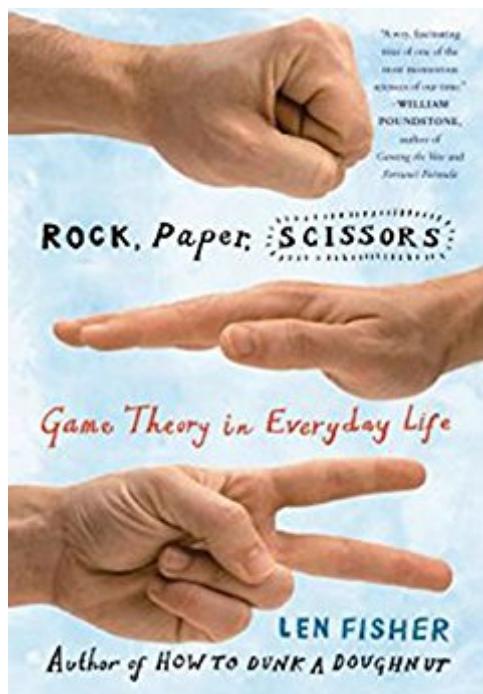


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# Rock, Paper, Scissors: Game Theory In Everyday Life



## Synopsis

Praised by Entertainment Weekly as "the man who put the fizz into physics," Dr. Len Fisher turns his attention to the science of cooperation in his lively and thought-provoking book. Fisher shows how the modern science of game theory has helped biologists to understand the evolution of cooperation in nature, and investigates how we might apply those lessons to our own society. In a series of experiments that take him from the polite confines of an English dinner party to crowded supermarkets, congested Indian roads, and the wilds of outback Australia, not to mention baseball strategies and the intricacies of quantum mechanics, Fisher sheds light on the problem of global cooperation. The outcomes are sometimes hilarious, sometimes alarming, but always revealing. A witty romp through a serious science, *Rock, Paper, Scissors* will both teach and delight anyone interested in what it takes to get people to work together.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A good example of how to write at the "popular" end of the popular science spectrum. Game theory in general deals with settings in which each player has to choose one of several strategies without knowing other players' choices, and gets a payoff depending on everyone's choices (note this is

rather different from what we call games in everyday language). Such games typically have a Nash equilibrium, which (roughly speaking) is the result when players behave selfishly; but there may be some different "cooperative" choices of strategies that would make everyone better off (a "social optimum"). This paradox or "logical trap" is usually illustrated by the Prisoner's Dilemma story. Observing where this situation occurs and contemplating ways of getting around them by "self-enforcing strategies" -- how cooperation might be achieved in the face of temptations to cheat -- are the main themes of the book, which is well paced and engagingly easy to read. Some highlights are (1) Discussion of "7 deadly dilemmas" given cute names by theorists (Prisoner's Dilemma; Tragedy of the Commons; Free Rider; Chicken; Volunteer's Dilemma; Battle of the Sexes; Stag Hunt) -- models in which there is math theory. (2) A lengthy verbal discussion of strategies to promote trust and cooperation (e.g. making it costly to change your mind later; deliberately cutting off your escape routes). (3) Martin Nowak's 5 rules for the social evolution of cooperation. While the in-text accounts of scientific studies in the human social world or in biology are conversationally casual, the end-notes (comprising 1/5 of the book) provide citations to the scientific literature -- a definite improvement on most books at this level. All popularizers tend to exaggerate the scope of applicability of their subject, but this book less so than most. Let me just mention two ways in which the real world is more complicated than the book implies. (4) Except in special cases where the payoff is money and nothing else matters, the payoff has to be modeled as some number of abstract "points" (or "utils", in jargon) which one can't actually measure. And then any observed behavior can be construed as optimal behavior in some game theoretic model. So game theory is more like a useful way of thinking about issues, and less like a traditional scientific theory which makes testable predictions. (5) In complicated real world economic situations, trying to make everyone better off is both fiendishly complicated and involves some kind of tax and subsidy scheme; introducing such things creates its own moral hazard outside the context of the one particular game.

If you don't know anything about game theory, this book is a nice non technical place to start. If you're looking to get into the mathematical details, I'd recommend a textbook

Game theory is an important and exciting topic. Unfortunately, this book ignores the beautiful mathematics in favor of an annoying combination of autobiography and political commentary. If you want a basic primer of game theory it is best to look elsewhere.

RPS came recommended from a reliable source. I'm currently ghostwriting a book on strategy and this book has been a helpful resource with some everyday practical advice. I like Len Fisher's style. Witty and intelligent stuff!

The subtitle of the book is a variation on its "real" title: Game Theory in the Everyday Life of Len Fisher. While pleasant, and somewhat helpful as an introduction, a better book is struggling to get out. Rock, Paper, Scissors is best read by reading the chapters in reverse order. Fisher really wants to write about trust and how to gain it, by realizing that game theory not only describes situations (the seven dilemmas identified by Nash equilibria), but also identifies methods for breakthroughs. Various problems in everyday life (mainly Fisher's!) and some business/political ones can be identified, then addressed. This is good stuff. Knowing the Ultimatum and Centipede games provide value. A reader upon completion will most likely believe that while the book was worth the time and effort, a better book should be available with more interesting examples, that would have been MORE worth the time and effort. It's as if Fisher "mailed" it in. He couldn't have spent more than a few weeks (if that long) writing it. It's merely a money-maker that doesn't show great depth of knowledge or effort by the writer, but it is understandable.

**Everyday life:** If you want to understand the human psyche from all aspects and how businesses are run, this is the book for you. The book goes through in a step by step process into the game theory. The process people use to make a decision and choices are very well written and easy to understand. Prisoners dilemma along with Tragedy of the commons, The Free Rider, Chicken, the Volunteer's Dilemma, the Battle of the sexes and Stag Hunt are explained very well with examples of each and how they play a part in everyday life. The idea of the book is to show the reader that by cooperating will benefit both sides. A win situation for all parties involved is always a good place to be although it does not happen all the time but the idea of being satisfied to a mutual benefit and minimizing the risk, makes any deal more acceptable.

The author does an excellent job at presenting complex topics in a manner that you can either understand at a high level, or he also provides sidebars so that you can understand the mathematics of the conclusion. The author presents topics that are useful to everyday life, and can make you a better decision maker. What could be presented in a very dry manner, is instead presented with a nice touch of humor.

This is a great book, but if you are looking for a lot of 'textbook' game theory you may be left wanting more. Talks very qualitatively and easy to understand to anyone out there on the street. The examples are good and the author does relate to his everyday life. I'm sure you will find it an enjoyable read, but if you are the technical sort be ready to go on a quest for more game theory!

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