

Dreaded Steel Gauntlet

Students in college had the disrespectful albeit creatively humorous habit of renaming many of the meals served in the cafeteria. Breaded Veal Cutlet was dubbed Dreaded Steel Gauntlet, Pot Roast was, of course, Roasted Pot, and meatloaf with gravy became, regrettably, Beethoven's Last Movement. Like car salesmen and landlords, institutional foods provoke a visceral reaction in our culture. No matter how generous the salesperson, how understanding the landlord, or how tasty and nutritious the institutional food, people know that they are not supposed to like them.

Having visited many other colleges and prep schools, I know that our cafeteria's offerings were among the best both in quality and in taste, but the cultural bias against institutional food is so automatic and deep-seated that one does not even see it as a bias. Renaming the meals reinforces the negative evaluation of them, thus encouraging the next generation to continue the bias. Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) tells us that we can reframe anything to change our attitude towards it. If we reframe breaded veal cutlet into dreaded steel gauntlet, we'll begin to notice tough, gristly sections of meat and ignore the tender parts.

If we refer to smash-mouth cage fighting as Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), we'll be able to emphasize the all-inclusive artistry of the battlers and ignore the blood and guts. Similarly, I suggest we refer to traditional martial arts as Skillful Sudden Self-defense (3SD) so as to ignore the stodgy sounding "traditional" aspect.

Notice that I do not suggest we rename mixed martial arts as SMCF (smash-mouth cage fighting) because I feel that that professional sport deserves its success. It has capitalized on a long-term tendency in the traditional martial arts toward "realism" and a longer-term tendency in society to worship the "toughest man alive." It may not be my cup of tea, but any product that understands the market should succeed until the market changes. Good luck to them! Instead, I am suggesting that, consciously or unconsciously, MMA had reframed traditional martial arts as something that doesn't work by ignoring contexts in which it does work and by emphasizing that the only context that really matters is the cage. Because one cannot train like a professional MMA athlete regularly nor enter a ring when accosted in the locale commons by a semi-stuporous slime-bag with a stiletto, I suggest that one might want to see the virtues of 3SD for self-protection even before one recognizes its substantial non-combative benefits.

In other words, I am suggesting that, instead of finding fault with professional no-holds-barred fighting because it is not traditional martial arts, traditional martial artists shouldn't even attempt to play in the same competitive cage. NHB cage fighting, logically, is the ultimate martial art for NHB cage fighting contests. 3SD functions in a different context, one in which NHB fighting is less than efficient. 3SD, just as logically, is the ultimate in skillful sudden attack defense. Okay, now that we've stated what should be obvious yet seems to have escaped many people's attention, we have to consider the hedgehog vs. the fox problem ([see last week's essay](#)). Not all martial arts handle every sort of sudden attack. Tae Kwon Do works especially well at kicking

distance, Shotokan karate works well at arm's distance, Goju and Uechi function closer in, aiki is especially good when seized, and judo's specialty is standing- and ground-grappling. So, aren't we back to the very amalgam that allowed cage fighting to be called Mixed Martial Arts? Yes and no.

Decades ago, I was singing the praises of those few traditional martial artists who ignored petty stylistic bickering in favor of balancing their studies with the following general emphases: striking, standing grappling, ground grappling, and weaponry. It doesn't matter if your striking art is Chinese, Korean, Japanese, or Okinawan, if your standing grappling is catch-as-catch-can wrestling, judo *tachi-waza* (standing technique), or aiki, if your ground grappling is Brazilian ju-jitsu, collegiate wrestling, or judo *ne-waza* (ground technique), or if your weaponry is Okinawan kobudo, aiki jo, or Filipino escrima. What matters is that you become familiar with four areas of skill to cover many scenarios of attack, not just one-vs.-one in a cage.

A multiple traditional martial artist may seem a contradiction-in-terms, but multiple martial artistry (whether it is achieved by studying several arts or by studying one art in such depth that depth becomes breadth) is precisely the cure for what ails traditional martial arts today. To regain the respect the traditional martial arts deserve, each art should not bury its head like a hedgehog, nor run from tree to tree like a fox, but live up to its potential as 3SD by emphasizing a four-ply training schedule.

If traditional martial arts do not show that their skills can be used as a dreaded steel gauntlet in self-defense, they may end up a pile of beef like Beethoven's last movement.