

Selfishlessnesshood

Frequently, I'll take a book off my library shelf and look it over. Having left the book untouched for several decades, I might now look at it differently. Not so with W. D. Norwood, Jr.'s THE JUDOKA (1973) of which I have a first edition. In a laudable attempt to merge creative writing with philosophical essay, Norwood tries to explain how his character, The Judoka, has been psychologically and philosophically influenced by his art. For example, he suggests that, "Detachment from particular things is the obverse of attachment to all things, to the process of life itself. If one is process...[he leaves vague what he means by a person actually being a process], one has faith, and thus need not be attached to any particular thing. To be attached to any particular thing...is to idolize it. To idolize anything is to blow it up out of proportion...and therefore to behave in a fashion that simply does not work. The most common of idols is the ego, that illusory picture of the self that a person carries in his mind's eye." So, to have Faith is to NOT idolize something because, in some way, "that ...does not work". Norwood suggests we should rid ourselves of this idol of the ego and thus become detached.

I wrote in the margin: "Attachment to Detachment is its own weakness. The Ego is not only an object of Attachment, but also a feeling of worth without which Detachment is impossible." In other words, why would you want to "detach" except to make things better *for yourself*, and perhaps even feel good about it? Oops, that's selfishness, and we can't have that since that is the idol of Ego.

Norwood goes on to advocate that judoka should "focus *sympathetic* attention on the adversary [italics are in the original]. It is...difficult to do. Sympathetic attention comes close to being a definition of love. What the Judoka does is to love his enemy." If this sounds like a mixture of Christianity and Ueshiba in his latter years, I would concur. Nevertheless, my 1973 notes point out that when a Judoka or Aikido-jin focuses sympathetic attention on his adversary, he is not approaching love, except perhaps that he values the humanity of an adversary enough not to use his martial art in a deadly manner, rather his "sympathy" is intended to understand how the adversary is functioning, not in order to join them in some sort of martial art oriented Stockholm Syndrome, but to "know one's enemy as oneself" (Sun Tzu). I can concentrate sympathetically with my adversary without loving (i.e. valuing) him.

Often, these philosophical definitions get reversed in writers' minds. They think that when you love someone you will be sympathetic to them, and thus it must follow that when you are sympathetic to someone, you must love them. Norwood writes, "To feel this is to feel union: that is to say, love." Uhh, I don't think so. Again the qualities are falsely reversed. You may be in union with someone when you love him/her, but being in union with someone does not necessarily mean you feel love.

He writes, "...whatever changes the consciousness in an aesthetically satisfying manner is poetry." Although Poetry may change the consciousness and/or be aesthetically satisfying, not everything

that changes consciousness through aesthetics is Poetry—is painting or sculpture Poetry? Is a novel or an essay Poetry?

To paraphrase Inago Montoya, “Ah, I do not think these words mean what you think they mean.”

As a strong advocate of minimal motion martial arts (whether the art be judo, aiki, or karate), I think I understand why Norwood writes the way he does. Don't forget his book was released in the Love, Peace and Flower Child seventies. However, I would suggest that both Ueshiba's “love your opponent” and Norwood's “sympathetic attention” ultimately boil down to strategy and tactic, whether or not you choose to leave the attacker battered and bloody or merely morally chastened with some minor bruises.

More on Selflessnesshood next time.