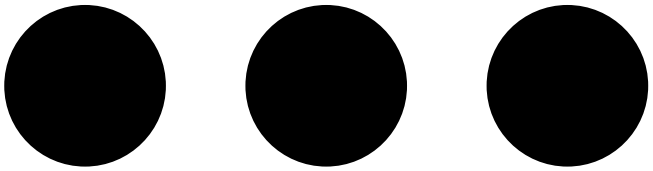
Written by **Selwyn Duke** on May 25, 2014

The Marxist Attack on Kids' Competition

Our society's attack upon competition is intensifying, and it breeds some truly ridiculous policies. Years ago already, a soccer league in Massachusetts banned keeping score in 10-and-under tournaments in deference to the feelings police. Some schools have eliminated the designations "Valedictorian" and "Salutatorian" because they're too non-egalitarian. More recently, a Rhode Island school canceled its long tradition of an honors night (the decision has since been reversed following an outcry) because it was too "exclusive," and, not to be outdone, a Michigan elementary school just distributed a flyer stating that the "urge to win" at their annual field day should be minimized because all students are "winners."



There are obvious points to be made here, such as how this anti-competition mentality unjustly denies achievers their due. It's also true that if you reward something — and excellence is no exception — you get more of it; if you don't, you get less. But in our effort to protect losers' feelings, we forget the other victims in this lunacy:

The losers themselves.

As a few of my readers know, for part of my life I was an aspiring tennis player. It was an all-consuming passion, and I wanted to be the best. I did become good, but, alas, I didn't have the talent to rise to the grandest stage. What, though, if the playing field had been tilted so that I could somehow be made to appear as capable as Pete Sampras and Andre Agassi? Assuming I would have accepted such preference (I wouldn't have), it could only have hurt me.

You see, there was great disappointment and pain associated with my failures, but, as C.S. Lewis said, "Pain is the megaphone God uses to get through to deaf ears." My striving and stumbling built character, helped teach me what truly mattered, and, ultimately, steered me toward areas in which I was truly gifted. And now, with pain-perfected priorities, I'd much rather be spreading the Truth via tongue and pen than spending my time hitting a fuzzy ball around.

The point? This fixation with shielding kids from certain realities, such as failure and consequences, denies them necessary growth opportunities. Pain is the crucible in which the impurities are distilled from our souls.

What we're seeing from the anti-competition crowd is a lack of depth, a superficial world view. Sure, they're concerned about losers' self-image, but if a person can't handle losses, the problem doesn't lie with the winners or any fair competition.

It lies with him — with his lack of humility.

Humility is when you know what you are and accept it; humiliation is when you find out you're something you're not and can't handle it. Instead of protecting children's sometimes bloated egos and fixating of their "self-esteem" — now a euphemism for "pride" — we should regain appreciation for humility and the "failures" that can cultivate it. We should ponder why Rudyard Kipling stated in his poem "If" (written for his 12-year-old son), "If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster and treat those two imposters just the same." Kipling might have meant that the two are imposters because they're impermanent, they come and go; that they're illusory because they don't really reflect God's true plan for us; or that what may seem negative or positive may actually be the opposite (such as "success" that destroys a child star or, again, painful losses that inspire growth). He also might have meant that we are what we are, and confronting better competition and losing or worse competition and winning doesn't change that; hence Hemingway's saying, "[T]rue nobility is being superior to your former self." But whatever Kipling meant, he didn't say that worldly triumph and disaster don't exist and that everyone is a "winner." He was adding perspective, not denying reality.

The pain of failure, like physical pain, is also invaluable feedback. It calls your attention to a problem; it may signal that you have to work harder — or be an indicator that your glories lie elsewhere. Insofar as this goes, competition is the world's best guidance counselor, sometimes saying about a given endeavor, "This is your calling" or "This isn't for you." And one of the secrets to happiness is learning where your gifts lie and then diligently cultivating them.

The reality is that little good drives the anti-competition movement. And one of its uglier, but seldom noticed, animating forces is something hiding in the Trojan horse of equality, something expressed by French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville when he wrote, "Equality is an expression of envy. It means … 'No one shall be better off than I am.'" Instead of stoking children's envy, we should help them appreciate others' gifts, as we simultaneously help them identify and exploit their own.

De Tocqueville also warned that as long as this envy-driven equality "is preferred to good government, good government is impossible" and that "Americans are so enamored of equality, they would rather be equal in slavery than unequal in freedom."

If we want to breed slaves who will revel in their equality, our educational model is on exactly the right course.