

## Application Over Theory

In colonial America, settlers were interested in science and philosophy, especially political philosophy, but both their science and their philosophy had to have a practical application to garner attention. Ben Franklin's shocking discovery that electricity could be drawn down from a thunder cloud was less important to them than his creation of bifocals which made their lives easier in the more immediate future.

In the professions, colonial Americans were less interested in being members of specialized societies or being licensed by boards than learning law or medicine "in the field", as it were, letting the marketplace sort out the incompetent and letting daily use provide the experience.

American literature could be highbrow or lowbrow, but settled into a middle area that communicated to the common man, if he be literate, and related to his situation. Washington Irving's *Knickerbocker Tales* gave the reader stories from his own time in his own country. James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* were frontier adventures but were not fantastic or impossible to relate to and took place in the nearest wilderness: upstate New York. Americans did not want stories about royalty and high-falutin' romance. In fact, one of the reasons that, in a later century, Charles Dickens was so popular among Americans was that he wrote about the common (albeit British) man, woman, and child.

Americans continued the tradition of practical applicability in economics, contributing to their success both after the colonies' break from England and beyond the effort to keep England from being broken in the Second World War.

This has become a strong streak in martial arts philosophy, as well. As spiritual a country as the USA is (you may do a double-take here, but I believe it to be true and hope to argue my point in another essay), the average American pooh-poohs theory in favor of practical application nearly every time: "Don't bother me with this theoretical mumbo-jumbo and all this form-and-posture doo-dah. Show me something I can use!" Ironically, it was an American who grew up in China that capitalized on that streak. Bruce Lee was the first notable to argue against stilted, rigid, form-oriented martial ways in favor of a practical, street-oriented system that came to be called Jeet Kune Do (JKD). In another essay (*The Trends of the Half Century*), I related the devolution of functional JKD and full-contact kickboxing into today's cage fighting. But what is fascinating, in my humble opinion, is not that devolution, but the continuing belief that cage fighting is the most practical of martial studies. JKD could argue its functional based on an array of drills and a philosophy that, together with a sound theory of tactic and strategy, could function on the street. Wait. Did I say "theory?" but Gosharootie, Polkadottie! That is precisely what practical application is supposed to win out over. It is the highly theoretical martial arts (like T'ai Chi or Aiki, for example) that people consider the epitome of non-applicability. I suspect that when people see a martial art that teaches theory, they immediately see how impractical it is which is why I get notes from YouTube like this:

**DocSatori has posted a comment on your profile:**

Complete and utter nonsense. You have to be suspect of someone posting these types of video to a public forum with commenting and voting disabled. Anyone looking for constructive and honest information on martial arts, ki, bu-do and similar - run away from here. It saddens me to see serious bushido abused and diluted this way.

A heart-felt sentiment, if you ask me, no doubt from someone who really respects bushido and budo, but someone, I would surmise, who is looking at the theoretical expecting to see the practical. It's only a guess on my part, of course, but I often wonder why those who have never experienced the art make judgments about it. For this essay, however, I'm not interested in the psychology of nay-sayers on the internet, rather I would like to investigate the psychology of those who truly and sincerely believe that a demonstration of an art (one that evidently seemed like nonsense to the viewer) stands for the abuse and dilution of bushido (by which I believe he means traditional budo). It can only be, I suggest, that because the demonstration shown would not look the same if the art was used on the street, that the skills developed in such an art do not seem to have a practical use. If I am correct about this, let me point out just a few small items about arts that may seem less theoretical and thus more applicable.

If you are a full-contact kick boxer, can you do your combinations on the street, when held from behind? If you are a JKD guy, can you do your *cadena de mano* drill when your wrists are seized? If you are a cage fighter, can you perform your escape to a mount when someone is grasping your lapel standing up? If YES, then I suggest that the art functions on a certain amount of theory as well. If NO, then I suggest it isn't at all applicable for self-defense.

*More about this subject next week.*