

## Arrogant Humility

You are a senior martial arts teacher who has just lectured his students about keeping a humble attitude despite their ever-increasing skill in the martial arts. Always willing to learn yourself, you visit a seminar in which another equally senior martial artist of a different system delivers a similar lecture. “It is good,” you think, “that we all want our students to be humble. Imagine how embarrassing it would be if a self-important student were shown up by someone with less training.”

On the mat, the master teacher, with an apparently kind heart, offers you some technical corrections that you see as less skillful, more effortful, less advanced ways of performing. You try them, of course, since he may have an insight into something you have overlooked, but after several attempts, you realize that your own methods are far more efficient and effective. Will you then offer *your* variations to the master instructor? If you do, would you be doing so out of a sincere desire to help, or out of arrogance?

You decide that you will keep your advice to yourself in order not to appear arrogant, but then you begin to wonder why the seminar instructor decided to offer his “correction” to you. Was it not a smug act intended to put you in a lower position while masquerading as a charitable donation? In other words, was not this master, who had just lectured on the need for humility, really practicing arrogant humility?

Or, on reflection, is it *you* that is too self-important to accept a correction as a sincere act of kindness, even if is unproductive or inefficient? If you were in his position, would you offer the correction without a tinge of arrogance, never once entertaining the idea that you are so much more skilled that you could correct his technique? Is it *you* who tout humility yet are arrogant enough to question his actions? Or was your assurance that you had a correction worth giving really just an expression of confidence, something both you and he would want your students to have?

When does confidence become conceit? When does assurance become arrogance that tolerates no correction?

My mother’s generation used the word “proud” to mean something negative, something akin to “snobbish” as in “He’s too proud to take a correction from someone else.” I had to overcome that use of the word to arrive at a more positive sense of pride, one that would allow me to hold confidence and would not allow others to put me down, while not assuming I was too high and mighty to be taken down.

We want our martial arts students to be proud of their art, proud of their style, proud of their dojo, their sensei, and of themselves, don't we? Sure! Otherwise, we'd be telling them how

bad our system is! But at the same time, we lecture them on humility, hoping for a balance of self-assuredness and confidence in one's training on one side of the scale and, on the other, openness to new knowledge and respect for those who have taken another path. This amalgam of characteristics is neither arrogant humility nor humble arrogance; rather, **it is reality-based egoism that rejects fantasy-based egotism**. It is lecturing on humility knowing that you can go to a seminar and tolerate a master instructor correcting your technique, whether or not he is arrogant. At least, I hope it is.