

C O N T E N T S

INTRODUCTION

DO OR DIE

THINK

Formulate and Pursue a Sensible Object

Study the Opponent

STRIKE A VITAL POINT STRONGLY

Surprise the Opponent

Strike Swiftly at the Critical Time

Strike in Combination

CREATE OR EXPOSE A VITAL POINT

OTHER PRINCIPLES

Parry the Opponent's Strikes

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Fight as Little as Possible

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

F R O M T H E I N T R O D U C T I O N

Any species that comes into being through natural selection is selfish; since our species came into being through natural selection, it is selfish. *The human species is not exempt*; it is not one whit less biological than the others. A human being is a member of the Order Primates, Infraorder Catarrhini, and Family Hominidae. Our modes are life, species, and individual. What is true of the other species is true of ours; the same processes are at work. "...[B]y and large," writes Wilson, "people behave in their daily lives as though somehow guided, whether consciously or unconsciously," by the principles of evolution by natural selection. "The same arts and tricks that boys will now try upon you for balls,

bats, and half-pence,” wrote Lord Chesterfield to his son, “men will make use of with you when you are a man, for other purposes.” We take a highly instrumental view of other creatures, whether of our own species or of others; our chief consideration is how they might contribute to our comfort and convenience. “Let us not be angry with men when we see them cruel, ungrateful, unjust, proud, egotistical, and forgetful of others,” said Jean de La Bruyere; “they are made so; it is their nature; we might just as well quarrel with a stone for falling to the ground, or with a fire when the flames ascend.” The mode of life is to be selfish; what the Greeks called the gods, is biology.

As we pursue our objects and others theirs, collisions of interests naturally occur. Society is a cockpit, an arena of conflict. Getting to our object is like crossing a field or bog: we must sometimes lay down stones as a bridge, sometimes go round obstacles, and sometimes simply hack our way through. Fighting is one of the ways to lessen the asymmetry between oneself and the strong, to lift one’s mode, to lessen the likelihood of one’s being imposed upon by others. All relationships *should* be symbiotic; in general, the more the asymmetry between the parties, the less the symbiosis. Fighting is one of the means by which one *forces* a relationship to be symbiotic. The great law of natural selection is this: a creature must have a certain degree of power to survive. *Fighting is a form of power.* “Covenants without the sword are but words,” said Hobbes, “and of no strength to secure a man at all.”

While morality will *sometimes* stay the hand of the moral, it will only rarely that of the immoral. The moral will refrain from doing immoral things more than will the immoral; at the very least, the moral will feel compunction at hurting others. (A good person, said the Russian philosopher, is one who does bad things with disgust.) The moral person is torn by conflicting claims, the immoral not. “A man’s general character may be that of the honestest man in the world,” said Chesterfield. “Do not take this probity upon trust, to such a degree as to put your life, fortune, or reputation, in his power. This honest man may happen to be your rival in power, or interest, or in love; three passions that often put honesty to most severe trials...” Immorality is put to no such trials. Morality is an obstacle the moral will usually respect and the immoral not; what Germaine de Stael said of Napoleon is quite as true of the immoral: “He owes his success as much to the traits he lacks as to those he possesses.”

In a world in which selfish genes create survival machines with needs and vulnerabilities; in which the strong see to their interests at the expense of the weak; in which human beings have “jury-rigged” brains over which we are only imperfectly in control, and are wildly maladapted to the environment in which we live; in which the moral constraints of kinship and strict reciprocity are largely absent — in such a world, we must sometimes fight. Fighting is one of the necessities, one of the many disagreeable concomitants of evolution by natural selection. “Whoever defends not his water-tank with his goodly weapons will see it broken,” said the pre-Islamic poet Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma. “Whoever suffers people always to be riding upon him, and never spares himself humiliation, shall come to rue it.” The Romans would open the doors of Janus Geminus, the shrine of Janus, when

Rome was at war and close them when the city was at peace; between the 7th and 1st centuries BC, the Romans closed the doors only twice. Knowing how to fight well is as indispensable in life as any of the other social skills.

Fighting has gotten a bad name; it should not be so. Fighting itself is neither moral nor immoral; only its *object* can be said to be so. Was Caesar immoral to end oligarchic rule in the Roman Empire, Richelieu feudalism in France? Only if you think the oligarchy of the late Roman republic, and late French feudalism, good. We may count the ability to fight well, when applied to a just cause, among the virtues. To be moral is *not* to fight no one; to be moral is to fight those who vitiate life and civilization. As Richelieu observed, sparing certain lives “causes the death of a great many others.” Hawks and bullies prefer that most of the population be doves, because then they do so very well. In computer simulations of groups, notes Dawkins, “nasty” behavioral strategies flourish only while “softy” strategies exist; once the softy strategies die out, so, too, do the nasty ones. That the moral are far less willing to fight than the immoral has always hurt societies; the moral would do far better to follow revanchism, a policy of retaliation. Fighting is one of the means by which to restore the constraint of reciprocity to modern life. Our chief concern should be for, first life, then civilization; fighting may foster life and civilization, and not fighting harm them. If you truly wish to make the world a better place, you should sometimes fight.

It is in the interests of the individual to further the interests of the group. Not to do so is to hurt oneself over the long term. The lower understanding sees that one is a biological creature and must do certain things to survive, the higher that one is a member of a group and benefits from aiding that group. Many human beings simply do not understand that they are “a piece of the continent, a part of the main,” that they are part of the group, that *its* interests are *theirs* as well. Our lower understanding prompts us to care about the kin group (why we all do so); but only the neocortex prompts us to care about the non-kin group (why only a minority do so). “Civil society,” said the great German historian Theodor Mommsen, “but slowly and gradually attains to a perception of the interdependence of interests.” Only a minority of human beings attain “to a perception of the interdependence of interests,” come to care deeply about the group. (The more civilized the society, the more the concern for the group among its members.)

Fighting is to attain a certain object — a resource, market share, the betterment of the group, emotional satisfaction — or to prevent another from doing so. To fight is to attain the object by force; fighting is thus distinct from competing. To compete is to let merit determine the outcome; to fight is to lessen or nullify the merit of the other. If, in a foot-race, two runners run as fast as they can and the fastest wins, they have competed; if the runners trip and catch at each other as they run, they have fought. The distinction between fighting and competing is determined not by the field, but by what is done; a diplomat may find himself fighting quite as much as any general. And two rivals

may simultaneously fight and compete. Fighting is sometimes light and sometimes thick, sometimes of long duration and sometimes of short, sometimes legal and sometimes illegal, sometimes bloody and sometimes bloodless. The ultimate goal in fighting is to attain your object as swiftly as possible while having your interests hurt as little as possible.

The principles are immutable. “In the art of war,” said Napoleon, “nothing is lost, nothing created.” They are the same whatever the context; of Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign a military historian said, “It is indeed less suited to serve as a distinct military lesson than his other campaigns, for the climate as well as the enemy were too much unlike those to be met with in Europe. Still, the great principles of warfare, true under all circumstances, were here, too, acted on, and may here also be studied.” The principles are the same whether applied by Caesar or the common workman — the difference lies simply in scale. They apply equally to competition, as they do to war, social reform, epidemiology, business, and sports. The principles are usually applied simultaneously, or at least in rapid succession; they reinforce one another, each done well fortifying the others.

While the principles themselves are overarching and unchanging, the way in which you apply them is not. Each situation is unique; each calls for a unique application of the principles. How you strike, when you strike, where you strike — all these may change. Napoleon would work out the best possible method of attack and then modify it according to circumstances. “One engages,” he said, “then one sees.” Here you will win by first demoralizing the opponent, there by first stoking his self-confidence; here by continually attacking, there by withdrawing for a time; here by showing clemency, there by giving no quarter; here by adapting yourself to his dispositions, there by forcing him to adapt to yours; here by striking a single point, there by striking multiple points. Simply knowing the principles did not make Napoleon a great fighter; after all, a child could learn them. (Indeed, this is why he decried “maxims” of fighting, though his own writings are filled with such maxims.) It is because Napoleon applied the principles creatively and with great intelligence that we remember him.

Size and strength matter little, where the principles are applied well. With 50,000 small Italians, Caesar conquered Gaul; he then defeated Romans who controlled the whole of the Roman Empire save Gaul. Richelieu, a frail man directing a frail state, vitiated the much stronger Habsburg states of Spain and the Holy Roman Empire. In his first campaign in Italy, Napoleon won a series of brilliant victories with a ragged army of raw French recruits; indeed, in most of his battles Napoleon had fewer troops than did his opponent. Talleyrand, an infirm man with no position to speak of, hastened Napoleon’s fall. In its early years, Microsoft bested far stronger rivals such as IBM, WordPerfect, and Borland International. While soldiery matters, it does so far less than does the intelligent application of the principles. Had Caesar, Richelieu, Napoleon, Talleyrand, and Gates *not* applied these principles, they would most certainly have been destroyed by their far-stronger opponents.

The best study of these principles is the lives of those who applied them best. Just as we read great writers to learn how to write well, so, too, should we study great fighters to learn how to fight well. Doing so, said Napoleon, “is the only way to become a great general and to grasp the secrets of the art.” “Truly Caesar ought to be the breviary of every fighting-man,” said Montaigne: “he was the true and sovereign model for the art of war.” Clausewitz’s *On War* should properly be titled *On Napoleon*, since it is little else but a study of Napoleon’s campaigns. Indeed, so superior were Caesar and Napoleon as generals that their chief difficulty was not in winning, but in inducing their opponents to fight. In fighting, these men knew what they were doing. For the purposes of learning these principles, it does not matter whether those applying them were in politics (Richelieu and Talleyrand), politics and the military (Caesar and Napoleon), or business (Gates): the principles are the same.

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