

Spinoza and ...
... *Sports* ???

Presented by Sidney Bailin
to the Spinoza Society

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Outline

- On three Numbers
- War and the Food Chain
- Sport as Metaphor
- My Approach to Karate
- From 2 to 1

On Three Numbers

- 0: void, emptiness, non-existence
- 1: unity, oneness, wholeness
- 2: separation, distinction, apartness

From my Amazement presentation , December 2006:

In Jewish mystical terms:

0 Ein dvar

translation: no thing

1 Ein sof (or is that ∞)

translation: no end

but also no division, hence unity

2 Tsimtsum

translation: contraction, withdrawal

hence division, multiplicity

Theology of Three Numbers

- Divinity lies somewhere in the 0 - 1 realm
- 2 is where we live
 - Expulsion from Eden
 - Breaking of the vessels (in Lurianic Kabbala)
- Redemption is the journey from 2 back to 1

1, 2, and Immanence

- There is also a journey from 1 to 2
- In Christianity, God Incarnate
- In Buddhism, the Bodddhisatva
- In Kabbala, the facets or faces of divinity
 - Especially the lower Sephirot
 - Also the Shekhinah

Spinoza and Three Numbers

- Spinoza tends to conjure away 2

“...although two attributes may be conceived to be really distinct (i.e., one may be conceived without the aid of the other), we still cannot infer from that that they constitute two beings, or two different substances.”

“From these propositions it follows that no substance, and consequently no corporeal substance, insofar as it is a substance, is divisible.”

From *Enter the Dragon*

Question: What are your thoughts when facing an opponent?

Bruce: There is no opponent.

Question: Why is that?

Bruce: Because the word "I" does not exist.

Note: I think this is short enough to be fair use as a quote, but if told otherwise I will of course remove it.

It is not, "I am doing this," but rather, an inner realization that "this is happening through me," or, "it is doing this for me."

The consciousness of **self** is the greatest **hindrance** to the proper execution of all physical action.

Bruce Lee, *The Tao of Jeet Kun Do*

What about 3?

- Formally (in set theory)

$$3 = \{0, 1, 2\}$$

- So one can argue that the theological significance of 0, 1, and 2 implies significance also for 3

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Spinoza on War

“Men, insofar as they are torn by affects which are passions, can be contrary to one another”

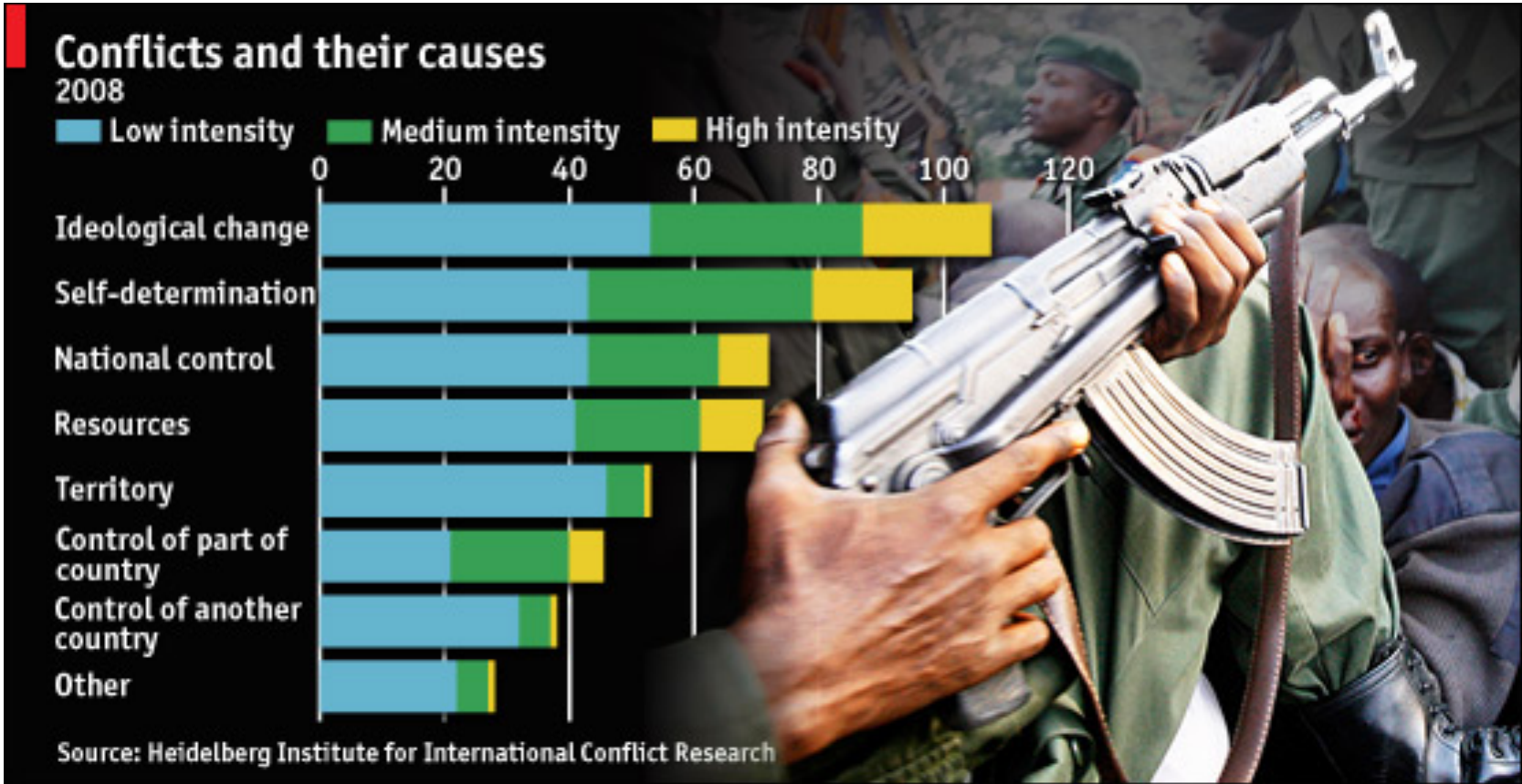
“Men's natural passions are the same everywhere ... A political order which has not removed the causes of civil strife ... differs little from a veritable state of nature, where everyone lives according to his temperament with great danger to his life.”

War as Passion

- For Spinoza, passion is passive - the opposite of action
- So Spinoza is **distinguishing** between war and action
 - Contrary to our usual thinking of war as an extreme form of action
 - Spinoza is saying that war is **not** a manifestation of agency
 - We will build on this when discussing sports

War and the Food Chain

- War is a manifestation of the will to power
 - I would like to think this follows by definition
- The will to power is largely a function of the desire for material security
- But also mental, spiritual security?
 - “Holy” wars,
 - Ideological wars



Copied from <http://www.economist.com/node/12758508>

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Sumerian wrestlers are cast so as to form the base of a small vase. Because the piece was found near the alter of a temple, it is probably that wrestling was part of religious ceremonies of this ancient period.

- Life magazine, August 1938

Sport as Metaphor for War

Why are the "winning games" important to our animal brains? Why do they draw our attention? Why are they "fun"?

The answer is possibly that raiding is nature's original team sport.

The human desire to play or watch sports has arisen from the ancient violence.

- Alex S. Key, *Basic Instincts, Psychology Today*, December 29, 2008

Theories of Sport

- **Sport as practice for work (Marxist)**
- **Sport as manifestation of instinctive drives and impulses (ethnology)**
- **Sport as play: biological function of sport**
- **Sport as a safety-valve for aggression**
- **“Sport as a special, ritualized form of conflict”. Konrad Lorenz. *On Agression* (1963)**
- **Sport as cult**



From “Theory and Origin of Sport,”

<http://department.monm.edu/classics/sport/Theory%20and%20Origin%20of%20Sport.ppt>

Sport as Distilled Competition

- I myself am skeptical of evolutionary psychology
- “Sport as play” seems as convincing as “sport as war”
- Regardless, in both sport and war there is competition
- Competition implies the existence of **the other**

Thus, sport is based on the
number 2

What about Solo Sports?

- I like to rollerblade, for example
 - I don't compete
 - Not good enough, and **no interest in it**
- But show me a solo sport that someone hasn't **turned** into a competitive sport!

Sport as Agency

- Even solo sports can be viewed as a distillation of the notion of **agency**
- **Goal**-directed behavior
- I am trying to **make** something happen
- Uh oh ... does this mean Spinozists should not do sports?!

Sports and Determinism

- A Spinozist competitor might ask:
 “What if I am **supposed to** lose?”
- No, a Spinozist would not say “supposed to.”
 Rather:
 “What if I am **going to** lose?”
- But almost **any** competitor will worry about that, Spinozist or not

"She had a good game plan against me. She's tall. It's hard to punch her in the face.

The first round I said, okay, I can lose this fight. But I fought hard, I was ready for a war."

- Cris "Cyborg" Justino, after her March 28 Muay Thai loss to Jorina Baars

Spinozists and Sports

- So, does determinism mean Spinozists should not do sports?!
 - Of course not.
 - At the Spinoza Society, we have discussed *living in a deterministic world* enough to know better
 - Specifically, **being an agent** in a deterministic world: act “as if”
 - But Spinoza has a lot more to tell the sports participant

The great mistake is to anticipate the outcome of the engagement; you ought not to be thinking of whether it ends in victory or defeat.

Let nature take its course, and your tools will strike at the right moment.

Bruce Lee, *The Tao of Jeet Kun Do*

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Why Karate?

When I was 16, I saw a karate demonstration by kids in the Bronx neighborhood where I lived.

I wanted to be able to do what they did.

What impressed me most was the beauty of it.

To this day, it is the beauty of karate that most motivates me.

Geometry in Motion (1 of 3)

- Karate is about **position**
- Proof: Stand at the opposite end of a room from someone else, and **hit** them as hard as you can
 - I bet it won't hurt them!

Geometry in Motion (2 of 3)

- Now stand close to them but have them hold a **cast iron pan** in front of their face
 - Imagine hitting them (please don't actually do this)
 - Who will be hurt?
(I know, the pan might get pushed into the holder's face. But not if he is holding it properly.)

Geometry in Motion (3 of 3)

- Now, while the pan is still in front of their face, slip to their side and hit from the side.
 - Who gets hurt this time?
(As I said, please don't actually do this.)
- Karate is about **position**

The Counter-Fight

- Counter-fighting is when you **wait** for your opponent to attack
- A fighter is most vulnerable when they are attacking
 - Mentally, their focus is on the attack
 - Physically, limbs that **could** be used for defense are being used instead for offense
- The counter-fighter takes advantage of the attacker's vulnerability to counter-attack

Virtues of the Counter-fight

- Technically, it's a waste of energy to strike when there's no opening
 - An effective way to create an opening is to let the opponent (try to) strike
- Morally, counter-fighting is superior to offensive fighting
 - I don't want to hurt anyone
 - I just want to stop you from hurting me

Technical Specifics – My Method (1 of 3)

- Strikes in karate are either direct or indirect
 - Direct strikes follow a straight line to their target
 - Indirect strikes follow a curve, usually out then in
- My general method:
 - I counter a line with a circle
 - I counter a circle with a line

Technical Specifics – My Method (2 of 3)

- Someone throws a direct strike at me (a line)
 - I use the line to pivot around (that's a circle)
 - In boxing it's called "slipping"
 - I am then facing my opponent but he/she is not facing me
 - That's called the "dominant angle"



Technical Specifics – My Method (3 of 3)

- Someone throws an indirect strike (that's a circle)
 - I move straight (a line) **into** the space inside the arc
 - I thereby get close to my opponent while they are vulnerable and open



Geometry in **Motion**

- Obviously this is not just positioning
- It's also timing
- You can foil my method by being too fast
 - Your strike connects and retracts before I can reposition myself
- Or you can foil it by feinting
 - Feint a direct, I start to slip, you throw a hook (indirect)

Geometry in Motion

- But this, too, translates into position
- The trick is to maintain just enough **distance** to have **time** to react and respond
- The theory is simple
 - Implementing it can be difficult if your opponent is good

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Truth is relationship with the opponent;
constantly moving, living, never static.

To know oneself is to study oneself in action
with another person.

Bruce Lee, *The Tao of Jeet Kun Do*

Martial Art as Relationship

Bruce Lee, in *Enter the Dragon*:

"When the opponent expands, I contract. When he contracts, I expand."

Note: I think this is short enough to be fair use as a quote, but if told otherwise I will of course remove it.

"Never a shout in anger. That's what got me back into the ring. I was going to be able to win, but never in anger. Never this killer instinct. Never again. Never try to leave them hurt or damaged or maimed.

"I would do it with **compassion**. Never a shout in anger. Besides, people forget: It's only a game."

George Foreman, taken from <http://www.sfgate.com/sports/article/Beauty-in-the-Beast-George-Foreman-used-to-want-3028506.php#page-4>

The Oneness Dance

To prevail over the other ...

You must become **one** with the other