

The Nature of Power Struggles

Montgomery Stewart

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Most people face power struggles during their lives, whether in relationships, friendships, or the workplace. Depending on the experience and outcome of the struggle, it can turn out to be a victory, a defeat, a compromise, or even a life-changing event.

In *The Nature of Power Struggles*, a comprehensive and ambitious book, Montgomery Stewart casts a very wide net. He addresses power struggles in the context of person-to-person relationships, the battle of the sexes, and societal issues (including racial, cultural, and group prejudice). He also talks about power struggles within the United States and elsewhere.

Stewart begins with a general discussion of power struggles and what he describes as “forms of power,” in which he notes the differences between force, manipulation, guilt, victimization, and persuasion. Stewart concludes that “the less sophisticated and knowledgeable a person is, the more likely he or she is to use force ... By contrast, the more sophisticated and knowledgeable individuals tend to use manipulation and persuasion whenever possible.”

Stewart then explores three “models of behavior”—war, games, and social engineering. He explains the attributes of each and makes the point that individuals and groups who operate using different models of behavior are rarely able to reconcile their differences. The author goes on to cover various aspects of power struggles, including alliances, control, opposition, and disassociation.

A particularly intriguing chapter in the book is entitled “The Subjective Nature of Fairness.” Stewart says he has seen similar power struggles in diverse industries “over money, control, authority, position, status, ownership, and recognition.” The problem in all of these struggles, he writes, is the definition of “fair.” Fair, argues Stewart, “is an easy concept to discuss and a difficult one to implement.”

Stewart’s concluding chapter is perhaps his most insightful. “One reason we struggle for power,” writes the author, “is due to the system of beliefs that we have inherited in this country.” In explaining his theory, Stewart says our society relies largely on “the war model in making decisions.” He further states, “Although many profess and speak of the need to act from a place of love, most human beings are more responsive to and act out of fear.”

Cartoons call attention to some of Stewart’s main points in *The Nature of Power Struggles*. However, the reader may find the cover and interior illustrations, which depict angels and devils doing battle, a bit inappropriate for the subject matter.

Stewart can be redundant at times, but, on the whole, he’s produced a well-written, expansive work that will provoke serious thought about life’s power struggles.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (November 7, 2011)

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