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de que lo esencial de una palabra no es su significación sino su uso. Además, aunque hay algo de juego en el lenguaje, hay en el juego algo que no es lenguaje. Por otra parte, todo juego, aunque no sea lingüístico, tiene algo de lenguaje. Por ello más que comprender los lenguajes a base de juegos, los juegos se pueden comprender a base de lenguajes.

Actualmente se ha despertado un gran interés por la obra de *Wittgenstein*. Y no sólo por la filosofía de las *Untersuchungen* sino también por la del *Tractatus*. En la filosofía anglosajona la influencia de *Wittgenstein* es demasiado perceptible pues lo era desde hace ya varias décadas. Ahora tal influencia se extiende también a la filosofía no anglosajona. ¿Por qué? La pregunta queda en el aire. Este artículo es expositivo. Por ello deja de lado la apreciación y el dar respuesta a la pregunta anterior. Sin embargo podemos decir que *Wittgenstein* tuvo una visión demasiado estrecha de la filosofía, pero es evidente que su obra rebasa sus propios límites. *Wittgenstein* no es positivista lógico ni analista del lenguaje —al menos como se entiende y practica el análisis lingüístico en Oxford y Cambridge—. Si el intento fundamental de *Wittgenstein* era negar absolutamente la filosofía, porque filosofa con pasión y con intensidad al descubrir y plantear nuevos problemas, no acertó a eliminar totalmente la filosofía: sólo le trazó nuevas metas. Pero una cosa es su concepto de filosofía, y otra muy distinta es el resultado fáctico de su pensamiento.

Termino con un párrafo de *W. Schulz* que apruebo en su totalidad: “Digamos expresamente que nuestro objetivo no es hacer reproches a *Wittgenstein*. Ello sería, teniendo en cuenta la apasionada intensidad de su pensamiento, inadecuado y ridículo. Se trata tan sólo de poner de manifiesto el hecho de que el *Tractatus* de *Wittgenstein* no ofrece a la filosofía contemporánea ninguna auténtica posibilidad; como tampoco, por otra parte, las investigaciones filosóficas, pues en ellas la tendencia de *Wittgenstein* a la inmediatez, que se muestra al final del *Tractatus*, se hace patente como la tendencia fundamental que le dirige en la totalidad de su filosofar”.⁹⁸

En todo caso, si la filosofía de *Wittgenstein* es tan especial que resulta inexpresable, la mejor actitud ante ella es callar y reflexionar. Porque “de lo que no se puede hablar, se debe guardar silencio —*Wovon man nicht sprechen, darüber muss man schweigen*”.

⁹⁸ *Wittgenstein, la negación de la filosofía*, G. del Toro, Madrid, 1970, p. 54.

MAN AND THE CONFLICTS OF LIFE

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THE GENERAL theme of this paper is the complexity of human life as a moral phenomenon. As everybody recognizes to a greater or lesser extent, conflicts of all sorts arise in daily conduct, making for or adding to the complexity of individual and social life. It certainly is no news to hear that we live at a time when we are so concerned with the recurring problem of national and international tensions, especially, that it is natural for us to be anxious about finding ways and means of removing their causes or at least of mitigating their bad effects. (Actually, it would be news indeed to hear the opposite for a change.)

There are many parallels between our neo-Hellenistic times and the Hellenistic Age in the ancient world. This is evident from the increasing crop of Utopian panaceas— some, for status reasons, carrying the highly prestigious label of science and technology— which are being prescribed left and right to guarantee us either instant peace of mind (*ataraxia*, the goal of the ancient Epicureans) or instant efficiency (the goal of *pax* of the ancient Romans) in a world rampant everywhere with violence and war, hot and cold. If men and nations were ever to learn how to get along with each other, life doubtless would be heaven on earth, but in that event Utopia could be duller than we contemplate. With all due respects to the great Hebrew prophet Isaiah, it seems to be getting more and more difficult to envision any millenium tomorrow or the next day, when nations and people “shall beat their swords into plowshares” and “the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb.”

Despite, however, our daily concern with the causes of conflicts and our intense practical interest in getting them resolved somehow, it is ironical that, of all the fundamental notions in the field of individual and social ethics, the one which is taken most for granted, and hence given the least formal ana-

lysis, is evidently the moral conception of conflict itself. As a consequence, the traditional and universally accepted conception of moral struggle as a constant battle between doing right and wrong (or their equivalents), being taken as self-evident, goes unquestioned, on the assumption (ostensibly) that it exhausts the whole class of moral conflicts, logically. As a further and graver consequence, no theoretical room is ever left in principle for any other conception of moral conflict, the net result of which is the reduction of all problems of conscience to the Problem of Evil and the elimination thus of the most tormenting problem in life from the universe of ethical discourse, namely, the Problem of Good. Such understandable but naive reductionism in theory of moral conflict, implicit in the traditional definition of ethics and explicit in practically all systems of morality, will be questioned for its eversimplified picture of the human situation.

Interests (from the Latin, *interesse*, to be of importance) are the basic positive stuff of which human life is made. Being of importance or value to us, interests are objects that we strive to get or to keep, even if we have to fight for them, openly or subtly. Long before Darwin's (essentially economic) view of physical life as a constant "struggle for existence", men were of course aware that conflicts of interest in economic and allied areas were bound to arise in their midst, due originally in all probability to the limited supply of material goods on hand and the unlimited demands of human beings for their acquisition. Sooner or later, practical intelligence taught men that the effective rule for handling conflicts of interest is compromise. To be sure, they also learned in the course of events that compromise was only half-hearted cooperation; but, like the proverbial half loaf of bread, it was better than none at all. At any rate, as a result, compromise became the standing legal rule of political life short of war, and has governed ever since all realistic attempts on the part of groups of individuals and nations to achieve a balance of power between contending factions from within and warring parties from without.

Interestingly enough in this connection, the pre-Socratic "Fire" philosopher Heraclitus, who lived through the hectic period of ancient Greece's historic struggle with Persia and who assigned to "strife" in his literary remains the fundamental role in the entire scheme of things, seems to have possessed such an acute sense of compromise to offset his keen sense of conflict that, apparently, he argued from a political analogy, arriving at the following metaphysical conclusion: If a balance of power is the precondition of order in political life, then by the same token a balance of contrary forces is the precondition of order in the universe as a whole. If Heraclitus the Ephesian starts from a balance theory of politics and generalizes its implications for a balance theo-

ry of metaphysics, his paradoxical fragments, for example, that "Opposition brings men together" and that there is "harmony in contrariety"¹ everywhere, begin to make sense. In any event, like Machiavelli and Hobbes some 2000 years later, it appears that Heraclitus was an astute observer of the political scene, and it would be well for us today to remember him for that at least, especially since his realistic approach to the conflicts of life may serve as a timely antidote to any simplistic way out of them.

As everyone in the learned world knows, Aristotle says explicitly that man by nature is a political or social animal, while Hobbes says implicitly that he is by nature a belligerent or anti-social animal. Kant, on the other hand, says that natural man is *both*, that is, he is sociable and unsociable at the same time. This is the meaning of Kant's paradoxical phrase: "the unsocial sociability of men."² The celebrated philosopher from Königsberg is closer to the truth than either Aristotle or Hobbes, but he does not realize the full implications of his own double-aspect characterization of the natural condition of man. The reason that he does not may be derived from what motivates his epistemology. Just as Kant limits the cognitive possibilities of natural science in order to make room for morality, so he limits the behavioral possibilities of natural man for the same reason. In fine, Kant consistently gives primacy to morality, whether he is thinking of Nature at large in the context of Newtonian physics, or thinking of human nature in the context of "universal history".

All this is understandable, once given the Kantian standpoint, with its artificial dualism between the natural and the moral. But, what is not so understandable, however, is that Kant's theory of human nature, contrary to its initial double-aspect character, ascribes much more significance to men's unsociable manifestations in human history than to their sociable ones. At any rate, as a true son of the German Enlightenment and the incipient Industrial Revolution, he confidently asserts that "mutual opposition" among men, despite his candid acknowledgment of its ever present threat to the preservation of society, is the real spur to human progress and the fulfillment of men's capacities, *not* "mutual affection", which he sardonically associates with "laziness" and an "Arcadian" or pastoral mode of life.

Nevertheless, if "mutual affection" is worth while in moral life (as Kant would have to admit as a believer in Christian love), why is it of no value at all "in an Arcadian shepherd's life" prior to the postulated advent of culture

¹ BAKEWELL, Charles M. (ed.) *Source book in ancient philosophy* (New York: Scribner's 1939), p. 31.

² KANT, Immanuel, *On history* (ed., Lewis White Beck; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), p. 15.

and morality? Whether his speculations on the beginnings and course of human history make a greater virtue out of the natural factor of "mutual opposition" in society than even Hobbes, and whether Kant is too sanguine in his pre-Nixonian advocacy of "the work ethic", the point at issue here is that his cultural bias in favor of "*antagonism in society*", as Nature's way of effecting "*a lawful order among men*" in the long run, is not consistent with his double-aspect conception of human nature. In short, what is needed is a thoroughgoing application of the principle of polarity to human nature and society. If men are inclined by nature to associate themselves with their fellowmen as well as to isolate themselves from them, any exclusive selection of one aspect of the matter at the expense of the other will not work, on theoretical grounds.

Our brief survey of Heraclitus and Kant may seem a digression from our general subject, but it is not in reality. Heraclitus states that opposition brings men together and Kant maintains that it brings human progress. But, ironically enough, and this is something Kant could hardly imagine in the so-called "Age of Reason", progress brings more problems at the same time that it brings more solutions. As we are beginning to realize more and more each day, the very solutions to our old problems, spelling scientific and technical progress, have turned into new and unexpected problems themselves. To take an example at random, modern medicine has decreased the incidence of death and increased the expectancy of life only to magnify the problem of overpopulation in the world. As it would be foolish, if not practically impossible, to declare a moratorium on medical progress, what should we do in such a demographic situation? Legalize "the pill" for birth control, legalize abortion, or do what? Whatever we do or even propose to do, we have conflicts on our hands, such as those heated ones between certain scientific and religious groups for or against population control. They say that sin is the most natural thing in the world. But, with apologies to St. Paul, conflict is more basic than sin, in that sin presupposes conflicts. Adam and Eve could not have sinned in the Garden of Eden, after all, unless they had experienced a conflict between obeying and disobeying God in the first place. In a word, the natural condition of man is *conflict*.

In order to set the problem of our daily conflicts — private and public, domestic and foreign, at summitry or below — in a larger perspective, let us first take a quick look at the roots of conflict in human nature so as to understand a little better why man's conflicts of interest are as natural to him as his breathing, and then take another quick look at how man's conscience approaches and tries to resolve them morally.

Man is so constituted by nature that two opposite tendencies are constan-

tly at work in his ordinary behavior. On the one hand, he is furnished with aggressive tendencies which make him act in favor of what he takes to be his own interests, but which in turn make others react in terms of what they take to be theirs. On the other hand, besides this action-reaction cycle of aggressiveness and resistance, man is furnished with gregarious tendencies which make him act and react in behalf of what he takes to be in the interest of others. Obviously, at a very early stage of life, the aggressive and gregarious tendencies of man are apt to clash, and do in fact, inasmuch as they represent natural impulses working in opposite directions. Thus the reason that man can be a divided soul morally is that he has a built-in divided nature biologically. Man is an animal, literally, but what distinguishes him from other animals is that *his natural anima* is divided against itself from start to finish.

Proof of the potential existence of a natural schism within man himself is that, at a certain stage of his relationship to society, the rift between his aggressive and gregarious tendencies comes out in the open. Before the arrival of that stage, man conforms to group custom and the schism within his animal nature lies dormant. On its arrival, man rebels against group custom and his inner conflicts get externalized in conduct in the shape of conflicting interests. But, since man's gregarious impulses are as rooted in his physiological makeup as his aggressive impulses, and since the two tendencies in their natural state compete with each other for dominance, it follows that all human conflict is ultimately traceable to *their* mutual clash within man himself, rather than simply to what Kant has in mind, to wit, the "mutual opposition" in society stemming from man's instinctive aggressiveness *alone*.

If man were by nature either aggressive or gregarious, period, his life would be much simpler than it is. Even to say simply that man is *both* will not do, unless we recognize frankly that his two natural tendencies are at potential or actual war with each other. Man's aggressive tendencies get him into overt trouble with others, but his gregarious tendencies get him into inner conflict with his own aggressiveness. Now, in view of the fact that the natural condition of man is such that it puts him in an uneasy state of conflict with himself as well as with others, there is no doubt that the tremendous problem for him throughout his life is, essentially, how to get out of his natural state of conflict concretely. This is no easy task.

We have already said that compromise is the political way out of conflicts of interest in life, and sometimes this method of settling issues works. But we have ample evidence from past and current history that compromises, as those reached at the summit by heads of state (to allude to the ones affecting millions of people), do not always work, not to mention our moral hesitation

to compromise on principles. The reason for our failures in reaching working compromises is not due, however, to conflict *per se*, but ultimately to the finite nature of man, whose possibilities of success are limited. For the unique thing about conflict is its two-way character. Like Janus in Roman mythology, conflict faces in two directions, one signifying success, the other signifying failure.

Conflict is not only the major source of human failure, it is also the major source of human success. However sobering the rebuff to human vanity conveyed by the unflattering statement that history is, "among other things, the cemetery of human hopes",³ it is equally true that history is their *cradle*, which is one of the other things that history is. This should not be forgotten even in our somber moments, if we are to respect the multidimensional feature of human history. In any case, without the challenging and agonizing element of conflict, men could not succeed or fail in meeting the personal difficulties confronting them in daily life, nor for that matter could they succeed or fail on a larger scale with their novel experiments in international cooperation and repeated attempts at global compromise. They would just vegetate. In a word, conflict is the very *ferment* of man's life. To the extent that this is so, Kant is right in his insistence on the melioristic import of conflict in human history, but he is wrong in not recognizing sufficiently that the very phenomenon which can make men better than a beast can make them worse as well, unfortunately. In addition to the bright side of the story of man, there is a dark side which makes him (despite the Psalmist), not "a little lower than the angels", but much lower than the beasts.

The beasts have their own problems, of course, but conflicts are *the* problems of men. The conflicts of nations are the conflicts of individuals writ large and politically. If the political conflicts of the former are settled by compromise or balance of power, how are the moral conflicts of the latter handled? The answer to this question of questions involves, to put it metaphorically, the birth and strategy of conscience in moral life.

However lofty the destiny of moral conscience may be, its appearance in human experience has humble origins. An infant begins by liking some things and fearing others, but he soon learns from hard experience that some of the things liked (e.g., touching the attractive flame) hurt him, and that some of the things feared (e.g., taking a medicine) benefit him. Out of the former sort of self-defeating experiences men arrive at the proverbial truth, "The burnt child dreads the fire", while out of the latter sort of self-correcting

³ COHEN, MORRIS R., *The meaning of human history* (La Salle: Open Court, 1947), p. 294.

experiences they learn that things originally feared may be "blessings in disguise" in the end. Moreover, if the child (say) likes to eat, but likes to stay slim at the same time, he or she (especially the latter as a grown-up in certain cultures) may find that the two desires are incompatible with each other: She can't have her cake and keep her figure, too. The problem is further complicated when the child eventually learns that what is useful to him may be harmful to others: "One man's food is another man's poison". To make matters even worse, he also learns to his chagrin that his food at one time may become his own poison at another. Out of all such difficulties inherent in natural wants and fears their uncertainty as to utility, their lack of compatibility and uniformity — men's conflicts of interest gradually take form and become in due course transformed by a refining process which renders them, hopefully, susceptible of reasonable management. When that happens, our conflicting interests are no longer morally neutral; they become morally significant and subject to critical examination and personal evaluation. It is such refining process of transforming conflicting interests into moral terms which signals the birth of conscience in human affairs. Its birth is accompanied by a new strategy for judging and tackling the problems of men.

To illustrate, suffering (like the proverbial rain) indiscriminately falls to the just and the unjust, that is, to each and every man, but the new strategy of conscience lies precisely in discriminating the suffering of the two. Needless to add, the strategy of conscience does not appear to be so powerful in human history as the strategy of arms, but it has a stubborn inner power of its own which should not be underestimated. The cynical doctrine that "might makes right" would go completely unchallenged in the world if its exponents did not have a pang of conscience about it and its opponents did not resist it for the same reason. For aught we know, as in the case of an individual person, the clear conscience of a nation may be her most powerful tool in the final analysis.

Prior to the birth of moral conscience, conflicts of interest may be said to be polarized wholly on the economic plane; in other words, they are in essence conflicts between the useful and the harmful. Once conscience appears on the human scene, however, these conflicts get transformed *formaliter* into either (a) conflicts between good and bad, or (b) conflicts between right and wrong. Thus, the original conflicts of interest are moralized and get translated into two distinct moral languages, each of which has its own preferential accent. Conflicts stated in good-bad terms put the accent on the desirable; those stated in right-wrong terms put the accent on the dutiful. If we view the prime function of conscience as one of refining morally the raw materials

of human nature its aggressive and gregarious tendencies — then it could be said that the accent on the desirable gives primacy to the moralization of man's aggressive tendencies, while the accent on the dutiful does the same thing for the moralization of his gregarious tendencies. Viewed in the light of the history of ethics, the accent on the desirable is basic to John Stuart Mill's ethics of happiness, while the accent on the dutiful is basic to Kant's ethics of duty.

Nevertheless, if "mutual affection" is worth while in moral life (as Kant one and only generic problem of morality for both theories of ethics boils down to the Problem of Evil. Whether, *formaliter*, moral conflict is stated with Mill in terms of "good *versus* bad", or with Kant in terms of "right *versus* wrong", in either case the over-all problem of morality is addressed exclusively to the problem of *evil*, that is, to the (epic) problem of overcoming evil with good. But, this restriction of the theoretical office of ethics to the moral problem of evil takes completely for granted that there is only one mode of moral conscience, namely, the *epic*, and consequently neglects its other mode, the *tragic*. Before showing the reason for differentiating the tragic mode of conscience from its epic mode, why has the moral problem of evil received so much attention in the literature of the field, and the moral problem of good so little? The answer is not difficult, once the question is considered from a purely practical standpoint.

In the first place, quite apart from their naive theoretical quality, all the decalogues and catechisms in the world, for obvious practical reasons, are concerned primarily (and rightly) with one problem basically: how to prevent man from falling into the trap of evil. In the second place, traditional morality and traditional religion usually join forces in the conquest of evil. That is why Moses (or his counterparts in other faiths) is listened to as a moral teacher, and why the traditional content of morals is oriented towards problems of evil and sin (which is ultimate evil to the old theology). In the third place, the whole business of morality and religion (in contrast with art, science and philosophy) is of a practical nature bearing directly on our weal and woe, even though it deals with momentous matters of conscience and the spirit. Now, since the strategy of conscience is in principle applicable to problems of evil, and not (as we shall see) to problems of good, it is no mystery that the epic mode of conscience is exalted as worth while and its tragic mode is relegated to oblivion as worthless. In the fourth and last place, moral philosophers as a rule have been just as concerned as Moses and the Prophets with the Problem of Evil, except that their concern has been more theoretical than practical.

The net result of all this is, to repeat what we anticipated at the outset, an unavowed reductionism in the initial and controlling problem of ethics, affecting the very definition of ethics as a field of inquiry and the very scope of moral conflicts. The worst consequence of such topical reductionism in ethics is its failure to come to grips with the complexity of moral life in all its bearings, tragic as well as epic. If ethics is defined in the traditional manner of the standard works on the subject, that is, as a discipline dealing with human conduct in terms of conflicts between good and evil, what makes the moral life so complex is missed to a significant degree. Ethics, therefore, needs to be redefined so as to include within its purview *all* types of moral conflict, if it is to be relevant to life in its entirety.

Our practical interest in arriving at the causes of conflict in national and international life will be better served, in my opinion, if scholars in ethics first take care of the preliminary theoretical job of classifying adequately the various types of moral conflict which may be analyzed out of strictly human situations. Etiology of conflicts presupposes their typology. A proper anatomy of life's conflicts is not only important to moral theory, it is important also to moral practice itself. Just as in the pursuit of knowledge we are learning increasingly that the appropriate method to be used in solving a cognitive problem depends on the particular nature of its subject matter, similarly, in the sphere of action we must learn that the appropriate strategy to be employed in resolving a conflict problem depends equally on its specific type. Otherwise, we are going to continue to find, to our great disappointment and frustration, that a strategic plan of action relevant to one set of conflicts may be quite irrelevant to another.

Materialiter, moral conflicts are legion, but *formaliter* they fall into three primary classes: (a) the epic class (good-versus-bad, or right-versus-wrong), (b) the comparative class (better-versus-worse), and (c) the tragic class (good-versus-good, or right-versus-right). The first or "epic" class, as already indicated, comprises what most individuals and most of the literature in the field regard as the nature of moral conflict, and so needs no further elaboration. (As to why we describe it with the aesthetic term "epic", this will be explained shortly.) With respect to the second or "comparative" class of moral conflict, the nature of which is more or less self-explanatory, the important thing about it is this: although such conflicts involve situations which require more reflection and more decision-making on the part of anyone who is faced with a choice between better or worse alternatives of action, the conflict between them is reducible in principle to the first or "epic" class. Once a person decides which course of action is better and which is worse, the former becomes accordingly in his eyes the good or the right, and the latter

the bad or the wrong. A better-versus-worse type of conflict is definitely solvable in principle, no matter how much more difficult in practice than a conflict between good and bad, right and wrong. In short, both types of moral conflict are species of the same genus; with evil in various guises as their common enemy and the triumph of good as their common aim.

This leaves the third or "tragic" class of moral conflict, which has to do with the problem of good in life. As I have pointed out elsewhere,⁴ probably the most abused and misunderstood words in our vocabulary are "tragedy" and "tragic". Most men (including, alas, philosophers) persist in confusing the term "tragic" with the term "pathetic". The two terms have nothing in common except suffering, but even so there is a world of difference between the uncompromising suffering of a tragic figure (e.g., the Sophoclean Antigone) and the undeserved suffering of a pathetic figure (e.g., Job in the Old Testament before his final rescue). And speaking of suffering, there is likewise a difference between the suffering of either of these protagonists and the undaunted suffering of an epic hero (e.g., the Homeric Odysseus and the Virgilian Aeneas).

In order to understand why we have described struggles between good and evil as "epic" in character, and those between at least two goods (rights, duties, ideals, etc.) as "tragic", let us look more closely as to what makes them "epic" and "tragic", respectively. This should help to clarify at the same time the difference between the two modes of conscience, epic and tragic.

An epic situation is one where the content of the conflict is "contravalent" (positive-versus-negative) in form and appears *avoidable* in context: the person involved may choose the good and eschew the evil, without suffering the consequences of a fatal choice. If the person chooses the good and carries it out in action, he becomes a hero for having made the right choice. If he makes the wrong choice, he is *guilty of evil*. An epic situation, therefore, is morally simple in principle, though not necessarily so in practice. On the other hand, a tragic situation is one where the content of the conflict is "bivalent" (positive-versus-positive) in form and appears *unavoidable* in context: the person involved is torn morally between two irreconcilable goods or duties (not between good and evil), and whichever good he chooses makes him *guilty of good* for having chosen that good at the expense of the other. The tragic figure is stuck, can't win, and has to pay the price for his fatal choice through sacrifice, whatever it be, including his or her life.

⁴ ROMANELL, Patrick, "Medicine and the Precariousness of Life", *Philosophy forum*, vol. 8, no. 2, December, 1969, p. 10.

Restated, a tragic situation is a situation in which one good clashes with another, hence the unavailability of the conflict between them and the inevitability of failure. Why the unavailability of the first and the inevitability of the second? Well, one can tell himself or others to avoid evil and he or they may succeed, but one can't tell himself or others to avoid good. For good by definition is something to be sought rather than shunned. But, in a tragic situation, a person is caught between choosing one good and another but conflicting good, and the inevitable result is failure because in committing himself to one good he can't help but fail to satisfy the other. Hence, the peculiar logic of tragedy does not permit the reconciliation of the irreconcilable. This, *in nuce*, is the Problem of Good in the drama of life as in the life of drama. Think for a moment, for instance, of Radamès in Verdi's *Aida*, and of the late Duke of Windsor, who chose to sacrifice the British throne for the woman he loved, and the predicament of a tragic conscience will become evident at once.

It should be clear by now why the strategy of conscience is applicable to epic situations and problems of evil, but not applicable to tragic situations and problems of good. The tragic problem of good, in contrast to the epic problem of evil, is the insoluble problem of human life. Whereas conscience in its epic mode makes heroes or villains of us all, in the tragic mode, however, it makes supreme failures of us all. Now, inasmuch as man's moral guide has no strategy for the tragedy of life, the only answer of conscience to the unanswerable is catharsis of the soul.

We wish to close the paper by showing how the differences we have made between epic and tragic types of conflict in moral life manifest themselves culturally in certain contemporary thinkers and philosophers representative of the two Americas. Man is a cultural animal. Nature is man's general home, to be sure, but culture is his special habitat. What the sea is to fish, culture is to man. Students of cultural anthropology refer to the "focus" of a culture, by which is meant that particular aspect of it which receives more extensive elaboration than the other aspects. In the first chapter of my book, *Making of the Mexican mind*, I attempted to explain that, while the focus of Anglo-America is on the epic side of life, the focus of Ibero-America is on its tragic side. What I would like to make clear now is how this focal difference in life styles gets expressed philosophically in the two Americas, and how the difference itself is of the utmost bearing on our present discussion of man and the conflicts of life.

William James is considered by many the most characteristic philosopher of my country. In his book, *Pragmatism*, he declares flatly, to quote his own

words, that "the world appears as something more epic than dramatic", makes reference to its "epic history", and finds complete satisfaction with living "in this moralistic and epic kind of a universe".⁵ Such accent on life as an epic, evident in his classic work, should be no surprise at all. James lived in a world of Pilgrims, conquerors of Plymouth Rock; in a world of Pioneers, conquerors of the Frontier; and in a world of Puritans, conquerors of Sin. His descendants now live in a world of Astronauts, conquerors of Space. There is no doubt that William James, an epic soul *par excellence* of Anglo-America, is her *vox populi* on the philosophical plane, since he looks at life and its conflicts in precisely the same terms as the great majority of her people so far. Life for them is a constant battle to conquer obstacles, no matter where (on earth or on the moon), and to overcome evil in whatever ugly shape it appears, the end in view being "the Great Society".

Of all the Anglo-American philosophers, the most influential in academic circles has been John Dewey. In his masterpiece, *Experience and Nature*, he makes a passing but most telling reference to tragedy in relation to the precariousness of existence and life. "The problem of evil", he writes, "is a well recognized problem, while we rarely or never hear of a problem of good."⁶ By identifying contextually tragedy with the problem of evil, Dewey does not realize that tragedy coincides instead with the problem of good. The problem of good and the problem of tragedy are one and the same problem.

This mistake on Dewey's part reflects the popular misconception regarding the nature of tragedy, but in his case the misconception is strange in a way, because in another work of his, entitled *Ethics*, he gives a brief but discerning sketch of a situation in life involving the tragic kind of moral struggle, though he does not call it such. He uses for illustration the plight of the genuine conscientious objector, who, like Antigone of Sophoclean fame, "is torn between two duties":⁷ loyalty to his country (patriotism) and loyalty to his religion (pacifism). Dewey, however, makes use of the case of the conscientious objector only to demonstrate what specific type of moral conflict serves as "the occasion of moral theory" and what specific type does not. In other words, he sees tragic situations in life as of great theoretical import to a personal and a reflective morality, but he does not pay enough attention to the fact that they are the occasion of moral *agony* as much as of moral *theory*. If Dewey had put less emphasis on his epic conception of conflict as an

⁵ JAMES, William, *Pragmatism* (London: Longmans, Green, 1907), pp. 144, 294, 296.

⁶ DEWEY, John, *Experience and nature* (Chicago: Open Court, 1926), p. 45.

⁷ DEWEY, John and TUFTS, James H., *Ethics* (New York: Holt, 1932), p. 174.

indispensable source of intellectual challenge to problem-solving and ingenuity, and had he put more emphasis on conflict as an unavoidable source of unresolved perplexity and unmitigated anguish in life, he would have come to the realization that the tragic problem of good is not such a rare phenomenon after all. But the reason that he does not is that he also, like his famous colleague William James, was too imbued with the epic spirit of his native land to have much commerce with the agony and tragedy of life. Epic souls everywhere (not solely, by the way, in the U.S.A.) are so busy overcoming obstacles to the good life that they are bent on even conquering the unconquerable.

As an historical preface to the tragic focus on life in Latin America, we quote the pertinent words of the respected Mexican historian, Justo Sierra, concerning the cultural origins of his nation: "We Mexicans are the sons of two countries and two races. We were born of the Conquest; our roots are in the land where the aborigines lived and in the soil of Spain. This fact rules our whole history; to it we owe our soul".⁸

Mutatis mutandis, this historical generalization about Mexico applies more or less to the complicated story of all Latin America, Spanish and Portuguese. Just as the epic sense of life in Anglo-America is correlated with her *single* British heritage, so the tragic sense of life in Ibero-America is correlated with her *dual* heritage. Sierra does not spell out explicitly the tragic ingredient of the Mexican soul, but it is implicit in its inheritance of conflicting cultures — Indian and Spanish, in particular — both of which are good in their own way but are difficult to harmonize because they clash in their respective ideals of life. Apropos of all this, two decisive confirmations — one direct and one indirect — may be obtained from a countryman and admirer of Sierra's, Samuel Ramos.

As to the direct confirmation, it is found in Ramos' major work on the "profile" of Mexican culture and the cultural *mestizaje* in Latin America as a whole. Citing Rubén Darío, who once cried that his soul was torn "between the Cathedral and the pagan ruins", Ramos then comments with approval on the Nicaraguan poet's cry as an appropriate "image of the drama of America". Ramos means by "America" (from the context) his own America of course, and by "drama" he is referring to the intrinsic difficulties of her two dissimilar cultures (Christian and Pagan) "on meeting to form a new synthesis".⁹

⁸ SIERRA, Justo, *The political evolution of the Mexican people* (tr., Charles Ramsdell; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), p. 62.

⁹ RAMOS, Samuel, *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México*, 2nd. ed. (Mexico City: Editorial Pedro Robredo, 1938), pp. 118-119.

Turning next to the indirect but even more revealing confirmation in Ramos of the focus on tragedy in Latin America, it appears in a critical study of his on Giovanni Papini, the contemporary Italian writer and pragmatist who eventually became a convert to Roman Catholicism. Ramos refers to him as "the tragic philosopher" and offers the following sympathetic analysis of Papini's tragic situation as a conscientious agnostic: "Papini was religious from the beginning of his spiritual adventures. He was a man athirst for faith, but who could not believe. His tragedy consisted in the clash between a great need for faith and an enormous critical power which made him sink constantly into doubt".¹⁰ Clearly, the conscientious agnostic has the same tragic problem, *formaliter*, as the conscientious objector, the difference being *materialiter*. But, what is relevant to our present purposes is the *tonal* difference between the manner Dewey the Yankee handles the problem of the latter and Ramos the Mexican handles the problem of the former.

As I see it, the Latin American philosopher who perhaps throws the greatest light on the tragedy of life is Carlos Vaz Ferreira of Uruguay. According to his frankly ethical approach to history, the entangled story of humanity consists of a cumulative series of restless efforts on its part to add more and more ideals to life, a necessary concomitant of which is their unavoidable "clash". This very phenomenon signifies for him that the ideals accumulated by mankind in the course of its long history are "only partly reconcilable" at best; therefore, "it is generally necessary to sacrifice in part some or all of them".¹¹ He gives many historical examples of these "clashes of ideals", but time does not permit our going into them. Most of them are pretty familiar anyway, and what is important about them is their telling implication for a tragic conception of moral conflict as against its prevailing epic conception presupposed by the popular and technical works on morals and ethics. In fact, Vaz Ferreira comes to the crucial conclusion that, as a result of the many "clashes of ideals" in history, humanity has been working out for itself a corresponding type of morality to fit, which he calls "*moral conflictual*". Whether Vaz Ferreira is reading too much of his conflict type of morality into the story of humanity, his refreshing attempt at a tragic view of human history has no room for Utopia. On the other hand, it does not spell hopeless pessimism, either. Fortunately, the Uruguayan philosopher is that kind of moral realist who is a genuine idealist.

To sum up, let us say in closing that we have compared the difference in

¹⁰ RAMOS, Samuel, *Hipótesis* (Mexico City: "Ulises", 1928), p. 59.

¹¹ VAZ FERREIRA, Carlos, *Estudios filosóficos* (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 1961), pp. 273, 274.

the spiritual horizon of the two Americas in order to call attention to the current need of developing a comprehensive conception of moral conflict, and in order to appreciate better what human life is all about. Life on the moral plane is too complex in nature to be understood, automatically, as either thoroughly rational or thoroughly absurd. And yet, the conflicts inherent in life itself are sufficiently heterogeneous to lend themselves to both epic and tragic elaboration, as evident on comparing the distinct cultures of the two Americas. The value of comparison as an intellectual tool is that it furnishes us (as Ortega once said with a nice figure of speech) "a pair of tweezers for the capturing of a fine truth".¹² The "fine truth" which we have been trying to recapture throughout this essay is that there is no "perfect solution" to the problems of moral life. Man's life has its tragic as well as its epic side, and it takes the two put together to give us a sense of its utter complexity.

¹² ORTEGA Y GASSET, José, *Invertebrate Spain* (tr., Mildred Adams; New York: Norton, 1937), p. 92.