

## The Chessboard Metaphor

Another useful metaphor for **self-as-context** is the Chessboard (Hayes et al., 1999).

Imagine a chessboard. On one side, the pieces are all your positive thoughts and feelings, and on the other side, the pieces are all your negative thoughts and feelings. We go through life desperately trying to move our positive pieces across and wipe off all the negative pieces.

But the problem is—there are an infinite number of positive and negative pieces. No matter how many negative pieces you wipe off, more will appear. And another problem is, the positive pieces attract negative pieces. You move forward the positive piece, “I’m a good parent,” and it immediately attracts the negative piece, “No, you’re not. What about the way you yelled at your kids last night.”

So, we can go through life, wasting a lot of time and energy, trying to win this battle that can never be won. Or we can learn how to be more like the chessboard. The board is in intimate contact with all the chess pieces, but it’s not involved in the battle. And there’s a part of us that operates like this chessboard; that enables us to step out of the battle with our thoughts and feelings and give them plenty of space to move around.

For a YouTube animation of this metaphor:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phbzSNsY8vc>

