Is Conflict Inevitable?
**Rationale**

Conflict: the varied, destructive, unchallenged and unstoppable force that has shaped who we are today. It is the inevitable outcome of pride, righteousness, tenacity and possessiveness woven throughout history and immediate life, which is relished and feared in equal measure.

Persepolis, 330 BCE; Crécy, 1337; the Battle of Blenheim, 1704; Pearl Harbour, 1941; the clashes of power-holders permeate our past, and have done so since the dawn of the human race. While civilisation today may appear different to what it was ten thousand years ago, the spark of conflict is the same—humans crave survival: survival requires dominance: dominance is fuelled by resources, whether they be meat, land, oil, or public support. It is the fear of the loss of power that drives this savagery.

However, conflict does not have to be on such a large scale. Domestic and personal conflicts are equally damaging, but more often forgotten.

I for one have been appalled and yet intrigued by conflicts in my life; whether they be in far-flung countries or on the path I tread each day. What drives the actions of the perpetrators? What warped, primitive instinct lives on today? I was determined to delve until I found the truth.

All that conflict needs for fuel is one creature, and some scrap of external influence. No more. Therefore, it is clear that conflict is inevitable. But how can the human race dampen this raging flame?

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**What is Conflict?**

Put simply, conflict is a disagreement of two parties with opposing beliefs.

However, it can also be characterized by a misunderstanding on one side, an aversion to a singular party, or opposing emotions.
History of Conflict

Personal Analysis: Conflict is embedded in our past, but brought alive today. No matter what scale, the sparks of the conflict always came from the same fire; that of fear, disagreement and jealousy. These base values still exist; no matter how many outside influences we introduce (usually religion, resources or disdain for another’s actions).

Drawing a Contrast:

The New Zealand Musket Wars

These wars, centred on the controversial purchase of Maori land by European settlers, ownership disputes and intertribal conflict, raged in the early 1800’s, fuelled greatly by the introduction of the musket from England.

The wars have been described as a prime example of fatal impact theory in practice, which refers to the actions of the Maori in ‘grabbing as many muskets as possible and killing as many as possible’ in the aftermath of European settlement. However, these muskets did not determine the future of the wars: they allowed them to escalate, nothing more.

Arctic Resource Race

The race between countries to gain a hold on Arctic oil resources can be likened in many ways to the Musket Wars.

Again, it is a contest of power founded on past economic inequality and a desire to gain dominance to ensure survival—entirely inevitable. If this dispute does not blossom into a war, then we can infer that our leaders have learnt from events in the past—a simple solution to the problem of conflict. Analysis and a desire not to fall into the same trap can work wonders. If not, we can expect a repeat of history.

‘To understand the basis of conflict, all you really need to do is study two people living together. Sooner or later, even if they have the best of intentions, situations will arise that emphasize their different outlooks and needs. When these differences are not addressed, conflicts will inevitably follow.’

History of Conflict
Part I- Internal Conflict

Internal conflict is the primary form of conflict, simply because it only requires a single individual and one form of external influence to take place.

It is defined as the presence of two opposing forces within one’s mind, which can lead to indecision, anguish and violence.

Conflict: My Experiences/A Personal Perspective

Like any other adolescent, I have experienced my fair share of internal conflict, and one lesson have I learnt: Conflict determines how we live our moments to come, which makes humans vulnerable to manipulation. The sorry case is, many have learnt how to exploit this weakness, whether by design or intuition to achieve dominance. As the fight for survival hinges on dominance, and dominance survives by manipulation, this form of conflict is inevitable; but that is no reason why it cannot be dampened or minimised.

In recent times I have become acquainted with a certain individual, who shall remain anonymous, who has opened my eyes to the realms of this entirely inner conflict not touched by the physical world, save for its influences. Through the careful, disguised gathering and sharing of supposedly confidential information, the twisting of tales and exploitation of perceived weaknesses the said person allowed me to weave myself into knots of uncertainty, doubt and regret that was unnecessary. Though I shall not elaborate, the only identifiable causes of this scavenging were superficial, and therefore weak; but are hallmarks of this form of conflict, which stems from one’s own insecurities. And, unless I am very much deluded or yet to be rudely enlightened, they had no lasting affect other than to induce my own caution. This was clearly a one-sided conflict; only one party harboured an issue, and by not forming it into words, allowed the problem to fester. Unfortunately this occurs all too often among the world’s youth.

This problem was solved with the support of close friends and family members, aided by talking to ensure that their views on my character were not being influenced by another’s fictional stories tethered to fact by a hair. Sadly, not all adolescents have this support, and when such a problem continues unabated it can be damaging to a person’s character and sense of security well into the future. But until we can eliminate all factors which motivated the perpetrator into action (usually other forms of conflict experienced at home) this conflict will remain inevitable.
Youth Conflict

The new generation: society’s everlasting hope for solving the problems created by their parents, yet the very people strongly affected by emotional turmoil and exposed to conflict on all sides.

It is inevitable that every individual will be subject to some form of conflict in their childhood or adolescence— the concentration of humans is far too great for unbroken peace. And, given the impressionable nature of the young, this idea of anger, violence and frustration due to the appearance of a barrier against their will is inevitably passed on. If youths are not taught methods to deal with conflict, then can we judge then for resorting to violence and the support of street gangs?

Fear motivates the young; these words from Shantigarbha, certified trainer in Nonviolent Communication, give an insight into this scenario:

‘I grew up fearing conflict, fearing strong emotions, fearing people throwing saucepans in the kitchen, fearing people leaving. And I spent my early life avoiding conflict – it was too painful for me to deal with.’

Part II - Superficial Conflict

The second group of conflict is superficial conflict. This is perhaps the most common conflict directed at one’s surrounds, but nonetheless is, in my opinion, the easiest to resolve.

Superficial conflict stems from jealousy, fear, or ignorance. Jealousy and ignorance are easily understood, but fear is less known. Fear enters the scene when an individual feels that they will be forced to relinquish their beliefs and culture by allowing another culture to become equal or dominant.

This form of conflict is often displayed as stereotypical comments, particularly in the young.
‘If thought through in detail war is perhaps the most illogical creation of mankind.’
Brown Brother/ A National Perspective

An inspirational speech by Mt. Roskill Grammar School prefect Joshua Iosefo (Samoan/Niuean) titled 'Brown Brother' has opened my country's eyes to the cultural discrimination which exists in our 'peaceful' nation.

Joshua's speech highlights some of the key issues that the Maori/Islander minority (perceived or otherwise) in New Zealand experiences today: preconceived stereotypes, whether real or imagined, impact youth's attitudes towards life and can limit their opportunities. It is a vicious cycle where each child learns from the example of a low standard commonly shown and accepted by its parents.

Joshua stresses the importance of aiming high and finding your own way in life, discarding views which pierce your esteem and sense of purpose.

His lyrics include: ‘I will always blame the government and everybody else around me but never myself — because I am brown.’

‘But can anyone explain? Will there ever be a time when our representation goes deeper than putting our own people to shame?’

Possible Solutions:

The best way to deal with conflict, for anybody, is to remove whatever is fuelling one's anger. Once this has gone, energy can be redirected into striving for understanding and from that, resolution. Simply speaking about a problem can put it into perspective. However, the conundrum lies in frustrations which go beyond the reach of reconciliation.

In this case, sport can be the best solution. The Afghanistan Rugby Federation was set up to promote positivity, determination and healthy competition in youngsters for the advancement of solidarity and social cohesion. The Federation has stated: ‘We do understand that sporting initiatives alone cannot stop or resolve conflict, but sport gives us an engaging and cost-effective medium for post-conflict relief work and peace building as well as future conflict prevention.’

In my experience, the best times were had at school when I worked and played sport in a team. We could share ideas and motivate one another, and the only criticisms aired had good intentions. We didn't think about racism or acknowledge our differences: we just supported each other, trying to have fun and win if we could. We were just a team trying to do our best. This makes incidents like the murder of 15-year-old New Zealander Stephen Dudley, beaten beyond recovery by opposing rugby players, even more disturbing.

Another method for preventing conflict in younger generations is education: learning from the past is a good way to ensure correct decisions in the future. The United World College of the American West offers an international baccalaureate diploma, with a special emphasis on peace studies and conflict resolution, with the goal of fostering respect for diverse cultural, social and religious backgrounds. This would have undoubted benefits for young adults, preventing the stereotyping and racial discrimination that is so prominent today.

Personal Analysis: Joseph Iosefo's words are at the height of truth. It is surprising that, given New Zealand is ranked as the 3rd most peaceful country on the globe by the Global Peace Index, superficial discrimination occurs so frequently in its communities. Are investigators putting too much emphasis on conflicts which escalate to a physical level?

Superficial conflict is potentially more damaging than moral conflict, as both parties cannot uphold their beliefs. In superficial conflict, one's beliefs are forced upon another in such a way that they shape the victim's everyday life. If this conflict were allowed to continue, a decrease in skilled, educated individuals and an increase in youth crime would be inevitable, due to youths setting themselves low standards and succumbing to discrimination, lowering their self-belief.
Tolerance is a form of surrender. It is not to surrender your beliefs, but to surrender your anger.
Part III - Moral Conflict

The third and final classification of conflict is moral conflict: the form most often brought to the attention of the media, and which plagues nations all over the world.

Moral conflict begins with a difference of predominantly beliefs. These can occur as priorities, perceived rights (for instance ownership of resources or land), religions, opposing cultures or disputes over the best actions to take against a problem.

So saying, it can be viewed as rather strange that, in trying to solve a conundrum, most people will create an entirely new complication through their own thinking.

The Syrian Situation/ A Global Perspective

100,000 human lives have been lost, and more than two million people displaced from their homes as a consequence of the Syrian Civil War, which began in 2011. The conflict began when 15 youths were arrested for displaying anti-government behaviour, and tensions escalated to full-blown riots as the public argued for peace, democracy and greater freedom. The Syrian Government, led by Bashar al-Assad, sidestepped their responsibility to consider all arguments and opened fire on civilians. When peaceful demonstrations continued, and the armed forces again attacked innocent protesters, the public began to cry out for Assad’s resignation. Tensions have risen onto an international level after allegations that chemical weapons were used against the country’s own people by their leaders.

Personal Analysis:

The conflict in Syria is an example of stereotypical moral conflict, in a nation where centralised power reigns, and decisions contradict public wishes.

If this civil war were to continue unabated, another world war may adorn the history books. The intervention of a neutral third party is necessary; however, I believe that the delusions and mistakes of the current Government have put them beyond redemption. By sparking conflict in a peaceful manner, the public in Syria has assured their victory. By striking back at possible progress, Assad has ensured his downfall.
Another example of moral conflict is the massacres which occurred in Sudan as a result of disagreement over resources and superiority.

Oil from reservoirs in the south of Sudan was extracted for companies in the North and sold to China. However, the majority of the oil well workers inhabited the South, and were dismayed when they received no benefits from the oil sales while the North experienced a period of prosperity. In addition, ethnic tension already existed in the country because of the perceived superiority of those with a pale skin tone, and oppressive measures taken by the Sudanese Government. The second Sudanese civil war ensued.

Co-operation, Discussion and Individual Freedom/Possible Solutions

In contrast to internal and superficial conflict, moral conflict usually escalates rapidly and reaches levels where large-scale consequences are inevitable. The most effective method of curbing these potential disasters may be to encourage nations to act as family units.

Families only function well if power and influence is spread evenly throughout all members; we all know the feelings of anger and unfairness that otherwise ensue. Countries are the same; the people must have power; they must be heard and be able to act. We have seen it in the French Revolution, in China, in Syria. The answer to the inevitability of collective violence is to promote individual freedom and reduce centralised power.

In families, people often get together to discuss matters of shared concern. There will be many opinions, conflicting counsels and even factions. But in a happy family everyone will accept to be bound by the final decision, even if they disagree with it. They have a shared investment in staying together. Nations could adopt this single-purposed but open-minded structure, allowing opposition yet keeping a goal in mind.
Conclusion: There is no escaping tension in this world; there has never been a way. So long as we seek survival, humans cannot avoid confrontation. Remaining peaceful in today's society is like lying down in front of a savage wolf in an attempt to avoid injury- while it will almost always succeed, the fear in the human mind is far too strong. If the thread that is conflict is removed from the fabric of our existence, we would not survive.

CONFLICT IS INEVITABLE.
We could laugh at our vulnerability, to succumb before something we create ourselves— and yet it is natural. But we always have a choice.
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