Kalokagathia from Aikidō Point of View

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Abstract:
Although kalokagathia (beautiful and good) is an ancient Greek term, there are many examples of its application in the context of contemporary sport. Kalokagathia (goddess) was the spirit (daimona) of nobility and good. She was associated with Areté (Virtue) and Eukleia (Excellence). Europeans are descendants of ancient Greek philosophy. Therefore, there is a natural tendency to see Japanese martial arts through the prism of European culture. We are focusing on kalokagathia from aikidō point of view. Aikidō is known as a martial art with deep philosophical roots. Its aim is to lead people to find their own peaceful way to share the Earth and the whole Universe in harmony and love with other (human) beings. Aikidō kaiso (founder of aikidō) used the term sumikiri for perfect clarity. Another interesting source of martial artists’ nobility is the seven virtues of budō. Kalokagathia originally referred to noble aristocratic citizens in ancient Greece. The whole budō is derived from martial way of noble samurai. Aikidō is recognised as one of the most gentle martial arts with profound ethical background.

Key words: kalokagathia, aikidō, sumi kiri, seven virtues of budō

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Introduction

Although the term *kalokagathia* (beautiful and good) is an ancient Greek term, there are many examples of its application in the context of contemporary sport. *Kalokagathia* was personified also as a goddess (*daimona*) possessing the attributes of nobility and good. She is associated with *Areté* (Virtue) and *Eukleia* (Excellence). Europeans are descendants of ancient Greek philosophy. Therefore, there is a natural tendency to see Japanese martial arts through the prism of European culture. In this paper we are focusing on the term *kalokagathia* from the point of view of *aikidō*.

**Kalokagathia**

The etymology of the word *kalokagathia* is from the ancient Greek *kalos kai agathos* (beautiful and good). In ancient Greece the phrase was also used in the form *kalos kagathos* or *kaloskagathos*. Similarly to other cultures, in ancient Greece clear distinction was made among different social classes of people. *Kalokagathia* concerned approximately mere one tenth of male citizens enjoying full rights. The others were excluded from democracy, gymnasium education and organised sports activities.

The ancient Greek *kalokagathia* is not the *kalokagathia* as perceived in the field of sport nowadays. According to Kysučan [2008], the term can not be seen in the light of our current perception. In ancient Greece the adjective *kalos* meant apart from beauty in the aesthetic sense also virtue, honesty and nobility, fairness, morality, that is beauty from the ethical point of view. The meaning of the adjective *agathos* was good (in general and moral sense), ability and nobility (generosity). Thus *kalos kai agathos* (*kalos kagathos, kaloskagathos*) originally referred to a noble citizen – aristocrat. Nowadays we could say “the real, true gentleman”.

We are aware of the fact that kalokagathia concerned only a fraction of all Greek citizens. Šíp [2008] points out that e.g. in the society of Athens 5-4th century BC not only slaves but also all women and free people were excluded, with the exception of state citizens (i.e. foreigners). A special group was formed by poor people as well who could not match with other citizens in social terms. Leisure time (*scholē*) was spent primarily by participating in exercise in gymnasium and palaestra. These institutions traditionally focused on military education and military training [Garlan, 2005]. Citizenship was
closely associated with participation in military campaigns and armed defence of the state.

Later the collocation *kalos kai agathos* appeared in figurative moral meaning e.g. in epitaphs as a highly positive evaluative attribute of a citizen – soldier who died as a hero in service to the country. In general language the term appears in the meaning of admirable, splendid. This shift in meaning in vocabulary originally having aristocratic connotations towards the field of general moral evaluation is according to Kysučan [2008] a rather common phenomenon in all societies that went through an aristocratic period (see above the words like nobleness, nobility, courtesy).

**Martial art aikidó**

Japanese martial art *aikidó* belongs to modern martial arts *budó*. Similarly to other Japanese martial arts aikidó also draws on the tradition of classical Japanese fighting arts *bugei*. The term *bugei* refers not only to the technique and tactics of combat itself, but also to the style of training and preserving advanced practices for future generations.

The term *ryūha* (*style, school*) is used in this context. Mol [2001, p. 73] translates the meaning of the term as “living tradition“. Teaching in *ryūha* was typically comprised of several stages, generally *shōden*, *chūden* and *okuden*. *Shōden* - the first stage was restricted to soldiers and military nobility, however, it was widely accessible. Many teachers opened private schools of martial arts since 17th century. Not anyone could take part in the higher stages of training *chūden* and *okuden*. In case of *okuden* (hidden teachings) the innermost secret of the school was conveyed. *Okuden* speaks of direct transfer of all principles related to the given *ryūha*.

In ancient martial arts novices were selected rigorously as a rule. The novice at martial art was in medieval Japan (with only minor exceptions) a member of the military class. Farmers or craftsmen had very few opportunities to access direct instructions from a teacher. To seriously apply for *ryūha* a novice submitted a reference (*shokai*), which, however, did not automatically lead to admission. In some *ryūha* in the process of admission even blood oath (*keppan*) was requested - a written vow sealed with a drop of blood (*kishōmon*) representing loyalty to the school.
This process was to a certain extent preserved till 20th century. The founder of aikidō (aikidō kaiso) Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1968) generally accepted students only upon a recommendation and after an interview. Although at that time the principle of social exclusion was present, nowadays aikidō is open to all people irrespective of their social status. Similarly to kalokagathia, there was a natural shift in compliance with democratisation and globalisation of society.

**The aim and the way of aikidō**

Aikidō is a noncompetitive martial art. No effort is made to search for opponents for mutual combat. Aikidō is practised with someone rather than against someone. It is possible to say that the aim of aikidō is to achieve the state of sumikiri (perfect clarity). All the powers must be balanced.

*When speaking of the mysteries of centripetal and centrifugal forces, Morihei said, “Large has no outside; small has no inside.”*

[K. Ueshiba 2004, p. 20]

We can only guess why ancient Greeks said about five virtues [Kischnick 2000, p. 114] ‘Find your focus by

1. bringing harmony into the course of your life
2. practising moderation and not getting carried away by your impulses
3. building selfconfidence by even development of upper, middle and lower person
4. cultivating the powers of your heart will bring beauty into your doing
5. practising fairness by learning about the aims and intentions of gods

Kenji Shimizu, one of the last direct students (uchi deshi) of the founder later called his own school tendo ryū aikidō (the heavenly road of aikidō) in the meaning of the philosophical phrase Honesty is the road of heaven [Shimizu 1993, p. 5]. Towards the state of sumikiri there is the same way (dō) as the way, order of heaven. In words of the founder [K. Ueshiba 1987, p 103]:

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"When the triangle, the circle and the square become one, it moves in spherical rotation together with the flow of ki, and the aikidó of sumikiri appears."

The ring, triangle and square are the archetypal symbols. They appear not only in aikidó, but in cultures of all continents. The ring, the symbol of a perfect shape without a beginning and end, represents the eternal cycle of life, movement and neverending rotation. The triangle symbolises the triad of states in all their forms. At the same time it symbolises male creative energy when the base of the triangle is at the bottom and female creative energy when the base is at the top. Through the unification of these creative energies a hexagram is formed, the symbol of creation and everything new. The square is the symbol of space, power, stability, integrity and solid foundation. Such a movement, which is ideal in aikidó, is often perceived by external observers as too fine and feeble. According to these external observers, it is as though martial art partly or completely lacked the combat elements. However:

"...understanding power only through impact, they comprehend its most limited form. Does the moon impact with the earth? Does the earth challenge Mars or Jupiter? Their stubborn preconceptions block the acceptance of truth. Their hostility blocks the development of true power."

[Saotome 1993, p 133]

Through sumikiri harmony is achieved (wago). Harmony in aikidó means

"...both to connect oneself to the cosmos (the universal) and to blend with a partner (the particular); in aikidó we draw an opponent into our sphere of movement in order to guide them."

[K. Ueshiba 2004, p. 29]

In other words, the character of aikidó practice is self-education. The founder of aikidó claimed that hakama, the traditional clothing for aikidó practise, should remind us of the seven virtues of budō.
“They symbolize the seven virtues of budō. These are jin (benevolence), gi (honor or justice), rei (courtesy and etiquette), chi (wisdom, intelligence), shin (sincerity), chu (loyalty), and ko (piety). We find these qualities in the distinguished samurai of the past. The hakama prompts us to reflect on the nature of true bushido. Wearing it symbolizes traditions that have been passed down to us from generation to generation. Aikidō is born of the bushido spirit of Japan, and in our practice we must strive to polish the seven traditional virtues.“

[Saotome 1989, p. 211]

The first records on the rules of conduct, elements of the ideal of a person appeared in Japan at the time of the Crown prince Umayado, known as Shotoku Taishi (574-622). Shotoku, an enlightened ruler, was inspired by Buddhism and China, which was at that time a real Centreland. The so-called Constitution of seventeen articles Jushichijo kenpō is ascribed to him. The constitution does not amend legal norms, it is rather the corpus of moral principles essential for the growth and preservation of a flourishing society, working for the good of everyone (in the ancient meaning of the word). Despite the general buddhist tone several articles illustrated below remind of a Confucian text On five virtues (Wu chang). The five virtues found in the speech of the founder are below:

**Benevolence** (chin. ren, jap. jin) - ... Flatterers and deceivers are a sharp weapon for the overthrow of the State, and a pointed sword for the destruction of the people. (article 6) Let the people be employed (in forced labor) at seasonable times.... From Spring to Autumn, when they are engaged in agriculture or with the mulberry trees, the people should not be so employed. For if they do not attend to agriculture, what will they have to eat? If they do not attend to the mulberry trees, what will they do for clothing? (Article 16).

**Justice** (chin. yi, jap. gi) – Deal impartially with the suits which are submitted to you. (article 5) Give clear appreciation to merit and demerit and deal out to each its sure reward or punishment. (article 11)

**Courtesy and etiquette** (chin. li, jap. rei) – When the people behave with propriety, the Government of the Commonwealth proceeds of itself. (article 4)
Wisdom (chin. i, jap. chi) – In all things, whether great or small, find the right man and they will be well managed. (article 7) But if we do not find wise men and sages, how shall the realm be governed? (article 14)

Sincerity (chin. xin, jap. shin) – In everything let there be good faith, for if the lord and the vassal keep faith with one another, what cannot be accomplished? If the lord and the vassal do not keep faith with each other, everything will end in failure. (article 9)

[in Morrell 1998, pp. 345-346]

Already in this text Prince Shotoku Taishi laid the foundation of convergence of Buddhist and Confucian thoughts. These had an influence on the life of Japanese nobility as well as common people. Shotoku Taishi as a statesman had in mind primarily governing the country. The virtues we deal with became a part of samurai teaching exactly at the time when military nobility bushi came to the fore, gradually forcing out aristocratic nobility kuge. Definite samurai virtues can be identified in the so-called golden age of fighting arts bugei. This period lasted from the accession of the Shoguns from the Tokugawa dynasty in the era of Edo (1603 – 1868).

In the formation of the administration system of shogunate of Tokugawa type there was involved also Seika from the Fujiwara dynasty (1561-1619), a wise man influenced by classical Confucianism, Zen Buddhism and above all Chu Hsi (Zhu Xi, 1130-1200) Neoconfucianism (Deal 1998). Seika turned the attention of samurai to the importance of fostering five types of relationships (gorin): lord and vassal (kunshin), parent and a child (fushi), husband and wife (fufu), older and younger (chōyo), friend and a friend (hōyu) and the five permanent virtues (gojō), that had been well known since the times of Prince Shotoku: benevolence (jin), honour or justice (gi), courtesy and etiquette (rei), wisdom, intelligence (chi), sincerity (shin). Apart from these he also dealt with other moral principles. He explained what it was humility (kenjo), truthfulness (makoto), heart (kokoro), and also reverence (kō).

Reverence kō is another of the virtues described by the founder of aikidō Ueshiba. Seika from the dynasty of Fujiwara, however, trusted chiefly in a human being in general, who, as he claimed, has the ability of meitoku, “excellent virtue“, that is the ability of presence of absolute good without any evil thoughts. He also raised the moral law giri, the law on
fulfilling duties resulting from human’s bonds with society and the universe. An individual shall maintain harmony and preserve peace by fulfilling their life journey (dōri).

In a similar sense these thoughts were promoted by other thinkers. The most renowned student of Seiko Razan Hayashi (1583-1657) was together with his brother Nobozumi the author of the famous codes of law Buke shōhatto (The Code of Law of Military Class) and Hatamoto shōhatto (The code of Law of Shogun’s Vassals), in which their philosophical thoughts gained legal authority [Tuckerová 1998]. Shosan Suzuki (1579-1655), another spiritual leader of the time, dealt in his theory of labour ethics with a commitment of a vassal to his lord. He shall be grateful (on) to him and subordinate to him and serve him in the course of all his life [Deal 1998]. Here and also in the thoughts of Sokó Yamaga (1622-1685) we can find the basis of loyalty (chu), another of the seven virtues of bushidó that was defined by the founder of aikidó Ueshiba. Sokó Yamaga even spoke of the ethical ideal of absolute obligation (gi) as the highest value [Thornton 1998].

**Conclusion**

Kalokagathia is a term from 5th-4th century BC, the philosophy of aikidō draws on the traditions of medieval Japan formed mainly in 17th century. Although there is a substantial shift in time and space, we can still identify several common features.

- Similarly to the way the nobility of kalos kai agathos related to aristocracy and military affairs, aikidō draws on the socially expected nobility of the Japanese class of warriors, samurai.
- In ancient Greece public affairs, gymnasia and palaestra were accessible only to a fraction of men, free citizens. The situation was similar in Japanese fighting arts bugei. Aikidō is accessible to everyone. However, we must point out that longterm training leads to the exclusion of those who impatiently expect immediate results.
- The aim of aikidō is to achieve sumikiri through practising the techniques of martial arts. Sumikiri is a spiritual category while kalokagathia is an ethical and aesthetic ideal.
The ethical ideals in aikidó draw on the ethical ideals of medieval Japanese military nobility of samurai. We call them the seven virtues.

Both different cultures drawing on the high ethical value of ancient warriors currently converge in new warriors (in the broadest meaning of the word). In EuroAmerican culture we follow the transformed traditions of ancient Greece. At the same time, however, we are concerned with martial art representing similar values of beauty and good in a different culture. But are these values important for the society today? We are not giving up hope that yes. In words of J. Williams [2000, p. 62]:

“Virtue must be taught and practiced; it must be nurtured and passed to each generation. Freedom must be taught and practiced as well. If not, it easily perishes. Virtue and freedom go hand in hand. Not to cherish the one is not to cherish the other. A society that looses the warriors’ virtues is the poorer for it and will soon be a society whose freedoms are lost.”

References