

## Ambidextrous Philosophy 2

*We need a break from strict intellectual activity so those who would think for us are all too willing to move in and present us with slanted arguments to gather our support, our vote, our contribution, or our little jot of a Nielson rating. Needing a break from intellection, however, does not mean we can give up entertaining the claims of “the other side”.*

Consider that you are in college and are diligent about studying. The weekend arrives and you have managed to finish your paper, due Monday, by Saturday afternoon. That evening, a bunch of your dorm-mates are going down to Finnerty’s to imbibe a little, an activity you know often turns into someone having to haul someone else back to the dorm for a private vomitorium session. But your brain needs diversion and there doesn’t seem to be any more appetizing choice for the evening. You end up being the one carried back to the dorm toilet, exposing your gastrointestinal fluids to your cohorts.

You knew in advance that the evening’s activity would not be rational or even reasonable, let alone good for your brain cells or esophagus, but you did it anyway. Although I don’t advocate this type of diversion, I do understand it from a psychological point of view. Fried by concentrated brain activity, you wanted to be a little brainless (within the relative safety of friends’ company) for a while. It profited you nothing and may have even lost you something (especially if you insulted your roommate or drooled on the girl you were thinking of asking out next week), but it gained your brain a cooling off period.

For similar reasons, we accept what CNN, MsNBC, or Fox has to say about this or that political shenanigan because we already have mentally aligned with CNN, MsNBC, or Fox and thus it is easier to receive our existing point of view from our favorite station than to watch all three and try to adjust the balance of that viewpoint ourselves. Similarly, once matriculated in a dojo, dojang, or kwoon, it is much easier to simply accept what the instructor has to say (about you, your system, and about other systems) than to research Korean, Japanese and Chinese styles in order to form your own ideas on the subject.

Of course, in martial arts, you have little or no basis from which to form a rational opinion, do you? The teacher knows everything and you know nothing. It would be like a junior high schooler voting in a national election—they can form an pseudo-opinion and give a simplistic argument, but they are not well-informed nor do they know how the world works sufficiently such that their points of view are worthy of respect (or tallying). On one hand you don’t want your martial arts teacher to form your opinions for you; on the other hand, you don’t know enough to form your own. What’s a self-respecting, rational martial artist to do?

First, pay attention. Second, talk to people from other styles. Third, check out facts, techniques, and other items on the Internet. (I used to do this by buying books, but it is cheaper, quicker, and easier to let your keyboard do the walking). You will gradually develop a base for asking questions of your teacher (and of others) and then perhaps forming your own opinion informed not only by your system and your instructor, but also by your own research. You will have honored tradition, but you also might find that your opinion is

somewhat innovative, i.e. the edge of the coin rather than heads or tails. Now, don't fall into the trap of "because I have done the research, everyone else's point of view must therefore be erroneously skewed". You also have to be free from your own well-formed ideas in order to be intellectually ambidextrous.

If you don't know how to begin, try eating salad with chopsticks. I did that a few days ago with about 75% success. I guess I am not as balanced as I would like to be, but neither am I stuck in an Asian restaurant that supplies only chopsticks begging for a fork that I can use only with my bandaged dominant hand.