of ideal set of principles to which one or several should conform. If philosophy is, as mentioned and historically referred to, not reducible to the activity of proposing some sort of ideal set of principles to which one or several should conform, then there is no such thing as a necessity for the philosophy of martial arts to be considered and conceived in such misleading way. There really is much more to be done, and especially if we take into account progresses made in social sciences, martial arts, and sports studies (See notably Boztepe, 2017; Holt and Ramsay, 2022; Lewandowski 2022; McNamee and Morgan 2015; Wacquant, 2002). Reciprocally although “philosophy” should not be understood *‘from’* martial art, in the sense that philosophy is an autonomous practice independent from martial art, there is a core of truth that is unproblematic with respect to the idea that martial arts have philosophies: less than the idea that each martial art involves a conception of philosophy, such idea involves that the unity of a way of practicing a martial art (for example, the unity of a style) involves some unity in a way of thinking a martial practice. That is the sense in which we can speak

4 Note that the criticism of the spectacularisation of aggressive behaviours during pre-fight events is distinct from the moralistic rejection of martial arts, whether “mixed” or “pure” or “traditional”, and is compatible with the criticism of the moralistic rejection of martial arts. Criticizing and rejecting the necessity of the display of aggressive behaviors during pre-fight events is not incompatible with criticizing and rejecting the presumption according to which practices of martial arts, as such, could be immoral. On the questions raised by the practices of MMA about martial arts see Malanowski and Baima (2022, pp. 16-28). On the problematic of the relevance of categories and of the categorization activity for reflexion about martial arts see Martínková and Parry (2022, pp. 4-15). Their account clarify that if categorization is involved by our reflexions about martial arts, then a pragmatic and open-ended conception of categorization is better adapted than an unpragmatic and closed one, inasmuch as categorizations do change. However, I do not argue in favor of a categorial conception of martial arts and sports in this article. Our practices and our conceptions of our practices are not unavoidably dependent upon the mediation by a set of categories.

about the philosophy of a martial art, and that we can distinguish martial arts according to their philosophies. This point especially matters to elucidate that practicing or defending martial arts could not neither involve any unavoidable entailment of a defense of militarism, or to make the apology of violence, nor involve any unavoidable entailment of the defense of peace. A complete elucidation of this last point does involve a further precision, inasmuch as such remark does certainly neither involve the rejection of the desirability of peace, nor involve an expression of bellicism in any sense whatsoever, and quite the contrary, in fact. A brief recall of the *historical* aspect of the mutual independence of the practices of martial art, of peace as an end or finality, of democratic ideals, can serve to elucidate their mutually conceptual independence. The compatibility of martial arts, of the practices of martial arts, with peace, with the development of democracy, of institutions, became clearer with the development of (some) martial arts as sports within democratic states during the XXth century (some of which, as Judo, Karate, and Taekwondo became Olympic disciplines), and also with the development of worldwide sportive martial art federations. That is to say, some martial arts evolved as combat sports, or, combat sports were developed from martial arts during the XXth century and after. And, at least some martial arts conferred to peace central importance in their own explicit conceptualization, as notably Aikido (Ueshiba, 2017), and were yet developed in states which were not democracies. To this extent, (pseudo)unavoidable entailments between martial arts, combat sports, peace and democracy need to be criticized if we are to account for pertinent ways of conceiving, thinking, and accounting for their conceptual relations.⁵

This should have rendered clear that some (conceptual) and more or less common impasses are to be brought out as such. The first, and quite common impasse, is that some martial art could be

5 The notion of “harmony” (sometimes conceived as “metaphysical”), as notably advocated by Ueshiba (2017, p. 39, 49) is to this extent illusory. Further developments of the practices of philosophy, notably during the XXth century have rendered clear that accounting for consciousness could not conceivably be dependent upon (a) ‘harmony’ between mind and world, for motives some of which shall be studied in the present article. For in-depth studies of the criticism of such harmony requirement in the works of Wittgenstein, see Sullivan (1996) and Narboux (2006). The author of the present text claims the relevance of Wittgenstein’s criticism of any such conception of harmony for the philosophy of martial arts. This written, criticizing such illusion could not involve to lose sight of the importance of peace and of the democratic developments of democratic institutions for the practice and the development of martial arts or combat sports, as shall hopefully be rendered clearer throughout the present article.

as such better than another. No comparison is achieved by the string of signs “Karate is better than Wrestling” or “Wrestling is better than Karate”, although we obviously can compare, and propose an evaluation of the eventually better suitability of a martial art in comparison to another relatively to some objectives, some constraints, and that we can express by means of conditionals such as “if you want to learn to hit with your fists, you should practice Boxing, rather than Aikido”. But string of signs as “Kung Fu is better than Judo”, “true martial arts are Japanese”, “authentic martial arts are Chinese”, “only MMA is a realistic martially artistic practice” could not have served to express about martial arts. A less common (conceptual) impasse is the one according to which there is an essence of martial art, or that there are essences of martial arts. Such criticism immediately requires precision, as very strange can seem to affirm that the supposition of the existence of an essence of martial art, or essences of martial arts is an impasse. For, major paradigmatic achievements, such as the ones of Ueshiba (2017) and Kano (2007, see notably chapter 2), involved heavy reliance on the notion of essence in their articulation of the philosophies of Aikido and Judo. And the unconformism involved by their reconceptions of the traditional conception of essence is not only clear but also fully compatible with the earlier criticized misconceptions about martial arts. One way to account for their reconceptualized conceptions of essences, is to remark that the practical tension involved by the then traditional conception of essence they criticized, can really be practically dispelled, and the difficulty practically dissolved if we consider the mutual co-existence of several martial arts. Nevertheless, it is unclear that the conceptual difficulty involved by essentialism, that we can think of as a tendency, sometimes conceived as a doctrine, according to which something is what it is because of its essence (contained or displayed by whatever is assumed to be an instance of a part or a whole), is then addressed. At least under its classical forms, but this is arguably a constitutive aspect of essentialism, the truth of essentialism would unavoidably imply the falsity of its negation. If there is no single true essence then essentialism cannot be satisfactory; but if there cannot be several true essences (of the instantiated) then essentialism cannot be

satisfactory as well. The tension can be posed and addressed by remarking that the claim or appeal to “essence” most often is a claim or appeal to entities which are not meant to be linguistic⁶. That is to say, every successful talk of essence would be *about* some thing, entity, an ‘essence’ which, neither would be an instance of some thing or entity, nor would *be* the concepts, words, signs by means of which we can think, refer, and use such thing or entity. So the linguistic appeal *to* and claim *of* the non-linguistic would both be meant to reveal that the non-linguistic could, and would both *ground* and *justify* the linguistic by means of which we could think and refer to the non-linguistic. Such claim can seem innocuous, but the involved aspatial, atemporal, ‘sublimation’ is nevertheless, at best, unlikely to turn out unproblematic.

6 On this see also Baz (2013, pp. 116-117).

2. Wisdom as an Unrestrictive Limit of Philosophical and Martial Practices

The core of truth of stereotypical representations of individual persons⁷ who excel in a martial art or philosophy is that wisdom constitute an unrestrictive limit of these practices. But to which extent is such core of truth dependent upon a proximate aspect of some martial arts and some philosophies, that is to say, of the claim of the necessity to *reach*, *know*, and eventually *apply* ‘essences’? For, as earlier suggested, an analogy has thoroughly shaped conceptions of philosophical knowledge and knowledge of martial arts: exactly as philosophical knowledge has been conceived to be necessarily distinct from unphilosophical (sometimes conceived as ‘ordinary’) knowledge by a constitutive difference, due to its being “knowledge of essences” (according to the traditionalistic and platonistic assumption, that can be found notably in phenomenology as well)⁸, the genuineness or authenticity of a martially artistic practice has been conceived to be distinct from unartistic martial practice, due to its being application of an essential knowledge, the knowledge of the essence of martial art.

Nevertheless the *conclusiveness*, and even further the *relevance*, of both the analogy (between the place ‘essence’ could have had in martial art and philosophy) and structurativity of essentialism (in philosophy and martial art) can, and further ought to be contested, for already mentioned motives. Indeed, conceived as some sort of *non-linguistic unificatory immaterial standard of the instances* ‘essence’ involves both too much, and, not enough. Too much: for, thusly conceived, or even, unconceived, appeals to essence, essential and essentialistic claims, will (quasi-)unavoidably enter in tension with other similar claims, *independently from actions, verifications, knowledges, and applications*. That is to say, not only that essentialism is unlikely to provide its own way out from the abstract problem of the one and the many (whose material and would-be ‘counterpart’ is that of the unity of philosophy, of martial art, internally to each one and among each others) but also, *practical difficulties* will not be understood as such (inasmuch as the

⁷ Such stereotypical representations, inasmuch as martial arts are concerned, are common in movies (as *Star wars* or *Karate kid*) and novels such as the ones of Eiji Yoshikawa about the life of Miyamoto Musashi.

⁸ On this see Uçan (2023).

mentioned problems are deeply intertwined with practical difficulties, some of which will be addressed in this article). In this sense, the ‘surplus’ involved by essentialism turns out to be ‘deficit’ (and inversely). Essentialism does both involve *too much* and not *enough*, inasmuch as no appeal to essence can ultimately turn out satisfactory to pose and address contemporary conceptual and practical problems of philosophy, martial art, and philosophy of martial art.⁹

By contrast, I propose to conceive wisdom as an *unrestrictive* limit, both for philosophical and martial practices in a way that is *undichotomistic*, *unessentialistic*, and *unsubstantialistic*. Such conception is *undichotomistic*, in the sense that dichotomies are not required as boundaries to account for the limits of knowledges and practices. This conception is compatible with the remark that all distinctions could not be dichotomies, although distinct from and incompatible with the conception according to which some dichotomies must have constitutive place within conceptual systems, independently from time, space and languages. Distinguishability of *relativism* and *skepticism* is indeed accountable for: the claim of the relativity of paradigmatic and constitutive successes (which could not amount to a claim of mutual dependence of paradigmatic and constitutive achievements) is not equivalent, and certainly not always compatible with the claim of the impossibility of the achievement of certainty (whose acontextual versions are simply delusory). Inasmuch as martial arts are concerned, the criticism of dichotomism is notably important to account for the assessability and comparability of moves and techniques. Indeed, there is no such thing as a move or technique which is, *as such*, ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Learning a devastative technique

9 In this sense, the present article contests and criticizes the conception of “the art of combat” presented and advocated for by Coralie Camilli (2020). She claims and attributes to approaches inspired by Wittgenstein that the statement “I am here” has no ‘proper’ or ‘authentic’ meaning (“signification propre”), as such meaning would be totally dependent of the context in which the statement is used, and attributes such approach to Wittgenstein (2020, p. 119). However, such presentations of the relations between statements and contexts is unlikely to turn out contextual. On this, see Laugier’s critical study of the myth of meaning (2000). In relatively independent terms, although we indeed can imagine effortlessly that such statement can be used derivatively in secondary ways, in a primary and basic range of cases – which is the primary concern of Wittgenstein, it is inasmuch as we know that different persons can express to other persons their positions by means of one, same, and only such statement, that we learn or inform in different contexts by means of such statement about positions of persons. To affirm that the meaning of some such statement is totally set by context involves an equivocation about the elucidations that contextualism can provide. There could not be any paradox in the relative independence to context involved by the practice of contextualism, in a way which is relevantly comparable with the unparadoxicality of the sort of absoluty involved by the theory of relativity for physics.

itself can sometimes turn out a practice relevant to avoid its application. Moves and techniques do display relevance according to the ends for which these have been conceived and perfected. For example, punching and kicking techniques are likely but not necessarily better adapted to knock an opponent down than throwing techniques. Although a secondary use can be made of a technique (for example, a cutting technique can be applied as blocking technique), the primary use of a technique is often better adapted to achieve the primary ends for which it was made. A blocking technique is likely to be better adapted than a cutting technique to block a cutting technique in many cases. But moves and techniques can be relevant for different ends. And although we can unproblematically express our appreciation of moves and techniques by means of monadic ascriptions (as in “that is a *good* technique”), such value ascriptions are not, as such, indicative of the intrinsic values of the moves and techniques we value, although these do sometimes thusly become valued and valuable. And this point matters not only to the assessment of moves and techniques internally to a martial art, but also among martial arts, to account for the mutually independent and objective assessability of the relevance of moves or techniques from distinct martial arts relatively to the ends for which these have been conceived.

The proposed conception is also *unessentialistic*, in the sense that it is independent from and incompatible with the claim that essences are required as unificatory immaterial standards of (instances of) moves, techniques, and practices. Inasmuch as martial arts are concerned, the criticism of essentialism is important not only to account for the *variability* and the *perfectibility*, but also for the *evolvability* of martial art. That is to say, constitutive paradigmatic achievements, and sometimes contrary to their own explicit conceptualizations, could not have necessarily involved the *closedness* of the practice. Even in cases in which heavy reliance has been made on the notion of essence to articulate the philosophy of a martial art, as notably in Judo by Jigoro Kano¹⁰, the appeal to essence was not meant to imply the closedness, the closure of the practice. Quite the

10 Judo both was explicitly conceived as a martial art which involves achievements of several martial arts, as wrestling, and other traditional martial arts (2007, 116) and was meant to constitute – and obviously resulted in a major achievement, a major contribution of *Japanese* martial arts to martial arts (2007, 103).

contrary, and for example, the teachings and practices included by Judo involved, from the beginning, the taking into consideration of the evolution of practices of martial arts, and such evolutions were not meant to end, but to continue with the successful practices of the practitioners.

The proposed conception is also *unsubstantialistic*: appeal to *substances* (similarly to *essences*) as aspatial and atemporal grounds of the practice and its philosophy (and eventually of its essences) are not only unrequired, but also misleading. Inasmuch as martial art is concerned, the criticism of substantialism is important to *maintain sensitivity* during both the learning and the teaching of moves and techniques; less than supposedly orientated towards some sort of replication of internal similarity with an image of the success of a move, teaching and learning should be orientated towards efficiency and ease of application. Substantialism (within or without its relations to essentialism) indeed involves several difficulties, among which and notably, difficulty to account for the temporality of practices (inasmuch as not only the timing involved by an application of a technique, but also the very activity of the organizing of a training necessarily could not have not involved temporal aspects which cannot be neglected without loss), but also a misleading picture of the activity in which what is sometimes called ‘mental representation’ or ‘mental depiction’ consists. Indeed, it is obviously unmysterious that we can depict to ourselves applications of moves and techniques for purposes of learning, training, and teaching. But most often, the unproblematicity of the distinction between a ‘mental representation’, or a ‘mental depiction’ of a move or technique and its application remains unnoticed – and that was a central point of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* (On this, see Uçan, 2023, pp. 403-404). This is a peculiarly problematic ‘loop’, a case of ‘vicious’ ‘circularity’, inasmuch as the distinction between our having represented to ourselves the application of a technique, and an application of a technique could not be meant to be practically abolished. Indeed, even the very enjoyable relative ‘indistinguishably’ of the depiction of the success of the application of a projected move or technique and its application involves their distinction in a way that could not cease with the successful achievement of a move

or technique. Would we have, per impossibile, ‘renounced’ the distinction, we would not have thereby achieved the overcoming of a ‘boundary’ of practice. We rather practically would have deprived ourselves from the conceptual means which are involved by the maintainment of sensitivity during learning, training or teaching.

As already clear, the account and approach I propose is not dualistic: traditional dichotomies (“bad” – “evil” – “wrong” / “nice” – “good” – “right”) are not at the scale of the evolution, the developments, and the potential of martial arts. But this remark could not have involved that no such distinction can be relevant at all, only that *such distinctions are neither basic nor sufficient to account for learning, training, and teaching in martial arts, to pose, solve, and dissolve problems of epistemology of martial arts.*

3. The Mutual Contributions of Martial Art and Philosophy

But what is the alternative? Or what alternatives are there ‘beyond’ or ‘without’ universalism (for example and notably, doctrines which appeal to ‘universals’ conceived as abstract entities available to mind independently from context in any context (Russell, 2009, Chapter 10)? How to (contemporarily) *think* the (eventual) mutual contributions of martial art and philosophy? As a guideline, *attention to context* does often suffices to pose and solve difficulties in the learning, training, teaching and the development of moves, techniques, and practices of martial arts.

Attention to context is an important pivot of the evolution of epistemology, philosophy of language, and philosophy of action during the XXth and XXIst centuries¹¹. This change also concerns philosophy of martial art, whether conceived or not in relation with philosophy of action, philosophy of sport, philosophy of art, in ways which are still virtually unexplored. Indeed, most often, solitary or collective difficulties about the assessment of moves, techniques, and practices during the learning or the teaching of a move are solvable by providing attention to *the context of application* (of a move, technique, practice). And this context needs to be considered *independently* from a *counter-context*, from a context of application of a counter-move, of a counter-technique, of a counter-practice. Maybe for teachers of martial arts, who have had the occasion not only to internalize ways of applying moves or techniques, but also to externalize ways for moves or techniques to be internalized, such remark may seem of little interest.

Nevertheless I argue that the scope of this remark remains often underestimated and its importance neglected. Indeed, its first importance, not only for the internalization of ways of applying moves or techniques, but also for the externalization of ways for moves or techniques to be learnt and applied, is that the consideration of a context of application independently from a counter-context renders achievable a focus on the considered move or technique, required to learn and practice the move or technique. This first aspect of the remark concerns different martial arts,

11 See notably, *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein, 2009), *The Uses of Sense: Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Language* (Travis, 1989), *Sens et sensibilité* (Benoist, 2009), *When Words Are Called For* (Baz, 2012).

and in some sense amounts to the triviality that if, of two partners one of which ‘mechanically’ attempts to apply a move or technique to the other, the other systematically applies a counter-move or technique, the first partner will not be able to practice the application of the first technique. Consider for example, similar situations in which moves or techniques can be applied in response to the application of a same or different move or technique (as for examples: an *ippon seoi nagi* in response to an *o soto gari*, a *punch* in response to a *jab*, a *front kick* in response to a *middle kick*, a *juji gatame* in response to a *kimura*, a *do gaeshi* in response to a *tenbin kudaki*, an *otoshigesauchi* in response to a *tsuki*). Obviously, if the goal of the exercise is the practice of a counter move or technique, the exercise can turn out fully satisfactory. But remark that the two exercises, that of the application of a move or technique, and that of the application of a counter-move or technique are *distinct*, different from each other. Their *unreflexive* conflation could not turn out beneficial, and the happening of such unreflexive conflations is very common, due sometimes to hastiness (and not speed), to insensitivity (and not power), to neglection (and not focus). So far, so good, this really is a triviality that many teachers integrate within their practice. However, responses to the difficulties which can result from confused conflations are really debatable.¹²

For what could have seemed an easy way out of the difficulty, that is the would-be *restriction* of the training by *differing* the learning of counter-techniques could not have turned out beneficial. This might seem a very strange remark, inasmuch as nothing is wrong in the idea that the internalization of a move or technique necessarily precedes the internalization of a counter move or technique: how could what to a counter move or technique can be applied can be understood without identifying relevant ranges of moves or techniques of its counter-applications anyway? However there really is a difficulty with the idea that the remark that the internalization of a move or technique precedes the

12 One important pivot of these difficulties is the assumption of the sufficiency of a combinatorial conception of moves and techniques (according to which, briefly formulated, every move or technique is the result of a combination) to account for practice, inasmuch as such assumption, *practically efficient to an extent* – and peculiarly to account for ways of relevantly combining moves or techniques among each other, could not suffice to account for ways in which, as earlier mentioned, practices, among which those of martial arts, can successfully evolve, inasmuch as the ‘set’ of available moves or techniques is, as such, neither meant to be, predetermined, nor ‘closed’.

internalization of a counter-move or technique could, as such, be incompatible with the remark that the learning of counter moves or techniques should not be differed. Indeed, if there might be cases in which the learning a counter-technique can be considered to be too early, this could not have implied the unavoidable necessity of the *restriction* of the training by the differing of the learning of a technique, for what remains unnoticed in such case is that the differing decision can itself turn out to be a hasty and inadequate response to an educative situation. Indeed, contrary to a too common assumption, this is not the case that learning counter-techniques cannot but unavoidably lead to their applications, and to the forgetfulness of correct application of techniques (analogously: how could forming sentences in the grammatical sense could be learnt if only learning to pronounce words was achieved?). The very ways in which the discrimination (in the distinctive and non-moralistic sense) of techniques, counter-techniques, applications, counter-applications, remains necessary to the teacher to teach throughout one's teachings, and can be considered as results of increasingly diminishing efforts, such distinctions are correlatively increasingly required for the students to learn and progress.

One central pivotal point is that techniques can also be perfected, that is to say, *not only their applications*. Subordination of the exercises of application of techniques to 'negative' and 'internal' replications of idealized moves cannot but turn out to be restrictive for the evolution of the practice. Many students have been discouraged of continuing their progresses due to their would-be inability of *replicating* moves, independently from relevant remarks concerning their own valuable capacities. Not every move or technique can be equally learnt, practised and achieved by each one. But could there have been anything as such as a reason for which from such remark the restrictive limitedness of some could have been inferred? Precisely not, the equation of moves or techniques we do not do with moves or techniques we cannot do is both superfluous and misleading. Some moves and techniques are available to some ones.

The difficulty is really with the ‘replicative’ (and corollarily, with the ‘theftuous’) conceptions of martial arts, and in a sense, not with anyone. *Doing* like *could not be equivalent with the reproduction of what would somehow need to be an ‘internal image’, an ‘internal representation’, or an ‘internal depiction’*. Such remark could not be incompatible with the one that we can obviously compare, for educative or competitive purposes, recordings of what we do (as pictures or videos). But such remark is really incompatible with the one – for motives some of which have already been mentioned – that any difficulty could have been involved, *as such*, by the difference between what we might assume to have done and what we have done. Indeed, that such difference can be made, whenever required, whenever useful (and that is, often) matters to us to improve both our applications of moves, techniques, practices, and sometimes the moves, techniques and practices (theseselves). This is not an auxiliary point to our practices, this is an aspect that matters to us to distinguish and prevent false-desperation.

For indeed, if the careful reading of classic books of martial arts, such as *Hagakure* (Tsunetomo, 2005) or *Gorin-no-sho* (Musashi, 2003), and more contemporary works (Mishima, 1985), is important to achieve some understanding of both the history and the spirit in which (in this case, Japanese) martial arts have been conceived in medieval times, exactly as the reading of classic books of philosophy as Plato’s *Republic* (2021) and Aristotle’s *Politics* (1995) is important to achieve some understanding of both the history and the spirit in which democracy has been conceived in antique times, the unproblematic negativity involved by a contemporary understanding and application of such achievements cannot without loss underestimated. The valuation of the ‘courage’ which could allegedly be displayed by the realization of an efficient beheading of prisoners or execution of persons (Tsunetomo, 2005, p. 9, p. 94; Musashi, p. 130), of the rejection of critical art (as in the *Republic*, Book X), of the eventual acceptability of slavery (as in *Politics*, 1995, 1253b23) should now freeze us, and *not due do their inactuality, but to the unacceptable*

*actuality of such practices*¹³, and inspire us wishes to strive for, produce and share alternative conceptions of the mutual contributions of martial arts and philosophy, in ways which are compatible with the development of democracy. Unreflexively developed and shared passeistic and ‘sublimated’ representations of the past, of undemocratic past, can really become a burden for the development of democratic institutions. Retaining only meliorative aspects ultimately does not render possible the developments we strive for. Remembrance obviously is of the past, but unparadoxically *through* a future. Refusal to think the past, sometimes does not turn out to be different in any sense from refusing the conception of a desirable future.

For this reason, I will argue that martial art and philosophy can be mutually contributive by *education to democracy*, in the contemporary sense. Thereby I really mean *education to democracy* and not, and by contrast with, *a defense of democracy*. Such claim immediately requires a few elucidations. First, *education to democracy* is distinct from *a defense of democracy* in that arguing in favor of democracy, is arguing in favor of a political unit among other conceivable political units. This is a really important and valuable exercise. To be able to provide reasons and ways in which democracy is desirable by contrast with other conceivable political units matters to us. But this could not be equivalent with educating *to* democracy. Understanding the desirability of democracy could not amount to a mere abstract selection of an item among other items allegedly ‘within’ our minds. For thusly conceived, not only that its achievement would be quasi-automatically be achieved with the achievement of the remark, but also, no one of our subsequent actions would be expressive of and liable to such understanding.

Second, we need further distinctions to contemporarily think these dimensions of martial arts. For as representationalism, the already criticized presumption that only through ‘internal representations’, ‘internal depictions’, ‘mental representations’, ‘mental depictions’ can mind

13 See the data rendered available by Forced Labour Observatory: <https://webapps.ilo.org/flodashboard/#about:1>; Reporters without Frontiers: <https://rsf.org/fr/classement>; Amnesty International: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/7200/2024/en/>

achieve conscious perception (of reality) generates different – but not unrelated – difficulties to epistemology (Uçan, 2023, pp. 401-402) and political reflexion. Asymmetrically the replicative conception of martial arts generates a double-difficulty, if the epistemological and political dimensions are not distinguished (and this, even, and *especially* if one is interested in the epistemology of the political). That is to say, we need to distinguish *representationalism*, which most often grieves the epistemology of martial arts (again, Botztepe's book (2017) is exemplary in its fierce criticisms of preconceptions about martial arts) from *representativism* (which is exactly like representationalism, but with social statuses, in the two senses of seeing (a person) 'through' (a status) and standing for (a status), and which most often preempts and blocks elucidatory and democratic reflexions and discussions from happening. A course of martial art obviously could not be equivalent with a law course, or with a course about the functioning of democratic institutions, or with the holding of a political gathering. As unhelpful would be to conceive of the contribution of the practices of martial arts to the functioning of democratic institutions in such ways, as the opposite. Again, attention to context provides a guideline: some training places, martial arts clubs, combat sport clubs, dojos, are *contingently*, but *necessarily contingently* situated in states whose functionings are democratic, in that the functionings of these states as such are dependent upon the application of (transparent) voting procedures (the sort of transparency which can be *looked after*, *cared about*), among which and notably the election of representatives. When functioning as these - I argue - *should*, the institutions in which dojos and clubs consist, function *as* the instituted democracies within which these are located. That is to say, the regulated practices of martial arts, which sometimes involve regulated violence (as during sparrings and fights) are embedded in these institutional backgrounds, *and not the opposite*.

The importance of this point is still, I argue, largely underestimated. We need to voice change and remark both the possibilities of the unpolitical of the political, and that of the political of the unpolitical. Many of us appreciate competitive aspects of martial arts in that the skills exhibited

by competitors are not, and are not even meant, to be representative of some political conception. That is to say, the skillfulness of practitioners and their assessments are independent from a political conception. Partisanship is not relevant for *assessment of martial and sportive performances*. We might (and arguably should) appreciate more the successful performance of a practitioner of a distinct, sometimes divergent, or even radically opposite political conception, than the unsuccessful performance of a practitioner of a similar, sometimes convergent, or even identical political conception. This remark is obviously independent from other appreciative relations that individual or collective persons can upkeep. But in martial arts, and probably more than, broadly conceived, other sportive practices, we also need to be more than careful with ‘apoliticism’. Sexist, anti-egalitarian, racist, anti-scientific, anti-artistic behaviors do present political dimensions that could not be addressed by repression only. In fact, on the contrary, most often repression – which in a sense *always* come too late – happens precisely due to the lack of prior discussion, due to earlier neglects, sometimes, unfortunately enough, (quasi-)intentionally realized. Surely, if discussion often takes time of practice, and is not necessarily desirable as such, for example and notably, during a training, discussion nevertheless needs to happen wherever and whenever required when martial arts are practiced, and even if only to remark that a discussion can be better achieved later. So far, so good, this really is a triviality, inasmuch as there is no such thing as a training which can happen without prior discussion, at least in a central and basic range of cases.

But I argue that we need to be firm on remarking that *not allowing for such discussions, and thereby to progressist initiatives to happen due to their political aspects is a political move*, and that we need, as practitioners, whether as students, as instructors, as teachers, as researchers, as organizers, as referees, to be more than careful about such tendencies. Silencing could not, as such, have turned out adequate: in most cases, there already are regulations which concern and condemn discrimination (in a moral, yet non-moralistic sense). In this case like many others, the difficulty is not that there are no laws, no rules, or that rules and laws and their applications are not severe

enough. The difficulty, sometimes hopefully enough, against the very own best wishes of contemptors of democracy, but in many cases, regrettably enough, rules and laws remain unapplied (this is peculiarly clear in cases of racist and sexist discourses, but also concerns anti-scientific, anti-artistic, and anti-ecological discourses). Such that in many cases, arguing in favor of the implementation of a new set of rules or laws, or for the tightening of already existing sets of rules or laws, could not have provided a satisfactory outcome to the resolution of the problems that these rules or laws were implemented to address. The opposite conception of necessary necessity and contingent contingency which goes together with the sublimated opposition between the wishes of reaching or renouncing control, is to this extent an expression of undue abstractionism. That ‘control’ needs not and could not have been the end of all ends, could not have implied that the realizability of every end is accountable for if ‘controlling’ could not sometimes be an end, whose realization’s importance should neither be over or under estimated. The very ways in which philosophical elucidations could not have been meant to end our practices of asking and responding to questions, even, and especially if definitive elucidations are conceivable, martially artistic practices could not be meant to end with the display of definitive techniques, even and especially if and when definitive moves or techniques are displayable and displayed¹⁴. Our practices can become mutually responsive, compatible, and beneficial, but that could not have been unavoidable.

14 These explanations are independent from the conception according to which definitiveness, definitivity and definitivizations could be unavoidably desirable. On this see Holt (2022, pp. 82-83).

Conclusion

To conclude, martial art and philosophy can be mutually contributive practices. I proposed an elucidation of this mutual contributivity by considering some constitutive dimensions of these practices. These practices are indeed mutually autonomous, and their constitutive paradigmatic achievements and standards are mutually and reciprocally independent. I proposed to clarify that the achievement of the distinction of these dimensions is of first importance both to think the conceptual and historical mutual independence of the practices of martial art, of peace as an end or finality, of democratic ideals, which can serve to elucidate their mutually conceptual independence. If accounting for pertinent ways of conceiving, thinking and accounting for their conceptual relations is achievable, then we also need to dispel the necessarily misleading idea that there could be (pseudo)unavoidable entailments between martial arts, combat sports, peace and democracy. Wisdom can then be conceived as an unrestrictive limit of martially artistic and philosophical practices, in ways which are independent from etymologist conceptions if conceived in undichotomistic, unessentialistic, and unsubstantialistic ways. Dichotomies are not required as boundaries to account for the limits of knowledges and practices. Essences are not required as unificatory immaterial standards of (instances of) moves, techniques, and practices. Substances could not be required as atemporal and aspatial grounds of the practice and its philosophy. Maybe contrarily to what could have been expected, dualisms generate much of the difficulties these were meant to render addressable. As an alternative guideline, *attention to context* often suffices to solve epistemological problems of the philosophy of martial arts. Positively (in a non-psychologistic, non-meliorative, non-moralistic sense), the distinction between the context of application of a move or technique or practice and the context of application of a counter move or technique or practice suffices to pose, address and solve many of both epistemological problems of the philosophy of martial arts, and practical problems of the learning, the teaching, and the improving of moves and techniques. Negatively (in a non-psychologistic, non-pejorative, non-moralistic sense) integration of such distinction renders achievable the remark of the problematicity of the replicative conceptions

of martial arts. *Doing like* could not be equivalent with *reproducing an 'internal image', or 'internal representation', or 'internal depiction'*. Correlatively, I argued that martial art and philosophy can be mutually contributive by education *to* democracy, which could not be equivalent but is certainly not incompatible with defending democracy. Regulated violence internal to regulated practices of martial arts are embedded in institutional backgrounds, *and not the opposite*. Thus, contrarily to what might have eventually been expected, 'apoliticism' could not have been a solution but a problem to practices of both martial art and philosophy: *not allowing for discussion, and thereby, to progressist initiatives to happen due to presumably political aspects is a political move which is not compatible with the democratic functioning of democratic institutions.*

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