

## ENGLISH: *LIFE OF GALILEO*

### When we avoid conflict, we betray ourselves.

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When we make a conscious decision to avoid conflict, we often have to compromise our beliefs and furthermore, betray our knowledge in order to survive. It may also result in loss of self-dignity. The Biblical account of Peter's denial of a connection to Jesus on the night preceding His death illustrates his fear in facing conflict. In the passage, although Peter is portrayed as the apostle who is closest and dearest to Jesus, he actively denies being a disciple of Christ three times, firstly to 2 common servants and finally to a servant to the high priest. This is due to the fear that if he were to affirm his apostleship, it would have resulted in his arrest or even his death. Following the denials, a rooster crows, affirming Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial and thus illustrating Peter's weakness in avoiding conflict. Thus, in this iconic Biblical recounting, we can see that when faced with conflict, an individual may choose to deny his or her beliefs to avoid it, and as such, "betray" both beliefs and himself.

In Bertolt Brecht's play "Life of Galileo", we see a similarity in a profound betrayal by the protagonist, Galileo Galilei, depicted as an intelligent man of science who aspires to further his research in astronomy. His persistence and at times stubbornness, along with use of the telescope, allows him to obtain evidence of the heliocentric theory of our solar system. He is clearly pleased with his discovery and eager to share it with the public: "how long can I go on shouting it into the void?" However, he is discouraged and threatened with drastic repercussions by the all-powerful Catholic Church whose scientific doctrine of the Aristotelian model of the solar system, with Earth at its centre, is insisted upon as dogma. When he is exposed to the sight of "certain exceptional powers of enforcement [which are] at the Church's disposal", namely, "instruments of torture", fear of such pain causes him to publically recant his previous knowledge and theory, and furthermore, results in him vowing to submit to the authoritative power of the Church. This causes him to sacrifice and denounce his "outstanding reputation" as a scientific researcher, and additionally causes him to deny his knowledge obtained as a result of avoiding clashing with the Church. Ultimately, this results in him becoming a "prisoner of the Inquisition until he dies", whose dictations to his daughter and writings are collected by a monk of the Church on a quotidian basis, illustrating Galileo's now pitiful and pathetic character following his recantation. Galileo's compromise, says the playwright, is an example of how the social responsibility of the scientist can be abandoned and the powers of science placed in the hands of dangerous authority which, he declares, is immoral. Thus, we can see that the avoidance of conflict indeed results in compromise of knowledge and self-dignity, as is shown through the character of Galileo.

However, in contrast, if an individual is willing to persist in arguing his hypothesis in a situation of conflict, startling knowledge may be shared with a public whom many believe have a right to know what our governments' policies mean for society. In 2010, Julian Assange, founder of the Wikileaks website, exposed thousands of top-secret American military documents, some of which showed shocking film footage of American military incompetence in Iraq. This placed Assange and his associates in jeopardy as a result of this conflict, and also caused the possibility of his being extradited to America to face charges of espionage. As a result, he decided to take refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he continues to reside today, as it does not have an extradition treaty with the USA. Assange represents an ongoing uncompromising conflict with authority, which does not involve any betrayal of self, rather, Assange continues to maintain his position and his criticism of American activities. Thus through his decision to expose such information, and subsequently facing the USA government as a result of the conflict instigated, Assange demonstrates the extraordinary results that may be obtained in facing conflict, as opposed to avoidance.

The 1950's in America saw the evolution of 'McCarthyism', a series of inquiries chaired by Senator Joseph McCarthy, whose belief was that the USA was being infiltrated and undermined by Communists. The HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee) harassed and forced many

witnesses to reveal the names of those they suspected of Communist activities or sympathies, and consequently, many did so out of fear for their futures or for genuine fear for their country. However, there were also those who refused to 'betray' fellow citizens on the grounds that freedom of political belief is a human right and that they preferred public vilification as opposed to betrayal. Edgar Murrow, a courageous news commentator who decided to oppose the Senator, publicly criticised McCarthy in his television show 'Goodnight and Good luck'. This caused conflict between the two men, which subsequently initiated conflict between the advertisers and CBS television; some companies withdrew their sponsorship on the grounds that Murrow appeared to be supporting Communism. However, CBS' response to Murrow's defiance was to support him. Ultimately, such criticisms lead to McCarthy's demise as a political figure, driving him to declare that the US President Eisenhower was harbouring Communists in the military. Such excessive reactions lead to his disgrace. Therefore, we can see how a few brave men who refused to compromise within a conflict saw that the conflict was ultimately resolved. Therefore, as a result of several brave individuals who refused to compromise within a conflict, we can see that the conflict was ultimately resolved.

When in the Biblical passage, Peter finds that his reflexive fearful actions show the truth of Jesus' prophesy, his emotions of guilt in betraying both himself and his master result in a terrible grief at his cowardice. Similarly, Galileo repeatedly castigates himself for betraying the dispersal of scientific knowledge for the betterment of mankind, which he sees as betrayed. Therefore, often betraying ourselves to avoid conflict can result in paying a painful price in grief and guilt. Conversely, there are uplifting tales of those who confronted conflict, refusing to betray their principles which eventually resulted in a better outcome for society.

I have presented my piece of writing in the form of an essay, entering an essay writing competition regarding conflict. I believe that this allows me to express my ideas clearly and in a concise manner. As such, I have utilised formal and sophisticated language to emphasise the formal and refined form of an essay.

The examples I have used range from biblical accounts to significant events in history and also to recent news articles, which all present a situation in which the individual was faced with conflict and which also show the respectable reactions and actions that he makes. I believe that the variety of these examples add depth to my response and show my understanding of conflict being omnipresent throughout history. They also show an array of how different people in different cultural and historic backgrounds have responded to conflict individually.