

Do vs Jutsu

It's an old argument, which is better, the *do* – or Way – or the *jutsu* – or skills? This article isn't about that.

Normally, when we see these terms bandied about, it is the proponent of one of the terms decrying the other and its followers.

Those who practice *do* arts (Judo, Aikido, Karate-do, Kendo etc) are said to be using watered down techniques. They are accused of only being interested in sport, or only in the spiritual side of the martial arts. As if those two things are the same. They are accused of being far removed from the practice of real self defence and the original barbaric techniques contained within the techniques of their chosen arts.

Those who practice *jutsu* arts (ju-jutsu, Aiki-jutsu, Karate-jutsu, Batto-jutsu, etc) are said to be missing the character developing aims of their arts, concentrating in a paranoid fashion upon an assault which (for most of us) will never happen.

Not wishing to get involved in their arguments, my question is whether the two terms are really mutually exclusive at all?

One of my students told me of a Japanese black belt instructor who berated a student in front of her because the fellow was interested in sport Karate. The instructor declared that sport sparring was “just *jutsu*. Only technique, no *do* involved”. The instructor (who is still alive) took the position that his Karate was all about the Way, and that this did not involve sport. He also seemed to think that it was about reality. This would seem to be contrary to the way that most people see the separation of *do* and *jutsu*. Apart from any discussion about the merits of sport and the spirit of the sport's participants, we must see that practice just for sport is the practice of only those skills that will enable one to win any particular contest. This, then, makes redundant all of the skills that are not applicable to contests, and therefore pares down the art.

Some would say that this streamlined art is all that is necessary, and that it is better to have one formidable, “always count on it” technique than it is to have a hundred techniques and suffer from “log-jam”. And indeed, it does take some commitment and drive to attain the skill levels necessary for winning in competitions.

So what's your point, then? I can hear murmurs from the back.

Do isn't sport. *Jutsu* isn't self defence.

The practitioner who bashes away with their best intent at trying to discover the heart of his art may or may not be wearing a white gi. They might practice hour upon hour of dynamic basic techniques in a long front stance, but it isn't even this practice that will decide whether they are *do* or *jutsu* practitioners. The practice of those basics to produce a winning technique would be a *jutsu*; the practice of those basics to produce drive from the hips for powerful self defence would be a *jutsu*. Those same basics, practiced in order to hone the body and concentrate the mind, might be considered a *do*; as might the training those techniques in order to “lose yourself” in moving meditation be considered a *do* art.

But what of the person who takes part in sport in order to better themselves – seeking the challenge, but unaware of the glory of winning or the ignominy of defeat – merely looking for the information on how they can do better and testing their assumptions?

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What of those of us who practice those pressure tested methods of defence – making sure that our techniques work in terrible conditions – who maintain that we practice for the sake of practice; and try to be better human beings. Sometimes we are so scared by the ease with which human beings can be hurt that we are forced to carefully consider our position on matters of self defence.

Do or jutsu?

I practice Karate-do. The Way of the Empty Hand. I practice harsh applications to the techniques I do, and I have little interest in sport. Colleagues who train the same way I do have called their arts after all sorts of Jutsu lineages, and they ask me why I don't say I do Karate-jutsu. The answer is "because it's Karate-do".

The "way" in question is constant training because I enjoy it, but the effectiveness is a built in part of that training. It's something to think about, something to test the mind, the body, and the spirit, and with a depth matched only by my interest in the subject.

The point, then, is that it isn't the name of the art or the uniform that you wear; it isn't whether you say "oss" or bow that makes what you do a *do* or a *jutsu*. You do that. *Your* outlook, *your* drive, *your* determination, the *results* that you crave, and the physical and psychological tests that you *put yourself through* in order to become what you want to be. That's what decides whether you are taking part in a *do* or a *jutsu*.

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