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The Concept of Relevant Superiority in Combat Conditions

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Abstract

The present essay demonstrates the application of the concept of Relevant Superiority in combat conditions. This concept is perceived herein as the choosing criterion of combat principles, as analyzed in a systemic manner. The combat principles are classified in three levels: the Strategic, the Tactical and the Technical one. Within this conceptual framework, it is argued that the attainment of Relevant Superiority is what the fighter quests for.

Keywords: Relevant Superiority, combat principles, Strategy, Tactics.

I. Introduction

The philosophical poem "On Nature", written twenty-six centuries ago by the ancient Greek philosopher Anaximander (610-537 BCE)[1], is considered to be the very first known text of the European Philology and Philosophy. In this work, Anaximander stated that the beginning of everything is the unlimited, unborn, undying infinity ("apeiron"): everything is made out of its circular motion from shape to non-shape. Still, Anaximander was not the first one who tried to explain the world scientifically (aside from the common religious and mythological beliefs of his era worldwide) by suggesting one and only fundamental concept of creation. Before him, his teacher Thales (624-545 BCE) was the first one to take on this quest, by suggesting water as the creating source, as it becomes thinner (air) or denser (earth). Anaximander was not the last one either: he was followed by his student, Anaximenes (583-528 BCE), who suggested that air is the beginning of everything. Then it was Pythagoras (580-500 BCE) who stated that the numbers and their relations are the essence of the world, while Heraclitus[2] (544-484 BCE)

1. BCE: Before Current Era, alias BC.
2. Heraclitus also stated that "War is father and king of everything; 'he' appointed Gods and made other humans free and other humans slaves".

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suggested fire as the initial source (Mostratou, 1978). If we do not translate literally the ancient "basic elements" (fire, earth, water and air), then our common beliefs have not gone too far since then, as the world is made of energy (fire) and matter in the solid (earth), liquid (water) and gas (air) state (Kyriakidis & Konstas, 1974).

The desire to discover one and only fundamental concept that would explain all kinds of natural phenomena has been expressed since the beginning of civilization and interestingly enough, it remains unchanged until our times. Since the first-half of the 20th century CE[3], when physicists discovered the known natural forces, a quest started aiming at their "unification", meaning the formulation of one and only theory, which will mathematically prove that all forces are in fact the various expressions of a single one, at a different natural level. Until now, three out of four known natural forces have been unified, namely the weak and strong nuclear forces and the electromagnetic force, leaving the gravitational force still under question.

Well, strange though it may seem, writing this article was fueled by this exact same scope: to explain a number of seemingly different phenomena through one underlying theory. What differs is the scope: instead of the natural phenomena, we will try to explain an aspect of human behavior, namely combat. We will claim that there is a unified theory of combat, namely one and only concept, which is expressed differently at the various levels of a conflict (i.e., martial arts vs. war).

Although the following presentation is confined to the field of martial arts, there is only a difference of scale in comparison to war. The larger scale of war causes additions and modifications at every level of conflict, due to the large number of people involved, the increase of means used, the larger size of the battlefield and the longer period of hostilities (e.g., logistic – support operations). This is also the opinion of Miyamoto Musashi as well, shortly stated in "The Book of Five Rings" (2000, pp. 41, 68). Thus, conventionally and for the purpose of this presentation, Martial Arts will be defined as the level of conflict that deals with the preparation of one or few persons to participate in a duel or a skirmish (against few opponents).

II. Background

It seems pretty obvious that the aim of a conflict is to win/prevail over the opponent(s). On the other hand, the meaning of the term "win" is rather less obvious, since there are no generally accepted criteria concerning the evaluation of victory or defeat, with the exception of martial sports that acquire rules being set about it. For example, could it be defined as "victory" to kill someone in a fight and then have to spend a considerable amount of time in prison? A very well known such case in some circles of martial artists is that of 32-year old Isaias Umali, who fatally stabbed a bouncer in 2003, was then convicted of manslaughter in the first degree and subsequently sentenced to 17 years in prison. Umali was a student of a famous instructor of Filipino Martial Arts (FMA), to whose apartment he fled right after the incident[4].

3. CE: Current Era, alias AD.
4. http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/26/nyregion/26cigarette.html

Thus, it usually falls upon each individual to predetermine the conditions, which the outcome of combat is evaluated under, according to his/her character, the cultural environment or the specific context that combat is conducted under. For example, one might very well define victory as avoiding combat altogether; if a person engages in combat when alone, victory might be to escape unharmed, but if accompanied by other persons that need to be protected, then victory would be achieved by nullifying the opponents (please, note how ambiguous the term "nullify" is, as well). It should be also mentioned here that the definition of victory is very often drastically different for the parties involved. For instance, in the case of a law enforcement officer, attempting to arrest an offender, victory for the officer is to subdue and handcuff the opponent, while for the offender victory might be to just disengage and escape. A very interesting observation on this subject has been made by self-defense expert Tony Blauer (Murray, 2004, p. 79), who notes that officers typically view suspects to be placed under arrest as competitors to be subdued, while suspects often view officers as opponents to be destroyed. Such an incongruity in definitions might seem irrelevant to the way combat is conducted, but it can actually make all the difference in the world.

Consequently, someone might claim that, in order to "secure" the aim of victory, a person simply has to be superior to his/her opponent(s) in the several aspects of combat, like speed, strength, endurance, timing, thinking, knowledge, moral, etc. If we are superior to our opponents in every aspect, then we achieve total superiority. But is total superiority an easy or even feasible state to accomplish? Even if the human body allowed (which does not) for the amount of training that would give to anyone the speed and explosiveness of a world-class sprinter, the strength of an Olympic weight lifter, the endurance of a Kenyan Marathon runner, the flexibility of a gymnast and the mental clarity of a Zen master combined, plus the physical skills needed, the choice to devote the time needed for such a training regime would surely beg this question: If we are to spend our whole life training in order to become the best fighters possible, what would be left of this life worth fighting for? The answer to this question might seem pretty simple to some readers, but to others it's probably not. A similar question to the one above might be: "If anyone's life is to be spent working in order to amass wealth, how can this wealth possibly be spent in the same lifetime?" Obviously, there are a number of people in today's world who haven't yet managed to give a satisfactory answer to that.

So, if total superiority is not feasible, what is left for someone to do in order to increase the odds of a victorious outcome in combat? Well, if we can achieve better performance compared to that of our likely opponents in some aspects of combat, then we achieve relevant superiority (Papakitsos, 2010, p. D-1). If, additionally, we manage to turn those specific aspects into the most decisive factors for the outcome of combat, then victory becomes much more probable. The accomplishment of relevant superiority is both feasible and usual. Consequently, the concept under discussion, the one that may unify all combat theories into one, is the attainment of relevant superiority. Before we go ahead to examine how this concept is implemented, it is useful to present some definitions, for establishing a common framework of communication. The appearing herein terminology (frequently enclosed in parentheses) is that of the systemic perception of combat aspects (Papakitsos & Katsigiannis, 2015), whose familiarity with is a prerequisite for the easy and complete understanding of the following arguments.

III. Definitions

Having a combat aspect named [C], we may define a capability scale for this aspect. In this scale, each adversary has a degree of capability. Consider two adversaries named [A] and [B]. Let's call:

- [AC] the degree of [A]'s capability in aspect [C] and
- [BC] the degree of [B]'s capability in aspect [C].

Relevant Superiority is when one of the two adversaries has a larger degree of capability. If [AC > BC] then [A] has superiority over [B] relevant to aspect [C].

Question: How can [B] achieve relevant superiority over [A] in aspect [C] (BC > AC)?

Answer: Obviously, either by increasing [BC] to a larger value or by decreasing [AC] to a smaller value (maybe a bit of both, as well).

This is more or less the task or the necessity of consolidating the value and features of combat principles. Such a principle is:

"a rule that suggests or describes a specific behaviour under particular conditions in a combat situation that changes the degree of relevant superiority in our favor".

In such a framework, the related principles can be classified according to the three combat levels of organization (Papakitsos & Katsigiannis, 2015, pp. 29-31) in three categories, namely strategic principles (Strategy), tactical principles (Tactics) and technical principles (Techniques). A principle of a higher level (especially these of the Strategic Level) can have effects in lower levels or even beyond the organizational group of Combat Aspects, in defining the Combat Factors and designing the Preparation (Training) Phase (Papakitsos & Katsigiannis, 2015, pp. 27-29).

IV. Strategy

Strategic principles are those that set the overall framework of our combat actions. They are the most important, because they dictate the design and implementation of the rest of our activities at the other levels of combat organization. An overall superiority at this level may end the fight before it is started, for good. As stated by Sun Tzu ("The Art of War"): "to subjugate the enemy's army without doing battle is the highest of excellence". These principles are commonly summarized to the following "ten commandments" (Papakitsos, 2010, pp. D-2,

D-4, D-5) that follow (subsections 1-10). They are derived from the standard military principles of Strategy/War (Ayalon, 1987; Paraskevas, 1987) and they have been adapted to any kind of operational planning (Papakitsos, 2013, pp. 187-189).

1. Morale

Keeping the morale is a key-principle, since self-confidence is a prerequisite for any combat application. Moral is the result of good training, experience and thinking. Thus, it has a direct connection and effect to other combat aspects, especially those of training (Preparation Phase), abilities and power (Tactical & Technical Level). The adversary of superior morale can overcome minor disadvantages, especially when he/she believes in "a right cause" (justification), by being more persistent and determined (mental superiority).

2. Objective

The principle of having an objective and sticking to it is crucial for the aspects of time. The lack of objective causes hesitation in combat, which in turn can be fatal. Setting objectives presupposes a firm definition of goals, especially of the doctrine (Papakitsos & Katsigiannis, 2015, p. 30), and results in superiority relevant to timing that equals to superior specific-time management (Tactical Level).

3. Concentration

This is the ability of gathering and coordinating everything in our disposal in order to achieve our objective, which commonly is to discover and exploit our opponent's weakness.

4. Initiative

Keeping the initiative of actions forces the opponent to follow us instead of guiding us. This principle causes a "mental overloading" to opponents, namely they cannot think clearly about what is happening. So, we gain superiority relevant to the mental aspects. This principle is exemplified in Pentjak Silat, through the principle of "guiding the opponent" (Papakitsos, 2001, p. 7).

5. Deception

We can deceive our opponent in two aspects, namely our abilities and our intentions. In the first aspect, the opponent may overestimate or underestimate our abilities. In the former case, he/she may choose not to engage in combat; while in the latter case, he/she may not use his/her full potential. Thus, we gain superiority relevant to the aspect of abilities. In the second aspect (intentions), the deceived opponent who is "taken by surprise" is not ready to react. The adversary of superior readiness may prevail, even when having inferior physical abilities or power. The person, who can make use of his /her power before the adversary, practically deals with no reaction, thus negating any advantage of the opponent. A form of application for this principle in Jeet Kune Do (JKD) is realized by the classification of attacks, corresponding to "Attack by Drawing" (Kent & Tackett, 1986, pp. 118-123). There, the opponent is misguided

to attack a seemingly weak defense. The superiority relevant to readiness is different from the one relevant to timing, because in the second case the combat has undoubtedly started.

6. Economy

Economy of motion equals to economy of energy. This principle has a profound effect in movement efficiency (subsection 8), thus leading to superiority relevant to endurance (physical aspect).

7. Simplicity

Many combat aspects are imponderable in real-time conditions. If we are used to a complex set of pre-arranged techniques to deal with a specific threat, then this set will be useless whenever the fighting conditions suddenly and unexpectedly change. Moreover, our speed is both perceptional and muscular. Simple movements allow as being fast in both of the above cases, thus we gain superiority relevant to speed (physical aspect) and to functional aspects.

8. Efficiency

This principle is a bond between the principles of economy (6), objective (2) and simplicity (7). Efficiency in combat means to achieve an objective by using the least possible energy (economy). Moreover the economy of energy is facilitated by the simplicity of our plans, actions and movements. It is also the main principle of the Technical Level for designing any technique we can think of.

9. Safety

Our safety is the very cause of fighting (Combat Factors). It is part of the doctrine (Strategic Goals) and a requirement of every step in the process of combat, if we intend to reach the final ones (Exploitation Phase). One single careless action can be enough to end the fight at the expense of ours. Our capability to continue fighting (if necessary) is an important asset for our safety. This principle dictates our precaution actions of hiding from the opponent our crucial assets (abilities, plans and goals). By protecting them we gain an overall strategic superiority (compare the role of espionage in warfare). Consequently, this principle affects our preparation, as well (Training).

10. Adaptability

This is the ability to adapt in every change of the combat conditions. We must adapt to the environment, by being able to fight anywhere and use the surroundings for our benefit. We must also adapt to the opponent, in order to find his/her weakness and exploit it. Adaptability gives us an overall strategic and tactical superiority. It is related to the principle of safety (9), since it enhances our chances of survival in the rapidly changing and unstable conditions of combat. This way, adaptability and simplicity (7) are connected, because complex plans and actions cannot be altered fast enough to deal with novel threats, which in warfare are called

"The Factor of Changeability" (Beaufre, 1987). Another variation of this principle is softness vs. rigidity. It has been used to classify martial arts (e.g., soft Chinese arts vs. hard Chinese arts) and it is somehow expressed in all three levels of combat. At the Strategic Level, it is relevant to our plans affecting our combat guidelines. For example, if we choose an overall soft attitude, then we firstly decide to absorb the attacking energy by being elusive, in order to minimize the possible damage and thus weaken the opponent. Our counter-offensive may follow immediately. Despite common beliefs, Klausewitz (1997) thought of defense as a more powerful form of fighting than offense, as mentioned in Kondylis (1999). This practice was brilliantly exemplified by the Soviet Red Army at the Battle of Kursk, in 1943 (Viedienski, 1965). We are so allowed to potentially consider superiority relevant to the aspects of plans, energy management and perceptional speed.

V. Tactics

The definition of tactics is the method of conducting combat (Viedienski, 1966), including the set of our actions and the usage of our power (Papakitsos, 2001, pp. 18-19; Papakitsos & Katsigiannis, 2015, p. 31). The key-features of tactics are the maneuver in combination with the available weaponry (tools). The maneuver is planned and executed according to three concepts that are implemented in various ways: the concepts of maximizing safety (9) and power, as well as the concept of time management. So we move in order to minimize the effect of the opponent's power and to maximize the effect of our power, in appropriate time, since every weapon has its maximum ability at a particular distance (range).

The set of questions to be answered concerning our maneuver is:Where to go?How to go there?When to go there?

The second question (How?) refers to stepping patterns, which is a more technical matter. The last question concerns timing. Besides the stepping patterns, Tactics are characterized by the combination of space (Where?) and time (When?) choices of the fighter. Considering space, a fighter can:

- Gain ground from the starting point; this tactic is conventionally labeled as aggressive or offensive (Papakitsos, 2009, p. 12).
- Keep the ground of the starting point; it is labeled as a firm defensive tactic, called "Fondo Fuerte" in FMA (Somera, 1998, p. 25).
- Give ground from the starting point; it is considered as an elastic defensive tactic, called "Riterada" in FMA (Somera, 1998, p. 23).
- Move around the starting point, which is a flexible mixture of the previous tactics. It realizes the strategic principle of adaptability (10).

Moreover, regarding group tactics (many-to-many adversaries), an offensive tactic is to encircle the opponents, while the elastic defensive one is to avoid encirclement. The firm defensive tactic is to choose a place, which is frontally narrow enough to prevent encirclement, like a door, and ideally allows escaping (Maslak, 1982).

Defensive tactics can be also characterized as passive or active, depending on the degree of counterattacks executed. The more the degree of counterattacks, the more active a defensive tactic is. Counterattack is related to timing (When?), which is the other consideration of a fighter, who respectively can:

- Counterattack before the commencing of the assault; it is perceived as interception, executed as soon as the intention of the opponent to attack is recognized; in JKD, it is regarded as the supreme method of counterattack (Papakitsos, 2008, p. 6), forming the fighting core of the art (Papakitsos, 2003, p. 24)[5].
- Counterattack during the commencing of the assault; it is usually realized as a simultaneous block-and-hit action, favored by martial arts like JKD (Kent & Tackett, 1988, p. 110), FMA or Wing Chun (Lee, 1972).
- Counterattack after the commencing of the assault; it is commonly realized as a "block-first and hit-then" action.

The above choices are called "The principles of counterattack structure" in FMA (Magda, 1995, p. 16) and they determine the essence of timing in tactics, which is actually realized as when to react in an assault.

Thus at the Tactical Level, the combat maneuvers aim at gaining a superior position. A superior position is the one that we may use most of our weapons, while our opponent can use the least possible of his/hers (like to attack him/her from behind). This local superiority is attained by having more or better available tools than the opponent, according to the strategic principle of concentration (3), by using the space and time aspects of the Tactical Level as described previously through the three main concepts.

VI. Techniques

The Technical Level is the field of power management, as a consequence of the actions of Tactical Level, according to the strategic principles of economy (6), simplicity (7), efficiency (8) and mainly safety (9). Our techniques (usage of tools) must be not only effective but efficient too (power management). At the Technical Level, the major concept of relevant superiority specific to power management is expressed at the design of every tool and its effective usage against particular targets. Every tool has a most efficient surface (e.g., the cutting edge of a knife) delivered at such a target that may cause a result both damaging enough and with minimum risk. For example, such a tool is the frontal head-butt, executed with the frontal upper part of the skull. We never aim at the same part of our opponent's skull (like two rams fighting each other), since the risk is not minimal and we do not necessarily gain power superiority. Instead, we look for relatively softer targets, like a nose. In this respect, compare how risky is a shin-to-shin block on a low-kick.

The last part of relevant superiority in the Technical Level is an implementation of the

5. Jeet Kune Do: "The Way of the Intercepting Fist".

strategic principles of deception (5) and adaptability (10). It concerns the choice of the proper tools for every combat situation and it is expressed by the "golden rule of self-defense" (Moser, 1984, p. 19): "Hit when they are pulling you; pull when they are hitting you". The essence of this rule is that we achieve superiority over our opponent relevant to the usage of tools, by using tools that he/she is not familiar with (namely, grappling against a striker and striking against a grappler) and consequently more difficult to counter. Thus, we adapt (10) to the combat situation in reverse and we deceive (5) our opponent regarding our abilities.

VII. Commentary & Epilogue

The achievement of relevant superiority can be accomplished in all three levels of combat: the strategic, the tactical and the technical one. In the strategic level, the relevant superiority is mainly expressed in the domains of psychology and preparation, by:

- having decisiveness and persistence in the pursuit of our objectives (1. Morale, 2. Objective);
- guiding and deceiving our opponent (4. Initiative, 5. Deception);
- seeking to take our opponent by surprise (5. Deception) that will nullify his/her abilities, no matter how superior might be otherwise.

In the tactical level, the relevant superiority is expressed in the domains of space and time, by:

- securing favorable locations that will permit us to have more and better available tools than our opponent (3. Concentration);
- choosing ground that will minimize the efficiency of the opponent's tools, e.g., if he/she uses long-range tools/weaponry, to choose "closed" places (8. Efficiency, 9. Safety);
- acting with conservation of resources (6. Economy, 7. Simplicity) for prolonging our physical endurance by managing timing, which is crucial in combat against a skillful opponent or many of them (9. Safety).

In the technical level, the relevant superiority is expressed in the domains of power management, by making efficient use of our tools (8. Efficiency) and by choosing the proper tools according to our opponent (10. Adaptability). To be appropriate, our tools must be less familiar to our opponent or unknown.

In overall, the previous conceptual framework has a direct impact in training, as well. Every domain of combat for attaining relevant superiority is not suitable for every martial arts practitioner. An equivalent example is that we should not expect from a tall and thin person to become a remarkable weight-lifter, since his/her limbs will have to cope with excessive torque. Similarly and for obvious reasons, we should not expect from a short and muscular person to become a remarkable basket-ball player. Martial arts' training has to become more tailored to

the general characteristics of the practitioner, if the goal is to become more effective in combat situations, thus achieving relevant superiority wherever it is more feasible for each individual. This topic though deserves its own separate presentation.

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