Social Harmony

by Grim Beorn

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Very nearly all the violence that plagues, rather than protects, society is the work of young males between the ages of fourteen and thirty. A substantial amount of the violence that protects rather than plagues society is performed by other members of the same group. The reasons for this predisposition are generally rooted in biology, which is to say that they are not going anywhere, in spite of the current fashion that suggests doping half the young with Ritalin.

The question is how to move these young men from the first group (violent and predatory) into the second (violent, but protective). This is to ask: what is the difference between a street gang and the Marine Corps, or a thug and a policeman? In every case, we see that the good youths are guided and disciplined by old men. This is half the answer to the problem.

But do we not try to discipline and guide the others? If we catch them at their menace, don't we put them into prisons or programs where they are monitored, disciplined, and exposed to "rehabilitation"? The rates of recidivism are such that we can't say that these programs are successful at all, unless the person being "rehabilitated" wants and chooses to be. And this is the other half of the answer: the discipline and guidance must be voluntarily accepted. The Marine enlists; the criminal must likewise choose to accept what is offered.

The Eastern martial arts provide an experience very much like that of Boot Camp. The Master, like the Drill Instructor, is a disciplined man of great personal prowess. He is an exemplar. He asks nothing of you he can't, or won't, do himself--and there are very many things he can and will do that are beyond you, though you have all the help of youth and strength. It is on this ground that acceptance of discipline is won. It is the ground of admiration, and what wins the admiration of these young men is martial prowess.

Everyone who was once a young man will understand what I mean. Who could look forward, at the age of sixteen or eighteen, to a life of obedience, dressed in suits or uniforms, sitting or standing behind a desk? How were you to respect or care about the laws, or the wishes, of men who had accepted such a life? The difficulty is compounded in poor communities, where the jobs undertaken are often menial. How can you respect your father if your father is a servant? Would you not be accepting a place twice as low as his? Would you not rather take up the sword, and cut yourself a new place? Meekness in the old men of the community unmakes the social order: it encourages rebellion from the young.

The traditional martial arts tend to teach young men to undertake flashy and impressive, but not terribly effective, fighting techniques. Only as you grow older do the masters of the art teach you the real secrets--the subtle, quick, physically simple ways in which the human body can be destroyed. In this way, the old retain their power over the young--although they lack the speed and strength, they have in discipline in training more than enough to maintain the order. Social harmony is maintained in the dojo: the young revere the old, and seek to emulate them. Your father may be a servant, but he is still a warrior--and a more dangerous one than you. The father, being past that age in which biology makes us vicious, guides the son or neighbor to protect society rather than to rend it. It is not particularly different in the military.

If we would have a stable society, we must have dangerous old men. This means that, if you are yourself on your way to becoming an old man, you have a duty to society to begin your preparations. The martial arts are not the only road--my own grandfather did it through a simple combination of physical strength, personal discipline, and an accustomed habit of going armed about his business. There was never a more impressive figure--or, at least, there was never a boy more impressed than was I.

The martial virtues are exactly the ones needed. By a happy coincidence, having a society whose members adhere to

and encourage those virtues makes us freer as well--we need fewer police, fewer courts, fewer prisons, fewer laws, and fewer lawyers. This is what Aristotle meant when he said that the virtues of the man are reflected in the society. Politics and ethics are naturally joined.

We thank Mr. Beorn for allowing us to reprint his article. For additional articles, please visit his blog at; http://grimbeorn.blogspot.com