

CollabOrate
Peacemakers #12
Irenea

Peacemakers need a word. What is the antonym of violence? Of coercion? Mark Kurlansky, author of *Nonviolence: The History of a Dangerous Idea*, complains that no proactive word for nonviolence exists. The only word available is the negation of the word “violence” or the negation of the word “coercion.”

Gandhi coined the term “*satyagraha*,” for nonviolent noncooperation, which terminology has, frankly, never caught on with peacemakers. For Gandhi, *satyagraha* was clinging to Truth, which is spirit-force (that is, god). Practicing *satyagraha* builds the deepest tiers of character, and entails more than passive resistance. *Satyagrahi* (those who practice *satyagraha*) engage civil disobedience of immoral laws, and refuse to cooperate with corrupt governments. *Satyagrahi* decline violence or lesser coercions, and refuse to intimidate or humiliate opponents. *Satyagrahi* march, write letters, refuse honors, and make themselves publicly annoying to the powers protested. *Satyagrahi* spin thread and weave cloth (to break the British stranglehold on Indian textiles). *Satyagrahi* teach basic hygiene and spiritual discipline to the Indian people. Gandhi led salt marches, to show the Indian people their innate independence from overseas salt provided by British importers. Gandhi even protested by fasting, declining to eat until social grievances had been addressed, or when his own followers strayed into violence. The intense Brahmanic religiosity of Gandhi’s description of *satyagraha*, when combined with the unfamiliar word and difficult pronunciation, inhibits widespread adoption of Gandhi’s coinage.

I propose the term “irenea” (aye-re-**nee**-a) as an alternative coinage for the goal of peacemaking. The word “εἰρήνη” (*eirene*) is an Attic Greek term meaning peace. The Greek term enters English as “Irene,” a woman’s name, and “irenic,” an adjective meaning peaceful, or “irenicize,” a verb meaning to act to make peace. *Irenea* denotes wealth in social capital based on international cooperation. Individually, *irenea* denotes personal and interpersonal health and resilience. *Irenic* communities practice social equity and political equality, and aim at sustainable economies. People who do *irenea* promote peace. They foster cooperation and communication; they inculcate dignity and respect. *Irenic* communities deal with deviancy by carefully but fully re-integrating offenders into a human community. An *irenic* community addresses its commonplace challenges competently. *Irenea* promotes cultural education and tolerance of the differences of others and their cultures.

Irenea rejects coercive solutions. Coercion squanders social capital in organized murder (war) and punitive sanctions for deviants. Coercion creates an unstable and hostile international environment. Coercive social settings sacrifice personal and interpersonal health to power and acquisitiveness, resulting in general human frailty. People who do coercion promote violence. Economic abundance is subverted to subsidize war and incarcerations. Social and political inequities burgeon under coercive regimes. When coercive cultures spin out of control, war ensues. Coercive communities respond ineffectively to commonplace challenges of living. Conflicts of the most pedestrian sort consume vast communal resources. Coercive communities perpetually teeter due to threats and predations of enemies.

One might mistake *irenea* for Utopia. An *irenic* community is not heaven; it is riven by common human foibles. But where people practice *irenea*, social competence to address commonplace problems grows. Members learn peacemaking; they make peace. Where coercion aggregates money, *irenea* builds social capital.

By this point, critics of hopefulness, ensconced in their cynical bastions, heave great sighs. Where, Lancaster, is your *irenea*? Did human horror skip past your addled cerebrum? Remember Somalia, the Balkans, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, North Korea, Darfur, and the legion insanities, less genocidal but no less cracked, that jostle for column inches in local newspapers? I have not blinked. Perhaps it is irreverent to hope in the face of so much senseless tragedy. Or perhaps it is pointless to allow knowledge of misery to rob one of well-warranted optimism.

Irenea is hidden before our eyes (like a red bird—see the first essay of this series). Humans stride like giants toward *irenea*. Though we are more aware than ever before of the homicidal-genocidal frenzies that leap from the human breast, the number of those lacerative excursions plummets. Matthew Ridley (*The Rational Optimist*) notes that eighty-seven percent of contemporary hunter-gatherer societies suffer war annually. The death rate for hunter-gatherers from homicide and war averages one-half of one percent annually. Were the twentieth century as bloody as Paleolithic hunters, two billion people would have died violently. Steven Pinker argues (*The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*) that the existence of governments and habituation of billions to civilizing behaviors has caused warfare and death by homicide to plummet over the ages. Primitive tribal skirmishes were nine times as deadly as the warfare of the twentieth century, and homicides in medieval Europe transpired at 3,000% of today’s rate.

Humankind wends toward *irenea*. The proponents of violence and coercion are being slowly shouted down by the quiet voice of *irenic* pressures. This human transition is bumpy and long. *Irenea*’s span is measured in the life of our species, not in mere millennia or centuries. As such, *irenea*’s horizon lies further off than most can peer, even when squinting. Perhaps *irenea* will become more visible with the advent of global-linking technologies such as the internet and cell phone.

Were Everett, or even (god-forbid!) Seattle, to become irenic communities, there would still be a place for courts and lawyers. Our jobs would be different. Courts would work out placements for difficult deviants and resolve intractable conflicts. Lawyers would stand at the irenic front, making peace violently (as Jesus might have put it). It is not absurd to hope for and act to create a better life in a better world. Our cynicism may be wholly unwarranted. Hopeful expectation may prove not half so good as what actually comes to pass. Eeyore-ic doomsayers among us may be puzzled, yes, utterly flummoxed.

Deliberating irenea and adopting peacemaking as a template for professional practice has changed my lawyering. Take a minute or some hours. Irenea might do the same for you.

This is the last essay in this Peacemakers series. Some colleagues have responded. If these essays have provoked thoughts, I would be most intrigued to learn your responses. Email me.

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