

A posteriori & a priori knowledge in Taekwondo

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1. Introduction

Immanuel Kant bifurcated knowledge into two classes: *a priori*, or knowledge that is learned through reason or other means which does not require the use of the five senses, and *a posteriori*, or knowledge that is learned empirically or through experimentation. Epistemology, the branch of philosophy which examines knowledge, has since debated the distinctions of these two types of knowledge (Horrigan, 2007). Also, promulgators of Taekwondo (TKD) have asserted that studying that Korean martial art develops practitioners physically, mentally, and spiritually (Choi, 1985; Rhee, 2012; Adrogué, 2012). Yet, TKD knowledge has not yet been elucidated as either *a priori* or *a posteriori*. Thus, this research determines if TKD contains either *a priori* or *a posteriori* knowledge. For this paper, TKD as a martial art (i.e., a system of self-cultivation) was examined, because all other forms of TKD stem historically from this purpose (Adrogué, 2003; Moenig, et al., 2014). Research has determined that TKD can be defined according to how it is practiced (Wasik, 2014; Johnson & Ha, 2015; Dziwenka & Johnson, 2015). Recent unbiased accounts of TKD history indicate a strong roots in Japanese martial arts (Adrogué, 2003; Gillis, 2011; Moenig, 2011; Moenig, et al., 2014). Japanese martial arts have been researched for decades and offer a plethora of insights into their Korean counterparts. For instance, the pedagogy of Judo, which is arguably the first martial art with the goal of self-cultivation and where modern *-do* suffixed martial arts stem from, is well-researched (Kano, 1989; Kodokan, 2009). Like Judo (Kano, 1989), TKD has three stages of learning: *musul* (martial technique), *muyae* (martial artistry), and *mudo* (martial 'way') (Johnson, 2016).

2. Methodology

Kant's *a priori* or *a posteriori* knowledge were first defined. Next, TKD's three stages of learning, called *musul*, *muyae*, and *mudo*, were delineated according to the most recent published literature on TKD pedagogy. TKD knowledge, or knowledge acquired during or through the practice of TKD (Mayen, et al., 2015), has been categorized as *musul*, *muyae*, and *mudo* epistemologically (Johnson, 2016), which contradicts the more ontological-inclined understanding of the terms (Yang, 1999). As competing interpretations of these concepts exist, the educational perception was applied to the current research as that theory corresponds to skill (i.e., kinesthetic knowledge) acquisition models. Research has shown that TKD knowledge corresponds to the various levels found in skill acquisition (Johnson, 2016), so it was hypothesized that TKD could be categorized as either *a priori* or *a posteriori* based upon the knowledge TKD students acquire at each stage. To elucidate whether Taekwondo knowledge is *apriori* or *aposteriori* in nature, what is learned at the *musul*, *muyae*, and *mudo* was determined and then categorized as either *a priori* or *a posteriori* knowledge.

3. Results

TKD has practical (i.e., kinesthetic) knowledge whilst providing a means of self-cultivation (i.e., non-kinesthetic knowledge). The practical knowledge found in TKD was understood as *a posteriori*, because it must be tested for effectiveness either in battle or in competition. The non-kinesthetic knowledge was determined to be *a priori* knowledge, because it is acquired through practitioners'

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personal rationalizations to apply TKD knowledge to their daily lives (i.e., reason). TKD thus possesses two types of knowledge: *a posteriori* knowledge, which is found at the *musul* and *muyae* stages of learning, and *a priori*, which is identified at the *mudo* level. Uniquely, TKD's pedagogical process illustrates that it is possible to have both *a priori* and *a posteriori* within one discipline.

4. Discussion and conclusion

This paper proposes that *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge are existent within TKD knowledge in particular and, in a wider view, all martial arts with a *-do* suffix. It was found that a Kantian approach to TKD pedagogy can provide a guided course of study for all TKD students regardless of their experience levels. This pedagogical paradigm of TKD can withstand academic scrutiny better than previous philosophical and pedagogical theories for four reasons: 1) it avoids the problems incurred by the ontological-based TKD philosophies and pedagogies, namely the innate conflict they create when introduced to students with existing religious beliefs and their inability to improve students' understanding of TKD itself; 2) it avoids inaccurate and overtly nationalistic TKD histories, which other philosophies use to substantiate their conclusions; 3) it is easily incorporated into all TKD programs regardless of their final educational aim (e.g., self-defense, self-cultivation, sport, etc.), and 4) it approaches TKD philosophy from examining what TKD *is* rather than what it *could be*.

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Key words: Immanuel Kant; *do*; *musul*; *muyae*; *mudo*; Taekwondo pedagogy; combat sports.