

Chaos vs. Compelled Order

Just as there is a personal frame into which we gradually draw items from the field of the unknown in order to learn, there is natural desire to order the items in that frame. Making order of the items in our frames creates a buttress against confusion and chaos. If you will forgive this writer's psycho-philosophical bent for another few paragraphs, I believe you will see how important this concept is to you as a martial artist.

Every system of psychology, philosophy, politics, or economics attempts to make sense of the chaotic outside field. To the extent that those systems comport with one's experience and can predict future experiences, we trust them as methods to aid learning. Even though we know the systems cannot be perfect and we cannot order all the items we have pulled from the field of the unknown, we trust that system will be a sufficient guide until a better system present itself. The reason we differ with one another about psychology, philosophy, politics, or economic systems is (1) because our experiences differ, (2) because we would rather live in our ideal of reality than the real reality, or (3) because we refuse to open our minds to another, perhaps more accurate or helpful, system.

Order usually *seems* to be, and often *is*, much safer than Chaos. Unfortunately, **when we feel compelled by our chosen system to act a certain way that does not comport with our experience of reality, the system itself is in danger of becoming almost as dangerous as Chaos itself.** In that case, we need to retreat to a *less* ordered system or at least as less mandatory order, i.e. we might have to adopt another system or systems—one we did not initially favor. Think for a moment about the history of Stalinist or Maoist Communism resulting in millions of deaths through compelled order. If you didn't like those systems, you were not free to leave or adopt another method, so they became the sort of chaos they were set up to avoid.

One can argue that all social systems have an element of compulsion in them in order to secure the consistency of the system. But even if *political* or *economic* systems do include elements of compulsion, would it follow that adherence to *psychology* or *philosophy* systems include compulsion? Absolutely not! People customize their psychologies and philosophies all the time, whether or not those systems are consistent with their original designs.

Now what about martial arts systems? (See, I told you I'd come back to you as a martial artist.)

There are two aspects of martial arts systems relevant here: an on-the-mat behavioral aspect, and a psycho-philosophical aspect. We conform, mostly out of choice, but sometimes out of compulsion, to the methods our chosen method offers, but we do so knowing that we can leave the school whenever we wish if the methods become dangerous or distasteful. If Sensei Stub Byorn insists we spar full contact without safety gear in order to prepare us for potential contact on the street, he may be creating situations as dangerous as those that the street could provide. If so, we might consider bowing out and joining Sensei Simi Tuff across town. Behaviorally, pain hurts, so thanks, Sensei Byorn, but no thanks. Nevertheless, we may agree with Stub Byorn *philosophically* and therefore find ourselves disappointed that Sensei Simi Tuff doesn't challenge his students

more realistically. At Simi Tuff's school, we feel less compelled to enter into the dangerous fray (whew!), but we also feel less prepared should we actually *have to* (feh!). It is no easy job to find the correct balance for ourselves and even more difficult for a sensei to find the perfect balance for his students.

What we can agree upon, however, is that *there is a balance*. **Freedom without an order** (chaos) is facing the chaos outside unprepared. **A strict order without sufficient freedom** (compelled order) is not being able to face the unknown at our own pace.

Next time: Security vs. Adventure