

applying nietzsche's ubermensch and kant's deontology in improving the attitude of karate tournament spectators

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Abstract

Tournaments have been a good way to promote and market the martial art of Karate. However, there seems to be a growing phenomenon in these tournaments as some spectators have begun to neglect the proper attitude and values in watching and accepting the results in competitions. Many spectators seem to be concerned only with their favorites and the success that these competitors achieve. Unfavorable results towards the players they support have often led to undue criticisms and protests against tournament officials and organizers. In this paper, the authors will hope to present that a good understanding and sincere appreciation of Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the Ubermensch and Immanuel Kant's deontology could serve as a guide to help spectators adopt the proper values in accepting the outcome and results of Karate competitions. The authors believe that these concepts, if properly understood, could possibly lead to a change in spectator attitudes that may help in preserving the integrity



of tournaments and contribute in promoting a competitive yet harmonious atmosphere in these Karate contests.

Keywords

Karate, Spectators, Nietzsche, Kant, Ubermensch, Deontology

Introduction

This paper is actually quite simple. It is simple if the reader knows Karate and the difference between Karate as a martial art and Karate as a sport. It is simple if the reader knows Immanuel Kant and his deontological approach to ethics. And it is simple if the reader knows Friedrich Nietzsche and his concept of the Ubermensch. However, the authors are going to assume that this paper will be read by individuals who may or may not be familiar with what was mentioned in the previous sentences. The authors will therefore be presenting a short introduction to the martial art known as Karate and how it is also a very popular combat sport. They will be drawing from their firsthand experiences with Karate and eventually explain what they feel to be a recurring problem in the world of Karate competitions; a problem that actually inspired them to write is paper.

The authors will then give a brief introduction to the philosopher Immanuel Kant and explain his moral philosophy particularly his deontological approach to ethics which is exemplified in his categorical imperative. This will then be applied to Sport Karate and will be used by the authors to address their problem.

The other philosopher to be discussed in this paper will be Friedrich Nietzsche. The authors will be discussing his ideas on master morality and slave morality as well as his concept of the Ubermensch. These will again be related to the problem that the authors have witnessed in their experiences with Karate tournaments. A conclusion will be presented at the end of the paper.

The Way of the Empty Hand

What is Karate? Is it a martial art? Is it a combat sport? Or is it a form of self-defense? The authors of this paper have been taught that Karate is all of the above and more. Based on their experiences in Karate, which span nearly three decades, the authors have been exposed to different Karate instructors and martial arts masters who have shaped the way they look at Karate. They consider themselves lucky to have had the wonderful experience of being taught by such experts and to have experienced training with talented individuals during Karate practices. It is also worth noting that they belong to a very prestigious Karate organization which boasts of international affiliations.

The word Karate actually means "empty hand." Historically speaking, the characters for Karate were known as "Chinese hand" owing to its Chinese and Okinawan roots. This meaning changed when Master Gichin Funakoshi, the father of modern Karate, proposed that the characters be changed to "empty hand" to reflect the nature of Karate as a Japanese art. This caused a tremendous uproar among some of the older and more traditional Okinawan masters (Hassell 1983, 32-33). How Master Funakoshi answered these masters, however, is not the focus of this paper. It is to say that the authors of this article have come to know the definition of Karate as such and were also taught that as a way of life Karate means "The Way of the Empty Hand."

In one of his books, famous Karate Master Hirokazu Kanazawa says that Karate has gained popularity due to its national and international appeal as a modern competitive sport with specific rules. He also points out that many are interested by the traditional and martial aspect of this art. Harmonizing these two essences, according to Master Kanazawa, has allowed young, adults, women, and men to practice Karate according to their needs (Kanazawa 1981, 15). Another famous figure in Karate, Master Masatoshi Nakayama, implemented the concept of Sport Karate in the 1950's. This was, of course, under the guidance of his teacher Master Gichin Funakoshi (Hassell 1983, 11).

Both of the authors have been trained to see Karate as both a martial art and as a sport. The focus of this paper though will be on Sport Karate because that is where the problem lies. The authors will draw from their experiences with this aspect of Karate since both have experienced Sport Karate firsthand as competitors and eventually as licensed tournament officials.

A Problem with Attitude

Karate tournaments are actually quite exciting. Though others may argue that it is not good for the martial art, it has been a good way to market Karate and make it more popular. Participating in such competitions is rather invigorating as both the authors have competed in their younger days. Officiating in these tournaments, however, is another matter. The authors would like to clarify though that the problem they see is based on their own experiences which have greatly contributed to their perspective regarding these Karate tournaments.

The main problem that they see is in the attitude of the spectators watching such tournaments. To clarify, spectators in these tournaments are usually comprised of the competitors' teammates, their coaches, their family, and also their friends. The authors have witnessed that in the past years there has been a growing trend wherein spectators complain whenever their favored competitor is losing or has lost in an event. It's much worse when it's the parents complaining about their son or daughter losing or getting an unfavorable decision. They also resort to blaming tournament officials when the results are unfavorable to them. Add to the fact that there is now social media, complaints are now not limited to the competition areas as there are also those who resort to posting their complaints and gripes about a certain tournament or about certain referees on social media. For the authors, this is a sad thing indeed and diminishes the prestige and honor of Karate tournaments. This is because such competitions were designed to test the skills and the spirit of those participating. Accepting the results in such endeavors is part of the whole experience. The authors believe that spectators should exhibit a better attitude and conduct themselves in a better manner in these prestigious events. Philosophers Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Nietzsche, the authors believe, could be of some help.

Immanuel Kant and the Categorical Imperative

Imagine if a driver was driving his or her car when suddenly he or she hears a siren which sounds a lot like an ambulance. And upon looking at the rearview mirror the driver does confirm that an ambulance is speeding in the

direction of his or her car. Should the driver give way to the ambulance? Or should the driver just stay put and think that the ambulance should just stick it out like everyone else who happens to be on the road at that time? In short, the driver will not make an effort to move thus not allowing the ambulance to pass through. Will this be the right course of action for the driver or for anyone else who happens to be in the same situation?

Another common scenario is when an individual goes to the mall and as usual arrives at a parking lot wherein there seems to be no parking slot available. Suddenly, perhaps out of sheer luck, the individual sees a vacant parking space from afar. As he or she excitedly nears the vacant space, the individual sees a sign on the parking slot that says that the space is reserved for disabled persons. Should the driver just ignore this sign and park anyway? Or should the driver think that a disabled person might actually arrive and will eventually need to use the disabled parking slot?

German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who believed that morality can be derived from reason, would definitely have answers to the questions posed at the end of each of the two scenarios. First, he'll most probably tell the first driver to give way to the ambulance. Why? The answer is rather quite simple. It is because if the positions were reversed and the driver was the one driving or worse the one inside the ambulance needing emergency medical attention then he or she would want the vehicles on the road to give way so that they will be able to reach the hospital as soon as possible. As regards the driver in the mall parking lot, Kant would most probably advise the driver to look for another parking space and leave the disabled parking space to those who the slot is intended for particularly disabled individuals. The reason being, that if the driver was in fact disabled or was carrying a passenger who is disabled, he or she would want to be able to park in the designated parking spot for people with disabilities and would definitely be angered if the slot was occupied by someone who is actually not disabled.

This kind of reasoning reflects Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy. Kant believes that morality can be expressed only in categorical imperatives and such imperatives tell us what to do unconditionally and may be defended by reasons (Scruton 2001, 83-84). In fact, Kant believes that the fundamental principle of morality presents itself in the form of a "categorical imperative." It's categorical because the demands are unconditional but an imperative since this law is something that individuals ought to follow (Guyer 2006, 180). Therefore, as the

first formulation of the categorical imperative goes, Immanuel Kant says “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law” (Guyer 2006, 184). Simply put the authors believe this to mean that an individual must have a check for the universality of his or her actions. Just like in the first example, it would be reasonable to think that the driver who gives way to the ambulance believes that people in the same situation must do the same action which is to allow the ambulance to pass. This has to be true in all cases involving an ambulance that needs to pass. Several instances in the news reflect the dire consequences of drivers not giving way to ambulance that need to pass. Kant regarded this first formulation of the categorical imperative as the philosophical basis for the famous golden rule wherein individuals should act in a way that they want others to act towards them (Scruton 2001, 86). This can be seen in the second example wherein the driver who leaves the vacant lot for disabled persons respects the right of such individuals to receive special consideration for their situation. And respect, the authors believe, is something that individuals want to be accorded to them. Just like what the golden rule exemplifies.

The categorical imperative can thus be used to address the problem that the authors presented in this paper. However, they would also like to briefly share the second formulation of the categorical imperative which says “So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (Guyer 2006, 186). The authors believe this to mean that an individual should never treat other individuals as mere means in order to achieve their goals or to get what they want. Instead, individuals should treat others with utmost respect for their personhood and for the fact that others are also autonomous moral agents.

Kant and Karate

As mentioned in the earlier part of this paper Karate tournaments are actually very exciting but oftentimes can also get to be intense. The authors, having officiated in quite a number of tournaments already, have witnessed this firsthand. These tournaments have their rules but this paper will not discuss all these rules. The authors officiate in Sport Karate competitions which mostly follow the competition rules of the World Karate Federation. In such

competitions individuals compete for medals and trophies and like all events of this nature there will always be winners and of course there are going to be losers. The problem, as mentioned earlier by the authors, lies in the fact that a lot of the spectators cannot seem to accept it when their athletes lose in these tournaments. They complain about bad calls and poor officiating whenever their students, teammates, sons, daughters, or relatives do not win. The authors themselves have been called names in the past by disgruntled spectators and have been heckled when their decisions do not turn out to be what the crowd was looking for.

This is where Immanuel Kant can help. The authors believe that such disgruntled spectators can apply the categorical imperative here. They feel that the universality test as exemplified in the categorical imperative can help by allowing such spectators to reflect on their complaints. Whenever a spectator protests a ruling in a tournament because the ruling wasn't in favor of his or her athlete, the question can be asked "Would that spectator have protested if he or she wasn't connected in any way to the athlete that lost?" This echoes Kant's universality test "Would anyone in your position have done what you just did?" and touches on objectivity by asking the question "Are the spectators protesting because a ruling was inherently flawed or because their athlete is losing?"

If the spectators protested simply because their athlete lost and not because of any technical mistake or flaw in the officiating, then they are violating Kant's categorical imperative because their actions cannot be considered as universal. They should only protest if they feel that a decision was mistaken thus any person in their position would have the right to do so if such was the case. The authors often hear spectators praising the officials if their athletes won even if the officiating was bad and hear them say that officiating was bad if their athletes lost even if, in fact, officiating was actually very good. This is rather sad because it violates Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative wherein he states that individuals must always be treated as ends. When spectators blame officials for the poor performance of their athletes then they are treating these officials as mere means. Spectators have to remember that tournament officials undergo examinations to become licensed referees and that they undergo training. And though they are not perfect, tournament officials are always reminded of such values as fairness and integrity. They always try their best when they make decisions. The authors believe, as autonomous moral agents and as licensed tournament referees, that they

deserve to be treated as ends and not merely as means. If spectators would keep this in mind then maybe their attitude towards Karate tournaments and officials would greatly improve.

Friedrich Nietzsche and the Übermensch

Friedrich Nietzsche was a nineteenth century German philosopher who took inspiration from people such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Richard Wagner, and Goethe. Known for being critical of religion in general and Christianity in particular, he was the originator of the phrase "God is dead." Touted as the last great moralist (Chodorow et. al. 1994, 730), he advocated a reversal morality, or in his own words, a transvaluation, of the morality he saw prevalent in his times, i.e. "slave morality." The end goal of his philosophy was to bring about the Übermensch—someone who lives by "master morality."

For Nietzsche, the adherents of slave morality tend to find an external oppressor with evil intent whenever their situation is miserable. For example, a poor person with such a morality may blame his or her poverty on corporations ("They don't pay me enough"), on the government ("They tax too much"), on society in general ("The capitalist society only cares about what it can get from me"), and would complain to such "oppressors" that they should adjust themselves for his or her sake. Hence, such an individual would sue a corporation, join rallies denouncing the government, or generally just be critical of capitalism and materialism.

The adherents of slave morality also view "good" as a reversal, and hence a derivative, of "evil" (Nietzsche 1954, 655-656). Here, evil is understood to be malevolent, wicked, sinister, and is usually attributed to their oppressors. Good is understood to be humble, passive, gentle, and is usually attributed to them.

The adherents of slave morality also have a reactive tendency, in the sense that they only act when something has been done to them. Thus, they harbor grudges toward their oppressors (Nietzsche 1954, 753-54). Until the possibility of carrying out their vengeance seems possible and close, they spend most of their time imagining how such a vengeance will play. This is "contemplation," "meditation," "prayer," and "anticipation of Judgment Day."

On the other hand, the adherents of master morality find the fault within themselves when their situation is miserable (Nietzsche 1954, 634-35). For

example, a poor person with such a morality will admit that his or her poverty results from his or her own weakness ("I didn't work hard enough"), or mistakes ("I made stupid choices with my finances"), or failings ("I didn't give value to the world"), and would fix such flaws to improve the situation. Hence, such a person would give a better performance at work, make smarter decisions with money, or find a way to add value to the world.

The adherents of master morality also view "bad" as a flawed imitation or a falling-short and hence a derivative, of "good." Here, bad is understood to be lousy, pathetic, feeble, miserable, and is usually attributed to people they don't obsess with. Good is understood to be assertive, dynamic, strong, effective, and is usually attributed to an ideal or an exemplar (Nietzsche 1954, 637).

The adherents of master morality also have a proactive tendency, in the sense that they decide what they want for themselves, without compulsion from external forces, and go for it. Thus, they have a drive to do something for them that will improve their situation (Nietzsche 1954, 655). They become focused in accomplishing whatever they set out to do, and they do not spend their time dwelling on or ruminating about the past.

Nietzsche and Karate

Friedrich Nietzsche's ideas on morality can be applied to the attitude of spectators in Karate tournaments to the decisions made by the officials in several ways.

One way to look at it is to see that spectators such as coaches or parents who complain that referees and organizers are biased or cheating their athletes when such athletes lose are manifesting their slave morality tendency. They blame the outcome on an external oppressor, inadvertently admitting that their athletes, teammates, sons, or daughters cannot control the outcome of a game by winning it. They habitually say that "It's the fault of the officials."

Another way is to view spectators who become fixated on the "injustice" dealt to them by their "oppressors" are again manifesting their slave morality tendency. They hold grudges against officials and tend to look backward (to the past) and want revenge. They become reactive. They want to get even. Both the authors have seen this kind of behavior in tournaments that they have officiated in.

Nietzsche's ideas can help improve the attitude of spectators by inspiring them to own up to the weaknesses of their athletes when such athletes lose and then help their athletes commit to fixing such weaknesses thus exemplifying the idea of master morality. They tie up the outcome on their own weakness and resolve to help their players overcome such weakness so that next time around their players can control the outcome. It's like saying "We'll fix the flaws in our game for the next tournament."

Lastly, spectators who accept their athlete's weaknesses, resolve to fix such weaknesses, and manifest their master morality actually improve themselves and look forward to future tournaments wherein their athletes can compete again and see whether their athletes have improved or not. They become proactive. They want to surpass their limits. Karate tournaments would greatly benefit from such an attitude and if spectators and competitors alike would think this way then the authors both feel that officiating in such tournaments would be a much more pleasant experience. It would also help preserve the integrity and prestige of such competitions.

Conclusion

Master Teruyuki Okazaki, a 10th dan black belt who was a student of Master Masatoshi Nakayama and the founder of the International Shotokan Karate Federation, visited the Philippines a couple of years ago. Both the authors had the pleasure of meeting him and attending the classes that he gave. Master Okazaki greatly emphasized that Karate, a martial art that makes use of striking techniques like punching and kicking, is about character development. He said that Sport Karate is only one aspect of Karate.

Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative, the authors believe, is a good test for everyone before they commit an act. It makes one more responsible because one will think first on the universality of one's actions and how these actions can affect other individuals as well. It also helps an individual think of other individuals as ends and not merely as means.

Friedrich Nietzsche's *Übermensch* is something individuals can aspire to be. It can help individuals to let go of their slave morality mentality and adopt a more proactive attitude which is reflected in Nietzsche's master morality.

The problem of the paper, as the authors have discussed, focuses on the attitude of the Karate tournament spectators in accepting the results of these competitions. The spectators keep complaining without thinking that they may only be complaining because their athlete or athletes lost. When their athletes do not lose they do not complain even if there are times when the officiating is bad. They treat officials and referees as mere means. They also exhibit what Nietzsche refers to as the slave morality when such spectators do not own up to the shortcomings of their athletes and their shortcomings as well. They hold grudges on the referees and blame the officials for their athletes' not winning in the competition.

The solution to this, therefore, lies in the application of the concepts of Kant and Nietzsche that were discussed in this paper. The authors believe that spectators should always have an attitude of respect towards tournament officials which reflects their respect for the tournament itself. The spectators should treat referees as ends and not as mere means in their quest to win medals and trophies in Karate competitions. And before complaining, spectators should apply Kant's categorical imperative and ask themselves if they will still complain even if they do not have any kind of relation to the athlete involved in a bad call or bad decision. Spectators should also adopt the master morality as explained by Nietzsche and accept defeat gracefully. They should own up to their shortcomings and weaknesses and work on overcoming them. By acting like Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, these spectators can bounce back in future competitions and not hold grudges on referees and tournament officials. All in all, applying such concepts can help improve the attitude of Sport Karate tournament spectators. This, the authors believe, can help elevate the level of such competitions in the Philippines.

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