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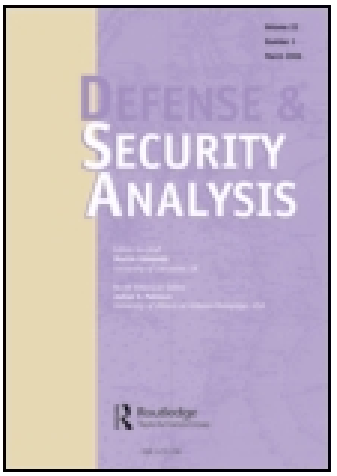

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The classics of military thought: Appreciations and agenda

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The Classics of Military Thought: Appreciations and Agenda*

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I

Like the DEW radar line in the north of Canada, this paragraph is in place to provide early warning. The reader should bear in mind the somewhat unusual terms of reference to which this paper responds. Assume, first, a commitment to the working out of a theory of combat and philosophy of war. Secondly, note the substantial body of classic works which might well be relevant. The question then arises how one is to assess the classics of combat and strategy for the purpose of contemporary theory construction. This paper begins by outlining two methods of selecting the classics. Then it climbs up the escalation ladder from the tactical to the operational and strategic levels of analysis. At each level selected classics are assessed for contemporary relevance. That is to say, conceptual treasure is indicated and agenda for research are pointed out. Then, with a view to fuller exploitation of the classics, the military levels of analysis are discarded and some classic themes are considered anew in a comparative way. The task set for the author was not to dogmatize but to explore. So the reader will not expect that this paper will march irresistibly to some theoretical or practical conclusion about one or more issues in the catalog of current concerns.

Even in our somewhat unheroic age, great deeds of statecraft and great deeds of intellect retain interest. Like towering mountains, the classics of military thought challenge our ambition and stamina, and promise elevation with a godlike view.

This elitist appeal may be strongest to the thinking and scholarly minority, but there is another appeal of growing strength whenever a nation experiences perplexity about its course in world affairs. In times of felt perplexity people yearn for clarity, not to say dogmatism, about fundamental truth and right. And the fundamentals are exactly what one hopes to find in a classic text.

It is, however, not one peak which looms up: a whole mountain range lies in view. Indeed one might refer to several mountain ranges like the Alps and the Himalayas. For every Clausewitz and Sun Tzu, there are many and perhaps dozens of lesser peaks. Clearly this calls for circumspection and method. On the one hand, an attempt will be made to provide something of an overview and mapping and

*This paper is a revision of the invited theme address given at the annual meeting of The Military Conflict Institute in McLean, Virginia, in November 1985.

articulation of the basic structure of the field. Secondly, the tapestry to be woven will point to problem areas and suggest directions for further effort.

The first objective, mapping and overview, is unavoidably imposed by the sheer multitude of the classics of military thought. The two standard anthologies, *Makers of Modern Strategy* and *Klassiker der Kriegskunst*, list, respectively, 38 and 17 great names or schools of thought. Add to this the classic analysts of combat from Du Picq, Delbrück, Admiral Fiske, and Lanchester down to the present, and one can count at least 50 candidates for serious attention. As recently as 1977, the Soviet military encyclopedia described the works of Delbrück as still meriting practical interest.[1]

The systematic approach

One has a choice of approach to so large a subject. One might begin by defining the designation of the two constituent bodies of analysis, "theory of combat" and "classics of strategy." Next one would search for candidates. Here an encyclopedic knowledge is called for, drawing on the entire cultural heritage of mankind. Yet there are probably few students of modern history who are knowledgeable about Wolzogen's proposal of 1810 for a Russian strategic retreat before Napoleon.[2] To take another example, this from the Far East of the present century: very few of us, if any, can have seen *The Essence of Victory*, written in Moscow in 1940–1941 by the future Marshal Lin Piao.[3]

Next one would close the list. This might well involve difficult choices and questions. Taking the list, then, one would evaluate each candidate against the yardstick created earlier by definition of "theory of combat" and "classics of strategy." One assumes that the classics of strategy are defined broadly to include the interactions of strategies and, in general, the theory of war.

Such an approach by definition and evaluation may be called the systematic approach. It has not, to the best of the author's knowledge, ever been attempted. Even so, the editorial introductions to the aforementioned anthologies are still worth reading in this connection. Hahlweg cites earlier anthologies from 1789 to 1950.[4]

Second-order analysis

A very different path, promising at least some economy and elegance, takes one to second-order analysis. This has its root and justification in historical fact. The classics of strategy, and their critical appropriation, are not topics on which this century has a monopoly. Aristotle, like later Alexandrian scholars, concerned himself with "the tactics of Homer" because the poet's rendition of the Greek order of battle in the *Iliad* seemed nonsensical in several respects, which Aristotle was able to clear up.[5] Flavius Vegetius Renatus, the "born again one," gave new birth and life to Roman military classics when he produced his synthesis *De re militari*. From Vegetius, Marshal de Saxe got the cadenced march, lost for 1000 years. Almost certainly the single most important classical revival was accomplished by Maurice of Orange in leading Dutch resistance to Spain. Fittingly enough, the Dutch center of military operations research is named after Maurice. The Dutch

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model, later taken up in Sweden, France and Prussia, is deservedly famous as the prototype of modern linear tactics. It also includes, however, the sound public financing of military forces, and a civic and military ethos profoundly inspired by the neostoicism of Lipsius, under whom Maurice had studied at Leiden when he rediscovered the virtues of Roman infantry.[6] A later strategic classic, Jomini's *Précis*, found its way into the essentials of the US Army's FM 100-5 in 1944.[7] Jomini's influence on the military is well known; his most famous disciple was Mahan. In the early 1920s, Major Dwight D. Eisenhower was introduced to Clausewitz by his superior, Brigadier-General Conner. Later, while at the Army War College, Eisenhower continued and deepened his study of Clausewitz.[8] President Reagan, addressing the West Point corps of cadets early in his first term, quoted and interpreted Sun Tzu's most ambitious concept of strategy.[9]

Given the record of large and small classical revivals just sampled — a proper history of these revivals is long overdue — an approach suggests itself that is very different from the systematic one. As evidenced most dramatically by the Dutch model, some military classics are now alive in the basic, ongoing practice of any self-respecting military force. One sees little reason to study Aelian, Arrian and Vegetius today if they have indeed been effectively modernized for us by Maurice of Orange and the routine practice of companies and battalions. The first point about second-order analysis, then, is that it is a tool of economy. At least for the case of infantry tactics, it may well be unnecessary to go back to classical antiquity. One can begin with recent scholarship on the Dutch model.

Furthermore, second-order analysis differs from the systematic approach by introducing the normal corrective for the textualism of the latter. That is to say, the study of historical revivals forcefully directs attention to the motives, circumstances, constraints and intentions with which classics are revived. Texts are not self-explanatory and do not "apply" themselves. Their meanings, as distinguished from their words, must be reconstructed with due — and sometimes elaborate — care. And their meanings may well have to be modified given contemporary circumstances. Some present intent is needed to motivate such labors. Any revival of a classic, then, is an effort both historical and existential, and in matters military a task of organizational adaptation. The course of post-Vietnam US Army soul-searching, including the consideration of Prussian–German models, nicely illustrates some typical aspects of classic revivals.[10]

Some grounds of choice

Given these two approaches, some grounds of choice can be specified. The first, definitional approach is an invitation to a quagmire of pedantry. Defining a "theory of combat," for example, may be no easy task. Similarly, an attempt to define "classics of strategy" raises questions about levels and types of strategy, including moderate, reactive "Venetian" strategies in contrast to "Roman" ambitions of comprehensive control.[11]

Leaving aside the difficulties of conceptual yardsticks, it is also true that the first approach somewhat more than the second supposes much scholarship on candidates and selectees. Such literature as is available presents a hurdle: a

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considerable portion of it deters the linguistically impoverished American. One does not expect soon an English translation of Jacobsen's massive two volumes on Haushofer. Again, the 2½ linear inches of catalog cards at the Library of Congress show that the literature on Sun Tzu is, as one might expect, overwhelmingly in Chinese and Japanese. There is no compendium or anthology of translations from it into any of the major Western languages. Nor, for that matter, are there reliable and recent scholarly treatments at book length in English of the Spanish military tradition from El Gran Capitan to the present.[12] In short, one is confronted by a task which, imposing years and probably decades of the broadest scholarship, might strain if not preclude many sources of institutional support. The enterprise really should have an endowed, nonprofit home with access to research universities around the world.

Even if the systematic approach were easily practiced, second-order analysis would be necessary in its own right. More than the first approach, second-order analysis brings out two crucial variables: secular and millennial evolution on the one hand, and on the other the variable of high cultures such as India, the Byzantine millennium, imperial China, and others. Second-order analysis avoids "reinventing the wheel" but explores the relevant universe with an *a priori*, correctable awareness of what makes a classic adaptable and adoptable. The danger in the second approach, as in all things strategic, is solipsism. To search world history for good ideas is not enough. One must pay equal attention to what is adaptable and adoptable by others. In the 1960s, Pakistan failed to study India in this respect and was overwhelmed when Lt Gen Aurora rather suddenly developed the *Blitzkrieg* capability which overran East Pakistan in December 1971.[13]

The universe of analysis

A reasoned choice between these two approaches, then, will yield some finite list of great works. Fortunately one need not make the choice in order to map out the resulting universe of analysis.

Each classic, whether of combat or strategy, calls for analysis by several intellectual operations. First the text has to be *established*; even for modern works this can involve major headaches. Secondly, some tenable *interpretation* or exegesis has to be provided; one would wish it to be not merely tenable, but so thorough and persuasive as to rank as the standard work for decades. *Explanation* of the author's meaning typically includes and illuminates the practices of his day and the objectives of the author. *Inference* allows us to draw conclusions from the text which the author did not articulate. (Sometimes, also, his words are used to *decorate* reasoning and conclusions at which one has arrived quite independently.) The author's real influence is seen in those who use his work to *derive* therefrom conclusions theoretically reachable in other ways. Influence at its most innovative and creative is by *exclusive heuristics*, when one uses a classic to produce conclusions difficult or impossible otherwise. Comparison of a classic with one or more others examines the texts with respect to *likeness, difference* and *analogy*. These 10 intellectual operations account, one suspects, for practically all that has

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been done with classics in the past. They seem likely to operate on the classics in the future as well.

These 10 operations are, obviously, heavily weighed in favor of textualism: their focus is the very body of the classic text. As pointed out earlier, there is also an indispensable existential aspect to the study and revival of a classic. We bring to it various fears and hopes, policies and preferences. These will vary from person to person; no matrix is necessary for present purposes. The list of concerns will include: territorial and political sovereignty; support of diplomacy, alliance management and extended deterrence; crisis management; prewar bargaining; intelligence interactions, warning dynamics, and defense conditions; escalation both vertical and horizontal; joint operational doctrine; mutual fears of nuclear preemption; global problematiques including nuclear risk reduction, nuclear proliferation "horizontal" and "vertical," nuclear winter concerns and so on. Naturally these topics can be divided and subdivided and elaborated.

Assuming about 50 great works, 10 basic intellectual operations, and at least the 10 concerns adduced above, one can visualize the resulting analytical domain roughly as in Fig. 1. Any such scheme defines a theoretical maximum of "cells" or "interactions."

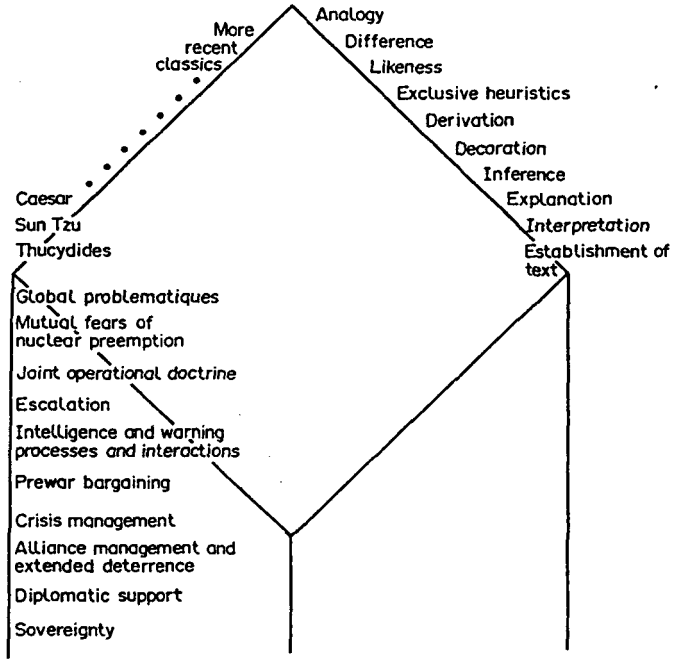

Fig. 1. Analytical universe.

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No assertion is made here as to the locations of cells with more or less interesting content. Needless to say, it is not intended to treat here all of this domain. The selection of subjects which follow is, however, neither arbitrary nor random. It serves the purposes of information, illustration and exploration.

II

The importance of tactical units

The importance of tactical units was rightly emphasized by Gordon Craig when, 40 years ago, he contributed his chapter on Delbrück to *Makers of Modern Strategy*. Those pages still repay reading, and for present purposes one may refer to "Delbrück's Iron Law" as the insight that *tactical units are microcosms of their societies*. Like every law this calls for intelligent application. In very specialized units, exceptions may be found to the law. The main reference of the law is, however, to tactical units normally understood. It is well known that the early intellectual development of Delbrück was strongly influenced by Clausewitz.[14] Perhaps the famous Clausewitzian notion of war as a political act underwent, in the mind of Delbrück, some extension and democratization.

The iron law, then, constitutes a way of looking at smaller military bodies: it is a point of departure for a universal and comparative military sociology. Such a perspective is probably found more easily in retrospect than for prediction. Yet predictive straws abound in the current winds. One hears serious talk that the performance of US Navy sonar operators is not what it should be because many have suffered impairment of hearing due to rock and roll. Labuc and Donnelly, discussing the implications of a multiethnic Soviet Union for Western "Red" gaming, write as follows:

> "Today the Armed Forces seem to integrate the nations of the USSR and impose on non-Russian elements a conditioning of Russianness. It also makes it very difficult to rely on tactics based on the ability of the conscript NCO to show initiative when he and his fellow soldiers may have to communicate in a language foreign to both of them.
>
> It is important that the acting Red Force commander in a battle game has an awareness of the effect of such ethnic problems. Otherwise he is quite likely to under-estimate the extent to which a real Soviet Commander is constrained by the restrictions which an ethnic mix has on running his unit efficiently."[15]

Again, take the topic of high-technology weapons, Army manuals, and American literacy levels. If Johnny can barely read, he is most unlikely to "devour" his Army manuals with rapt attention.

The quality of recruits, important as it is, does not by itself define the military value of a tactical unit. There is, obviously, the variable of leadership. Theorists of combat should find suggestive the following passage by General DePuy and derive from it retrospective verification as well as, perhaps, predictive insight:

> "Those who have long experience in front-line battle know that the sergeants and junior officers carry the load when the battle goes critical. *There can be no doubt that front-line fighting effectiveness is directly proportional to the number of leaders*

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present. . . . As the lethality of weapons goes up and the number of men goes down, the leader ratio must rise."[16]

Verification of, and prediction by, DePuy's leader ratio is of interest in itself. It is not, course, the only question presenting itself to the theorist of combat. The benefits of a high leader ratio inevitably raise a question of cost. Strong leadership presence at the cutting edge is, in traditional accounts of World War II, ascribed to German ground forces and especially to German armor. The benefits of such forward command are very much part of the German model as perceived in current American studies. These benefits are attained at some cost: attrition must be considered.

Figure 2 gives a general overview of monthly German losses on the Russian front in percentage terms based on a total of 3.2–1.8 million soldiers.[17] At division level,

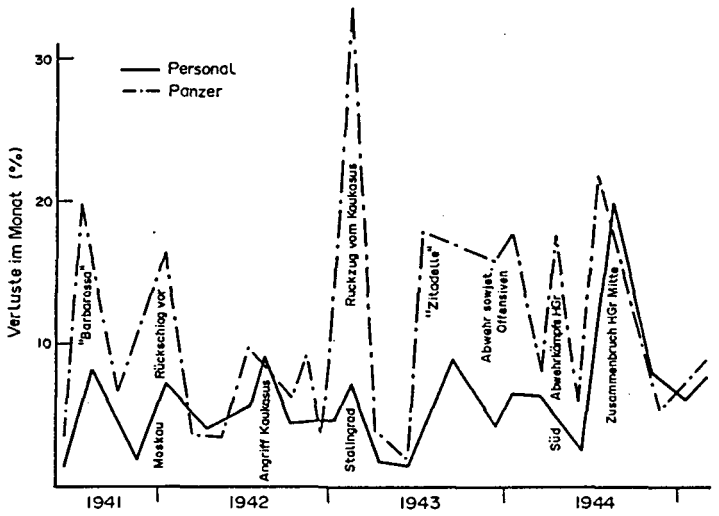

Fig. 2. German losses in Russia (casualties as solid line). Source: D. Schinzer (1981).

combat troops made up less than 25% of total strength, but suffered about 80% of casualties. Losses fell regularly during spring and autumn, when periods of mud interrupted operations. Except for the collapse of Army Group Center (*Heeresgruppe Mitte*) in 1944, losses of armor were multiples of casualties. Such, approximately, is the general picture.

If one then wants a sense of the cost of forward command to the officer corps, Steiger's still untranslated little classic about armor tactics from 1939 to 1941 gives some data from the period when advantage and momentum were overwhelmingly with the Germans. He reports that 10th Panzer Division had, by 5 December 1941, lost 63% of its officer mobilization strength, 47% of its NCOs, and 42% of its

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men.[18] Unfortunately, one cannot tell how typical this was. Between Schinzer's very aggregate and Steiger's more specific data, much room remains for wishful thinking, hypotheses and research. This much seems certain: a loss of 63% of officer mobilization strength in the first half year's offensive means about 10% a month, and so about *twice* the monthly theater average depicted in Fig. 2. Very rightly the literature about military operations research is full of caveats about theater-level aggregation.

Composed of men and leaders, tactical units act on their training. When one turns to tactical doctrine, one is surprised to find falsified what has long been the consensus of Clausewitzian scholarship. For decades one has been told that much of *On War* is obsolete, tactical detail as distinguished from the constellation of concepts at higher levels. This consensus or cliché must now be qualified if not discarded. Captain Vad of the Bundeswehr shows that the Clausewitzian discussion of *Temporisieren* bears on what are called delaying operations in Chap. 12 of the US Army's FM 100-5.

Vad begins by stating that the traditional distinction between attack and defense must, in the light of the two world wars, be recast as attack, defense and delay. Such is the formulation of the West German HDV 100/100 of September 1973.

Citing numerous passages in Books VI and VII of *On War*, Vad identifies and relates basic concepts of tactical doctrine: space (*Raum*), forces (*Kraft*), and time (*Zeit*). Next, again invoking Clausewitz, missions of attack and defense are introduced to determine the proportions of, or emphases on, these three elements. Attack is dominated by time, defense by space. This Clausewitzian mode of analysis, i.e. mission-determination of priorities, is then applied by Vad to the three tactical missions given by HDV 100/100. The result is depicted in Fig. 3.[19]

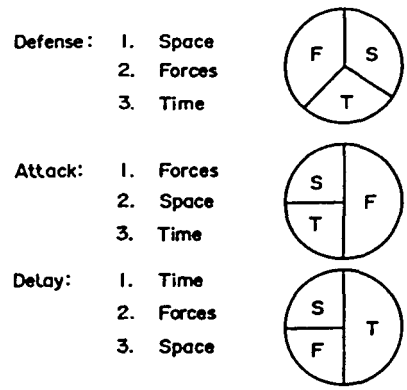

Fig. 3. Captain Vad's tactical priorities. Source: Vad (1984, p. 63f).

The obvious challenge to the analyst lies in assessing Vad's argument. Kant, one recalls, undertook a prolegomena to any future metaphysic. Analogously, perhaps, Vad's exegesis and extension of Clausewitz may constitute the one and future

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foundation of tactical doctrine. American and other analysts of combat may be startled by the omission of weapons and technology from the set of fundamental concepts.

The classics and the operational level

As one proceeds from the tactical to the operational level, one finds the most severe challenge to the devotee of the military classics. Consider the current interest in operational art and in joint operational doctrine. The study of military classics has, it would appear, not caught up with it. Even *historical* studies directed at joint operations are practically nonexistent. Recurring appeals to institutionalize this genre of military scholarship have been made in recent decades. They have, so far, come to naught. A bureaucratic perspective blames this on the stone wall of service monopolies on military history. Yet one shoud bear in mind that the intellectual and conceptual requirements might not be met even if bureaucratic willingness were present. Brilliant models of operational history in the context of statecraft have been provided in Piers Mackesy's works on the wars of the Napoleonic period. We lack, however, the intellectual bridging from military policy at the presidential level to military thought at the theater and joint levels. What resources do the classics provide for joint operational history and other joint studies? No one knows because, to the best of the author's knowledge, no one has sifted the classics for this purpose. *A priori* one may suspect that the classics, oriented as they are to the experience of countries with unbalanced forces, are unlikely to be very helpful to analysts of joint matters.

Yet there is at least one work demonstrating the relevance of a classic concept to theater-level operations. Lt Col Barry Watts, in his *Foundations of U.S. Air Doctrine*, brings the Clausewitzian concept of friction to bear in a startling analysis of the Allied air offensive in Europe in World War II. The book is a major advance in Clausewitzian studies.[20] Not much is left of USAF strategic theory when Watts is done. His book might just as well be entitled *The Nonexistent Foundations of U.S. Air Doctrine*. It makes strategic use of Colonel Fabyanic's concept maximizing Clausewitzian friction to the point of cumulative or "collective risk" of strategic failure.[21] Watts has done at book length what I. B. Holley and others had begun earlier.[22]

Decision in war

So much for a major lacuna, the operational level. We go on from there to decision in war. Decision *in* war may be distinguished conceptually from decision *by* war. The former is of interest to the national command authority, the net assessment function, CINCs and their staffs, and, retrospectively, to historians and war college faculties. Decision *by* war is a matter of grand strategy pursuing war aims. In the real world, decision *in* war overlaps decision *by* war inasmuch as the former makes possible the latter.

In the spirit of exploration the setting of sign posts is a modest but useful first step. They point to meaningful but seriously neglected ways of thinking about war and decision in war.

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The first such concept is the balance of error. One can do no better than to quote at some length the relevant discussion of a major example analyzed by Clausewitz.

> "In the last decade of the eighteenth century, when that remarkable change in the art of war took place, when the best armies saw part of their doctrine become ineffecitve and military victories occurred on a scale that up to then had been inconceivable, it seemed that all mistakes had been military mistakes. It became evident that the art of war, long accustomed to a narrow range of possibilities, had been surprised by options that lay beyond this range, but that certainly did not go against the nature of war itself.
>
> Those observers who took the broadest view ascribed the situation to the general influence that policy had for centuries exerted, to its serious detriment, on the art of war, turning it into a half-and-half affair and often into downright make-believe. The facts were indeed as they saw them; but they were wrong to regard them as a chance development that could have been avoided. Others thought the key to everything was in the influence of the policies that Austria, Prussia, England and the rest were currently pursuing.
>
> But is it true that the real shock was military rather than political? To put it in the terms of our argument, was the disaster due to the effect of *policy on war*, or was policy itself at fault?
>
> Clearly the tremendous effects of the French Revolution abroad were caused not so much by new military methods and concepts as by radical changes in policies and administration, by the new character of government, altered conditions of the French people, and the like. That other governments did not understand these changes, that they wished to oppose new and overwhelming forces with customary means: all these were political errors. Would a purely military view of war have enabled anyone to detect these faults and cure them? It would not. Even if there really had existed a thoughtful strategist capable of deducing the whole range of consequences simply from the nature of the hostile elements, and on the strength of these of prophesying their ultimate effects, it would have been quite impossible to act on his speculations.
>
> Not until statesmen had at last perceived the nature of the forces that had emerged in France, and had grasped that new political conditions now obtained in Europe, could they foresee the broad effect all this would have on war; and only in that way could they appreciate the scale of the means that would have to be employed, and how best to apply them.
>
> In short, we can say that twenty years of revolutionary triumph were mainly due to the mistaken policies of France's enemies."[23]

Here is a bold idea. Self-inflicted defeat for decades: this notion is so disturbing that its general neglect is not surprising. A sophisticated avoidance mechanism is easily available. One need only examine the topic of Clausewitz in relation to the French revolution, and German reactions to French developments in the 1790s. Let such temptation be resisted. The concept of the balance of error must not be explained away, nor should it become the exclusive preserve of strategic history. Its challenge lies in its application to contemporary history and even to net assessment in the prospective or forecasting mode. The ambition of manipulating the balance of error by inducing error pervades Colonel Boyd's work on the patterns of conflict.[24]

A second concept about decision in war, the concept of culmination, is also Clausewitzian. Like the previous concept, this is widely neglected. Interestingly enough, the Clausewitzian literature of the free world and the communist world are agreed in this, that they pay surprisingly little attention to the discussion of

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culmination found in *On War.* One may speculate that the reason for the Clausewitzian emphasis on culmination is that it links up perfectly with his view of the defensive as the stronger position. Perhaps that very reason also explains the well-nigh total silence about culmination in the military literature. To be sure, one very interesting study of culmination has compared the campaigns of 1812, 1870–1871 and 1914. Its author was a German general of infantry, writing in 1942 and 1943. In 1870, one learns, the Germans entered France with about 500,000 men. They arrived before Paris with 150,000.[25] Culmination, like the balance of error, can be very dramatic as Napoleon discovered in 1812 (see Fig. 4).

Like the balance of error, culmination is a concept with little, if any, currency in our strategic discourse. One citation will illustrate the typical situation. Van Crefeld's discussion of German logistics for Barbarossa is included in Captain Thibault's most useful anthology of *The Art and Practice of Military Strategy*.[26] On p. 471, the reconstruction deals precisely with the threat of culmination. Yet the index has no entry for that term; and the entry for "logistics, operational" does not refer to Van Crefeld's discussion. If argument were needed to direct attention to the concept of culmination, consider it in relation to the center of gravity of the opponent. If an invader reaches the point of culmination before capturing the center of gravity, he may have lost the war. Conceptual clarification and historical studies of culmination are certainly in order.

Decision by war

However the decision *in* war might go, the concept of decision *by* war is important at the level of theory. Reference is made to the early, initial assumption that the classics of strategy are defined broadly to include the theory of war. That inclusive definition marks out comprehensively the intellectual territory of interest. Yet for realistic mapping, the classics of strategy must be distinguished from the theory of war.

A sound distinction between the two requires explicit or implicit resort to the concept of decision by war. Consider a spectrum of topics beginning on the left with prewar international relations, outbreak scenarios, and the like; and ending on the right with topics like victory, armistice, peacemaking and so on. Victory and peacemaking, together, make up what we mean by decision by war. This is, admittedly, a fairly instrumental not to say rationalistic concept of war.

A spectrum of the type just outlined allows one to examine the classics of strategy broadly defined with a view to assigning some to the category of strategy in the strict sense and others to the category of theory of war.

To illustrate such allocation the reader is invited to relate to the aforementioned analytical spectrum Jomini's *Précis* and Clausewitz *On War.* Jomini presents, early in the work, a whole chapter cataloging various reasons and objectives alleged by states going to war. The rest of the book tells us how to do it. Nothing is said about the end of the process: victory and its use are not examined. In terms of our analytical spectrum, the work deals with the initiation and prosecution of war. Its emphases and proportions are such that one has to classify it as a work of strategy narrowly defined, that is to say, as a work on the art of generalship. It is no theory of war.[27]

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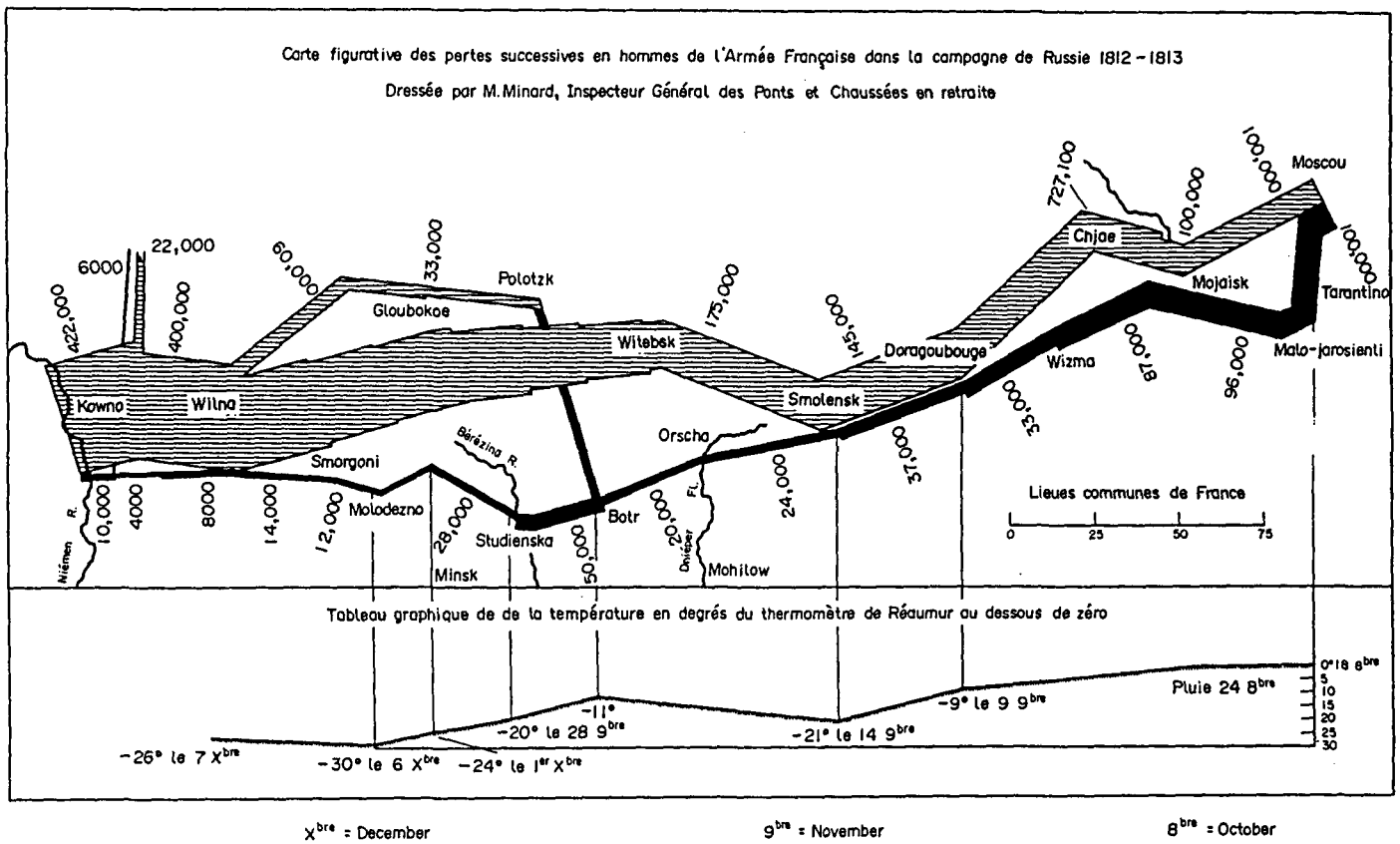

Fig. 4. Napoleon's losses, 1812–1813. Source: E. R. Tufte, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*. p. 41. Graphics Press, Cheshire, CT (1983).

In Clausewitz the intellectual proportions — as distinguished from a page count — are very different. In his very first chapter (Section 4), one finds a concept of war termination. Clausewitz articulates the essence of the strategic calculus which, performed by a belligerent, brings him to accept terms.

This is a very high order of intellectual penetration. Unlike Jomini, Clausewitz does not devote a whole chapter or even a few pages to classifying the real or alleged motives and objectives of belligerents, with which modern history so amply acquaints one. The ghost of just war doctrine has been laid to rest. Clausewitz seeks to think the whole war through from beginning to end. His work is indeed a theory of war. though it has much to say about strategy and tactics.

One infers the simple rule which may be termed "the concluding criterion:" a work silent on the right end of the analytical spectrum cannot be a theory of war. By this criterion, one suspects, most of the classics of strategy are not theories of war.

What, then, are they? With exceptions such as Thucydides, the classics before Clausewitz are actually the military subset of a genre well known to students of political theory. The genre is that of political paraenesis, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as exhortation, advice and counsel. Present in all high cultures from ancient Mesopotamia down to Frederick the Great, political paraenesis is typically cast in the forms of mirrors for princes and political testaments.[28] Written by or for the ruler, his prime minister, or his captain-general, these writings were essentially about "How to be a Successful Supreme Commander." Autobiographical and therefore unsystematic, they are meant to be practical rather than analytical and, typically, throw in reflections about mobilization and various political, legal, ethical and economic matters of interest to the intended reader.

Looking back on this exploration of the classics at different levels of military operations, one notes first how suggestive Delbrück's "iron law" is. It leads fairly directly into the heart of tactical doctrine. At the operational level, the relevance of the classics is frequently elusive, though the Clausewitzian concept of friction is as strong a candidate here as at lower levels. Above the operational level, the Clausewitzian concepts of the balance of error, culmination, the center of gravity, and war termination are of compelling interest. In general, the classifying of strategic classics as a subset of political paraenesis allows judicious assessment in retrospect as well as relatively undistorted comparison across cultural boundaries.

The device of the escalation ladder has been used, so far, for convenience of exposition. As its levels do not guarantee exhaustiveness of analysis, one may discard the device and turn to a comparison of the classics along lines well established in the literature.

III

Clausewitz and Sun Tzu

Comparing Jomini and Clausewitz can be instructive, and used to be not uncommon. More recently, American attention has turned to comparing Clausewitz and Sun Tzu. This may seem strange, not to say bizarre, from a humanistic or

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philosophical point of view. The ancient Master Sun, one might think, can have nothing in common with the philosophical idealism of the modern Prussian. Yet there is a military topic to which both can be related. It is the topic of stratagem and its place in military thought. By extension from stratagem, covert action, subversion, and all measures short of decisive battle between main forces are involved. Thus Liddell Hart perceived in Sun Tzu a like-minded advocate of "indirect strategy." So it is that Clausewitz and Sun Tzu, in the convenient though intellectually disreputable shorthand of much military literature, are reduced to one-dimensional symbols of contemporary attitudes, policies and priorities. Contemporary American interest in Sun Tzu derives unmistakeably from President Kennedy's emphasis on counterinsurgency, and demonstrable Soviet interest in Sun Tzu.[29] From the Kennedy era there has come down to us what is now the standard English version of Sun Tzu. Brigadier General Samuel Griffith, basing himself on his dissertation at Oxford, published his translation in 1963. It supersedes the excerpt in *Roots of Strategy* and has been the standard work widely cited and relied on for a good two decades.[30]

Its wide diffusion justifies the following caveats. Griffith's philology and historiography have come in for substantial criticism. Průšek's sinologically expert criticism is that Griffith included interpretation in his translaton, giving the reader no way to chose between possible different translations. Průšek gives an extended discussion of the problem of translating the last paragraph of the first chapter, about the calculations preceding victory.[31] This discussion bears on the "rationality" or calculability of war outcomes and hence, by implication, about the balance between "material" and "moral" variables in a theory of war. Serious students of Sun Tzu will want to read and ponder Průšek's critique.

As for Griffith's translation of the important military terms *cheng* and *ch'i*, Professor Wallacker has furnished criticisms and alternatives.[32] One would also like to see a translation of an article about Sun Tzu's military philosophy published in 1957 but missed by Griffith.[33]

Barton Whaley, studying the rise and fall of stratagem in military doctrines east and west, notes that Griffith's account of Japanese military thought omits "the rise of the indigenous code of *Bushidō* from the mid-seventeenth century and, then, two centuries later, the importation of European military doctrines."[34] "By entirely overlooking these two new factors, Griffith, pp. 175–178, incorrectly sees the stratagemic influence of Sun Tzu continuing as the preeminent doctrine down to World War II."[35]

Leaving aside the issue of stratagem, one may also round out Griffith's picture in naval respects. Akiyama Saneyuki, "the Japanese Mahan," read his Sun Tzu around 1896 as one of the sources of his own strategic conceptions.[36]

Reference was made above to the strange effect which can take place when two classics are compared with respect to a military topic or issue. Some counter to this is found in recent scholarship. In 1978 Professor S. Kohno of the Japanese National Defense Academy published a comparison of European military concepts and Sun Tzu.[37] Professor Kohno shows awareness of archaeological finds in China in 1972 bearing on the ancient question of the century of Sun Tzu.[38] For the purposes of

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most Western military men, the study usefully underlines the cultural hegemony of Chou even in decline, the strategic implications of a multistate context, civil–military relations, and the constraints imposed by an agricultural economy on military policy.

As Professor Kohno's literature base is overwhelmingly Japanese, a useful complement is found in a study of the Chinese heritage of military thought by Major-General Ko-min Yao.[39] This will give the Western reader some sense of what is indispensable yet missing in Kohno, the political ethic and idealism traditionally embedding much Chinese military thought.

For a truly scientific appreciation of Sun Tzu all these aspects have to be synthesized — in the right proportions — and put in the context of ancient China. Here the works of C. C. Rand are indispensable. He provides the comprehensive context for Sun Tzu, describing the different schools of thought in ancient China about military force as an instrument of the well-ordered state and society. The problematique common to the schools of thought was the right relation between *wen* ("civil," nonaggressive means) and *wu* ("martial," aggressive means) for the managing of conflict internally and externally:

> "Based on a study of all pre-Han and early Han writings addressing the issue of war and aggression, the following three principal solutions were identified: (1) the "militarist" view, which lays greatest emphasis on *wu* to reunite the Chinese state and achieve political homeostasis: (2) the "compartmentalist" view, which stresses the subordination of *wu* to *wen* and posited the segregation of threatening *wu* activities from applications of *wen*: and (3) the "syncretic" view, which enjoins a balanced utilization of *wen* and *wu* according to which would most efficiently reestablish equilibrium in the state.
>
> These principal solutions are also variously combined in the sources with three additional minor solutions or emphases. The first of these, the "metaphysical," combat as a function of a sage-general's "psychicity" (*shen*) acting upon the quasipalpable effluence (*ch'i*) that constitutes both the participants in and the setting of warfare. This means that *ch'i* must be "transformed" by *shen* at optimum points of actuation (*chi*) both through complementarity (e.g., normal–extraordinary maneuvers (*cheng-ch'i*), manipulation of unprepared and prepared positions (*hsu-shih*), etc.) and through pseudo-scientific evaluations of astronomical and meteorological phenomena in order that conflict may be resolved with the least expenditure of means. The second minor solution is the "pragmatic," which in a fashion familiar to students of Western military works, describes the legalistic, organizational, technological, and training aspects of warfare. Finally, there is the "ethical" outlook, which vaunts "civil," humane treatment for both active participants and civilians involved in hostilities, and advocates the perpetration of combat only when an adversary must be "punished" for conducting "unrighteous" aggression."[40]

A subsequent study elaborates on the Taoist aspect of the matter. Referring to the three principal solutions above, Rand characterizes the early military treatises, presumably including Sun Tzu, as having:

> ". . . an inclination toward the 'syncretic' view of the *wen–wu* controversy. That is to say, martial and civil are prescribed most often as tandem functions of the general/ruler, whose ultimate purpose is to construct or reconstruct a state of harmony whatever the means. *Wen* and *wu* may be equally conducive to the health of the state, depending on the nature and greatness of existing internal and/or

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> external pressures. In addition, the military treatises commonly adopt in varying degree all of the lesser solutions outlined above regarding the cosmological, practical, and moral attributes of war-making. In composite, then, the military treatises propound the evaluation of 'syncretic–metaphysical–pragmatic–ethical."[41]

At this high level, at last, something like a meaningful, well-rounded comparison of Sun Tzu with Clausewitz becomes possible. Insofar as he insists on the instrumental nature of warfare in the service of state policy, Clausewitz can be considered a "compartmentalist." Insofar as he urged military measures to achieve the unification of Germany, he can be considered a "militarist." Ruthlessly skeptical about the calculability of war outcomes, Clausewitz was neither a military crusader nor, of course, a pacifist. Devoted to the preservation of his society, Clausewitz like Sun Tzu is a "syncretist" or pragmatist.

Peripheralism and its varieties

Continuing with comparison, the concept of peripheralism may usefully be introduced: it is defined here as any strategic doctrine *other than* a doctrine of decisive battle between main forces.

The first point to be made, then, is that any dichotomy between peripheralism and Clausewitz is a false dichotomy. In other words, one need not chose between Clausewitz and peripheralism. What is the proof? Having first-hand experience of the campaign of 1812, Clausewitz arrived at the peripheralist conclusion that Russia could be defeated only by its internal divisions. This may be called peripheralism in a political variant.

Liddell Hart's advocacy of the indirect approach is the advocacy of another variant of peripheralism. Concerning Liddell Hart's variant, the late Raymond Aron makes a point of considerable interest. The strategist of a continental power, Aron writes, and the strategist of an insular power tend to interpret differently the abstract propositions that war is a whole and that success on the principal front decides all. Great Britain, protected by the sea against invasion, could chose a secondary theater of operations where small forces would, after a while, have an effect out of proportion to their number. Neither Germany nor France were in a position to apply such maxims; or, at least, their application would have cost them more.[42]

Students of indirect strategy might well ponder this passage. It opens up lines of interpretation very different from the standard picture as found in Brian Bond's biography of Liddell Hart. That otherwise excellent biography makes the point early and clearly that indirect strategy was his response to the trauma of World War I on the western front. This is an eminently plausible view; and yet it may be very far from the whole story. Aron's pointing to the British tradition suggests that the milieu in which Liddell Hart moved and worked was, long before World War I, deeply predisposed in favor of peripheralism, of a strategy of indirection. A secondary theater of operations where small forces would, after some time, have a disproportionately large effect: *leverage* is the name of this game. This is the very picture of Britain's alliances with many a small, poor, continental army maintained

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by British subventions. It is also the picture of British expeditionary forces at Gallipoli and Admiral Sir John Fisher advocating a landing by British forces on the Baltic coast of Germany in World War I. The concept lives on in the present. For example, in the book-length scenario of World War III by General Sir John Hackett we find a chapter entitled "vital peripheries." This work, published in 1978, depicts the United States making good use of "its firm base . . . Iran."[43] In 1979, the firm base was no more. National strategic predilections must ever be reexamined for continuing feasibility. And the opposition between indirect strategy and a clash of main forces, as an abstract antinomy supposedly fundamental to all strategic theory, should perhaps be discarded as intolerably superficial: it reflects strategies typical of sea power and land power.

Aron, with his sensitivity to concepts, has put his finger on the important theme of strategic traditions and cultures. His case is, actually, stronger than he knew. He might have cited historical evidence to trace the "insular" interpretation of "abstract [strategic] propositions." Surveying British opposition to Russia throughout the nineteenth century, Ingram notes that "a whole theory of Indian defence, the Punjab School founded by Lord Lawrence on the principle of masterly inactivity, rested upon the assumption that limited military movements would have dramatic political consequences."[44] Here, no doubt, is the background of Corbett's classic on sea power.

Two other versions of peripheralism, those of Fuller and Mao Tse-tung, emerge in fairly logical historical succession. Describing the origins of his *Foundations of the Science of War*, Fuller notes in the preface that the work predates the outbreak of World War I. Yet in his case, as with Liddell Hart, one may safely take World War I for a major stimulus to military self-examination: trench warfare and mass slaughter had to be overcome. For this purpose, the promising wartime experiments with armor were natural candidates for further development.

One aspect of this, little noted so far, is the paradoxical relation of armor to airpower. On the one hand, as desired by Seeckt in 1921, the combining of armor with tactical air gave armored columns support from flying equivalents of self-propelled artillery, more flexible and quicker than such artillery. On the other hand, when the armored offensive was launched against the Third Republic in 1940, there came to the fore its use against the overall coherence of the enemy posture. Command, control and communications fell victim to armored speed. In a sense, the speedy armored offensive, by paralysing headquarters in the rear, performed what strategic air could only promise. Beyond normal imagining, the armored force created to break through a linear defense had succeeded in attaining decision in war. Naturally the Manstein plan helped. The *remarkable conceptual dialectic* that went into this strategic plan has now been articulated most instructively by Bennett and Dando.[45]

Fuller's mechanized solution to trench warfare found, in the Far East, only one nation industrialized enough to attempted such warfare. Japan's war in China pitted the machine against China's plenty, manpower. The triangular tangle that locked Japan, the Republic of China, and the Chinese Communists in deadly embrace produced, on the Communist side, much strategic controversy. With

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respect to the essential political and strategic concepts, the account given by the late Marshal Lin Piao in 1965 is still worth reading.[46]

As everyone knows, the Maoist conception won in the debates and on the field of battle. Mass mobilization in a protracted people's war concluding with regular forces turned the tables on Fuller: once again men would dominate machines. Especially in the early stages, the Maoist model resorts to armed propaganda and subversion. Some military literature takes this for proof of the influence of Sun Tzu on Mao. That overlooks the more important difference: Sun Tzu opposed long wars because they were economically ruinous and strategically risky in a multistate context. A long war is exactly what Mao needed, wanted and won.

Missing superstructures

Concluding these comparative reflections one notes a feature common to the classics. Except perhaps for the geopoliticians, the classics lack superstructure. That is, they say little or nothing about international relations, international technological rivalries and trends, defense implications of economic cycles (notably the Kondratieff), crisis management, alliance cohesion and loosening, alternative world orders, non-zero-sum issues, and the philosophy of history. The missing superstructure and its "interface" with the military classics has received some attention lately in connection with peace research. On the whole, however, the interface remains a large and largely unexplored subject. Here one can only note the lacuna.

The comparisons made above, then, yield some surprising results. The shared deficiency of the classics with respect to superstructures crucial to contemporary statecraft must be recognized and admitted. Yet this deficiency is very understandable and almost inevitable given the aforementioned point that these classics voice the military element in the theory of statecraft or political paraenesis. Secondly, sound comparison across the highest cultural barriers is shown to be possible in the case of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu. Furthermore, a broad yet differentiated concept of peripheralism makes possible new insights into Liddell Hart, Fuller and Mao.

IV

In conclusion a word about cognitive rather than political and historical superstructures. Concern with the cognitive, theoretical and philosophical aspects is inevitable when one compares, for example, Clausewitz and Fuller. The non-Hegelian dialectic of the former cannot be mistaken for the Edwardian mentality of the latter, unlucky enough to have done some of his basic work just before logical empiricism transformed — or at least challenged — previous conceptions of science, theory and philosophy.

Decades have passed since World War I and the main impact of Ayer, Carnap, Popper, Schlick, Wittgenstein and others. Logical empiricism has marched on beyond its point of culmination and victory. Reverses and decay have set in. Voices are not lacking to proclaim the demise — and the legacy — of a movement which has powerfully affected American social science and policy research.[47] At

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least since the 1950s, this movement has imposed on defense research and military thinking its views of science and scientific work. Not surprisingly, the whole gigantic machinery of sponsored research had no inkling of, or interest in, dialectical modes of thought whether Clausewitzian or other.

If logical empiricism is now dethroned, it behooves one to consider the implications. Behold the disciples of Kuhn are already at the door. Some, like Lt Col Watts, are well inside. Not by accident is the journal literature sprinkled with reflections about the crisis of classical operations research.

This trend is intertwined and must be grasped together with another. The utilitarian strand in economic theory is not what it used to be. This matters deeply to operations research because the concept of optimization in operations research is identical with the concept of optimization in utilitarian economic theory. Together with the previous trend, the soul-searching under way in economic theory should be monitored for its bearing on our ideas of policy analysis and analytical completeness. There is easy access to at least some of this material.[48] An expansion of the analytical horizon from "optimization" to "metapreferences" might be no small thing.

Concurrently with these trends another is at work: holistic approaches such as nonlinear systems dynamics and hypergaming are increasingly applied to defense studies. These new approaches, devotees of the classics might note, breathe something of their spirit: they seek to see the whole, and to see it steadily in all its change.

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