THE PROTECTOR ETHIC

Morality, Virtue, and Ethics in the Martial Way

JAMES V. MORGANELLI

MARTIAL ARTS / PHILOSOPHY / ETHICS B5581

The martial way only lives when we treat it as something that can die

“One of the most unique and helpful books on martial philosophy ever written.”
—Jack Hoban (from his foreword), president, Resolution Group International LLC; author, *The Ethical Warrior*

“As you take [Morganelli’s] concept on board and change for the better, so shall all those around you.”
—Joseph C. Shusko, marine (retired); director, Marine Corps Martial Arts Program; author

“A heartfelt and well-argued reflection that will appeal to all aspiring Good Samaritans.”
—Dr. Gordon Marino, PhD; professor of philosophy at St. Olaf College

“This is a book for people who haven’t yet realized how the martial and the moral are connected, and how important that is.”
—Jason G. Cather, PhD; adjunct professor of philosophy, Saint Xavier University; fifth dan, Bujinkan

The Protector Ethic explores the principles and values that must anchor a modern warrior.

As the book begins, we are thrust into the true story of a robbery turned homicide. It happens midday on a train. The victim is twenty-four, and the murderer is eighteen. What unfolds is nothing short of horrific, yet the other passengers refuse to help.

Morganelli sees this as a symptom. When we are reluctant to defend ourselves, when we refuse to protect those around us, we become part of the disease.

As a martial artist and ethicist, the author says martial arts are much more than technical exercises. They offer us a “physical philosophy” —one that allows us to understand ourselves, teaches us about others, and demonstrates the true meaning of justice. They help us make difficult moral decisions. Ultimately, isn’t this why we train?

Readers will
- Examine the martial way of valuing, reasoning, judging, and acting.
- Understand natural law, protective instinct, and self-risk.
- Discover how moral relativism, political correctness, and contrived social-justice campaigns do not make people equal. They can actually dehumanize us.

Only the great books address philosophy for the contemporary warrior, which is why such titles as *Zen in the Martial Arts, Living the Martial Way,* and *Meditations on Violence* have become modern classics. *The Protector Ethic* is an indispensable contribution to this conversation.

James V. Morganelli has been a student and teacher of martial arts for nearly forty years. He holds a master’s degree in ethics from Loyola University Chicago and a master instructor license for a Japanese martial tradition.

Cover design by Axie Breen
Author photo by Jon Phillips

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1-800-669-8892 • info@ymaa.com • www.ymaa.com

ISBN: 9781594395581 (print) • ISBN: 9781594395598 (ebook)

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All rights reserved including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.
Edited by T. G. LaFredo
Cover design by Axie Breen
This book typeset in 12 pt. Adobe Garamond.
Typesetting by Westchester Publishing Services
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Publisher's Cataloging in Publication

Names: Morganelli, James V., author.
Title: The protector ethic : morality, virtue, and ethics in the martial way / James V. Morganelli.
Description: Wolfeboro, NH USA : YMAA Publication Center, Inc., [2018] | Includes bibliographical references.
Identifiers: ISBN: 9781594395581 (print) | 9781594395598 (ebook) | LCCN: 2017963167
Subjects: LCSH: Martial artists—Conduct of life. | Martial arts—Moral and ethical aspects. | Martial arts—Psychological aspects. | Hand-to-hand fighting, Oriental—Philosophy. | Violence—Moral and ethical aspects. | Violence—Psychological aspects. | Self-defense—Moral and ethical aspects. | Discipline—Moral and ethical aspects. | Justice—Moral and ethical aspects. | Vigilance (Psychology) | Courage—Moral and ethical aspects. | BISAC: SPORTS & RECREATION / Martial Arts & Self-Defense. | PHILOSOPHY / Ethics & Moral Philosophy. | PHILOSOPHY / Good & Evil.
Classification: LCC: GV1102.7.P75 M674 2018 | DDC: 796.815—dc23

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Printed in Canada.

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Foreword

When James told me he was writing *The Protector Ethic: Morality, Virtue, and Ethics in the Martial Way*, I was very happy. Partially, this was because he is a good writer and he should write. But most importantly, he is an expert on the subject matter—the ethics of the protector. This expertise comes from years of hard work and sacrifice in the physical disciplines of the martial arts, as well as in the intellectual rigors of formal ethics training and study.

I knew the book would be good, but the book is actually very good. It breaks new ground, not just for aspiring and practicing martial artists but for anyone who is concerned with—and would like to see a decrease in—human violence. I venture to say there is also much to excite those interested in the intellectual pursuits of philosophy. The book will be helpful for anyone trying to make sense of the natural law in a useful way.

The other value of this book is that it represents a fresh bridge between Eastern and Western philosophical thought. Particularly in America, we consider our martial prowess to be a hallmark. It is not. Our prowess is technology and resources, mixed with a little stubbornness and topped off with an organic moral sense inherited from our founders. Our martial philosophy is deeply flawed, as can be seen in the frightening numbers of American warriors who come back from their combat-related experiences with psychological and moral injuries.

The shortcomings of Eastern politics are self-evident, but the philosophical strengths of Asian martial thought are a treasure still to be mined. James does the mining in the context of Robert L. Humphrey's astoundingly satisfying Dual-Life Value theory of human nature. James makes sense of the often less-than-literal nature of Eastern thought in a way that the reader will find new and worthwhile. When East meets West in this book, the reader sees that life is the superseding, absolute value that all humans share, regardless of culture or ethnicity, and that our ethical imperative is to protect life. Whose life? Self and others. Which others? All others.

And that is what the martial arts represent—a skill set to bring into action our intrinsic moral inclinations to protect and respect life. If the philosophy of the West can articulate why life is an absolute value, the martial philosophies of the East can teach us how to practice that value as an ethic.

I really believe that the world needs a refresher and clarification on the subject of values, morals, and ethics. And that is why this book is important *now*. And not only for martial artists. It is heartbreaking to see men and women who are supposed to be our leaders and role models in business, government, the military, law enforcement, entertainment, sports, and even religion failing to act morally. This holds dire consequences for the rest of us, not just directly, although we are often physical, political, or economic victims of their lack of ethics. But we are *philosophical* victims as well.

When we see our role models and leaders acting immorally (and succeeding!), we ask ourselves if we might be the patsies. If we may be wrong. We wonder if we should be doing what they are doing. It seems to be the road to success in the world—this world, anyway. They are doing it, so why not us? If we don't do it, someone else will, right? After all, who is to say what's truly right or wrong?

And there you have it: the disease of moral relativism. Modeled by our leaders with a chilling trickle-down effect on us all.

James proposes that we have become a nation (world?) dominated by moral and cultural relativism. *Moral relativism* means that if an attitude or action doesn't directly injure or disrespect "my tribe" (country, race, color, ethnic group, religion, company, team, and so on), then it is OK. Anybody outside our "in-group" is fair game. *Cultural relativism* means that all cultures are equal, just different, and you have to respect all of them. These mutually exclusive concepts, often somehow lumped together, are both dead wrong.

You've heard the phrase "Everything's relative"? Not quite. Almost all values are relative—different for me from how they are for you. But the value of life is not relative; we all share it—those in our tribe and those outside our tribe. Equally. Tribal values are relative; the life value is not.

Don't overthink this—we all have it, or we wouldn't be alive. And if we were not alive, we would have no need for our other values. Some of which involve respecting the life of self and others. Some of which do not. Life, therefore, is not only the absolute value; it is the *superseding* value by which all other, relative, values must be qualified.

James argues that we need not like or respect the relative or cultural values of others, especially those values that are dangerous to those outside our in-groups. But we must value and respect the *life value* of self and others—all others. When we demonize, or dehumanize, those outside our in-group—that is, those who do not share our relative values—we violate the sacred life value. And the conflict, and perhaps violence, and perhaps killing, starts. Guaranteed.

And from this arises James's perception of a warrior. A protector of life. Whose life? Self and others. Which others? All others. Can we separate the relative values of others' beliefs and actions, some of which may be moral, neutral, or immoral, from the absolute value of life and our respect for it? That's the discipline of the warrior. And James clarifies the philosophical basis for this transcending imperative.

James's book, I believe, will ultimately be viewed as one of the most unique and helpful books on martial philosophy ever written. And, as an added benefit, it is a very entertaining read.

Enjoy it, think about what he says, and share the insights with your family and friends.

Jack Hoban, president, Resolution Group International LLC,
author of *The Ethical Warrior*

"I'M AT LAUGHING MAN TAVERN in Washington, DC."

This is the last tweet of Kevin Joseph Sutherland. It's dated July 3, 2015.

In the early afternoon of July Fourth, Sutherland boards the Metro Red Line to meet friends downtown to watch fireworks. He is twenty-four, has recently graduated from American University, and has been hired as a digital strategist for a DC firm.

Just before 1 p.m. another passenger, eighteen-year-old Jasper Spires, tries to take Sutherland's cell phone. He resists. They tussle. And now it's a beating. Ten other passengers watch.

Spires pulls a pocketknife and stabs Sutherland more than forty times. He stomps him and kicks him. He dropkicks his head and even destroys the phone he originally tried to steal, smashing it against Kevin's face.

Spires then turns on the others and demands their money. One gives him $65, another $160. He gets off at the next stop. He throws away bloody clothing, the knife, and a book bag containing his ID, and skips past police, who are looking for him.

Sutherland dies on the floor of car 3045. It's the first homicide in the transit system's four decades of existence.

Two days later Spires is arrested and charged with first-degree murder. A crucial piece of evidence: CCTV footage of Sutherland and Spires boarding at Rhode Island Avenue, where the train leaves at 12:46 p.m. It arrives at NoMa–Gallaudet, the very next stop, at 12:49.

The attack, murder, and robberies took all of three minutes.

Prologue

When I was nine, Mom enrolled me in karate class. Growing up, I was a small kid and got smacked around some, especially at that age when even nice kids bully just to try it out. I remember my instructor wore a black uniform, so it was probably kempo I was learning, but when I was nine, “karate” was what I called all that stuff.

Twice a week during that summer, we gathered at the rec center in Riverside, Illinois, a quiet hamlet with twisty streets just southwest of Chicago. I don’t remember my instructor’s name. I do remember he was young and rocked a stache, just like my favorite TV private eye, Thomas Magnum, so I just assumed he had a closet full of Hawaiian shirts and drove a Ferrari.

Those classes stopped once the school year began. As of this writing, I will soon see four decades in martial arts. That may seem like a long time. It’s not.

By twenty-one I was prone to extremes. At five eight and a lean 150, I could dive roll over the roof of a hatchback—yes, the roof—break bricks with my hands and feet, and max a bench press of 320 pounds, more than twice my body weight. I was a teetotaler but smoked cigars like somebody bet I wouldn’t. And I mouthed off. A lot.

I liked brutal sparring and ultraviolent techniques. The Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) was just airing, and was my new favorite thing because it seemed to mash up cartoons and kung fu movies—two of my other favorite things. So when a Russian gongfu expert challenged me to a "match," I knew it was just code for "fight," and I put him down. And a few others along the way. Usually, I was charming enough to get away with poor decisions. But not always, like the night a noise complaint landed me at the business end of Sheriffs' pistols.

I read a lot. Still do. I picked up books like this one, looking for insight. When I graduated from college, I moved to Japan to train and study. When I returned years later, I founded a school to keep training and studying. I earned a master's degree in philosophy. I was still searching. Still am.

Are you seeking ancient martial secrets? Here's one: you already know how to defend yourself. A qualified instructor can run you through the basics, but that can take all of ten minutes. After that the serious work begins to reactivate and refine the instincts we take for granted.

People come to the martial way for all kinds of reasons, some of them good, most of them not good enough. Others have watched too many action movies. A select few seek the supernatural, working hard to sound just like the gongfu master's master whenever they open their mouths, which is often, far too often. Deceit is at its worst when we believe our own lies, so avoid those who talk like Yoda and move like Jabba.

It took years for my own temperament to change, but that's not just my story; it's the life cycle of any serious martial artist. To break the mold of the form and enter the fray of the formless, where the real training takes place, you have to give up looking for answers. Only then can you do what must be done: ask better questions. You have to. Skills like exceptional punching and kicking only improves further once you understand and articulate an ethos for it. So you start with the question most avoid asking because they have a less-than-inspiring answer or, worse, none at all: Why?

Why am I doing this?

Why should I learn any of this stuff?

Why train?

Logic and reasoning can lead that inquiry. Other times a simple story convinces in a way argument cannot. Isn't clarity the point? In fact, clear thinking on big questions begets bigger ones, like resolving right from wrong, deciding action from obligation, and facing up to the musts, oughts, and shoulds. If we're going to use our bodies as weapons, and weapons as weapons, we'd better train our minds to discern wisdom from knowledge so we can act in the right way at the right time. Do this and avoid the worst possible fate, the one where we're too late to make any difference.

Do you agree with the following statement?

> *I cannot intervene to stop an attack on another person because I am not physically capable.*

It's nonsense—claptrap, pretention to illicit approval, a ploy to con our higher sensibilities.

To even think about responding to the terror that struck Kevin Sutherland on the DC Metro line that sunny July day can leave decent folks inert—an utterly normal response, by the way. But dread is hardly an excuse for inaction, since its answer is so predictable—it always favors inertness.

"Agitation and anxiety caused by the presence or imminence of danger"—this is the dictionary definition of fear. But why should danger cause us fear when we do dangerous stuff every day? We slam into each other in hard-charging sports, snapping bones and joints; we enjoy diets full of junk that satisfy but poison us; and, like Pollyanna, we naively turn the privacy of our lives over to the titans of the virtual—and any criminals paying attention—just to buck our anonymity with a megapixel shot of a sushi platter. Driving a car is by far one of the most dangerous things anyone can possibly do. Over a five-year period, more than 25 percent of drivers will be involved in an accident—that's one out of four! If I had a one-out-of-four chance of being eaten by a shark, I wouldn't swim in a backyard pool. So, if danger doesn't scare us, what gives?

People fear death. People fear pain. But nothing causes fear like having to deal with conflict. Human conflict is by far the number one phobia of our species, and most folks will do just about anything to avoid it, including ignoring suffering, cries for mercy, even our own conscience pleading to lend aid. Why do you think there is such a divide in how we view, debate, and carry out our social contracts, cultural beliefs, and politics? It's because ambivalence toward traditional and time-honored mores is pandemic in this twenty-first century and the reason why is simple: most folks are terrified.

To save us, *skepticism*—the doubt that assails the search for truth—cozies up with soft words and bears gifts to transform our fear of conflict into a superficial strength. Some see this as compassionate tolerance and others a kind of civility—a way toward greater equality through the mantra "Different strokes for different folks" or "Live and let live." But it is hardly that. Its true self is masked, and underneath is one of man's oldest foes that holds contempt for the good, cynicism toward the joy of wonder, and a thick suspicion and distrust for truth itself. Its name is *nihilism.*

If nihilism were a person, he would be a supervillain living in a hollowed-out volcano with an army of ninjas waiting to die in his name. Nihilism may seem foreign, but it's quite domestic—all spoiled children, whether children or adults, are nihilists at some point, for it's the malady symptomatic of selfishness and its dearth of gratitude. The nihilistic ideal does not just lead to ethical befuddlement; it leads to moral confusion because it advocates for willful ignorance in the prioritization of values, the principles or standards of our behavior. Not only do we not know what to do ethically, but we don't know why we do not know.

Some values are more important than other values. When we deny that, we're not on top of Mount Righteous waving the banner of tolerance; we're hunting down and culling truth with torches and pitchforks.

Nihilism makes us bystanders, ones who willingly sacrifice the sacred to the senseless and art to the artificial. Choosing to stand for nothing allows the promotion of anything. In fact, when the zeitgeist equates all values, it provides the perfect cover to join in because, hell, everybody's doing it. But this groupthink bears an unintended consequence: it normalizes the sick and twisted. Faced with a zombie apocalypse, rather than fight, we stand shoulder to shoulder with the risen dead as zombie activists, waving signs and yelling, "Zombie rights now!"—just before we're surrounded and devoured.

From behind this veil of equivocation, folks can aspire to a world in which no value is greater because all of them are lesser. Conflict can then only occur when we choose to take a stand. But choose to stand for nothing and you protect you and yours. There are plenty who believe this to be a good, righteous, enlightened view of the world.

They're wrong. It's a joke—a sick and killing one.

The aim of morals, ethics, and especially virtue—the pinnacle of our moral and ethical endeavors—is not to avoid the fight but ensure that it's worth fighting. Denying the causes of conflict does not alleviate but stoke, especially when faced with intolerable values like those that threaten, harm, torture, and murder innocents in the name of culture or creed. Distorting reality through groupthink and manipulating language and popular culture to claim the mantle of the right and the good is to deceive fundamentally on the matter of rightness and goodness. Consensus is never a worthwhile end if it means consensual suicide. Only the ignorant and dishonest are assured there is nothing worth risking themselves for. But this reasoning is as twisty as a Gordian knot. Fidelity to truth is not about unraveling these knots but, like Alexander, cutting them.

Intervention is often underrated in the aftermath of horror, usually by the bystanders who did nothing. It is hard to imagine, however, that these same folks would have discouraged passengers from coming to their own loved one's aid. Would they have asked them politely to stop? Encouraged them to look out for themselves? Do you think Kevin Sutherland appreciated in those last moments the fact that no one dared intercede? After all, these folks only did what normal people think they should normally do: stay out of it.

Hardly.

Our absolute needs become our fiercest desires when we find them in short supply. Just ask anyone saved from drowning. No one is more grateful for a life saved than the saved life.

But try telling that to those who are convinced there is no magnetic north on the moral compass, like the writer at the *Washington Post* who softened the blow of her own nihilism with cooing solidarity: "It makes a lot of us uncomfortable to think we would have cowered instead of confronting Sutherland's killer."[1] Of course it's uncomfortable. It should be. We are all perfectly capable of intervening. *We make a conscious choice not to.*

Everyone has the mental, spiritual, and physical fortitude to intervene on behalf of another who needs protection. Who would be unwilling to shield their child, sibling, or spouse under brutal attack? Those who love them can throw themselves on their bodies to shield them from violence. Anyone mobile is capable of doing this, from Grandma to Junior, and people of all kinds have. No one has to be made of steel to intervene, because doing violence to the aggressor is not the point. Protecting the victim is.

If we do not acknowledge this difference, then we stand to applaud the claptrap and confide in the con that says we are powerless. This is irrational fear, the worst kind, and it seduces into that cult of victimhood—a cult of death—where we expect to be a victim at some point, and our only defense is the condemning hope that sheer numbers safeguard us from being next.

If you're unwilling to risk your life to protect a complete stranger, congratulations, you're a member of the club called *human*. There are plenty of folks—good folks, mind you—who will never bring themselves to intervene. But do not confuse that raw fact of our humanity with the moral, ethical, or virtuous, should, ought, and must.

However, if you are willing to risk yourself to protect others, that makes you above and beyond—superhuman, in fact—and we have a name for those people: heroes. And just so we're clear, those willing to risk their lives to protect the lives of others, *and physically engage attackers to rout them, kill them, or subdue them*, well, we call those rare folks by another name: warriors.

The best that martial training can do is not simply provide the necessary mental and physical skills to respond to conflict, but calibrate ourselves *justly* to know we ought to respond. That's another of those ancient martial secrets. In fact, you will find these secrets have one thing in common: they all concern, touch, and overlap the realm of ethics.

Placing ethics first, ahead of physical, tactical concerns, isn't simply more *difficult* because it requires more training, more study, and skill. It's more *life threatening* because it forces us to risk our lives for ourselves and others and thereby requires greater fortitude of will for the courage to act. Any book can splash photos of techniques across its pages. I admit, this book aspires to something more: to articulate why it is harder, tougher, requires more competence, more strength of character, and more faith in oneself, to be ethical before we are tactical.

The best definition of ethics I ever heard did not come from some inscrutable ancient philosopher or religious exponent or secular concern, although each of these has contributed in some capacity to its historical meaning. It actually came from a US Marine Corps captain, a mentor of mine, who stated that ethics is nothing more than our "moral values in action."

Damn.

The simple and sublime from someone trained to shoot and blow things up. From a man trained to fight.

We ought to protect others. We ought to shield them and defend them if we must, so as to escape threats and violence. And we ought to want to.

Soldiers and police officers are protectors by duty. But so are moms and dads and schoolteachers. So is the pizza guy, the investment banker, and old lady Smith down the street. So are the ten passengers on a metro train when a predator sets upon an innocent.

We can ask ourselves that question again. We can ask it and attempt to answer with examples from the martial way's significant history, or the hallmarks of its traditions, or the extensive beliefs that the antiquity of its thought communicates to us today in its myriad cultural forms. Or we can accede to its simple, undeniable answer and the resolve it compels us to accept.

Why train?

My God, how can we not?

NOTES

1. Petula Dvorak, "Passengers Watched Killing on Metro Car. Should They Have Intervened?" *The Washington Post*, July 9, 2015, accessed September 25, 2017, www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-38500002.html?refid=easy_hf.

Introduction: The Martial Is Moral

Know Your Ought

When scientists looked to record data on the stimulation of a frog, they used a bell to startle it into jumping. They rang the bell, recorded how far the frog jumped, and then cut off one of its appendages. This ringing and snipping continued until the frog was but a stump. And when they rang the bell for what would be the last time, and Stumpy did not jump, their conclusion was this: when all of a frog's appendages are removed, it loses its hearing.

This story was told to my father in his first year at dental school, and its point is simple: do not disregard the obvious. That's essentially what this whole book is about: rediscovering and clarifying what is, or rather what should be, self-evident truth. Bear in mind, this is not the stuff we all agree on—nobody really agrees on everything anyway—but rather that which we cannot deny.

Imagine training the chest-compression and breathing techniques of CPR but divorced from their purpose of saving lives. Without their purpose, why learn them? What's the point of the skill if we're training ourselves to be incapable of recognizing when it ought to be applied?

In fact, without that "ought," that sense of obligation, what makes it at all necessary?

Some years ago I traveled to the West Coast for training at a weekend event. During one of the segments, I was called to the front to physically defend a fellow who was to be attacked. Now, I was a highly adept martial artist who'd been training since I was a kid, and I'd even lived in Japan for several years, getting my butt kicked by the very best teachers of my art. I was little concerned about defending anybody from anybody because I knew something the attacker did not: I was about to attack the hell out of him.

The moment my protectee was threatened, I leaped into action with more than twenty years of expertise to thwart the assault. I remember feeling pretty satisfied as I loomed over the aggressor, now facedown in the dirt and dust, and twisted him into an airtight submission. I was proud of myself—I'd been called out before a crowd of my peers, so my aim was to impress, and I was pretty sure I had. I remember that moment as well as I remember the next: turning to confirm the safety of my protectee, only I couldn't find him. He'd been silently nabbed by an unknown second attacker. Cue the laugh track for this fool.

A teacher, mentor, and friend, Jack Hoban, arranged the fiasco. He had nothing against me; he was simply taking advantage of the chance to teach a larger lesson. And I have never forgotten that lesson. It laid bare the one thing no professional ever wants to admit he possesses: a weakness he wasn't even aware he had. My confidence to serve up skill lacked the one thing truly necessary for right action: clarity of what I *ought* to do. My job, my role, in that moment was not about attacking an attacker. It was about defending someone, about safeguarding his life. *It was about being a protector.*

After all my years of training and experience, you might think I should have already known this, that it would be second nature, a given. It was not. And it is not for many other professionals. In that crucial moment, I was convinced I was doing the right thing, but I was wrong. I was confused. And I failed. Instead of being a protector, I behaved like a thug.

No one trains martial arts to get worse at martial arts. No one trains to gain less understanding and ability. Everyone trains to get better, gain comprehension, and enlighten themselves. Even weirdos dressed as Power Rangers who flood the net with claims of secret training from Master Cucamonga believe this through the fog of their own self-importance. In fact, it is this unanimous motivation to gain proficiency that's translated into the variety of reasons folks train in martial arts. But real proficiency is contingent on a central truth: it must protect and defend a clear sense of obligation. It must know its ought.

In his seminal work, *The Twenty Guiding Principles of Karate*, the founder of modern karate, Gichin Funakoshi, recounts the story of a famous feudal-age sword master. A high-level student of Tsukahara Bokuden with "extraordinary technical skill" passed by a skittish horse, which kicked at him. The student "deftly turned his body to avoid the kick and escaped injury." Townsfolk were so impressed, they immediately related the story to Bokuden himself, who reportedly said, "I've misjudged him," and promptly expelled the student.

Mystified by his reasoning, folks plotted to force Bokuden to react to the same circumstances. They placed "an exceedingly ill-tempered horse" on a road they knew he used, then secretly waited. When the old man finally came round, they were surprised to see him give the horse a wide berth and pass without incident. Once the townspeople confessed their ruse, the sword master said this: "A person with a mental attitude that allows him to walk carelessly by a horse without considering that it may rear up is a lost cause no matter how much he may study technique. I thought he was a person of better judgment, but I was mistaken."[1]

Funakoshi highlights this story to introduce the principle of "mentality over technique," writing "mentality" as *shinjutsu*, describing acute mindfulness with ethical connotations. Losing our mentality, or, worse, being willfully ignorant of it, can be life threatening, as it represents a personal duty. Bokuden dismissed his student for the plainest of reasons: *he had lost touch with the duties he was obligated to uphold to himself. And if he had failed himself, what use was he to anyone else in need?*

This clarity of obligation is by far the most important point of martial undertaking because it places every lesson in context—protecting the self grants the confidence and accountability to protect others. People concoct all kinds of reasons to study the martial way, but track those reasons far enough, and they invariably travel full circle to this originating alpha point because of a shared experience: *the martial way was not invented; it was discovered.*

Universal instincts from deep within the human condition compelled early adherents toward a shared sense of purpose: to survive human conflict. Thus, at different times, in different places, by different people, in different ways around the world, the martial way was realized and refined into the plurality of means and methods we know today. More than simply traditions of culture or libraries of fighting techniques, they are creeds. Codified systems imbued with values, morals, ethics, and virtues—a code of what we feel, what we think, what we do, and what we aspire to do—all calibrated to a particular end, what I call the *protector ethic.*

The Protector Ethic

Take this true story of a young man who went to the aid of a young woman—she was being beaten. This fellow tried to thwart the attack by attacking her attacker. But, unbeknownst to our hero, the aggressor's friends were not far behind, and when they came on their comrade receiving a knuckle sandwich, they served up several of their own. Whatever happened to the girl is anyone's guess.

Were our hero's actions ethical? Did he do the right thing?

He saw the violence and knew it was wrong. This young lady did not deserve to be beaten by a cretin. In his gut, he knew this to be immoral and acted. Our hero, a trained martial artist, gained tactical advantage and took the bully out. Now, had the violence stopped at that point, perhaps he could've tipped his hat and walked into the sunset. But the question remains: Did his tactical action provide him with the best option to stop the violence and prevent more?

Some will say yes, based on his *intention* to do right. But intending is not the same as doing. Knowing the right is not enough—doing the right is what counts. Then perhaps by merit of the *outcome*? Still not enough. The outcome could have been born of pure luck, like a rum-fueled dance-like-nobody's-watching stumble accidentally knocking the attacker out—hardly an ethical act, even when the outcome goes his way. But the outcome didn't go his way, and our hero was lucky he won only some nasty bruises, in spite of doing a noble, dumb thing that could have resulted in croaking at the hands of angry drunks.

The world is a brutal place, and there will always be cases in which good folks have no choice but to attack an attacker, even at great risk to themselves or others. But this doesn't mean it should be our first choice. In fact, if your default setting in regular training is "stomping mudholes in chests" or worse, slitting throats like a commando but you are not a commando, you are priming yourself to go off road, even off map, to cause greater conflict and violence. "Kill 'em all and let Gary sort 'em out" is an awful way for Gary to live in the real world, where some of that indiscriminate aggression will rub off on him and people he cares about.

We can be tactical without being ethical. It's easy, really—far easier than being both, for sure. Even though our hero had been tactical—he approached and ambushed unseen from the rear—he had not acted on the ethical first. If he had, he would have given himself the best opportunity for the outcome he was initially compelled to effect.

Let's remember why he intervened to begin with. It wasn't to deliver justice to the villain and tie him up with a note for the cops. He did it to protect a young woman who could not protect herself. Why, then, did he choose a tactic that endeavored the former and neglected the latter? Bear in mind, once the aggressor's friends attacked our hero, it created a new issue: now he needed defending. And the young woman was left in the very same predicament our hero found her in to begin with—at the mercy of those who meant her harm. *He had lost touch with the duties he was obligated to uphold to himself. And if he had failed himself, what use was he to anyone else in need?*

By unnecessarily attacking the attacker, the hero placed himself, the girl, and even his attackers in potentially deadly harm. Yes, even his attackers: had the hero or someone else been carrying a concealed weapon, such as a firearm, it might have turned into a turkey shoot with no turkeys.

What ought the hero have done?

He should have placed himself between the young woman and her abuser and separated them. This ethical action is the best tactical action, as it protects everyone:

- By standing up for the girl, he becomes a guardian to protect her from further violence.
- By not immediately attacking the attacker, our hero protects himself because the attacker isn't forced into a fight. Fighting becomes a choice the attacker has to make.
- It also protects the attacker from harm by the hero, as well as harm he may incur on himself as a result of his own poor behavior, even if he doesn't realize it.

Our hero should have acted as a protector of self and others, including, if possible, the enemy. This outlines the protector ethic, with the "if possible" as the balance, since we must engage from a sober understanding of our ability under given conditions—we can only do what we are confident we are capable of doing. Protecting our enemy is definitely the most difficult and dangerous thing we can do. It doesn't just speak to our willingness to do it; it also speaks to our martial capability and maturity because there is no higher skill than to subdue an aggressor without killing him.

Operating from the perspective that less is definitely more, when engaging in violence we should employ the least deadly tactic (until more lethal ones are required), in order to conform with the protector ethic. We should take the application of martial tactics as seriously as any mortal threat posed against us. The human body is a complex, if sometimes frail, vessel that can malfunction just as often as it can perform wondrous feats. How an opponent will react in response to grave techniques is often an educated guess. Every year there are an alarming number of scuffles that turn deadly—one-punch knockouts that end up homicides, and this often between untrained people. And let's face it: any physical action we perform may land us in court, since in this polite society, litigiousness is a culling sword, even when folks follow the law and do everything right.

Balancing the ethical-tactical continuum is the best way to increase our ability because it's when we can (or cannot) ethically protect everyone and resolve conflict that tactics become vividly clear. The tactical itself, on its own, is devoid of meaning without orientation—a sword-cutting technique is simply that, a procedure to cut with a sword. The technique gains priority and consequence only when used in fulfilling our protector ethic, which is always moral-physical.

A Moral-Physical Philosophy

Some believe the ethical and tactical are mutually exclusive, even incompatible. The tactical is about survival, they'll say—"Kill or be killed." The ethical is for Sunday school or philosophers, who rarely, if ever, get punched in the face. But this is hardly true—I get punched all the time.

Anytime someone decides to begin martial training, the decision itself is of an ethical nature. Take the three most basic questions anyone who trains must answer:

What am I going to learn?
How am I going to learn it?
Whom am I going to learn from?

These considerations only gain in importance because they do not just inhabit teaching lives; they haunt them:

What am I going to teach?
How am I going to teach it?
Whom am I going to teach?

We answer these questions regardless of our awareness or ignorance of them because choosing to train in martial arts is our vote for the "what, how, and whom." These questions further call for direction, not just for knowledge of techniques but also for the manner of their use. Manners relate to a person's qualities, and qualities relate to character. "Manners are of more importance than laws," the philosopher Edmund Burke wrote. "Manners are what vex or soothe, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarize or refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation, like that of the air we breathe in."[2] No one can engage the martial without being subjected to the modification of character.

Training does not automatically moralize us just because we do it. It only grants us the opportunity, provided we affix training to its virtuous, life-protecting design. Unless students are faced with the inherent duties of the protector ethic, training is nothing but selfish endeavor. One that can become incomprehensible if we purposely obscure its path due to our own penchant for amusement, or, worse, outright refusal to follow the path where it's taking us. The biggest concern anyone should have with training is the obsession with technical information—techniques—which is symptomatic of the excessive focus on the self and the continual satisfaction of the ego. Perhaps you've heard martial arts destroys the ego, but this is silly. People need a healthy ego to thrive. Training functions as a temper, and it does so by balancing our needs and wants with humility stemming from our duties to self and others.

When training gets selfish, it can grow dark and twisted, a place where everyone is a potential enemy, including people we care about. Instead of becoming that happier, healthier, brighter light to the world that others look to for strength and guidance, we dim, obscured by shadows of our own making. And it's only in this darkness that the bloodline of the martial way is misidentified as mere "killing arts." This has the effect of diminishing it, severing the link between tactical strategies and their original, life-protecting principles. The account departs from any sense of responsibility and appeals, perhaps unwittingly, to a base appetite for "might makes right," a self-satisfaction that degrades training as amoral, neither ethical nor unethical. If it's neither right nor wrong, it's just a cold, hard tool that makes it easy to kill.

Now, do not misunderstand me. The knowledge and material ability to kill an enemy hold an immeasurably important place—sacred, even—in martial means and ways. In many respects, maturity in the martial way is paradoxical, as in "learning to die in order to live" or "killing to protect life." These notions are intrinsic to advanced studies, but because they are not simple to comprehend, let alone physically embody, they are easily misunderstood. And the easiest to misinterpret is the martial as merely mortal.

The fate of the feudal and ancient world was indiscriminate death. People died young, sick, and infirm, as they were plagued by plagues, starved, hunted, and massacred between tribes and clans. History's brutality is legendary. It was the martial way that tipped the balance to protect and sustain life. Is there any question as to why the warrior class would ascend to the preeminent cultural position throughout antiquity? It wasn't because the warrior was renowned for his death

1

To Value: Justice as Honor

A Genuine Fake

The video is grainy. A blotchy corner timestamp says December 19, 2003, 10:46 a.m. A barren table and a single chair sit against the wall opposite the camera, crowding a small police interrogation room. A scruffy-haired, bearded man is led in by a detective and seated. He's agitated, exposed. In the din of our Verbal Judo classroom, Dr. George "Doc" Thompson points to the projection screen, "This guy just shot a cop." Everyone watching is silently queasy. We oughta be. We're about to witness something awful.

The scruffy man is Ricardo Alfonso Cerna, a Guatemalan immigrant to the United States, and he knows something his captors do not: his latest act of violence will be his third strike in the criminal justice system and assures he'll go to prison for life.

Cerna had just been pulled over by Sheriff's Deputy Michael Parham for a traffic infraction when he decided a high-speed chase would be more exciting. He took off in his vehicle, and when he crashed it, he burst from the wreck in a Butch and Sundance blaze, firing six shots at the deputy, striking him twice in the abdomen. Parham survived.

Several departments then teamed together to run Cerna down and arrest him. In the video, he sits at the San Bernardino sheriff's office in Muscoy, California. The detective who led him in hands him a bottle of water with a good-natured "Here you go, *señor*." The politeness is hard to square with the knowledge that Parham is at this very moment fighting for his life in surgery, a fact the detective must certainly be aware of, but his attitude does not betray. Thompson speaks up: "That just saved his life."

The detective leaves. Cerna opens the bottle, drinks deep, and gives himself a moment. He tugs at his shirt and, like a rabbit from a hat, produces a model 1911 .45-caliber handgun from his waistband. Without hesitation, as if it were a practiced, automatic movement, he presses the muzzle to his temple and blows his brains out.

The blast jolts him stiff. The gun slides from his grip. Blood pours out of him and tattoos the concrete floor like spilled wine. His eyes swell. His nose drips. His body deflates. The detective walks back in. "Aww fuck. Nobody shook him [searched him]." Cerna's head lolls, his body sinking heavily but still in his seat. "Holy fuck." The video darkens.

Even though the San Bernardino police, the county sheriff, and the California Highway Patrol all had a hand in arresting Cerna, no one had properly searched him. Investigators would later confirm that his gun had two bullets left.

Cerna's violence toward an officer might have won him disdain, causing the detectives to vent anger against him. It's possible no one would have thought twice about it if they did. But because the detective's treatment of Cerna exemplified a universal truth—everyone wants to be treated with dignity—he didn't arm Cerna with a motive to kill him.

Several years ago I was invited to complete a forty-hour course in Verbal Judo. If you're unfamiliar with it, look it up. It's known today as TacComm, or Tactical Communication, and its founder, the late Dr. Thompson, started teaching it more than thirty years ago after earning a PhD in English literature, then serving some twenty years in law enforcement, where he refined its techniques. The video was one of many, illustrating that our words can either keep us a step ahead or push us off a cliff.

Thompson, a longtime martial artist himself, described Verbal Judo as a "martial art of the mind," and he was right. Verbal Judo's principles are based on observation of the human condition and designed to take advantage of another's verbal aggression, tip them off balance, and gain control. He spoke about letting go of one's ego, maintaining one's temper, focusing only on another's behavior, letting angry words wisp away. Thompson even said he'd reconciled police tactics with Aristotelian models of rhetorical persuasion and laid it all out in clear form. The secret to it was what he called *tactical courtesy*.

Throughout that weeklong course, there were endless examples of people saving lives using a mind trained in tactical courtesy as a baseline for conduct. This means treating others, including despicable criminals, with the same level of basic courtesy we'd ourselves like under similar conditions. Stories were varied, and many included officers using their words to deescalate situations. One legendary LA gang detective unknowingly saved his own life one night: a bogus 911 call was actually an initiation to assassinate a cop. But when this detective showed up, the gangsters lowered their rifles, explaining some months later that their regard for him—because of the regard he had shown them—stayed their triggers. Thompson himself was called in to negotiate with an unstable father holding a knife to the throat of his three-year-old son. No one wanted bloodshed, but SWAT snipers were already in place and needed but a sign to take a shot, so Thompson combed the man's words for the key to use against him. When finally admitting he did not want to kill his son but he felt he had to—he was possessed by the devil—there it was. Thompson suggested a priest perform an exorcism. It worked. The boy was unharmed and his father taken into custody.

Like any rhetoric, be it the timing of comedy, riposte in debate, or eloquence in speech, tactical courtesy is a practiced skill, rife with techniques and tactics that must be studied under expert practitioners and applied unceasingly. At its best it can deliver a masterstroke when the practitioner is under duress.

But good timing does not make one funny, clever riposte does not ensure one argues from the truer perspective, and stirring speech certainly does not imbue the message with meaning and profundity. Like politeness or civil manners, especially under stressful or taxing conditions, tactical courtesy is a performance, a veneer. Don't get me wrong, compelling another's compliance in lieu of conflict is an excellent skill for any professional.

However, there's a principle here worth embracing because it's the fundamental building block for strategies like tactical courtesy and virtue itself: *genuine respect.*

Respect is rooted in the protector ethic's first steadfast virtue, honor, and within the ancient cardinal virtue, justice. How we respect—value ourselves and others—and how we uphold that respect, honor, has everything to do with how we justify our reasoning, judgments, and, most importantly, actions.

Respect: Owed or Earned?

Is respect earned or freely given? How would you explain the feeling of basic respect, let alone describe its delivery—what does it mean to show respect? And can we stomach giving it to those we might deplore, like an enemy, opponent, or criminal?

In much of the martial way, the beginning and end of training are marked by respect, or *Rei*. We bow upon entry to our training space, we treat our teachers with deference, and we protect our training partners, though we may seem to mistreat them through the rigors of training itself. For much of our everyday life, many would agree that showing respect means adhering to the Bible's Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matt. 7:12). The concept is simple, as it relies on our own self-worth in balancing treatment of and from others.

But is this arguably self-evident point flawed? One person's standards can differ from another's and so may be perceived as offensive by another. This would mean the Golden Rule isn't so shiny because to treat others in a way that they consider offensive would be to treat them disrespectfully. This has led to calls to revise the Golden Rule into: "Treat others the way *they* wish to be treated."

However, this is the same issue in reverse—the behavior of others might be considered offensive by you. Allowing our actions to be governed by the quirky tastes of another person's culture or creed, especially if those ways are unknown to us and out of context, is counterproductive at the least. Imagine police officers treating the public, suspects, and criminals by the variable cultural standards *they* wish to be treated by. Deference to this subjectivity would engage police in endless study of cross-cultural and sociological trends, with the result that police would "respect" some people differently from other people under similar circumstances, turning law enforcement into awful enforcement.

Does Kant hold the answer? Immanuel Kant was an eighteenth-century German philosopher who channeled the Golden Rule into his own maxim stating we should always treat others as "ends" in themselves and never merely as "means" to our own ends. In his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, he reinforced his ideas with his "categorical imperative": "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law."[1] That's a fancy way of saying, do only that which you would be willing to have everyone else do to everyone—including you—all the time.

But even Kant's meticulous phrasing requires qualification, since his formulation could be applied to almost anything, and, in fact, it was sometimes interpreted to that end, such as when the Nazis used Kant to justify their most heinous actions. Kant was named as a forefather of the ideals of Nazis from Adolf Hitler to Adolf Eichmann, chief logistician of the Holocaust. Eichmann, kidnapped in Argentina by the Israeli Mossad and extradited back to Israel, famously argued at his trial in 1961 that he attempted to live his life by Kant's categorical imperative, saying, "'True to the law, obedient, a proper personal life, not to come into conflict with the law.' This, I would say, was the categorical imperative for a small man's domestic use." In other words, I was only following orders when I enabled a precision plan to boxcar Jews for extermination in death camps. Now, philosophical Kantians are, of course, dismissive here, and they are wont to say, "The Nazis didn't get Kant right." Of course they didn't get him *right*. But tell that to the Nazis.

Getting it right is an enduring problem when seeking prescribed formal guidance, whether it's from Socrates or Bruce Lee, because throughout the ages, well-meaning sentiments have fallen casualty to misinterpretation and outright misuse in disciplines ranging from philosophy to theology. Even the Bible's Ten Commandments, some of world's oldest moral directives, have created confusion. "Thou shalt not kill" has been ridiculed, as any plain reading can prompt one to question the butchery of animals and discount self-defense and just war. But the misunderstanding stems from translation—the original Hebrew actually said, "Thou shalt not murder." The fact is that the human condition too often grinds both the intellectually complex and sublime into a digestible paste, allowing us to gorge all the better on the feeling of moral superiority, a permanent human failing.

What's misunderstood in criticism of the Golden Rule is simply this: it is not formalized but *empirical* by nature, meaning it requires observation and experience rather than mere reliance on theory, logic, or platitude. To use it correctly—that is, respectfully—we're obliged to seek further content, such as given conditions dictating our behavior and manners, and better understand the context of use, such as why we are engaged with someone to begin with, before we make it a sound maxim. With this combination of the moral context and physical conditions, we can create a behavioral ideal for everyday ethics and

About the Author

Photo by Jon Phillips

JAMES V. MORGANELLI has studied martial arts for forty years. His writing has appeared in *Black Belt* magazine. In 2001, his screenplay "Captive Moon" was a Finalist/Winner awarded by FilmMakers.com. A graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, he majored in philosophy and held a concentration in East Asian languages and culture. In 2013, he received a master of arts in social philosophy from Loyola University Chicago, where he concentrated his studies on applied ethics and natural law. James has been certified in verbal defense and influence and is a master instructor in Bujinkan Budo Taijutsu of Japan, where he lived and trained for three years. Upon his return from Japan, he founded the Shingitai-Ichi Dojo in 1998 to continue his training, teaching, and outreach. James is also a staff member at Resolution Group International—professional conflict-resolution experts dedicated to teaching ethical, verbal, and physical skills to civilians, law enforcement, and the military. It is headed by Jack Hoban. James is also the founder and Director of the Protector Ethic Institute. Find more information at www.protectorethic.org. James lives in Chicago with his wife.