Power Relations in an ‘Aikido Dojo’

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“The path of the ‘bugeisha’ (martial artist) is not only a rocky road, it is a lonely one. A teacher may set you on the path. But the ‘bugeisha’ must walk the path, dependent only on himself and the mercy of God.”

There is, throughout Michel Foucault’s work, a preoccupation with the nature of power, issuing in an analytics of its operations in different institutions — asylums, hospitals, prisons, schools, etc. “Power,” he tells us, “is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.” Be that as it may, the ubiquity of power is, in Foucault’s view, cause for neither distrust nor fear. For against the traditional understanding of power as “domination,” that is, as the outcome of the exercise by clearly identifiable institutions or individuals of a certain strength, against which humans have to wage war to win what they call their “freedom,” Foucault counterpoises an understanding of power identifying it with “complex strategical situation[s]” constitutive or productive of society itself. He nonetheless recognizes that, quite apart from being productive of society itself, power is productive as well of a reality of suffering for entire classes of people. In Madness and Civilization, for example, he describes how, in the course of the development of different “cures” for madness, a practice of power over the mad (later called the “insane”), came to be organized around the examining eye of modern psychiatry. He begins with an account of the practice in the Middle Ages of confining lepers in fa-

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1 Introduction by Wayne Muromoto to Dave Lowry’s Persimmon Wind (Boston, Massachusetts: Tuttle Publishing, 1998).
3 Ibid., p. 93.

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cities situated at the edge of the city, far enough from the city’s other inhabitants so as to preempt contagion, yet close enough so as to serve as a forceful reminder of God’s punishment of the wicked, and of His power over death. Following the dramatic decrease at the end of the Middle Ages in the numbers of those afflicted with the disease, these houses of confinement fell into disuse. Yet, Foucault tells us, “often, in these same places, the formulas of exclusion would be repeated, strangely similar, two or three centuries later.” Poor vagabonds, criminals, and “deranged minds” were recruited to replace the lepers in these houses of confinement. In the aftermath of the economic crisis of the seventeenth century, which incited a general “condemnation of idleness,” these houses of confinement metamorphosed from being places of exclusion, into “factories” where a productive labor could be exacted from the bodies of the confined. It was in this context that subtle transformations came over the mechanisms of power for dealing with the mad. In particular, Foucault cites the work of Samuel Tuke in England and Philippe Pinel in France, who in the effort to establish a different but more efficient “economy” of power, replaced the chains and barred cells in which, formerly, the mad had been held, with psychological counseling, and prolonged stays in beautifully-appointed countryside retreats. Decisive for the success of this process was the emergence of the “medical personage.” Foucault writes:

“Of them all, it is doubtless the most important, since it would authorize not only new contacts between doctor and patient, but a new relation between insanity and medical thought, and ultimately command the whole modern experience of madness. Hitherto, we find in the asylums only the same structures of confinement, but displaced and deformed. With the new status of the medical personage, the deepest meaning of confinement is abolished: mental disease, with the meanings we now give it, is made possible.”

All in all, then, Foucault demonstrates that, quite the reverse of being a medico-clinical matter played out in a free realm of observation,

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5 *Madness and Civilization*, p. 56.
diagnosis, and therapeutics, the study and technical treatment of "madness," or "mental illness," was an instrument of moral domination, serving mainly bourgeois values and perspectives. Foucault makes an analogous point with respect to the "patient," and "illness," in The Birth of the Clinic. For under the impact of the newly emergent clinician's "gaze" or "act of seeing," the "patient" and his "illness" became the principal targets of the medical establishment's efforts, not so much to produce knowledge, as to "spatialize" (literally, at the other end of the stethoscope), or distribute power. Legitimating this development was the "epidemic," since it gave the authorities an incentive — and an excuse — to establish a society-wide apparatus centered upon the hospital. The hospital was to become means by which they would be able not only to track the public's general health condition, and also to collect such bodies as there were of the indigent ill as raw material required by the scientific-medical apparatus in its search for medical knowledge. All in all, Foucault's investigations into the operations of power in hospitals have provided, in Thomas Osborne's words, "less the basis of a general theory of medicine than an analysis of the heterogeneous applications of discipline — one of which is, indeed, medicine." Thus, the patient at the end of the stethoscope, and the prisoner in the panopticon (the subject of investigation in Discipline and Punish), became points of application for disciplinary technologies that were "identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus [because they are] a type of power, a modality for its exercise" that "can be taken over by institutions (schools, hospitals) as 'an essential instrument for a particular end.'"6 "The pure legal subject [became] the real human individual ... in the shape of a body to be trained."7

These bodies to be "trained" or "shaped" had first to be segregated from the general populace, which required the establishment of special enclosures such as barracks, schools, factories, which were then partitioned or subdivided into local spaces (e.g. classrooms, bedrooms, factory production sections, etc.). Into these spaces individuals were distributed, assigned definite functions and, generally speaking, conformed

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6 Ibid., pp. 269-270.
to "a production machinery."\(^8\) Distributions were carried out according to "an art of rank, a technique for the transformation of arrangements." Time was partitioned, producing timetables for the regulation of activity and the measurement of productivity. Activity itself was calibrated, conformed to an elaborate "learning series" (e.g. the precise and elaborate manner in which a rifle had to be borne in a military drill was spelled out in great detail and recruits made to learn it in keeping with that detail). Specific "techniques of enforcement" were applied for purposes of directing, regulating, and evaluating the various routine modes of conduct — among them the technique of hierarchical observation, which transformed the act of observation into a power of coercion, the technique of"normalizing judgment," which established norms of behavior through the application of local forms of punishments and rewards, and the "examination,"\(^9\) which Foucault describes as "a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish ... [that] establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them."\(^9\) In all of the aforementioned ways, disciplinary power "established in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination."\(^10\) Disciplinary power was not, then, simply repressive, but was productive as well, capable of enhancing the power of the individual/body at the same time that it "shaped" or "trained" him. With such considerations in mind we turn now to the subject of aikido.

Drawn from the older budo (martial arts), such as kenjutsu and aikijutsu (which Ueshiba also promoted),\(^11\) aikido seeks to train its disciples in

\(^8\) Colin Gordon, *Birth of the Subject - Foucault*, readings in Philosophy 298, p. 81.

\(^9\) Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977) p. 144. Continues Foucault: "Each individual has his own place; and each place its individual ... Disciplinary space tends to be divided into as many sections as there are bodies or elements to be distributed... Its aim was to establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits. It was a procedure, therefore, aimed at knowing, mastering and using. Discipline organizes an analytical space" (p. 143, italics mine).


the art of blending the energy proper to themselves with that of an opponent and, by means of the resulting force, to subdue him; and, concomitantly, in the art of stemming conflict before it escalates, of viewing the world through one’s adversary’s eyes, of meeting tribulation with a serene decisiveness. Hence, the appellation, aikido, compounded from the words, ai - harmony, ki - inner strength/force, and do - way of life, meaning “the Way of harmony of ki.” Words and letters can never adequately describe aikido,” declares its founder, Moriihei Ueshiba, “[for its meaning is revealed only to those who are enlightened by hard training.” Be that as it may, the attempt to gain familiarity with aikido, must begin with the dojo, “space of enlightenment,” “place of the Way;” or, quite simply, the space which serves as the site of its practices. Now, “practice,” in relation to aikido, is not the same thing as the “practice” dancing, writing, speaking, fiddling, golf, etc., we engage in with the objective of improving and even “perfecting” our performance of them. In aikido, what matters, what is of intrinsic value, is present activity, not some hoped-for future outcome of present work. “There is no result in Zen practice. That is not the point. It is the effort you make to improve yourself that is measured.”

Since the practice of aikido involves a number of throwing techniques, it cannot be carried out on a bare floor. To facilitate rolling, and to break falls (ukemi), the floor of the aikido dojo is covered either with tatami mats or some other material capable of absorbing the impact of bodies hurtling to the ground at high speed. Typical of Japanese design, the furnishing of the aikido dojo is minimalist. Placed usually at the

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12 Ibid., p.138. Italics mine.
13 Kenjutsu is a generic name for swordsmanship, and aikijutsu is a style of jujutsu that uses the principle of aiki. Jujutsu is also a generic name for the technique of grappling deployed by the samurai to complement their weapons arts. Jujutsu involves a variety of locks, holds, and throws, as well as strikes such as kicks. Bereft of a weapon, the samurai who had gained a mastery of the art of grappling could still defend himself.
14 The character for ai is also translated as “love”; hence, the essence of aikido is said to be love, the avoidance, and peaceful resolution, of conflict. If this element disappears, the techniques become empty movements undifferentiable from all the other methods of combat. Just as the two sides of a coin make up the coin, and the removal of one face renders it useless, so also the disappearance of the element of love/harmony from aikido renders it a mere method for fighting. Equally devastating to the art would be the loss of technical expertise, for then it becomes useless and effete. Let go of one of its dimensions and you lose aikido.
midpoint of one edge of the mat is a small table, called the kamiza and on this are placed a portrait of the Founder of aikido, a small vase of flowers, and sometimes some incense. The kamiza serves as a point of orientation for practice. On the front wall a scroll is hung on which are painted the Japanese characters for ai-ki-do. The disposition of space in aikido has both a practical and a philosophical/aesthetic dimension. In its practical dimension, because aikido requires a lot of open space for the execution of its movements, the aikido dojo is bare, with the exception of the kamiza. In its philosophic dimension, the "emptiness" of the aikido dojo reflects a central element in Zen thought, namely, the relationship "between oneself and the moment," the "here and now" of existence. In its aesthetic dimension, aikido reflects the "emptiness" characteristic of a typical Japanese home:

"A Japanese house always looks like someone has just moved out," one tourist in Japan told me. To become comfortable with all this emptiness, to resist the urge to fill it in, one must be comfortable with the concept of ma. Literally, ma refers to an "interval". The gap between weapons held by two swordsmen facing each other is one form of ma... Ma plays a vital role in Japanese architecture. The severe simplicity of my guest quarters at the Fujiwara house was not a disregard for beauty. It was an example of ma, a deliberate aesthetic device to emphasize the accents that were in the room. In a space cluttered with paintings, sculpture, and other decorations, the spray of three chrysanthemum blossoms at the tokonoma and the scroll above it would have been just two more. But placed as they were, at one side against a spacious ma with nothing else to interfere, they drew to them anyone entering the room. Without competing distractions, the flowers could be appreciated in full. The vase they were in, a muddy brown pot in other circumstances, was highlighted and it was possible to notice how the color and texture of the vase were complemented by the soft, golden blossoms. The scroll was only a couple of lines of calligraphy, only a dozen or so characters. But because they were arranged on the hanging scroll — and the scroll itself arranged on the alcove wall — with a sensitivity to ma, they became objects worthy of study and appreciation, the inspiration for a meditative introspection. My room may have seemed empty. It was not. The deep expression of ma filled it wonderfully.\textsuperscript{15}

In aikido, the practitioner aims to develop such qualities of mind as calm, humility, joy, purity of thought, focus, concentration, symbolized by the budoka’s “empty tea cup.” The dojo, as such, is kept clean, uncluttered, bright, filled with ma, the outward picture of a heart rendered pure and humble by its release from mundane cares. The care of the dojo is part and parcel of aikido practice. Students keep it clean through daily sweeping, prior to, and following, class. They keep the kamiza neatly in its place and dusted. If the dojo is not outfitted with mats that have been permanently fixed in place, the students lay these out on the floor in preparation for practice and, following practice, re-deposit these in the appropriate storage bins. Through the energy they exert in the care of the dojo, they manifest their profound respect for it. A neglected dojo is a clear outward sign of inner laxity, of an incapacity to take on far more important responsibilities such as the safety of one’s practice partners. “The dojo is more than a training hall for development of bodily arts... It is a place where severe and intense destruction of the ego takes place.”

The term, “sensei,” used to refer to the teacher who leads the class, means the “one born before,” the “one who goes before.” Because the sensei is further along the Way than his students, he is in a position to provide them with guidance, which he does gladly, since “[h]e has struggled along the way himself and in return for the kindness shown him by his teachers, he shows [his students] the methods by which [they] can make the same journey for yourself.” The student, for his part, embraces the regimen of training within the aikido dojo, where the sensei’s word is final. As much as the strictly hierarchical relationships that obtain in the aikido dojo preempt any sort of a description of it as “democratic,” between the sensei and the sempai (senior students), and between the kohai (junior students) and the sempai as well, obtain relations and dispositions of utter mutual respect. Not even gender is a problem for the dojo. In some dojo, at least in Japan, women do not wear anything under their gi (a loose, white cotton jacket/uniform) with the exception

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17 Persimmon Wind, p.45.
18 The bukoka was the practitioner of the martial ways.
of a bra. Most *dojo*, however, allow women to don a shirt inside their *gi*. Women have the same access as the men to the *aikido dojo* because any form of discrimination against them would be emblematic of the kind of low-mindedness so antithetical to the spirit of the Way. Thus, the sensei guarantees equal treatment of both male and female *budoka*. Male or female, all *aikidoka* (practitioners of *aikido*) take the same falls during practice.

Among the many practices of mutual respect deemed capable of producing the correct frame of mind for “right practice,” one must list the *rei*, or the ways in which a proper bow is made. A standing *rei* is performed from the waist with the back straight and the palms of both hands on the thighs. Eye contact with one’s practice partner is maintained throughout this exercise (in the feudal era, for his careless exposure of the back of his neck, the *samurai* would sometimes be made to pay with his life). The *budoka*, in other words, had always to be alert, “on his toes,” even in the way that he bowed. A seated *rei* can also be performed from *seiza* (a seating/kneeling position with the feet tucked beneath the buttocks). To sit in *seiza*, the left knee goes down to the ground first, followed by the right knee. After the latter is completed, the body’s weight is shifted to the hips, as one rests on one’s buttocks. In a seated *rei*, the left hand is lowered first and placed on the ground, followed by the right hand with the tips of the thumbs and forefingers of both hands touching to roughly form a triangle or spade. The bow is again performed from the waist. As one returns to an upright position, the right hand goes up first, followed by the left hand. Accounting for this is the sword that is placed on the left side of the body. To facilitate easier sword drawing and sheathing, the left side of the body must always be kept free of obstructions; hence, the minimization of the left knee’s protrusion to the front. Since the right hand is used to draw the sword, the time it spends away from the waist (sword) is minimized; the right hand goes down last but goes back up first. There is, in that sense, a “healthy tinge of paranoia” in *aikido* practice, meant to instill a sense of *zanshin*, that is, a complete and continuous awareness of one’s surroundings. For all that, the *rei* signifies neither submission to, nor worship of, another person. It signifies, rather, a greeting, thanksgiving, and a sign of humility and mutual respect. Jon Pearson sums it up well in the following words:
“By adhering to formal rules of etiquette, you will be constantly reminded that you are practicing a martial art and that personal feelings must be kept under control. Were this not the case, you may forget that your partner offers his body willingly and freely to assist you, and that anger or desire to dominate the other should never be a factor in your practice.”

Aikido practice begins prior to the formal start of class. Upon entering and leaving the dojo, a standing rei is performed in the direction of the kamiza. This is done as well on entering and leaving the mat area, as a gesture of respect for the place of training. Footgear is not permitted inside the mat area. If class has already begun, the aikidoka must await the sensei’s permission for him to enter. Once permission is given, the aikidoka makes a standing rei in the direction of the kamiza, then enters. The sensei takes up a position in front of the class, while the students, also sitting in seiza, are lined up in rows. Facing the kamiza, the most senior student sits in the first row of the column at the extreme right. The student next to him in rank sits to his left — so proceeds the hierarchy, from the highest-ranking student to the lowest. The sempai sit on the front row, the kohai on the next, and so on. The progression from highest to lowest thus goes from right to left, front to back. Class begins with the sensei and his students performing a formal rei in seiza in the direction of the kamiza or the front wall. This signals the respect and gratitude owed to the Founder for having propagated the art. The sensei then faces his students and they perform another bow, still in seiza, to greet each other formally and to signal once again the respect and gratitude, this time to the sensei for having led the training. Simultaneously, the words “Onegai-shimasu” are uttered, as people give little bows to one another. Roughly, this translates as “please practice with me,” and “let’s help one another train.” Class ends much in the way it begins. The students line up in seiza, and everybody bows to the kamiza, then to the sensei. While the final bow is being performed, the words “Domo arigatoo gozaimashita” are uttered, meaning, “thank you very much”. As intimated earlier, bowing is an integral part of aikido practice, as the latter is meant to develop the aikidoka not only on the physical level but on the mental level as well.

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19 Aikido, p. 47.
"The action of *rei* is thus a constant reminder to make and keep you forever mindful in your thoughts and actions. It assists you, so that you do not fall into sloppy practice. This way you will stay centered and sharp, like the blade of a *samurai* sword. One day, your life or another’s may depend on this. In the meantime, sloppy practice means you have slipped from the Way."

All *aikido dojo* have rules and regulations that not only serve as "house rules", but reflect the etiquette required in one who undergoes *budo* (martial way) training. The following is a sample of the common rules and regulations observed in an *aikido dojo*:

1. Be punctual in all your scheduled classes.
2. Be presentable and keep yourself as well as your uniform(s) clean.
3. Keep your nails and toenails short. Remove all jewelry, pins, clips, or any hard/pointed objects before entering the mat area to avoid injury.
4. Bow before entering and leaving the mat area. If the training is in session, ask permission from your instructor(s) in order to be excused.
5. The martial arts training hall (*dojo*) mirrors the spirit of all the practitioners. Therefore, always keep the *‘dojo’* clean and respectable. Do not loiter in the mat area without your uniforms on.
6. Always address persons of higher ranks as "Sir," "Ma’am," or "Madam".
7. Be mindful of your actions. Keep in mind the safety of your practice partners. You are responsible for each other’s safety and development.
8. Practice seriously with the intent to learn, but practice with humility, patience, love, and respect for others.
9. Learning needs an open mind. A tea cup that is already full can no longer hold more tea. You should therefore "empty your cup" in order to learn. If you only seek to assert your own way of thinking, you will learn nothing and thus remain ignorant of

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20 *Persimmon Wind*, p. 61.
21 *Aikido*, p. 50.
the wisdom that others might offer.

The principles of *aikido*, “the Way of the harmony of *ki,*” derive from the principles underlying the martial technique called the *shomenuchi* attack (literally, a strike to the top of the head), which has the *aikidoka*, instead of blocking a strike, meets with his own hand the attacking hand, and guides it to its natural destination, downward. By so leading and thereby controlling the attacking hand, the *aikidoka* causes the attacker to overextend himself and lose his balance. The entire maneuver could then be concluded with either a throw or a pin. For just as a body in motion remains in motion unless an outside force acts on it, and just as a moving body propelled by kinetic energy, upon hitting another body, communicates or transfers this energy to the body that is hit, so also the attacking hand, on missing its mark, will be impelled by its own kinetic energy along its natural trajectory downward, which the *aikidoka*, by extending his hands, and blending his own force with that of the moving hand, aims to neutralize.

In *aikido* practice, the practitioners pair off; one sparring partner assumes the role of the *nage,* “the one who throws;” the other the role of the *uke,* “the one who receives the force.” Technically, *ukemi* refers to the art of falling. Whereas the *nage* practices the specific technique in question, the *uke* serves as the one on whom the technique is applied (*ukemi* is the art of being *uke,* of receiving the force of a technique). But as much as the *uke* makes it possible for the *nage* to learn the technique by providing the opportunity for him to launch a serious attack, both *nage* and *uke* are practicing *aikido.* The *nage* learns to make a technique effective, while the *uke* learns how to protect himself by learning how to become the recipient of a force, that is, how to harmonize his own kinetic forces with those involved in the *nage*’s throw. Failing to learn *ukemi* well, the *uke* runs the risk of injury in the course of a receiving a throw, and in his failure will hinder the *nage*’s training as well. Sensitivity and receptivity to one’s partner is something that both the *uke* and the *nage* need to cultivate in themselves, because short of that, the *nage* will fail to effectively blend his *ki* with that of his partner. *Aikido,* literally, is training in *musubi* or harmony. “Developing good *ukemi* is the shortest path to acquiring skill in *aikido.*”

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22 Ibid., p. 51.
In the course of advanced training, the aikidoka undertakes such exercises as randori which face him with multiple attackers; jiuwaza or freestyle practice sometimes involving prearranged attacks; and kaeshiwaza which require two practitioners to continually apply techniques on one another. The aikidoka do not so much train against each other as they do with each other: they assist their partners in acquiring a sound knowledge of basic techniques; they help them to discover their specific weaknesses; they provide them with the opportunity to effectively and safely (for while the exercises are not competition level or sparring type exercises, they still expose the careless aikidoka to the prospect of a certain amount of bodily injury) practice the techniques. With practice, the aikidoka can hope to become more flexible and acquire the freedom of movement necessary for effective aikido. With practice also, the principles behind the techniques start to show up in the life of the budoka. As a result of training received in the dojo, the true budoka learns to deal with life's problems in much the same way that he deals with aggressive attacks — that is, neither by meeting them head-on, nor by flinching and then crumpling in defeat, but by maintaining throughout an open and supple mind. In other words, the budoka does not ignore the problem, but neither is he overwhelmed by it. Rather, he calmly examines the problem and then determines the appropriate way to deal with it, and possibly, resolve it. The attainment of such a flexibility lies at the heart of good ukemi and musubi.

"Ukemi nurtures your ability to sense what is coming, to analyze a circumstance and to respond quickly. Just as those who anticipate too much in their ukemi in practice often fail to see the direction of a technique, those who are too calculating in life often fail to observe what is happening around them. They have no flexibility in responding to difficulties in life because they cannot see them until they are within their grip."23

Aikido is often described as a non-aggressive art. This is probably due to the fact that there is no competition in aikido. While this way of describing aikido is not false, it must be nuanced. The aikidoka does not

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23 The following are the rules and regulations that I have prepared personally for use at a local gym (Prime Fitness Center) where I serve as an aikido sensei.
go around looking for the kind of trouble that would make it possible for him to put his aikido techniques to use.

This is not to say that Aikido lacks an edge because it has no organized competition. Morihei described his style of training as shiai, "an encounter with death," which is the greatest challenge we will ever have to face. Aikido practitioners are always dealing with techniques that have the potential to be lethal, and such training demands the utmost concentration and intensity."

We have already noted how aikido practitioners are distributed throughout the aikido dojo according to rank, with the senpai occupying the front most row, and those of lesser rank taking up the rear. The arrangement in effect produces an "inner circle," with the sensei in front and the senpai directly facing him. Behind them the arrangement is a little more open-ended, posing a subtle challenge to the kohai: "train hard if you want to become a part of the inner circle." To demonstrate a particular technique/lesson, the sensei calls on the most senior student to serve as the uke. His seniority relative to the other students does not exempt him from being subject to the disciplinary power of the sensei. Within the aikido dojo time as well is partitioned, tied, through the intermediation of a timetable, to the performance of specific "tasks."

* The opening bow signals the start of the class, followed by warm-up exercises that lead naturally to aikido exercises.
* After the exercises, a three-minute rest period follows.
* The sensei then proceeds to demonstrate the lessons for the day in front of the class, while the students line up in seiza. After each lesson, the sensei gives permission for the class to pair off and practice what was demonstrated to them.
* The final bow signals the end of the class, signifying that the time for cleaning up the dojo has begun.25

25 Ibid., pp. 24-25.
The demonstration of an *aikido technique* commences with the unhurried and detailed demonstration of its parts. These demonstrations are then put into practice, starting off with static, holding attacks, throughout which one’s hand is held by one’s partner, progressing from there to grabs, strikes, punches. From his vantage point in front, or along one edge of the mat, or moving among his students to make his presence felt, the sensei, throughout the practice, keeps a sharp eye on them, correcting their mistakes, keeping the unavoidable “horsing around” under control. This, coupled with the strict observance of *aikido* etiquette, guarantees that no deviation from the routine goes unnoticed. When a student arrives late for class, for example, proper etiquette demands that he bow to the sensei, requesting permission to join the class. Failure to observe such rules is taken seriously and is punished. What form the punishment will take (whether of the “physical” variety, such as knuckle push-ups, or the psychological one, such as having a student “sit out” class on the sidelines), is at the sensei’s discretion. Perhaps his most important instrument for assessing the seriousness and the progress of his students is the examination, by means of which he gauges not only a student’s technical proficiency in the art, but his mental and psychological maturity as well. For *aikido* is more than the simple matter of subsuming “docile bodies” to the discipline of the *dojo* in order to make them technically proficient. It is a matter as well of mental and psychological maturity. This last point bears emphasizing, though we shall do this using the words of Mitsugi Saito:

“Aikido teaches a simple secret: the development of a better life is dependent on bettering yourself. Aikido offers no miracles except the miracle of your own existence and your human potential. Remember that you are a part of the universe. To ruin your life or waste it is to ruin a piece of the universe.”

This point is echoed by Foucault in an interview entitled, “The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom.” Consider the following.26

“an ascetical practice … not in the sense of abnegation but that of an exercise of self upon self by which one tries to work out, to transform one’s self and to attain a certain mode of being” (p. 113).

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"in order to behave properly, in order to practice freedom properly, it was necessary to care for self, both in order to know one's self... and to improve one's self, to surpass one's self, to master the appetites that risk engulfing you" (p. 116)

"One cannot care for self without knowledge. The care for self is of course knowledge of self - but it is also the knowledge of a certain number of rules of conduct or of principles which are at the same time truths and regulations" (p. 116)

"And the care for the self implies also a relationship to the other to the extent that, in order to really care for self, one must listen to the teachings of a master. One needs a guide, a counselor, a friend - someone who will tell you the truth. Thus, the problem of relationship with others is present all along this development of care for the self" (p. 118). (Foucault probably has in mind the third procedure in bodily training.)

Foucault, in short, points out that the practice of freedom is the condition of ethics, and that ethics is the "form assumed by liberty." Learning to care for oneself paves the way for one's ethical relationships with others. So it is with aikido. Morihei Ueshiba taught that there are three levels of practice to be mastered: the physical, the psychological, and the spiritual. The first level of mastery comes through the repetition of exercises, techniques, kata (practice of forms), etc. The physical principles are internalized and are thus learned by the body. One then becomes a skilled artist. The second level of mastery builds character. It is concerned with the development of will and commitment in the face of adversity, of facing and overcoming one's fears. The third level transcends technique and even character.

"It involves the release from form, as the ego-self becomes the egoless self... This egoless self has no concern to win or lose... The three levels of mastery are ultimately achieved by one practice, namely that of Aikido. One is not required to adopt a different practice for each level. One practice suffices; for in fact the three are one."27

27 The timetable presented above is a far cry from the much more austere one favored by the Founder himself:

6:00 a.m.: Morning prayers and meditation in front of the outdoor Aiki Shrine.
Aikido practice, as much as it might appear physically rigorous, and relentlessly disciplinary, really is, for the aikidoka, a path to self-knowledge. By so traversing this path, the aikidoka learns to relate to other people at the same time that he learns how to care for his own self.28

7:00 - 9:00 a.m.: Aikido training followed by a simple breakfast.
9:00 a.m. - noon: Farmwork.
12:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.: Midday break for lunch and rest.
2:00 - 4:00 p.m.: Farmwork.
4:00 - 6:00 p.m.: Aikido training.
6:00 - 7:00 p.m.: Bath.
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.: Evening prayers and meditation followed by dinner.
8:30 - 9:30 p.m.: Students would give Morihei's shoulders and legs a massage, read to him, and chat with him before he retired for the evening [Ibid. pp. 17-18].

28 The Principles of Aikido, back cover.