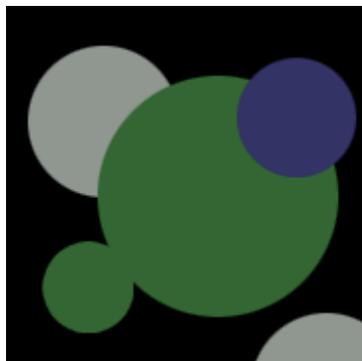


ARMIGER CROMWELL CENTER



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FORGOTTEN: The Ethos of Eros

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By Sam C. Holliday

Before science surpassed religion as the linchpin of Western Culture, the Ethos of Eros was a significant factor in combat success. And it still should be. Eros is the name of the son of the Greek god of war (Ares) and his mistress (Aphrodite), and the word is often translated as love. Yet Eros does not describe romantic love or sex—it describes the bond of mutual dependency and expectations. It describes the disposition, character, and fundamental values of warriors and soldiers. It is the basis of combat camaraderie and of protection from combat fatigue--which today is often referred to as PTSD.

Today psychologists and psychiatrists rarely use the term Eros for it lacks scientific credibility. It cannot be measured and is difficult to describe in a way that will allow scientific research. The Ethos of Eros is one of the factors that shape the inner compass

of individuals that allows them to make judgments on the basis of what is good or bad, right or wrong, virtuous or sinful. Yet today many have never heard of Eros, or have only found it in literature.

Humans, and humans alone, have the possibility of choices to avoid unconscious cruelty and brutality to others. At the same time Eros allows warriors and soldiers to be effective and to survive in both War and Warfare.

The mysterious linkage between Eros and Thanatos (death) has never been adequately explained, even though it often appears in history and literature. We do know that after death there is no Eros. If there is an absence of Eros during combat, the fear of death takes control of the mind—and such uncontrolled stress can result in mental disability. Death is the ultimate symbol of impotence—the lack of life—and Eros is a way to counter this inner dread. Sex does prove vitality; it shows individuals they are alive. And warriors usually have a high sex drive. But it is Eros that is able to preserve a clear, strong, purposeful mind under the most stressful of situations. Eros can thus reduce the opportunities for combat fatigue. It is Eros that contributes to combat effectiveness.

Psychologists and psychiatrists focus on diagnosis and treatment of disorders (therefore they address PTSD), but even more important are ways to improve combat effectiveness and prevent combat fatigue. This has been forgotten. Although it has gone by many names, combat fatigue has always been a part of combat. In the past the Ethos of Eros was seen as something that gave warriors and soldiers a sense of common identity, will, courage, and spirit that produced success in combat, and reduced combat fatigue. It is not enough to marvel at the Ethos of Eros displayed at Thermopylae by Leonidas and the Spartan warriors, at

the Alamo, in Pickett's charge, or in the charge of the Light Brigade. Eros can do the same in the future whenever men are sent into harm's way.

In ideological conflict Eros is not as significant as fear, belief that shapes the inner compass, discipline, and training--yet it is not to be ignored as it has been for many years. Eros causes humans to hold off the tension of life. Eros is a human quality of imagination, commitment and belonging. Eros provides the motivation for a union with others seeking fulfillment. Eros causes a person to remember, savor and look forward to repeating experiences of significance. It is Eros that creates the bond of brotherhood known as combat camaraderie, and builds a "Band of Brothers". Your "brothers" accept you for what you are; they would do anything for you, and love you no matter what. Being loved by someone gives you strength, while loving others gives you courage. Eros contributes to a strong inner compass capable of facing death successfully.

Both Eros (love) and Thanatos (death) are related to creation and destruction; they are united in complex ways. Humans are never able to escape love or death, for the warriors and soldiers they become critical. During Peace, love and death can be personal matters, yet in War and Warfare they determine success or failure. Those not in the heat of combat--be they in the armed forces or not--can be passionless and rational organizers, compromisers, and manipulators. But to strip fighters of Eros and their passions is to risk defeat. Warriors and soldiers must be principle driven, uncompromising, disciplined, masculine, and ruthless in order to cope with, and be successful in, combat.

It is an open question if the politically correct emphasis on diversity, gender equality and sexual orientation neutrality destroys the possibilities of Eros. Yet success in combat requires the Ethos of Eros--something that should not be ignored or forgotten.

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