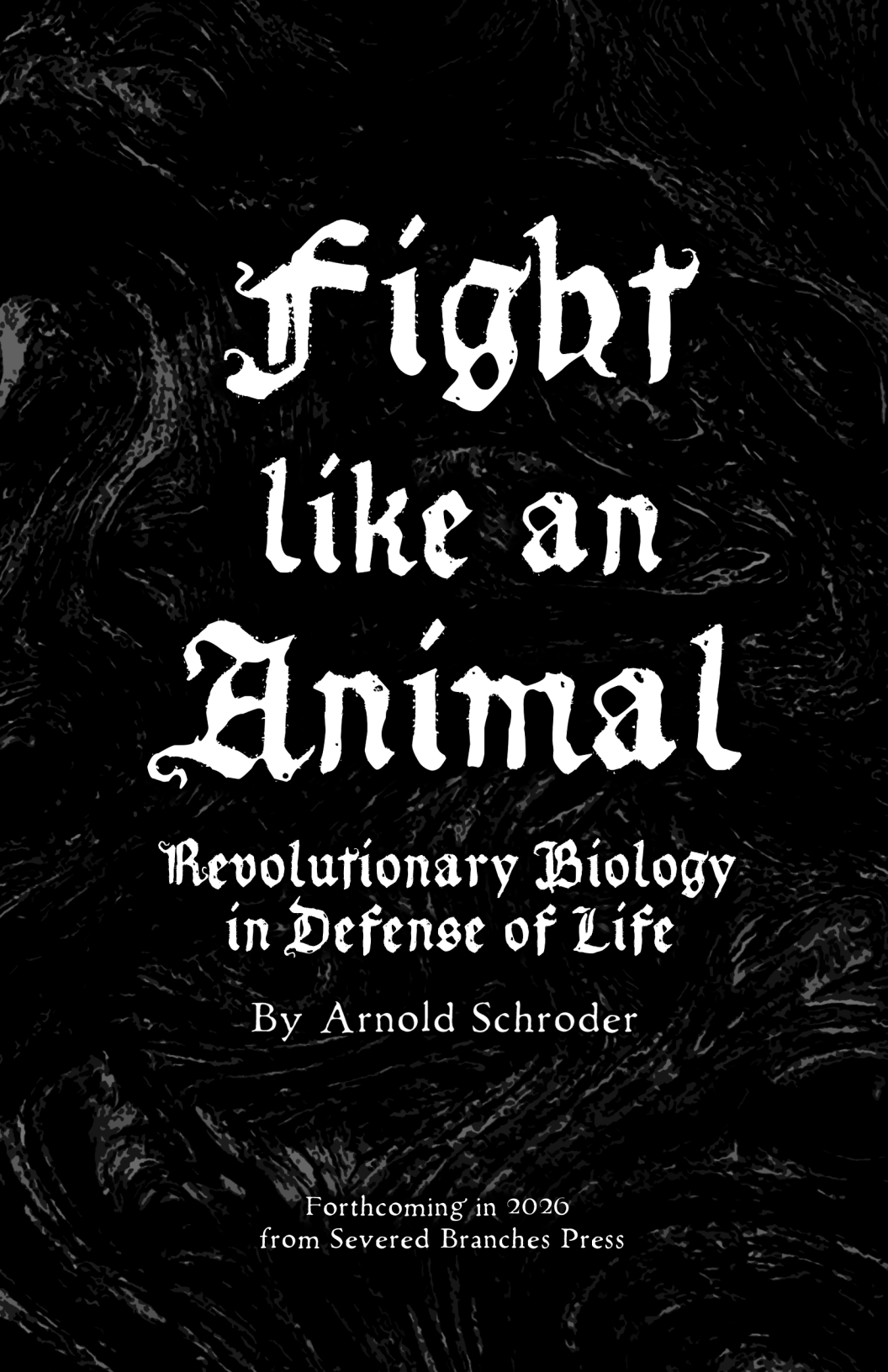


The background of the entire cover is a dark, intricate marbled pattern with swirling, organic textures in shades of black, grey, and white.

Fight like an Animal

Revolutionary Biology
in Defense of Life

By Arnold Schroder

Forthcoming in 2026
from Severed Branches Press

The Path to Integration
An Excerpt from

Fight like an Animal:
Revolutionary Biology in Defense of Life



Forthcoming from
Severed Branches Press in 2026

Concisely, we can say this work is an attempt to synthesize evolutionary biology and political theory. Even more concisely, we can simply say this work is devoted to synthesis. Repeatedly, and across levels of description—from how social connection thwarts despotism to the way communication between brain regions creates insight—our overarching theme is integration. We are attempting to connect what is severed, to mend the fractures in who we are and how we act in the world. The fractures within us, and how we see, I have observed in a life of earth defense.

Many works of evolutionary theory posit a universal human nature, or invoke individual difference to justify domination. My experiences of political conflict have attuned me to how people are very different, and offer a scathing indictment of domination. In complex societies, I see how we express particular, narrow ranges of biological potential, and how this furthers our many converging crises. Revolutionary biology is about how variable individuals, in variable conditions, produce societies. It examines how different kinds of people—different political personalities—exercise different kinds of power, and how the politics of a society is the sum of these myriad forms of agency.

We are utterly failing to advance a plausible narrative about avoiding the collapse we all know we're in. The world grows far more complex and dire; our stories do not change as profoundly. Arguably, their most salient feature is mutual incomprehensibility. As we converge on a sense of crisis, our sense of its origins diverge. The outcome is a widespread perception that the world has simply ceased to make sense. If it is going to make sense, we must be

willing to embrace truly novel approaches.

One of the novel approaches I embrace is to seriously ask—in a rigorous fashion, with a willingness to confront discomfort—why we live in such different stories about the world. It is my contention that technological society is not creating individual psychological differences, but revealing and amplifying them. There are neural correlates of self-selecting into FOX News viewership, which we will review shortly, but also neural correlates of watching it for years. All the hyper-diverse stimulus our complex societies offer changes us biologically, because “all learning changes the brain.” We have thus become a massively differentiated species in ways we do not really understand

To find a path through the flames, we must attempt to map all the diverse kinds of minds we are creating through these techno-biological feedback loops. This allows us a novel form of synthesis. We are not seeking a synthesis of all human perspectives, into some kind of logically-coherent, unified whole. We are seeking access to the underlying psychologies—and thus biologies—from which our divergent perspectives emerge. We are attempting to map, and experientially comprehend, humanity's psychological diversity.

When we do this, we see many kinds of techno-biological feedbacks, creating many distinct ways of being. We gain a much clearer understanding of why those who understand the world do not have power, and why those who have power do not understand the world. In other words, we see ways of being that have prevented us from fighting effectively for life. We also see the ways of being of the world destroyers, which we otherwise might not

have noticed or comprehended. In both cases, we are studying human difference in order to transcend self-referentiality.

When we theorize about the experience and motivations of others, we tend to infer more from our own experience than we are aware. We ask what “people” are like, and answer with what we are like. Thus we end up pursuing strategies that would only be effective, at least in isolation, on a more psychologically uniform humanity. Holding up signs in front of an office, saying something evil is happening in the office, would make sense—if everyone was more like the people holding up the signs. A biologically-integrated approach allows us to better map out strategic actions with reference to distinct populations, characterized by distinct technological feedbacks.

This leads us to the final two subjects we must address in this introduction: who I am and who you are. Because this book is about replacing the systems of power that threaten global ecological collapse, and no one's ever done that, no one can really claim to be an expert. All I can really say is that I am someone who has consistently taken a path through life where science and politics overlap, out of what is probably best described as religious reverence for life, and that I have been adapting to our changing circumstances the whole time. I think I am not being hyperbolic when I say that I have always been a revolutionary, and that I had very formative experiences of political struggle in childhood. At ten years of age, I found the definition of anarchism in a dictionary, and began to identify as one. I started writing social theory a couple years later, and entered movements at fourteen. At sixteen, I

had a conversion experience in the forest and threw myself headlong into the radical environmental movement, exemplified at that time by Earth First!.

During that period—the mid-1990s—our idiosyncratic scene combined animistic, anti-modern thinking, militance, and expertise in environmental law and conservation biology. These different ways of seeing corresponded to different kinds of political agency. I made impassioned speeches about the forest around campfires. I organized direct action, like logging road blockades and tree-sits. But I also reading every scientific paper I could find about the endangered species of the Sierra Nevada mountains, where I lived, which I used to author administrative appeals of National Forest timber sales.

We will later develop a framework of cultural, coercive, and technical power, into which these different activities fit. This fluid transition between kinds of power was widespread within the movement, and thus explicitly modeled for me. It is characteristic of modernity, and its tendency toward ever-greater fragmentation, that political scenes are increasingly exercising only one kind of power. Again, our overarching theme is integration.

Eventually, this phase of beautiful adventure came to an end. To seek revolution is to dance on a precipice. It is to affirm humanity's best tendencies, with all the heightened energy and agency this implies, and thus to be particularly undone by humanity's worst tendencies. Eventually, most of us who dance on this precipice fall off of it, at least for a while. It was after five years of constant political immersion that I fell for the first time.

I will never forget how the 2000 US presidential “election” forced me to come to terms with the profound strategic differences associated with different worldviews: what I sometimes describe as the relationship between attitudes and aptitudes. It was clear to me that the brief window of social possibility afforded by the end of the Cold War was over, and that something like the so-called War on Terror was inevitable, with all the stupidity and fear a surge of nationalist threat psychology implies.

It wasn't that their election subterfuge worked while ours failed. It was that we didn't have any election subterfuge to contend against theirs with, nor anything else so organized and strategic outside the realm of electoral politics. This seemed to reflect an asymmetry of aggression across contexts. We also didn't have a meaningful counterforce to the violence they employed against us, or to their media monopoly, or really any other form of power they exercised. But what was most depressing was that, within our movement, we mostly seemed to have two modes of response. We could either choose to live in stories about how what we were doing was about to work—all we had to do was believe a little more. Or we could decide everything was hopeless, and disengage.

After a long interlude involving plenty of addiction and despair, but also lots of art and friendship, and seeing the increasingly dire state of the global climate, at the beginning of the 2010's I threw myself once again into a conjoined frenzy of scientific work and disruptive direct action. The stakes being what they were, I found myself willing to take considerable risks during this phase. My scientific and technical efforts frequently focused on how to

interfere with industrial infrastructure. This proved to be an unpopular choice with various law enforcement entities, and I was subject to a few years of investigations, surveillance, warnings from lawyers, and difficult conversations with tearful loved ones. Some of my most fundamental perceptions of what life can be—of the mythic scope of what it can mean to fight for life—derive from these experiences.

This phase also, eventually, seemed to have run its course—and so I found myself in 2018 as I did in 2000: despairing, nomadic, enraged, and utterly failing to deescalate. Much like the last one, this period of disoriented grief very nearly killed me, but I am pleased to report that I managed to move through it in a mere two years. As I will make abundantly clear, I believe academia has done net harm to social movements—some of their very worst tendencies were born in humanities and social science departments. While I make extensive use of institutional science, I also believe we need academies born directly of the experience of fighting for our survival. Personally, I was expelled from ninth grade and have mostly never looked back, although I did complete two years of undergraduate math and science classes. If you feel this disqualifies me from making scientific arguments, let me ask you this: who should write a book about what evolutionary biology can teach us about ecological politics? An academic biologist who's never been in handcuffs, filed a lawsuit, or called an open meeting?

To offer expert proclamations on, say, nomadic herder marriage customs, or territorial aggression in gray wolves, scientists are expected to go spend some time around some nomadic herders

or some gray wolves. It is extraordinary that no similar expectation of empirical rigor prevails with respect to scientific proclamations concerning politics. The result is that even climate scientists, who are ready to stake their careers and reputations on disrupting the status quo, don't have much of a framework for change beyond the civil resistance paradigm. This paradigm is one of protest as a form of moral dialogue with those in power—which is to say, a moral dialogue with people who aren't motivated by morality. Recall my claim that studying politics in terms of individual difference allows us to transcend self-referentiality.

The field of social movement studies does sometimes provide useful insights. However, it very rarely touches upon the strategic variables which, in a life of political immersion, I have come to see as most central. And often, the discipline is a methodological horror show, attempting to quantify outcomes from strategies as insanely broad as “violence and nonviolence,” or movement factions as amorphous as “the mainstream and the radical flank.”

In other words, in its quest for sample sizes sufficient for statistical analysis, this scholarship mostly avoids looking at particular strategies in particular contexts. This is such a fundamental shortcoming it is almost difficult to critique, even if you're as traumatized by ludicrous theories of change as I am.

So we might simply say I am incorporating something like fieldwork into our scientific understanding of power and politics. Every scientist specializes, and if they write books or papers referencing findings from other disciplines and sub-disciplines, they are doing exactly what I am doing. It is not my claim that I am just

as qualified as a scientist to write this book. It is my claim that I am a scientist; my field of study is revolutionary ecological politics. This is what I have done years of fieldwork in—everything else I just read about. Sort of like Jordan Peterson is doing when he writes about anything other than trait psychology, or E.O. Wilson did when he wrote about anything other than social insects.

So that is who I am, in the sense of the work I have done in this life. But we are shaped by our experiences. Some of what I know, and feel the need to communicate, I know because I read papers on brain structure or snuck past a security guard at a pipeline construction site. But some of it I know because I have been a homeless person, heroin addict, and madman—or, to emphasize other developmental processes, a line cook, weirdo artist, and obsessive runner. We are not simply attempting to integrate knowledge, we are attempting to integrate the states of being we contain, associated with different kinds of knowledge.

And you—who are you? It's not a straightforward question in a work so focused on how our hyper-differentiation is making us powerless to avert global collapse. I am emphatically not writing for any existing, well-defined tendency within politics, culture, or science. I am writing for anyone who is attentive to our myriad crises, but skeptical of existing approaches to addressing them. I am writing for people who have inhabited political movements like I have, and observed some of the same shortcomings. I am also writing for anyone who is simply curious about how the world works.

Additionally, I am writing for scientists, and for anyone who is

convinced they are science-minded, who feels confused about why this system is producing outcomes other than the universal flourishing it advertises. I am writing for people who are asking things like: when are those in power going to wake up to the dire reality of the global ecological crisis? The simple answer is that they will never wake up, in the way you mean, and I will try explain why in scientific terms—and what we can do instead of continuing a one-sided dialogue with them. It could be said, in other words, that this book is a scientific case for revolution, and a revolutionary case for science. It is an attempt to convince scientists and the science-minded that the catastrophe we are witnessing is precisely what we should expect scientifically, and that revolutionary change is the only serious, adult prospect to consider. It is also an attempt to convince revolutionaries to take a more curious and conceptually-rigorous approach, where strategies are treated like hypotheses, rather than articles of faith.

Anytime we see anybody do anything, we mentally model being that person, doing that thing. My final answer to the question of who you are, and who I am, is that I am writing this in defiance of the fog of resignation that has engulfed so many of us, to help spread that defiance. We have been through so much, and efforts at survival and emancipation have left many of us with terrible scars. But there is still so much we have not tried, and so much we do not yet know. This is me lifting up my arms with you, despite the numberless horrors we confront, to exalt in this sacred world and all its beautiful possibilities. 🌱



Arnold Schroder lives in Portland Oregon where he writes, podcasts, organizes, and participates in ceremony.