

Case Against Adversaryism

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This tape will be entitled “The Case Against Adversaryism” and is designed for the Convention to be held on August 10th of this year.

As we look across the universe as far as we can see it and understand it, as we look across our own world considering the various kingdoms—the mineral, the vegetable, the animal, and as far as we know the history of mankind and even as he functions today, the principle of force occupies the sovereign position. Among the sidereal bodies, they are coerced by the force of gravity, as far as we can understand it, or if one object may strike another and determine the future course of the two bodies, this is an example of the principle of force. As we look at the mineral kingdom here, determination is by volcanic action, earthquake, storm, and other forces. And as we look into the vegetable kingdom, one individual or species survives because it can do so by its own vital assertion repelling and overcoming other living vegetable forms. And in the animal kingdom, one group survives because it has the force to do so—the male creatures fight and he who wins determines whose genes shall dominate in the future, and one who is strong lives by his capacity to destroy another animal and consume him. And so it is in the history of mankind, so far as we know it, that those survive as individuals, as races, or clans, or nations who have the strength to do so and the others go down; and even today, though other principles are struggling for ascendancy, still, force is the sovereign determinant. Every nation stands armed if not for the purposes of aggression at least for the purpose of repelling aggression; and it is not safe for any nation to take any other stand. And as we go into an analysis of our culture, we find this principle of force determinant, still, in field after field. Even in our courts, the principle of adversaryism is dominant in the effort to achieve adjudication—an extension on a mental level of the principle of trial by combat which ruled among more primitive peoples, but it still remains the same principle of force though carried to a higher or mental level. It is implied in our business relationships, even enforced by law, that one business or industrial entity shall have the relationship of adversary with respect to other individuals or industrial entities. And it enters in as a dominant principle in our sports, an activity in which the aim is to win at the price of loss to the other fellow.

Long ago, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted this fact of the predominance of force as the sovereign determinant in nature, as the first stasis of nature. But he noted a second fact, that there is the principle of reason that can achieve sovereignty in place of the sovereignty of force, and that this was a second stage in the evolution of mankind. Aurobindo, in his essay on Heraclitus¹ concurs with him so far, but he affirms that there is a third principle which he defines as the principle of the divine *ananda* that can ultimately be the sovereign principle governing man, and through the primacy of man

¹ Aurobindo Ghose, *Heraclitus*, in vol. 16 of the *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centennial Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 335-371.

become more and more the principle which governs in all of nature. I would suggest here that we might also view the principle of compassion, as defined in *The Voice of the Silence* as that which tends to bring about harmony in all things, as an alternative view to that of Aurobindo; perhaps the two views could be combined and united in one whole.

Now, as we look at the history of mankind, we find indeed that there is a growth of the principle of reason which has developed along with the principle of force, and that as the principle of reason becomes stronger and stronger through science and philosophy, it tends to become more and more determinant. But there is a great lag on the human level so that while one portion of humanity is oriented to the principle of reason, another, connected primarily with the governments of the world, is more largely still oriented to the principle of coercion.

On the animal and human levels, the principle of determination by force manifests as war. In the case of the animals, there is war between the carnivora and the herbivora, and among the males there is the war for dominance. On the human level, there is the war between nations, between classes, and between those who seek to win at the cost of loss to those who lose. In contrast, in the development of a scientific view of the world, there is emerging the principle of reason taken in its broadest sense. I'm well aware that the development of science involves two factors, namely, that of observation and of theoretical integration, but all of this in a broad sense is the emergence of the principle of reason as a dominant factor in determination. This is carried preeminently by a certain class in the human whole more evolved than the rest; but, at the same time, so far as man is to be considered as a mass, the principle of conflict or determination by force still occupies a predominant place.

Now, elite man has achieved the capacity to unlock monumental forces in nature and place them at the disposal of the human will, such as the power resident in the atom. This has meant not only that a new source of energy is available for peaceful pursuits, but also for the purpose of intensifying power in conflict. And as this power is of such a monumental sort that it could render life in this world impossible, it is a dangerous situation where man is still so dominated by the adversary principle. If the adversary principle had been successfully subjugated to another principle of cooperation, this discovery of a monumental power would not represent a hazard but a beneficent agency. In this connection, my thought is carried back to a statement in *The Secret Doctrine* to the effect that mankind is trailing in his evolution 150,000 years. In other words, it is there asserted that the development of humanity is in accordance with the movement of certain cycles in nature and that if the humanity does not keep up with the cycles in his own individual and collective development, there is a distortion. I think we can see this in this situation in which there is unlocked extraordinary power by one portion of the human whole while the rest of the humanity lags in a relative primitive or barbaric orientation.

Now, the thesis which I present here is in part this: that in the age of atomic power, adversaryism is a retention of a principle of force that is incompatible with this unlocked power. It therefore becomes necessary that the principle of determination by being adversaries should be replaced by the next step in the evolution, namely, the universal replacement of force by rational determination. This would mean that in all of the various conflicts of interest there would not be the employment of force or violence to accomplish the results, but rather the working out of formulae for the adjudication of

relative interests. An example would be the relationship between the laborers and those who contribute the intelligence and economic resources in production. Today, the problems or differences between the interests of these groups is solved by force, namely, the strike rather than by rational adjudication which would be by working out formulas essentially in the mathematical spirit. This is only one example. We see people coming together under the guidance of certain ideas, and even though they are in a minority, they seek to enthrone their ideas by violence not by rational discussion and intercourse. All of this produces a situation that is much less than truly civilized. Actually the life organization, the social organization in the human world today, is not a true civilization because the principle of adversaryism is dominant. It rather is an intellectual barbarism at best, and at worst a state of savagery. What I am asserting is that to become civilized is to reject the principle of adversaryism as the prime determinant in all activities and affairs and to replace it by the principle of rational determination. To some extent, of course, we can see rational determination being employed to overcome the fundamental attitude of adversaryism, and that is all to the good. But we are not as far along as we should be; in a massive sense, we are lagging. We are acting in ways that are primitive rather than rational and responsible.

Consider, now, the three potentially dominant principles: of force, reason, and of *ananda*-compassion; and let us suggest the guiding principles in each case. I think we can see rather clearly that in the case of determination by force, the guiding principle is hate and anger; in the case of reason, it is orientation to truth; and in the case of *ananda*-compassion, it is orientation to love and peace. It makes a great deal of difference which principle rules. Hate and anger are qualities that, no doubt, can be productive in their way. They can arouse considerable energy, in some cases even a supreme effort, but the direction which this takes is towards darkness and ultimate death. It involves the manifestation of the very worst features in human nature. No doubt, in the concrete situations of our conflicts, the quality of hate-anger may be modified by reason of the fact that human beings are a complex of many motivations. Few are wholly dark in their motivation, but the dark element is present here and stains, ultimately, any good motivation that may be underlying the use of force. One cannot serve light, truth, and goodness by vicious means without denigrating the ultimate effect into a quality that is dark and evil. One of the most serious heresies ever advanced by man is the heresy that *the end justifies the means*. The means employed will ultimately determine the end in what is probably major degree as Emerson noted when he said the end is resident in the means.²

Two large movements in the world history, one which fortunately is of the past, have employed this principle. They are the Spanish Inquisition and, today, the Marxist dialectic materialistic movement. And we have seen what massive cruelties have been justified by this dogma. The principle that the end justifies the means is a dark and evil principle. The means employed may well be more determinant as to the result than the theoretical purpose in the mind of the one who employed these means. Good ends cannot be achieved by dark and evil instrumentation. No doubt, to bring about good effects in this

² Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Compensation" in *Essays: First Series* (Boston: James Munroe and Co., 1841):

Cause and effect, means and ends, seed and fruit cannot be severed; for the effect already blooms in the cause, the end preexists in the means, the fruit in the seed.

sordid world, suffering may be unavoidable, but there is a world of difference between imposing suffering upon others in order to effect change and imposing suffering upon oneself to effect that change. The latter is the way that was followed by Mahatma Gandhi. One need not be ineffective, as Gandhi proved so well. He, by applying to himself the principle of self-suffering, was a prime force in effecting the independence of India.

I have no doubt that determination by force will be a factor in the life of this world for some time to come, but what I am urging is that we take the attitude of disparaging this principle as the determinant one, that we cease to heap honors upon those who operate by the principle of force or adversaryism. We should not honor the athletes who operate through the principle of determination by force, nor the military mind. We should look upon all of this as an expression of primitivity. In this connection, my thought goes back to something that I learned in high school days in the study of ancient history. It was at the time of a Persian incursion into Greece. I think it was under the King known as Xerxes. He advanced up to the Hellespont and had to cross that barrier to enter Greece. So he started the crossing of his troops in boats, but a storm came up and masses of boats were wrecked and soldiers lost. He was so angered that he ordered his remaining troops to take whips and lash the waves since they had presumed to act counter to his will. This is a supreme expression of the irrational force-oriented spirit. One masters nature by understanding her laws and by acting in accordance with them, and this is a rational approach.

But though the action of Xerxes, no doubt, will appear ridiculous to us, that it is merely a tantrum of a spoiled brat who happened to carry the crown upon his head, yet we find action in popular electorates that are not much different from that. Take for instance our present energy crisis precipitated by the oil cartel countries. ...judged from the news sources have risen in anger against the petroleum companies because they produced this sort of situation and they have sought a resolution of the problem by what is equivalent to a lashing of the energy companies, a punishing of them because they permitted a depletion of energy to occur. This is just as ridiculous as the action of Xerxes. In point of fact, the energy companies had warned us that we were facing shortage in petroleum resources, but the people ignored this fact and would not believe until the brute realities faced them. Reason would act otherwise. Reason would see the problem, or see the situation as a problem, and see it beforehand and take steps accordingly.

Again, we honor the manifestation of adversaryism in our sports. This is something which we should in fact discourage because it cultivates the attitude of trying to solve problems by the principle of force instead of by the principle of reason and sensible accommodation. We should take a position of discouraging in every field the principle of adversaryism. I know that by the balance of forces certain things can be achieved. I know that in the theory of *laissez-faire* regarding industrial and business activity, that the principle of balance of forces was implied. But there are other ways of accomplishing these results and we should strive in every way we can to seek them. To be sure, conflict may arouse resources in one that ordinarily are not aroused, and that under the condition of conflict, competition, and adversaryism in general, there is an arousal of energy that otherwise would tend to lie sleeping. But there are other ways of arousing energy; among them is the love of truth for its own sake. The orientation to compassion can arouse as intense an effort as any other motivation whatsoever and, indeed, may do more than any other motivation could arouse. The great effort put forth

by the Blessed One, Gautama Buddha, towards the handling of the problem of humanity was not aroused by the force of adversaryism, but by that of compassion. So I say unto you, orient toward this principle and reject, as far as is possible and in all relations, the principle of adversaryism or war.