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Unamuno's Concept of the Tragic

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Unamuno's Concept of the *Tragic*

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses in presenting Miguel de Unamuno's concept of the *tragic*. Historically this concept has suffered various changes of meaning and application. If successful the project shall provide the distinct connotation, features, and characteristics that Unamuno attributes to the *tragic*. His special treatment of the *tragic* harnesses a way for the *will* to become aware of its existential condition. This awakening of consciousness evokes an arousal of dichotomies that the *will* must confront. Faith against reason, religion against science, heart against intellect, are amongst these conflicting predicaments. The *will's* constant struggle between these opposing forces constitutes for Unamuno the *tragic* feeling of life. The *will* must live between the two and avoid the dangers of ignoring one side of the dichotomy and embrace the other. Quixotic philosophy, Unamuno argues, stands in as a manifestation of the *will* to salvage itself against the existential calamities of the *tragic* condition. The quixotic outlook empowers the *will* for the opportunity to forge an authentic life out of the *tragic*. Therefore the *tragic* is a fundamental aspect to understand Unamuno's existentialism, religion, and philosophy of life.

Preface

Tragedy has been employed to describe many aspects of human life. It has been the target of inquiry by the most prominent thinkers of history from ancient Greece with Aristotle, to modernity with Hegel, Freud, and Heidegger. The purpose of this thesis is to dissect the role of the *tragic* in one of the most influential Spanish philosophers Miguel de Unamuno. Most of his philosophical thought builds upon the meaning of the *tragic*; a term that he applies to every domain and aspect of human life. This work is aimed at examining the concept of the *tragic* as presented in the works of Miguel de Unamuno and to inspect the context and features in which the term of the *tragic* is applied by this enigmatic philosopher.

Miguel de Unamuno has been a great influence in Spain and the Spanish-speaking world, yet his work has been largely ignored in the English-speaking world. The concept of the *tragic* has been a focus of scholarly interest, but the works of Unamuno have been scarcely mentioned at best¹. This work is devoted to bringing to the fore the meaning and the complex features that compose Unamuno's concept of the *tragic*. The scholarship in Spanish about Unamuno has revealed an intense interest on his vast topics. However, the concept of the *tragic* has played a peripheral role. The most prominent scholars, such as

1. One of these attempts can be found in *The Tragic Idea*, by Vassilis Lambropoulos, but the work is a panoramic overview about the meaning of tragedy from roughly the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century.

Ferrater Mora² and García Blanco have addressed this issue but have only scratched the surface about the nature of the *tragic* concept by Unamuno. Therefore, the goal is to create a framework that places the concept and meaning of the *tragic* at the very core of Unamuno's philosophical views. Furthermore it must become evident that the results of the *tragic* sense, namely his concepts about faith, religiosity, and philosophy, all hinge around the very notion of the *tragic*.

The method employed in this thesis is a conceptual analysis and interpretation about the Unamunian conception of the *tragic*. The Spanish texts were used with the supplemental help of the available translations in English of his opus. Secondary and tertiary sources were found in the bibliographical notes of the primary works and those found relevant about the topic at hand. It is also important to note that one of the most difficult aspects of Unamuno's thought is the constant references and repetitions of concepts that often not only are confusing in their application, but present incongruent ideas under the same concept.

My efforts were devoted to examining as carefully as possible these multiple threads and contextualize them in a sequential order, although not always resulting in the desired effect, since frequently his concepts overlap in meaning and it can become quite difficult to establish clear cut distinctions. However, in this process of disentanglement of his ideas, I have articulated an outline that is able to serve as a general account about Unamuno's meaning and treatment of the *tragic* while maintaining a sense of fidelity and rendering a just presentation of his claims. This paper's purpose has been to give a descriptive account that enables the English-reader to have a better grasp about Miguel de

2. Perhaps Ferrater Mora is the scholar who has undertaken a systematic treatment in addressing Unamuno's concept of the *tragic*.

Unamuno's philosophical views.

His philosophical pursuit led him into an endeavor that lacked a rigorous and systematic approach. He has been deemed as irrational, heretical, and plainly absurd. These views are sustainable if, and only if; one ignores his notion of the *tragic* sense. He warns against this by claiming “We are about to enter, if you care to accompany me, into a field of contradictions, contradictions between feeling and reasoning, and we must have recourse to one and the other.”³ This way of thinking, he argued, was consistent with the way we live. For him, life should determine the way we think instead of dictating the way we conduct our lives. This, as I hope to better clarify, is an essential feature of the *tragic*.

The first step of this work must be able to present the process by which the flesh and blood individual shifts from ignorance to knowledge. This stage, as I call it, is the *pre-tragic* stage of the individual. The second stage presents the process of how scientific knowledge enables the human mind to become aware of its *tragic* existence and sows an attitude that places objective truth as the ultimate goal of the human mind. Here, the emergence of the contradicting forces put the human *will* at the center of the *tragic* predicament. The existence between contradicting forces; faith against reason, heart against intellect awakens in the *will* an appetite to exist forever. Armed with a hunger to eternally live and exist the *will* must develop a critical attitude toward these contradictions. This new attitude will confront these contradictions, not on the basis of rational discourse, but rather from the perspective of the human sentiments. Having found a new teleology out of the *tragic*, the *will's* volition becomes to live an authentic existence.

3. Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, 139.

This new attitude is embodied by the literary figure Don Quixote de la Mancha. From it Unamuno derives a whole philosophical notion that satisfies the two criteria through a philosophical madness. An approach that dispenses at will, by means of its madness to overcome and go beyond both, the *pre-tragic* simple faith, and scientific skepticism. And this new outlook, as it will be outlined, also represents the condition of the Spanish people. The work should present clearly that authentic life is not possible without the emergence of the *tragic* and the awareness of its condition by the flesh and blood individual.

Before further consideration about Unamuno's thought, a few words about his life are in order. Born in Bilbao, Biscay, Spain on September 29, 1864 and died in Salamanca on the last day of 1936, Unamuno led a life full of cultural enrichment and controversy. Philosopher, essayist, poet, philologist, Hellenic scholar and member of the renowned Generation of 1898, Unamuno held tenure at the University of Salamanca where he also served as Rector. He was a political prisoner in Fuerteventura, in the Canary Islands, under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and later exiled in Paris and Hendaye.⁴

Also prefacing the context to Unamuno's meaning, a brief historical account about the evolution of "tragedy" and its adjectival application "the *tragic*" shall prove useful to better contrast his views. The etymology of tragedy is literarily translated as the songs of goats. There are a few theories about the origins of tragedy. Two are the most common. One refers to the early dithyrambs in honor of the Greek god Dionysus and are a series of religious rituals that are often associated with sexual orgiastic intoxication to please the

4. He was in exile from 1924 to 1930. It is said that after his return from exile to the University of Salamanca he resumed his lecture by saying "as we were saying yesterday..."

god of wine; these rituals being performed by a choir of he-goats that would sing and dance. The other version traces the origins of tragedy as a series of dramatic competitions in which the best play-writer would earn a goat as a winning prize.⁵

Fifth Century Athens saw the institutionalization of tragedy by the representation of the art form in the polis, namely it started to be performed in the theater for the Athenian citizenry. During this period there were numerous tragedies that were performed for an audience produced by the three great Athenian tragedians Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus. This effectuated the systematic study of this particular art; one of the first and arguably⁶the most important of these works is Aristotle's *Poetics*. Tragedy remained a strictly dramatic term until modernity. Lambropoulos traces the modern concept of the *tragic* and affirms:

“Since the 1790s, this quality has been attributed to every domain, feature and function known to humankind, from life to cosmos, and from culture to society. The term has entered the vocabulary of existence and experience, description and evaluation, high reflection and common argument. It has been broadly present in major systems of thought, art and scholarship during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Starting with the Romantics, thinkers and artists have been engaging with the genre of tragedy as both a repertoire of past achievement and a responsibility of future art, while also exploring a dark dimension of life which they call tragic sense, experience, vision, paradox, fate or spirit.”⁷

5. Walter Kaufmann, *Tragedy and Philosophy*, 34.

6. Ibid., 30. Also Jonathan Barnes, in his *Cambridge Companion to Aristotle* claims that the *Poetics* lacks philosophical value.

7. Vassilis Lambropoulos, *The Tragic Idea*, 7.

This saw the beginning of a new trend. This trend would apply the notion of tragedy (or the actions represented by a particular play) into a different aspect of inquiry. Prominent thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche are bastions of this new trend of tragedy. Unamuno follows this trend and is strongly influenced by all three philosophers, although the very nature of the influence varies greatly from one to another.⁸ In general terms Unamuno incorporates general conceptions of each of these philosophers in order to ground its own views. The influence exercised by the religious outlook of Kierkegaard in Unamuno is quite clear, and for the purpose of this work assumed. However, the influence of Schopenhauer⁹ and Nietzsche are not that well outlined. Unamuno distanced himself from both while yet Nietzsche seems to represent, as discussed later on, a major point of convergence and at the same time divergence.

8. While there is a consensus about the influence of Kierkegaard, and to some extent Schopenhauer in Unamuno, there is however a strong debate about whether Unamuno was influenced by Nietzsche, or even if he was all that acquainted with Nietzsche's philosophy. It is my contention that Unamuno derives his notion of "the *tragic* life" from his sporadic and misrepresented readings of Nietzsche; particularly I think he follows the Nietzschean thread of thought in the *Will to Power*, section 851. that conceives the *tragic* as a worldview. Unamuno has been accused of oversimplification of philosophical views in order to accommodate them to fit his own views. (For the influence or lack thereof Nietzsche in Unamuno see, Tollinchi's "La ontología de Unamuno," Manuel García Blanco's "En torno a Unamuno," Gonzálo Sobejano's "La influencia de Nietzsche en España," A. Regalado García's "El siervo y el señor") The strongest objection against the influence of Nietzsche on Unamuno can be found in Tollinchi's work, while the opposite, the most generous advocate of the influence can be found in Regalado's work.

9. A brief discussion of Schopenhauer is found in *The Tragic Sense*, 161-162.

I. Introduction

For Unamuno there are two notions of man, the “concrete substantive” a man whose constitution is of “flesh and blood.” It is a man that is “born, suffers, and dies—above all who dies; the man who eats and drinks and plays and sleeps and thinks and loves; the man who is seen and heard; one's brother, the real brother.”¹⁰ This man Unamuno refers to, the man that occupies a physical place in the world and society, is the common man. The other notion of man is a “man from nowhere, from neither here nor there, neither of this age or another, who has neither sex nor country, who is, in short, a mere idea. That is to say, a no-man.”¹¹ This generic type is non-existent, it exist only in the minds of the first type of men, the existing-common man.

Unamuno's inquiries are directed toward the first type, the “flesh and blood,” The man that lives, feels, and dies. The nature of this type of man revolves around life and the perception of life, or what this man *feels*, “Man, they say is a reasoning animal, I do not know why he has not been defined as an affective or feeling animal. And yet what differentiates him from other animals is perhaps feeling rather than reason. I have seen a cat reason more often than laugh or weep. Perhaps it laughs or weeps within itself—but then perhaps within itself a crab solves equations of the second degree.”¹²

10. Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense*, 3.

11. *Ibid.*, 3.

12. *Ibid.*, 5.

The feelings thus are the most basic, intrinsic feature of the flesh and blood man. These feelings determine, or at least make ideas germinate in the mind. Thus the second type of man the idea-man stems from these feelings. “It is not usually our ideas that make us optimists or pessimists, but our optimism or pessimism—of perhaps physiological or pathological origin, the one as well as the other—that makes our ideas.”¹³ Unamuno's assessment on human nature is in principle, anti-Aristotelian. Humans are not rational animals, they are instead *sentimental* animals.

There is naturally a whole amalgam of ideas that stem from these two notions of man. Within those, the two ideas of God come about, one rational and pertains to the idea of the idea-man. And there is the other idea of God consistent with the flesh and blood man; it is a “God of feeling and volition.” This idea of God for the concrete existing man is no other than “the projection to internal infinity of man in life, of the specific man, the man of flesh and blood.”¹⁴ This idea of God is produced by the sentiments of the individual, the sentiments of concrete man willing to live eternally.

Philosophy falls prey to focusing on the no-man rather than in the flesh and blood man. Unamuno wants philosophy (philosophers) to acknowledge that the primordial focus of its endeavor must be the first type of man, “In most of the histories of philosophy that I know, philosophic systems are presented to us as if growing out of one another spontaneously, and their authors, the philosophers, appear as mere pretexts. The inner biography of the philosophers, of the men who philosophized, is assigned a secondary place. An yet it is precisely that inner biography which can mean most to

13. Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense*, 5.

14. *Ibid.*, 6.

us.”¹⁵

All effort must be put forth not in articulating a structure that deceptively diverts its attention to the no-man, rather it must focus on the man that creates these philosophies, “And this specific man, this flesh-and-blood man is both the subject and supreme object of all philosophy, whether certain self-styled philosophers like it or not.”¹⁶ Human inquiry ought to be directed toward itself and not to some external object or abstract idea of man, “Philosophy responds to our need to form a complete and unitary concept of life and the world and, following on our conceptualization, the impulse in question, instead of being a consequence of this conception, is the cause of it. Our philosophy, that is, our mode of understanding the world and life, springs from our impulse toward life itself.”¹⁷

Unamuno's emphasis on this “flesh and blood man” moves toward the idea that every human activity is moved by feelings; the sentiments enact as the prime movers of man toward the affirmation of life of this particular existing being. Thus he says, the essence of every living human being lies solely on “the effort, which he makes to continue to be a man, not to die.”¹⁸ Each living human being strives not only to exist but also to never cease to exist through the continuum of time. Namely the permanence of the “I” or the “self” in the concrete sense of the word, not the abstract “I” that leads to the no-man, which is timeless, since it does not extend itself through a unity in space and

15. Ibid., 4.

16. Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense* 4.

17. Ibid., 5.

18. Ibid., 9.

continuous time. All efforts of the 'real' man are directed toward the infinite existence in space and in time, namely the “effort of our past to transform itself into our future.”¹⁹

Unamuno's worst fears are summoned by shattering this space and time existence, not in the religious sense of dying and going through an after-life damnation, “I was not moved by the pathetic pictures of Hell that were drawn for me, for even at the time nothing seemed as terrible as Nothingness.”²⁰ This nothingness which he talks about is also inconceivable to the human mind, “In effect it is impossible for us to conceive of ourselves as non-existent. There is no way whatsoever to make consciousness become aware of absolute unconsciousness, aware of its own annihilation.”²¹ However, with the imaginative powers of the mind, if a 'hell' is possible to conceive as an idea, also the idea of nothingness is similarly conceivable. Furthermore with both imaginary concepts at hand it is even possible to compare them in normative terms, his comparison is:

“For my part I must confess, painful as the confession may be, that even in the days of my youth's simple faith, I never was made to tremble by descriptions of hellfire, no matter how terrible, for I felt, always, that the idea of nothingness was much more terrifying than Hell. Whoever suffers lives, and whoever lives in suffering still loves and hopes, even though over the portal of his abode is written 'Abandon all Hope! And it is better to live in pain than peacefully cease to be at all. The truth is that I could not believe in this atrocious Hell, an eternity of punishment, nor could I imagine a more authentic Hell than that of nothingness and the prospect of

19. Ibid., 12.

20. Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense*, 12.

21. Ibid., 43.

it. And still believe that if we all believed in our salvation from nothingness, we would all be better for it.”²²

The existence of man, with his essential sentiments, and its endeavors to affirm life and its continuous existence through space and time, develops according to Unamuno a peculiar sense, the *tragic sense of life*. And it pertains to the 'first type of man' the sole object and subject of Unamuno's inquiry. This tragic sense, he argues, “Carries along with it an entire conception of the Universe and of life itself, an entire philosophy more or less formulated, more or less conscious.”²³ This work pretends to examine this meaning of the 'tragic sense of life' in Miguel de Unamuno; the tragic sense of the flesh and blood individual and not of the abstract idea, the no-man. This tragic sense, Unamuno warns, “Sometimes it may originate in a chance illness, dyspepsia, for example; but at other times is constitutional.” This tragic sense can also be found in “whole peoples” since for Unamuno “in a certain sense a people is also a man.”²⁴

Unamuno attaches to the notion of the flesh and blood man a pathological condition, “man, because he is man, because he possesses consciousness, is already, in comparison to the jackass or the crab, a sick animal. Consciousness is a disease.”²⁵ This pathology is intrinsically contained in the notion of progress, “Perhaps disease itself is the essential condition of what we call progress, and progress itself a disease.

But what is the notion of progress when the progress may be also attached to the

22. Ibid., 49.

23. Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense*, 21.

24. Ibid., 13.

25. Ibid., 22.

space and time unitary continuums? For Unamuno, its pathology is the notion of progress as the curiosity to know. Progress through curiosity to know is the first physical symptom of this pathology, and it is suffered in both the religious and scientific realms.

The religious takes part when “Our first parents lived there in a state of perfect health and perfect innocence [...] they tasted the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and became subject to all diseases, and to crown and consummation of them all, death, and to labor and progress. For progress, according to this legend, springs from original sin.”²⁶

The scientific, following a Darwinian thread states that “Once upon a time an anthropoid ape gave birth to a diseased offspring—as seen from the strictly animal or zoological point of view—really diseased, and if the disease represented a weakness, it also proved an advantage in the struggle for survival.”²⁷ This advantage is the ability to survive by means of the intellect rather than the body.

This biological pathology, which is paradoxically advantageous for survival, manifests itself as knowledge. Curiosity and the desire to know are ramified into two notions. The first is the “love of knowledge itself.” This kind of knowledge is “reflective knowing, the knowledge of knowing itself.”

This type of knowledge is for Unamuno “inhuman.”²⁸ Its inhumanity rests in the notion that it does not seek the purpose of self-preserving man; instead it creates its own teleology, a circle of objective justification and autonomic affirmation. Humans, while

26. Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense*, 23.

27. *Ibid.*, 23.

28. *Ibid.*, 33.

engaging in the activity of creating knowledge for its own sake and seeking truth in itself, ignore the fact that “Science does not exist except in personal consciousness and thanks to it: astronomy, mathematics have no more reality than what they possess as knowledge in the minds of those who learn and cultivate them.”²⁹ Instead those devices of the mind must be put to work at the service of their life, instead for an ulterior purpose independent from their lives.

The second is “the need to know in order to live.” This kind of knowledge is the everyday affairs directed at our survival. Conversely, what knowledge is for the individual, a service for self-preservation; reason is for society. For Unamuno, “what we call reason, reflex and reflective knowledge, the distinguishing mark of man, is a social product.”³⁰ It does not become a nuisance as long as it does not interfere, let alone take over the very essence and nature of humans, namely the affective, sentimental aspect of the flesh and blood man. Let us explore Unamuno’s argument on the effects of knowledge upon the individual.

29. Ibid., 35.

30. Ibid., 29.

II. The Emergence of the Tragic Sense and The Will

A. Pre-Scientific and Scientific Religiosity

Miguel de Unamuno in his days of youth was a fervent catholic³¹; as such he did not need any kind of justification to affirm his faith. However, as he matured, a very strong rationalist tendency drew him apart from *his* faith to a burdensome attitude towards his existence. In the *Tragic Sense of Life* he presents a sketchy story about the process of how knowledge enables, with its skepticism, emergence of the *tragic* sense.

Unamuno's *tragic* sense is not an intrinsic ontological predicament. Instead the *tragic* is a process that comes into being through existential awareness. The flesh and blood individual, when born and during the early stages of life, lacks the epistemological features to have a critical consciousness about its own existence. This ontological condition enables the human mind to form a naïve conception of itself and the formation of concepts without the intervention of reason. The pre-scientific attitude directs the mind to affirm without scrutiny certain cultural values; while religion is among these perennial values, faith in a superior being, and the assurance of an eternal afterlife, inject a sense of security, purpose in life, and tranquility, given of course, that the naïve individual abides by the certain rules of its basic theological principles. Unamuno calls this attitude "simple

31. See Miguel de Unamuno, O.C. Vol. 1, *Recuerdos de niñez y mocedad*, Obras Completas, Vol. I.

faith.”³²

This pre-scientific stage that Unamuno describes could be said to be pre-*tragic*. The shattering of this innocence by the scientific attitude brings about the emergence of the *tragic* sense. People can go about their lives without considering the most fundamental questions of existence; or perhaps give expeditious self-satisfying answers in order to set aside the sentiments aroused by asking and pondering such questions. However, there are two general types of persons who approach these inquiries differently. Science is the main device that challenges the mind’s innocence and ignorance. The two types are the person who adamantly adheres to its naïve simple faith, while the other undertakes scientific knowledge as the ultimate end. The first becomes aware that his innocence has been obliterated by science and strives to restore the inner feelings that its faith once indulged.

In the process of living, the organism grows and develops. In the case of humans this development entails a formation into our human activity; this endeavor is the acquisition of knowledge. Before the acquisition of knowledge, the person has in itself certain unexamined beliefs. These beliefs are then, through the process of knowledge, asserted, modified, or discarded when they are critically examined by our logical rational powers. The construction of knowledge is based on this constant revision of beliefs through reason. The human mind yields its beliefs and accepts the results of these rational exercises by abiding to them, resulting in the production of a new set of beliefs. The mind surrenders its beliefs to reason and, if necessary, restructure itself in accordance to these new beliefs. Some of these changes may not effect a radical alteration to the structure of

32. Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, 49.

the mind, but other changes could potentially imply a dramatic transformation.

This new outlook is what leads Unamuno to scrutinize under the light of reason his unexamined innocent faith. Rationality made him an unwilling skeptic, and made him aware of his existential contingency and the conceptual unsustainability of his simple faith. Skepticism, under the name of knowledge and reason, annihilates forever his original belief; the damage produced is irrevocable and irreversible. Instead of embracing the product of his rational exercise as a form of intellectual progress, he took it as an imposing dogmatic force against life. From that point of understanding, out of rational skepticism, that faith was not as robust as he took it to be, he was forced to modify his life based on this rational activity. The modification came about abruptly and without notice, knowledge through rational discourse changed the structure of his beliefs and ultimately his whole being. He lost all agency and control over the process of knowledge. He found himself at a point where he was unable to regress to his original state of beliefs, and reason gave him not only the possibility he did not desire, but also the awareness to identify his possibilities. The scientific paradigm considers this whole process of objective knowledge to be part of a theory of progress; a position that he adamantly rejects, “The position of our progressives, the partisans of 'the central current of contemporary European thought; but I can not bring myself to accept the way in which these fellows deliberately close their eyes to the great problem, and essentially live a lie by attempting to stifle the *tragic* sense of life.”³³

The scientific method is designed to put everything under the scrutiny of reason without the intervention of the human passions, volitions, sentiments, and emotions; this

33. Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, 145.

process for Unamuno, this human “progress” of knowledge, is detrimental to life.

Ignoring life's inner contradictions is, for Unamuno, living in a lie. Rationality, and its pursuit of objective truth, inevitably leads to a false, incomplete life. The purpose of life for the rational, scientific mind is a continuous cycle of searching for factual truths; truths that are, more frequently than not, incompatible with the biological nature of humans, that is, the emotional needs of the individual. For instance, a man of science that devotes his whole life to the rigorous studies of his field is inevitably neglecting other key fundamental aspects of his life. He may be giving up, his scientific blind-sight quality of life with his family, friends, but most importantly he is not being true to himself, and he is living an inauthentic, incomplete life. The scientific man is so entrenched in the object of his attention that he loses sight of the whole, is not aware of his tragicity and therefore is not able to live life to his fullest; he only gets to exploit a particular fragment of life, paradoxically devoted to something that is often foreign to life.

Conversely, the same is true for the man of simple faith, the one that devotes his life to please and conform to the immutable laws of religion, laws that were created not in accordance with his needs, but as a set of external dogmatic laws that ought to be followed without questions or objections. Thereby he renounces to the material reality he occupies to form a spiritual stronghold, an ascetism of sorts that guarantees the promised eternal salvation in the afterlife. Both attitudes of life, the scientific and the simplistic religiosity are mutually exclusive; they repel each other. However, they both share the commonality of compartmentalizing aspects of life and bluntly ignoring (even to the extent of denying) other facets of reality.

The scientific attitude canalizes its devotion of faith unto science, knowledge, and objective truth. This type has, for Unamuno, the same pathology. Its difference resides in the devotion to something different, namely truth for its own sake. He deems this new breed the “scientific religiosity.” So far the human mind has maintained the basic features of itself. Nothing has intrinsically changed; science replaces faith and occupies the spotlight in the religious mind. Nonetheless both attitudes share the same dogma they both blindly affirm their particular teleology. The emergence of the *tragic* takes place in the clash between the pre-scientific and the scientific attitudes and out of the awareness of their contradicting forces in the mind. The *tragic* mind becomes aware of both faith and science, confronted with religiosity.

Aware of the impossibility of a return to innocence, Unamuno's only recourse is reduced to reminiscing something that can never be reinstated; simple faith is reduced to a memory. Much like the Heraclitean adage, “You cannot step into the same river twice” the *tragic* mind must, hence, move forward. To remain in the reminiscing stage will only feed torment and agony. The opposite option, the scientific attitude, offers nothing but an affirmation of factual knowledge at the expense of life. However, these are the only two options available to the *tragic* mind and are inevitably two opposing forces that offer no sense of existential security or certainty to man.

The *tragic* sense emerges out of this process of knowledge, namely from the change of ignorance to knowledge and the consequential arousal of sentiments tied to each one of those elements. The unexamined innocent faith offers a sense of security and well being, while the other, obliterates faith by inculcating a deep skepticism that arouses

a sense of despair and existential angst³⁴. This inescapable tension and constant oscillation between the two attitudes creates the *tragic* sense of life. We have now the two general concepts, faith against reason, intellect against heart, giving path to the emergence of the *tragic*.

B. The Tragic Sense

But what is the meaning and features of this concept of “the *tragic*” employed by Unamuno? His definition of this “*tragic sense*” demands attention to articulate its implications and applications.

The existential condition of the “flesh and blood” individual as being “*tragic*” denotes the oppositional tensions between the intellect against the heart of this existing entity. It is the constant opposition between faith and reason. Irremediably, these forces are in a continual struggle in contradiction with each other and partaking in the dynamics of the individual; herein lays the essence of the *tragic sense*. The emergence of this *tragic sense* reveals the true nature of life, the awareness of conflicting opposition of forces. Truth is no longer measured by the corroboration of facts; instead the *tragic* forces the individual to interact with these co-existing contradictions.

Unamuno revolts against the Aristotelian notions that “man strives by nature to know” that is for Unamuno the quintessential manifestation of human sickness; and that

34. Unamuno is not claiming a rejection of rationalism or ignoring knowledge and reason. He instead, is concerned with the lack of agency to adopt beliefs. His position must know cope with the results of reason and knowledge by creating an awareness of the impossibility to return to the unexamined belief, but most importantly to recreate the corresponding sentiment. Namely, the endeavor should focus on the search of avoiding unfavorable sentiments and embracing sentiments similar to those produced by unexamined beliefs.

humans are not by nature rational animals, they are rather sentimental animals.

This production of knowledge is not to affirm life but to create a conceptual structure independent of its author—humanity. This knowledge for the sake of knowledge is, according to him, the primary source of skepticism and doubt that leads man to be confronted with its existential contingency, purposelessness, and mortality. Unamuno begins, after the emergence of the *tragic*, to steer the flesh and blood individual, the concrete man, object of his inquiry, and consequently its abstract form the *will*, away from absolute rational grounds. A move that rejects the whole tradition of tragedy rooted in Aristotelian rationality.

The contrasting between Aristotelian rationalism and Unamuno's *tragic* sense is a point of great interest. It shows how different their conceptions about tragedy and the *tragic* are. In Aristotle's *Poetics* tragedy stands as a theory for conducting a practical life. It operates through the drama performed in the theater. Thus, the dramatic action takes place within the *polis*, and works as a function of it. The main features of tragedy are found in the *Poetics*. Aristotle defines tragedy as:

“A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arising pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.”³⁵

35. Aristotle, *Poetics*, Ch. 5. 1449b 24-29.

Furthermore it is an art designed to project and create, through its structure of plot and the form of diction, a set of mind in the spectator. There is a fine thread for a work to possess the required features to become a tragedy, let alone a good one. Aristotle distinguishes tragedy from other dramatic genres, namely comedy and epic poetry, each of which have a specific purpose or end. In the case of tragedy, the purpose is not to show any particular instance of a person's misfortune. Tragedy is designed to depict a generic character in an action where it produces in the spectator the arousal of pity and fear. These passions are exclusively known as the *tragic* emotions. Reason, or the rational, must be able, through the process of catharsis, to exercise control over the *tragic* emotions. To understand how these passions function the spectator must be able to submit to the rule of reason in order to teach himself, through the dramatic experience, how to control them. In the experience of the tragic plot, reason must preside over these emotions, and through catharsis control them and derive knowledge from the experience to be applied in the political milieu. The function of tragedy within the *polis* created a social and political bond.

In Aristotle we find the plot, the *tragic* emotions, the catharsis of fear and pity, and the discovery of the whole structure of the artistic representation, to be the four intrinsic elements of tragedy. Discovery of the plot takes place by the understanding of the complexities of the plot and the management of the *tragic* emotions. Discovery is in some sense the spectator's perception of the unity of the tragedy. This unity consists in the effect of the whole dramatic experience of the audience. The theater conveys a forum for this experience to take place. The unity of the tragedy is designed to have the same effect on the audience. That is, there ought to be a universal uniformity in the perception

of the tragedy by the audience. Aristotle's theory generates a collective production of knowledge through the experience of tragedy. This knowledge in turn will facilitate the relationships in the affairs of the *polis*. This collective universal knowledge establishes an *ethos*, a way of deriving healthy political guidelines and modes of healthy behavior in the citizens.

The theory of tragedy is supposed to work as a technical operator to create an educational format in the *polis*. It was a model for the individual to learn to maintain control over the passions, making the attainment of *eudaimonia* a concrete possibility. Aristotle identifies tragedy as an embodiment of the difficulties of attaining happiness, he says, "Tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life, of happiness and misery. All human happiness or misery takes the form of action; the end for which we live is a certain kind of activity, not a quality."³⁶ Its main purpose is to illustrate a generic slice of life, in particular one in which the passions take over the human soul, leading to catastrophic consequences.

The theory of tragedy as presented in Aristotle's *Poetics*, plays a major role in contributing to the project of human achievement, the life well lived, by achieving through this educational process a knowledge that renders itself as the ultimate mode of human happiness.

Therefore, Aristotle's theory of tragedy grounds its meaning and teleology on a rational framework, whereas for Unamuno, the *tragic* sense marks the beginnings to formulate the opposite, a framework that anchors itself to the sentiments and de-emphasizes the importance and role of rationality and knowledge in human life.

36. Aristotle, *Poetics*. 6. 1450a. 15-17.

“This enmity is the single but powerful source of man's fundamental tragic feeling: the feeling that his hope and faith are incompatible with his reason, and yet cannot exist without it. For reason subsists only by virtue of its constant war—and therefore its continual embrace—with hope and faith. We must avoid the common error of supposing that Unamuno's thinking was entirely slanted in favor of a complete victory of irrationality over reason. Were this true, neither could exist. Their warring coexistence is the substance of 'tragedy,' and the prime mover of the 'tragic sense of life.' If men could entirely escape the so-called 'dictates of reason' to such an extent that they might then be defined as 'irrational beings' hungering for eternal life, or blindly hopeful of it, there would be no tragedy in their existence. But Unamuno would then wonder whether they deserved to be called 'human' at all. For Unamuno, to live as a human being and to live tragically are one and the same thing.”³⁷

For Unamuno the emergence of the *tragic*, along with its internal dynamical functions, marks a negative impact upon the flesh and blood man. This negative impact of tragedy, namely the effects that knowledge introduces to the human mind, is best understood by examining Nietzsche's interpretation about the meaning of tragedy. This shall prove useful to contextualize the common features and assessments about the modern concept of tragedy.

Aware of the risk of oversimplification, it seems that Unamuno follows the same thread of Nietzsche's conception of tragedy as a revolt against the Aristotelian notion of tragedy. According to Nietzsche, knowledge and reason are the two features that lead tragedy to its death.

37. José Ferrater Mora, *Unamuno, Bosquejo de una filosofía*, Section 10.

He claims that the Greeks, including Aristotle, did not understand the function of tragedy beyond the realm of habit. That is, Nietzsche claimed that due to the moral superficiality of the Greeks they did not have a full grasp on what tragedy was. Hence, he states in the *Will to Power*, “I have presented such terrible images to knowledge that any Epicurean delight is out of the question. Only Dionysian joy is sufficient: *I have been the first to discover the tragic*. The Greeks, thanks to their moralistic superficiality, misunderstood it. Even resignation is *not* a lesson of tragedy, but a misunderstanding of it! Yearning for nothingness is a *denial* of tragic wisdom, its opposite!”³⁸

The death of tragedy for Nietzsche is nothing short of the process of how tragedy was overtaken by the Apollonian tradition away from the opposing dynamical relationship with the Dionysian. He states that the “basic intention now becomes as clear as day to us: it is to eliminate from tragedy the primitive and pervasive Dionysiac element, and to rebuild the drama on a foundation of non-Dionysiac art, custom and philosophy.”³⁹

A revival of tragedy, that is a return to its true meaning, will at least certainly include the restitution of the Dionysian to its former condition. Tragedy for Nietzsche, as part of the Dionysian tradition is meant to affirm life, the opposite will yield “an art dangerous to life.”⁴⁰ And the attempt at a rebirth of tragedy has to be aligned with the purgation of knowledge from tragedy. The problem is addressed in the following passage:

“What concerns us here is the question whether those powers to whose influence

38. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, section 1029.

39. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Section XII.

40. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, section 851.

Greek tragedy succumbed will maintain their ascendancy permanently, thereby blocking for good the renaissance of tragedy and the tragic world view. The fact that the dialectical drive toward knowledge and scientific optimism has succeeded in turning tragedy from its course suggests that there may be an eternal conflict between the theoretical and the tragic world view, in which case tragedy could be reborn only when science had at last been pushed to its limits and, faced with those limits, been forced to renounce its claim to universal validity.”⁴¹

The Dionysian represents for Nietzsche the embodiment of life-affirming excesses that must be rescued and embraced. Its contrary, the Apollonian tradition by the rule of *Socratism*, has atrophied the Dionysian tradition and has been subjugated to balanced measure, reason, and morality. This is responsible, according to Nietzsche, for the death of the Dionysian tradition, and by immediate consequence, the death of tragedy.

For Nietzsche tragedy must be conceived as a world-view that attempts to revitalize a life-affirming attitude against the prevalent obsession of reason and knowledge. Thus, the keystones of Nietzsche’s theory of tragedy are the following: First he emphasizes on the notion that the true meaning of tragedy hinges on the opposing forces of both, and not only one, the Dionysian and the Apollonian.

Second that philosophy, through what Nietzsche calls *Socratism*, has created the false notion that the essence of tragedy rests with rationality with the main purpose of purging the tragic emotions. This is for Nietzsche a moralistic calamity perpetrated by the ancient Greeks, and the basis for their misunderstanding of tragedy. These two general notions constitute Nietzsche’s critique against the Aristotelian theory of tragedy. And third, that tragedy must be

41. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Section XVII.

conceived as a world-view in order to break with the moralistic superficiality to pursuit a life-affirming attitude.

Unamuno is neatly in tune with this general Nietzschean overview, the tragic for Unamuno emerges from the opposing contradictory forces of faith and reason. He also agrees with the notion that philosophy has overemphasized the notion of rationality and ignored other aspects intrinsic to human life. Therefore knowledge for both Nietzsche and Unamuno has the effect of shattering the life-affirming attitude that both hold as indispensable. Although they agree in these general aspects their approaches are, nevertheless, fundamentally opposed. Throughout Unamuno's work there are multiple loose claims about Nietzsche, the main reference in *The Tragic Sense* reads:

“There you have that ‘thief of energies,’ as he so obtusely called Christ who sought to wed nihilism with the struggle for existence, and he talks to you about courage. His heart craved the eternal All while his head convinced him of nothingness, and, desperate and mad to defend himself from himself, he cursed that which he most loved. Because he could not be Christ, he blasphemed against Christ. Bursting with his own self, he wished himself unending and dreamed his theory of eternal recurrence, a sorry counterfeit of immortality, and, full of pity for himself, he abominated pity. And there are some who say that his is the philosophy of strong men! No, it is not.”⁴²

Thus their paths fork away toward opposite directions, Nietzsche follows the overflowing approach of the Dionysian while Unamuno continues his journey of contradictions in a quest to find a renewed faith that takes him to the eternal. Let us now

42. Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, 50.

proceed to follow Unamuno to explore the abrupt changes the emergence of the *tragic* brought about to the flesh and blood man and explore its effects and responses. Let us inquire about the intricacies of this *tragic* human life.

C. Hunger for Immortality

The *tragic* sense awakens in the mind a hunger for immortality. The existential void created by reason and knowledge must somehow be overcome. This thirst for immortality emanates from the process of the *will* through the *tragic* consciousness. The hunger for immortality motorizes the *will* to find a way to quench this desire. The first vestige of the *tragic* is the dynamic relationship between the *will* trying to cope with faith and knowledge. The *will* finds itself torn between two irreconcilable options, faith and knowledge. These two are mutually repelling; the *will* has to exist between both. The predicament of the flesh and blood person is to assimilate these contradictions that are in constant flux. The process from unexamined faith to knowledge through logic and science leads the person to modify its previous ontological condition. With faith or reason alone, the hunger for immortality would not have emerged. That spark of resistance is the emergence of the *tragic*. And from the *tragic*, the hunger for immortality becomes the main purpose of the *will*. Unexamined faith provided the safety blanket of certainty, while knowledge brought about the demise of faith by means of its skepticism.

Innocence is no longer part of the flesh and blood constituency, nor is science the purpose and goal of the *will's* own existence. This “*tragic*” predicament, of being “stuck in between” creates a continuous shifting to seek a way out. The emergence and

awareness of the *tragic* sense brings about in itself a theory of the *will*: “The inner, essential force has been called will, the impulse to be everything, to be all others as well as ourselves, without ceasing to be what we are. And it can be said that this force is the divine in us, that it is God in us, working in us because He suffers in us.”⁴³ Although Unamuno is not persuaded by employing the recourse to philosophize through abstractions, he nevertheless applies to the flesh and blood individual the notion of the *will*, which he frequently interchanges with the term “consciousness.” The *will* as an *inner force* works toward the hunger for immortality. An occurrence that, despite the abstraction of the *will*, manages to conceptually anchor the *will* to the material flesh and blood by ascribing it the biological appetitive features.

“And so, neither the vital longing for human immortality can count on any rational confirmation nor can reason supply us with any incentive or consolation in life or any true end purpose for it. And yet, here in the depths of the abyss, the despair of the will and of the heart meets rational scepticism and in the embrace, this tragic embrace, that is, this intimately loving embrace, will surge a wellspring of life, a life both true and terrible. It is scepticism, uncertainty, the final position reached by reason in its exercise of self-analysis, the analysis of its own validity, that provides a foundation upon which the heart's despair must build its hope.”⁴⁴

The idea of an afterlife vanishes, and the demise of the biological body is inevitable. Without the ability to purge itself from both the heart and the intellect, a

43. Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, 163.

44. Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, 118.

strong hunger for immortality suddenly erupts. The appetite for the eternal conforms to neither faith nor reason. Rather it no longer seeks an eternal afterlife or an objective system of truth, but a continuous guarantee of eternal material existence. That is to say, the promise of an afterlife belongs to the pre-scientific naïve stage, and thus life as physically experienced must be perpetuated. Hunger for immortality means an insatiable strive to exist eternally in the world. Life while *tragic*, still in the midst of opposing contradicting forces, recovers a sense of purpose. This hunger emerged as a dialectical product of oppositions, and furthermore, this “*tragic dialectic*”⁴⁵ must continue its course to affirm *the* actual life.

The *will* extends itself through time by bouncing from side to side between an ally of contradictions. For Unamuno the *will* is an abstract representation of the flesh and blood individual living in the physical world. Thanks to reason, God suddenly becomes more of an ideal rather than a tangible entity; knowledge with its skepticism reveals death.

Knowledge for the sake of knowledge has replaced the pursuit of an eternal afterlife, let alone the affirmation of life. Unamuno's *tragic* sense in the *will* is the impossibility to embrace neither, the afterlife through simple faith, nor the new paradigm of knowledge. When knowledge is juxtaposed to life, that is, when knowledge is no longer at the service of life and becomes the opposite, life becomes the servant of knowledge, and thus human life as a whole is sentenced to a *tragic* death.

The *tragic* sense embarks the *will* on a journey to seek a way out of the enclosed ally of contradictions. Life after the *tragic* emergence is an oscillating thread of opposing

45. See Julio Arístides, *Dialéctica de la tragedia existencial*.

forces. The *will's* recourse for coping with these opposing forces is hope in a new faith emanating from the hunger for immortality. For Unamuno, rationality is not the foundations of truth in life, but the destruction of faith and the immortality of one's soul.

Unamuno believes that scientific knowledge proclaims an ontological autonomy ignoring that it belongs to the realm of human activity. In this respect, humans have created a normative hierarchy that places scientificism at the top. This scientificist current also percolated into religion, for religion was during the Middle Ages in need to incorporate a rational discourse to maintain a credible status. This is how the systematic treatment of Christianity, namely the science of God—theology--came about. For Unamuno this aspect of rationality or perhaps this scientificist trend is highly suspect. It not only ignores fundamental aspects of life, it also precludes the *will* to expand the scope of its volition. This concern steers Unamuno in the direction of a new type of Religiosity and away from scientificist theological trend. It leads him to affirm an approach that leans toward an outlook that places the *will* and its needs at the center.

The practical impossibility of maintaining a changeless eternal existence, that is, an immortal phenomenic existence, troubles the *will*. The awareness of death precludes the flesh and blood individual to cheerfully embrace its state of present life. Thus two opposing forces co-exist in the *will's* consciousness simultaneously. The *will's* journey through life in the constant process of existing with these simultaneous contradictions must result in something beyond; hope offers a new kind of faith.

“Unamuno could not avoid thinking of death as inevitable and frightening. His struggle against the fear of death was so impassioned that in dealing with the problem of immortality he seems to have halted the

incessant pendulum movement of his thought at one of its extremes. If in speaking of God and man, negation unfailingly accompanied affirmation, doubt, faith, and despair, hope, in Unamuno's talk of immortality, assent often triumphed over denial. We are tempted to conclude that his desire for immortality blinded him to the misery of death, and that in this instance his heart won its only victory over the mind.”⁴⁶

The aforementioned new faith makes the *will* evaluate each and every one of the contradicting forces. The evaluation leads the *will* to scrutinize reason, knowledge, and science under the light of the sentiments. The *will* anchors itself to the sentiments rather than reason and acts upon rationality to establish the rule of the *will* over reason. This attitude, he thinks, should be the model for philosophy: “Philosophy is the product of each philosopher's humanity, and each philosopher is a man of flesh and blood who addresses himself to other flesh-and-blood men like himself. And let him do what he may, he philosophizes not with his reason alone but with his *will*, with his feeling, with his flesh and blood, with his entire body and soul. It is a man that makes philosophy.”⁴⁷

D. The *Will* Against Reason, Rationality, and Knowledge

Socrates' claim about the unexamined life yields in Unamuno a different kind of attitude. The attitude moves not toward objective factual knowledge of the world, but to a wisdom seen through an individual's life. This attitude must stand outside reason and simple faith. The *will* focuses on the possibility of a new outlook to live. This kind of

46. Ferrater Mora, *Unamuno: Bosquejo de una filosofía*, 46.

47. Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, 33.

knowledge pertains only to the life of the flesh and blood individual, its circumstances and its history. The *tragic* becomes the gravitational force that converges everything; where incompatibilities, although not molded to fit, collide. The Unamunian result is a fusion that violently affects the *will* of the particular flesh and blood man. Therefore the *tragic* sense in general, refers to the particular contradictions within every individual; a generic form to refer to life's most intrinsic antinomies.

“But just as a bit of scientific knowledge has its finality in the rest of knowledge, so the philosophy that we would make our own has also its extrinsic object—it has reference to our whole destiny, to our attitude toward life and the universe. And the most *tragic* problem of philosophy is to reconcile intellectual needs with the needs of the heart and will.”⁴⁸ As Ferrater Mora points out, this *tragic* sentiment divides the *will* between “equal parts between faith and reason, desperation and hope,”⁴⁹

Unamuno sees rationality through its practical instantiation, namely scientific endeavor, as a perversity against life. His stubbornness against them is founded upon the notion of incompleteness on the part of those elements, which lack the emotional, passionate, and sentimental aspects of life. To ignore or deny these elements is to defy the very essence of human nature. The *will* no longer avoids its nature; instead it actively grounds itself to its true identity, the sentiments.

At any rate, the emergence of the *tragic* not only brings about the hunger for immortality, it also highlights an intrinsic complexity to the man of flesh and blood. Not only did knowledge and science shatter simple faith, but it also compounded the

48. Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, 19.

49. José Ferrater Mora, *Unamuno, Bosquejo de una filosofía*, 52-53.

complexities of the meaning of life. Life has become *tragic* insofar as it is now operating in an abstract realm of existence. As Ferrater Mora notes, simple life has become troublesome:

“Thus the man of flesh and blood, who seemed to be so plain, simple, and straightforward, becomes a most complex reality seething with confusion and contradiction. No sooner had the philosopher asserted the concrete character of this creature then he injects it with what appears to be infinitely removed from any concrete reality: the pursuit of the impossible, the life of wish and dream. But even though the boundaries of personal unity seem thus to be broken, man never surrenders himself to any absolute being or to any transcendent realm of values. The man of flesh and blood strives to be all in all, while he fights to remain within the limits of his personal unity. He wishes to preserve his own nontransferable self, for being all in all means an infinite expansion of one's own personality rather than ceasing to be what one is.”⁵⁰

The *will* must now face the constant flux of oppositions. The hunger for immortality struggling with death and nothingness, harnesses the need for the *will* to escape its inescapable condition. The *will's* position, entrenched within the *tragic*, appropriates what is needed from the two frameworks of reference, reason and faith, hope and doubt respectively. Unamuno claims, “Faith is our longing for the eternal, for God, and hope is the longing of God in us, of the eternal in us, of the divine in us which joins to meet our faith and to raise us above ourselves. Man aspires to God through faith and cries out: 'Lord, I believe; give me the something to believe in!' And God, the divinity in

50. Ferrater Mora, *Unamuno, Bosquejo de una filosofía*, 59-60.

man, sends him hope in another life so that he may believe in that. Hope is the reward of faith. Only the man who believes truly hopes, and only whoever truly hopes believes. We only believe what we hope, and hope what we believe.”⁵¹ Hope, as a feeling, becomes the criterion by which the *will* casts under scrutiny the opposing forces of the *tragic* sense.

Rational inhumanity reaches its highest degree with Cartesian rationalism. Unamuno argues that the truth, instead of the Cartesian adage, “I think, therefore I am” should be replaced with the much more practical, much more appropriate “I am, therefore I think,” “I feel, therefore I am,” or “I will, therefore I am.”⁵² The activity of thought is a product and consequence of existence. And existence is the condition of creating a purpose-- a *willingness* to do something. The *will*, for Unamuno will be the only opposing force against rationalism; its only purpose becomes to counter rationality.

As mentioned, most of his attacks against philosophers and philosophies are aimed at this very obsession of “abstraction” that stubbornly rejects “man” to affirm the “idea.” Unamuno's intention is not to ignore the body by solely focusing on the mind. Rather his interests are directed toward the dynamics between the fusion of mind and body, the material and the abstract; much like reason and faith, and the other antinomies found along his thoughts of what constitute the *tragic*. For Unamuno, philosophers have only managed to address fragments of the whole problem of life. Their philosophies are specialized inquiries that set aside essential aspects of reality, amounting only at diverting its attention away from the *tragic* condition. He distances himself from these approaches by taking into account all aspects of life that were revealed by the emergence

51. Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense*, 219.

52 Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense*, 41.

of the *tragic* awareness.

As we have seen, the *tragic* in Unamuno has a twofold manifestation; the first is an awareness about his existential condition and an objection to the intellectual spectrum that oscillates from skepticism to dogmatism. The second is a condition to break and collapse these complex levels of inquiry of the aforementioned philosophies in order to come to terms with an authentic life. An authenticity that emanates out of the new faith and philosophies, and that has its foundations grounded on true human nature.

E. The *Will* Affirming the Sentiments

For Unamuno, living without the awareness of the *tragic* is not living at all. He insists upon the notion that to live is to feel, not to think; prioritizing sentiments over rationality. He thinks that the nature of human beings depends on their sentiments; that human beings are “sentimental animals.” Contrastingly, Aristotle claimed that human beings are political or rational animals. According to Unamuno, we are animals that derive everything from our sentiments and thus guide our lives according to the dictates of the heart, not the intellect.

Since reason is a social construct and the *will* must rearrange the relationship between reason and the emotions, it gives reason a status of contingency and the emotions an urgency to replace rationality. Unamuno’s *tragic* theory, unlike Aristotle, does not restrain itself to particular emotions of pity and fear; it is rather a reversal of the Aristotelian notion of tragedy. The emotions out of the *tragic* supplant reason and hunger for immortality becomes the prime and exclusive mover of the *will*.

The *tragic* will inevitably yield desperation, existential anxiety, and hunger for immortality. The primary differentiating factor in Unamuno's outlook is that the product of tragedy is detrimental to the human mind, yet it is impossible to avoid it. Tragedy becomes a necessity of life. All the passions and sentiments aroused by the *tragic* condition are impossible to evade or escape. Life for Unamuno becomes a search for an authentic existence despite its consequences. To find the true meaning of life is to rely on the true nature of the soul-- the sentiments. This process of pursuing the "true nature" reveals the human condition, i.e. its *tragic* condition. The *tragic* becomes a vindicator and savior of the human soul. It serves the purpose of revealing the human predicament that its own existence is contingent but salvageable through an authentic existence.

F. Religiosity and Authenticity Out of The Tragic

“The tragic sense of life embraces the impossibility of resolution between intellect and heart, thought and feeling, logic and emotion, knowledge and wisdom [...] These polarities define the essence of life and should not be reconciled. Their tension generates anxiety but also leads humans to authentic existence.”⁵³

As we will discuss later, in Unamuno's view the Quixotic outlook represents the embodiment of an authentic life. But what does this authenticity mean? Unamuno responds that Quixotism provides a complete philosophical framework that confronts the *tragic* condition of life through action. Namely Quixotism is a way of life in which its

53. Lambropoulos, *The Tragic Idea*, 113.

main purpose is to affirm life as a whole. It distances itself from scienticism and faith, objective truth, or an eternal afterlife. Life for the will becomes introspective immersed in itself and holding fast to its sentiments. All of life's aspects, insofar as they are *tragic*, become the key elements to an authentic existence.

However, the question of Unamuno's religiosity and faith in the traditional sense remain, as his whole philosophical views, rather complex and enigmatic. The new faith derived from hope and religiosity will find a stronghold in the Quixotic outlook. His skepticism was focused on the Catholic religion's fundamental scaffolds of faith; the conventionalism, and traditional Catholic faith was replaced with a deep interior relationship with oneself. In other words, Unamuno's religiosity became an intimate activity of the flesh and blood individual. His religiosity, supported by the Quixotic authenticity, becomes individualistic. But peoples being the sum of individuals also reflect this individualism as a collective through what he calls *intrahistoria*. This is the notion that the true history of a country is forged not by its politico-economical situation, but rather by the everyday activities and customs of the people. He says that his situation is the situation of Spain and as a Spaniard, he reflects Spain itself. *His tragic* condition is therefore, universalized within the Spanish context insofar as he is a Spanish citizen.

There has been an ongoing debate about Unamuno's religious convictions.⁵⁴ The Catholic Church accused him of heresy and of being an atheist. In his *Tragic Sense of Life* he exposes the most horrific discovery of his mind, the *tragic* element of his existence. His own intellect, through rationality, unveiled the awareness of his mortality.

54. See Eduardo de Agüero's, *El pensamiento filosófico-religioso de Miguel de Unamuno*.

Rationality led him to destroy his religion, his faith in God and created a realm in which he could not escape the disturbing effects of death and nothingness.

His work has been deemed as irreligious and blasphemous. However, under close inspection we are able to identify a strong sense of religiosity. Here, religiosity becomes something utterly different from the conventional meaning; it is no longer a systematic endeavor of following a set of rules, laws or maxims. Instead this new definition now includes an individuality that follows one's sentiments, feelings, and intuitions. A kind of religiosity that is able to supplant even the most stable of systems, religion as an institution, and even rationality as a human necessity. It also carries within it the "authentic," which is quite different from the pre-scientific religious condition of man. The differences are many and radical, and they rest on the notions of authenticity and truth.

Truth for Unamuno is not based on facts or mathematical equations. A human being, when feeling sad, does not have to prove its state of mind in order to believe it as true. On the other hand, one may have false beliefs that are believed to be true. For Unamuno truth is derived from the sentiments of the subject rather than objective claims about the universe around the subject. More importantly, truth for Unamuno is linked to individual authenticity and not a verifiable system of facts. He distances himself from the scientific and logical epistemology in order to account for irrational, random states of mind. As Aristides points out, "Unamuno does not pursue truth counting on syllogisms; quite the opposite, he roars, desperately revolves looking for the vital depth of peoples where he can sow his tragic sense."⁵⁵

55. Aristides, *Dialéctica de la tragedia existencial*, 28.

Human necessity shifts from knowledge, as an end in itself, to place the human sentiments, passions and feelings into the ultimate purpose of human existence; a new kind of religiosity that harnesses all the features emanating from the *tragic* sense of life. It is a discourse that dethrones the two most powerful dimensions of human activity, logical discourse and the renunciation of established religions. His religiosity is a critical and creative approach that re-evaluates the epistemological principles of the human mind.

In the case of Unamuno the *tragic* life has left a stormy path against rationality. The *tragic* sentiment of life is the powerless man confronted with his unavoidable destiny of mortality. The *tragic* is the catalyst of Unamuno's religiosity and a desperate claim for eternal life:

“We must believe in the other life, in the eternal life beyond the tomb, and in an individual and personal life, a life in which each one of us senses his own consciousness and senses that it is joined, without confounded, with all others in their consciousness...”⁵⁶

His religiosity is the fight against death and non-existence through the powers of creativity, a creativity, whose possibilities rest on the synthesis of the philosophy emanating from the sentiments and the creative powers of poetry. He substituted God for life; he created a new deity, with a specific decree, to live life for the sake of life itself. “[T]his religious despair I have been talking about and which is nothing other than the *tragic* sense of life itself is, though more or less veiled, the very basis of the conscience of civilized individuals and peoples today; that is, of those individuals and peoples who

56. Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, 281.

do not suffer from either deficiency of intellect or deficiency of feeling.”⁵⁷

In an essay titled “Mi Religión” he defines his religion as “the pursuit of truth in life and life in truth.”⁵⁸ In turn Scientificism, that is, “the blind faith in science”⁵⁹ along with an “Intolerant, fanatic, aggressive; a dogmatic skepticism against dogmatism”⁶⁰ lead to create a false sense rooted in vanity that “what is important for them is not *being*, but *being in appearance*.”⁶¹

The blind faith in Christianity leads to the same ailment, to believe in dogmas of the church. These are for Unamuno not sufficient to lead a life of truth and find truth in life. Authenticity being can be found, according to Unamuno in this bi-conditional equation between truth and life; a kind of truth that does not rest on rational justifications, but rather on sentimental affirmation. Let us now consider the character that embodies the ultimate quest of the *tragic* life.

57. Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, 139.

58. Unamuno, *Obras Completas*. Vol. IV, 387.

59. *Ibid.*, 523.

60. *Ibid.*, 530.

61. *Ibid.*, 530.

III. Literature, Poetry, and Philosophy

A. On the Importance of Literature and Poetry in Unamuno

Before entering into considerations about this classic literary figure and its philosophical implications in Unamuno's thought, it seems imperative to delve into the role of literature and poetry for the Spanish philosopher in order to understand the importance of *El Quixote* in the context of the *tragic*. For Unamuno, Spanish Literature represents the philosophical framework of Spain. "For I increasingly harbor the conviction that our philosophy, Spanish philosophy, is to be found diffused and liquescent in our literature, in our collective life, in our action, above all in our mysticism, and not in any philosophical system whatsoever."⁶²

Neither was Unamuno too fond of philosophical systems, for him they stand as instantiations of rationalistic traditions that tend to ignore life and rather focus their inquiries in abstractions and objective truths. Enclosing Unamuno into a philosophical compartment is perhaps one of the great injustices one could possibly perpetrate against him. However, for the sake of contextualizing his thought Ferrater Mora, aware of the dangers at hand disserts:

62. Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, 336.

“At any rate, it would be a mistake to enlist Unamuno in the ranks of classical idealism, as it would be inadequate to consider him a naturalist or a realist. To be sure, Unamuno speaks often of 'realism,' but at such times it is to be understood as an injunction to create reality rather than as an invitation to describe it faithfully and accurately. Also he seems sometimes on the brink of naturalism and even materialism, but it is only because he wishes to emphasize what is concrete in man's existence. Realism, naturalism, and materialism define man in terms of what he is, which nearly always means, in terms of what he has been. Idealism, on the other hand, defines man in terms of what he ought to be. Unamuno prefers to 'define' him in terms of what he will become, or more exactly, in terms of what he wants to become, since 'we are lost or saved on the basis of what we wanted to be, and not for what we have been.' If a name could be given to Unamuno's philosophical anthropology, 'poetic realism' would perhaps be the least inadequate of all.”⁶³

Apart from the obvious fact that the concept of the tragic derives from the literary and dramatic realm, for Unamuno, literature and poetry serve as neatly suitable vessels to fully articulate an endemic Spanish philosophy. Poetry is for Unamuno an intrinsic part to overcome the negative effects of the *tragic* on the *will*. Poetry is a means of creativity that does not depend whatsoever on rational or logical discourse. It serves however, as a link with reason and logic to that of the passions, sentiments, and feelings of the will. Moreover, literature and poetry represent a whole theory of truth. Unamuno's meanings of the “real” and the “true” rest upon the nature of the sentimental man. By ridding itself from the social convention of rationality, and embodying its true self, man can only look inward; his interior life is what's real. His sentiments are the epistemological catalysts to

63. José Ferrater Mora, *Unamuno: Bosquejo de una filosofía*, 59.

judge something true and real.

Poetry as an artform is able to broadcast these multiple aspects that were set aside by logic, reason, and science; not as the object of inquiry but as a wish for creativity⁶⁴. Poetry must not be conceived as an oppositional force to reason but as a complementary feature for the *will*. The fusion of these two things can potentially be achieved through philosophy. Unamuno's sharp critique of philosophy rests on this very notion that does not take poetry into account. It is easy to identify how Unamuno plays out this notion in his prolific poetic production. As Tollinchi⁶⁵ and Garcia Blanco⁶⁶ point out, Unamuno uses poetry, and literature for this matter, as an alternate means of expression to promote his philosophical ideas. He rescues, in some sense, the versatile creative powers of philosophy; a philosophy that molds to the requirements of the tragic sense and is able to go beyond.

“Philosophy, then, is also the science of the tragedy of life, a reflecting upon the tragic sense of life. And what I have attempted in these essays is an exercise in this philosophy, with its inevitable contradictions or inner antinomies.”⁶⁷ In fact, these inner contradictions are the very essence of authentic life.

64. A good example of the poetic approach can be found in two Spanish philosophers strongly influenced by Unamuno, José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) with his “raciovitalismo” and María Zambrano (1904-1991) with her concept of “Razón poética” “Poetic reason” and forms part of this Unamunian critique to science and knowledge by pointing out the alienation of the passions, sentiments, and emotions, into a complete theory of human nature. For these philosophers seek a notion that incorporates all contradictory aspects of life into a holistic theory of personhood.

65. Esteban Tollinchi, “La ontología de Unamuno,” pp. 109-110

66. Manuel Garcia Blanco, “En torno a Unamuno,” pp. 483-484. García Blanco reproduces a sonnet authored by Unamuno in 1910 that is aimed at Friedrich Nietzsche.

67. Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, pp. 347.

Taking Unamuno's claim that Spanish philosophy is articulated through its literature, it only seems necessary to include his own literary works to shed light on his philosophy. The novels *Niebla* and *San Manuel Bueno, Mártir* are two literary pieces that represent the manifestation of the tragic sense.

1. Niebla

The novel *Niebla*, published in 1914 is considered one of the best literary works written by Miguel de Unamuno. It is a story about love, its disappointments, and discoveries. Augusto Pérez was an introverted wealthy lawyer. Struck with love at first sight by a passing woman on the street, he sets out to court the enchanting woman.

Her name was Eugenia. She was a piano teacher who was in love with another and resisted Augusto's courtship attempts. Disregarding Eugenia's rejections, he pays the mortgage of her house, which only infuriates and offends her. Her numerous and constant rejections led Augusto into the arms of another woman and he finds himself questioning the profound love he felt for Eugenia. Moving forward, Augusto asks for Eugenia's hand and marriage. Surprisingly, she accepts but later runs off with her true love, Mauricio.

Overwhelmed with depression, his thoughts led him to suicide. But, he goes back and forth on following through with this action when he comes across Miguel de Unamuno's article on the subject. Intrigued and compelled by his work he decides to travel to Salamanca and sets on his inquisition.

During the interview, and sitting down in Unamuno's own studio, he reveals to Augusto that he is only a character in one of Unamuno's *nivolas*. Augusto was only a

creation of the imagination of Miguel de Unamuno and as such he did not have the autonomic will to kill himself. Augusto, enraged by his words, kept insisting, “Don Miguel, for God’s sake, I want to live, I want to be me!”⁶⁸ This revelation created an existential controversy between Unamuno and Augusto. Augusto, asserting existential autonomy questions Unamuno’s own existence.

To prove his point, Unamuno in turn guarantees Augusto’s death upon arrival to his home. Augusto distressed with the idea that his existence is dependent on and created by Unamuno, decides to act upon his own volition and refused to die.

He comes to an understanding that he did not exist. Augusto fights Unamuno back by claiming that even he (referring to Unamuno) will die. Augusto, acknowledging the fact that he was a *nivolesque* character, argues that authors serve the purpose of endowing their characters immortality. Furthermore, the authors themselves are mortals that serve as means to cast the story of their characters. As Unamuno said, Cervantes created Don Quixote, yet Quixote is more real than Cervantes. Realizing it was impossible for him to die, since he was not even alive, nor existed, Augusto thought to acquire some kind of immortal condition.

Enlightened by his epiphany, he starts eating to nourish himself and affirm his own immortality, or so he thought. Nevertheless, Augusto dies in his bed shortly after arriving to his home, as Unamuno promised. His two servants call the family doctor and his death is declared to be a heart attack. It turned out that his over-nourishing put a strain on his heart and led him to his evident death.

Augusto points out the possibility of Unamuno being part of a *nivola*, suggesting

68. Miguel de Unamuno, *Niebla*, page 284.

that anyone may very well be part of a novel just as his character claims not being part of one. The term *nivola* is claimed to be a genre formed by Unamuno to illustrate the fine threading between reality and fiction. The character demands an answer from Unamuno; he needs a justification of the impossibility of his *real* existence. Augusto Pérez had thought to be a flesh and blood individual but ended up being a creative invention authored by Unamuno.

Augusto has the fear of death and awareness of nothingness. He demands of his creator the autonomy of his existence. He does not care about anything other than his own existence and his affirmation of life. Life for Augusto is a chain of events that leads him from ignorance to knowledge about his ontological condition; a notion that is self-reflecting, as in the case of Augusto, centered upon itself. The scope of its examination is centered on the reflection of its ontological condition. The will, in the case of Augusto, is focused on its existence and its volition to affirm life, and immortality. The will, after the realization of its ontological condition, seeks a course of action that will yield its volition. The will becomes a legislator of its own truth by stepping away from the rational knowledge, which in turn produced the awareness of its condition; creating its own truth will dispose of the need for reason and knowledge and replace it with what the will *feels* to do. Moreover the *will* collapses upon itself and everything outside becomes, at best, contingent; relenting other surrounding agents, i.e. other individuals, their own autonomic existence.

2. San Manuel Bueno, Mártir

Miguel de Unamuno's, *San Manuel Bueno, Mártir* was published in 1930. The story takes place in the small town of Valverde de Lucerna in the mountaintops of Spain. There a young woman, Angela, recalls the life of the priest Manuel Bueno in her memoirs. Don Manuel was being considered for beatification through the Catholic Church. And so, Angela had been asked for information by the bishop of the church, who was assembling a biography about the priest. Her memories revolve around the village and their beloved priest, as well as her brother, Lázaro.

Angela was sent to a convent for education. After her return, she was impacted by how great the love and admiration the people of the town manifested towards the village's priest. Don Manuel was known to be a man of the people; a man who dedicated his whole life to the well being (and proactively helped in the manual labors and economic affairs) of his community. The landscape of the small town of Valverde de Lucerna, situated in the shores of a lake besides a mountain, was an allegory to the priest's relationship with the people of the village. The people often commented about the reflection of the mountain in the lake, much like, the people of the town were a reflection of Don Manuel's actions. Aware of this, Father Manuel took upon himself the responsibility of reassuring that image of pure sanctity and innocent faith.

Years later, Angela's brother had returned from America. Influenced by the new world's outlook, Lázaro brought liberal ideas to his household and village. These ideas were strongly against the religion of the Catholic Church. He had little regard to what others thought of his views and expressed adamant reluctance to change his outlook. The

town perceived a rivalry between Lázaro and Don Manuel. But it was Lázaro's mother's dying wish that brought the priest and him together.

His admiration and respect grew after witnessing, as Angela did, Don Manuel's dedication to their community. Father Manuel befriended the brother and little by little they established a strong bond. The brother assisted mass and received communion on a regular basis and the town perceived that the brother converted to Catholicism. This reassured the people about the special character and the spiritual powers of the priest and augmented their faith. Little did the people know that the brother knew the darkest secret of the whole town. Father Manuel did not believe in God. Rather it was Manuel who convinced Lázaro to deceive the people and let them believe in God and not question their faith.

The bond between the priest and the brother grew so strong that the brother succumbed to Manuel's volition to keep the town ignorant. With Father Manuel's death the brother confesses to his sister the saint's "tragic belief." She was, with her brother, an accomplice and upholder of the secret that was locked up in their souls, as Manuel kept his for the common good of the people, to maintain the priest's sanctity intact.

The case of San Manuel represents the collective awareness about the tragic sense. San Manuel lacking the Christian faith chooses to conceal his beliefs, keeping the whole town under the impression that his faith was infallible. The town admired the projection of his faith and regarded him as a Saint. He was consumed by his existential dilemma but never gave up his Christian duties toward his fellow citizens. Furthermore he convinces an atheist to help him maintain the town's ignorance and strong faith. As with his own views about Spain's identity, the atheist assumes the role of the Christian Catholic for the

good of the community.

His strong sense about the communal well-being was above and beyond rational truth and individual beliefs. His duty, as a priest is to disregard his personal beliefs and uphold the values of his social position, the values of the Catholic Christian faith, which are, as we saw earlier, Spain's identity. His sole purpose was to maintain and enhance the faith of his people. Lázaro, instead of revealing the secret of the priest to the people, chose to follow upon the priest's project. Lázaro could have unmasked the truth and would have left the town without a saint, let alone with their faith.

Both characters somehow came to realize that their ulterior purpose was not to reveal their truth, but to upkeep the faith of the community. That course of action produced the effect they desired, the peaceful unexamined faith of the people, thus asserting a collective sense over their individual beliefs and volitions.

These two literary examples provide the basis to establish Unamuno's concept of the *tragic* in his own literary works. Both works transmit the desperation of existence, the fear of death, and the experience of nothingness that were to Unamuno the essence of the tragic sense of life; the problems of knowledge against faith, and immortality against nothingness. But perhaps the most important feature of his literary fictional characters is that they are more real than existing men that lack the awareness of the tragic. These fictional characters, Augusto and Manuel, by having all the symptoms of the tragic, inevitably become real entities.

“What we deem as reality is not objective; on the contrary the
tragic emerges from the clash with other human realities. In addition, the

reality of a fictional entity or one of flesh and blood is valued by the measure of its passion for being. A fictional character who longs passionately to live and place the “yo” securely after death is more of a person than one of those flesh and blood men who assassinate time and grow foolish in triviality to escape the thought of their tragic condition. This is the 'apparential' subject and the former is the authentic one.”⁶⁹

The role of the *nivola*, as he calls his own novels, serves to explore the boundaries of existence and immortality. Where, it seems, that if one exists then is not immortal, and vice versa. The only aspect that warrants immortality is being a character of a *nivola*. A dimension in which it is not clear if one has one or the other, but not both. The *nivola* for Unamuno stands as a special ontological realm. It is a term to erase boundaries between entities, such as, author and character, master and servant, mortality and immortality, and rationality against irrationality.

These oppositions confirm Unamuno’s philosophical critique against reason, and existence. He says, “Faith in immortality is irrational. And, however, faith, life and reason are in need of each other”.⁷⁰ But he still insists in confronting things such as reason against irrationality, faith against reason, writer against dramatic character, existence and nothingness.

Literary poetry, as in the case of San Manuel, offers “The fact that ultimately there can be no truth, no reality, except that of the story itself, the fact that we the readers

69. Aristides, *Dialéctica de la tragedia existencial*, 153.

70. Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*. 101.

can never hope to be in possession of the truth about Don Manuel, is but a reflection on one level of man's limited access to knowledge of others and on another of the potential that literature has for creating self-contained worlds that are ever-beckoning but ever mysterious. Angela will have one view of reality, we may have another one; but the truth itself must always elude us.”⁷¹ For Don Miguel de Unamuno truth is to believe things wholeheartedly. Thus man in its passionate belief also acts according to those beliefs branded in his heart. The intrinsic beliefs of the heart are not scrutinized against factual knowledge; rather they are supported by the sentiments of the *will*. Authentic existence is possible through the enforcement of the sentiments upon those beliefs.

The opening lines of Nikos Kazantzakis' *Spain* denote that “Spain has two faces. Its one profile, the elongated fiery visage of the Knight of the Woeful Countenance; and its other, the practical, square head of Sancho.”⁷² Spain in the eyes of Kazantzakis is divided between the grotesque irrationality of Quixote and the practical wisdom of Sancho. The first represents the religiously passionate side of Spain's identity; the other represents the attempt to become rational, i.e. Europeanized. Unamuno resisted this notion of Europeanization by wittingly claim for a Spaniardizing of Europe. In his view Europe must embrace the tragic sense in order to unveil the truth of life, a truth not found in external inquiries but rather on the innermost reflections of the soul.

71. Longhurst, “The Problem of Truth in Saint Emmanuel,” 597.

72. Nikos Kazantzakis *Spain*, page 15.

IV. Don Quixote: Unamuno's Tragic Hero

A. Quixotic Philosophy

Unamuno's proposal of Quixotism, or Quixotic philosophy, is an approach that stems from what he likes to call the Spanish “national Bible”⁷³ the most prominent work in Spanish literature, and perhaps one of the quintessential literary creations of human kind⁷⁴, *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547-1616).

Unamuno warns about the interpretation of the text and insists upon the notion that it is the experience of the reader with the text what is the most important aspect of *his* Quixotism. He believes to have “a right to see our own symbols in these characters.”⁷⁵ El Quixote becomes the role figure of his new outlook. A new framework of reference that enables the human *will* to survive the *tragic* condition of its existence.

Don Quixote is the “hero out of thought.” The hero, although not a real flesh and blood person possesses something more than the flesh and blood individual, something the author feels jealous about. That is, perhaps, the process of the character being

73. Unamuno, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, 366.

74. The Encyclopædia Britannica deems Don Quixote as one of the greatest books of the Western World. It is also the second most translated book in history (second only to the bible). The Fact that it has been translated to many languages may suggest its universal relevance, a notion that Unamuno implicitly wants to advance through the Quixotic philosophy.

75. *Ibid.*, 358.

immortalized in the novel. The Quixotic move is a strategy to try to escape rationality. Unamuno wants to go outside the boundaries of reason. In *El Quixote*, the main character is an old man who had a passion for cavalry books. He delusionally mimicked the activities of a medieval knight. In his world, he thought of himself as a grandiose knight in *La Mancha*, but in truth he was nothing other than an old mad man. He fought with windmills thinking they were giant monsters. That kind of “insanity” or divergence with reality is what Unamuno suggests is a methodology to overthrow the rule of reason.

Unamuno asserts that, “There exists a Quixotic philosophy and even a Quixotic metaphysics, and also a Quixotic logic and a Quixotic sense of religion. This philosophy, this logic, this ethics, this religious sense is what I have tried to outline, to suggest rather than to develop, in the present work; not to develop rationally, of course, for Quixotic madness does not admit of scientific knowledge.”⁷⁶

Its madness is the key feature out of the tragic circle. A realm which has been stretched to its very limits. Unamuno pushed knowledge to its limits and made it to succumb to Quixotism. Its essence is based on the effect of the tragic that ultimately leads to “The mad craving for immortality which, should we doubt of living on in spirit, makes us long to live behind at least our *eternal name and fame*.”⁷⁷ These cravings for eternal existence are attached to an “inextinguishable longing to survive”⁷⁸ and it is also “a source of the most extravagant follies as well as of the most heroic acts.”⁷⁹ It also

76. Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense*, 321.

77. Unamuno, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, 356.

78. *Ibid.*, 359.

79. *Ibid.*, 359.

includes a thirsting of a “more ample life”⁸⁰ An approach that intrinsically reflects Unamuno's notion of an authentic existence. Although this special kind of existence is not found or revealed upon rational grounds, it is rather by the sheer madness of *willing* to be and never cease to exist. The Quixotic approach includes the notion of faith in oneself, it moves to find this inwardly, ample, faithful madness that strives to live by means of its hunger to exist.

The hope that emanates out of the hunger for immortality gets embodied by the figure of Don Quixote; a figure that represents for Unamuno the ultimate Master of existence. Don Quixote possesses the features to overcome the agony of the tragic sense. The religion of Don Quixote, armed with hope and faith, moves toward its affirmation of his existence. This fictional character possesses the secret weapon against the tragic sense negative effects, madness. The mad master's insanity takes no part in rationality or set of dogmas, rather its madness is the legislator of actions. It offers a complete disconnect with both simple faith and objective knowledge. Quixotic madness liberates the *will* from the shackles of obtuse dogmatism and skepticism. It converts its tragic existence into a self-affirming quest for immortality. Sancho Panza, Don Quixote's traveling partner, follows its master into the most recondite absurd missions. While Sancho maintains a sane perspective of reality, he nevertheless tacitly acknowledges the supremacy of his master's mindset. Sancho embodies the submission of rationality to sheer volitional madness. Its superiority revolves around the liberating effect it produces; Sancho becomes a contingency, while for Sancho the guidance of his master becomes an

80. Ibid., 364.

ontological necessity.

“It is a great shame that though an infinitude of scholars and Masorettes have fallen upon *Don Quixote*, and have scrutinized every nook and cranny of the text, submitting it to every form of historical examination and exegesis—and some of the exegetes have been not a whit less mad than Don Quixote was himself—and though they have found every manner of enigma, arcanum, and intricate symbolism, so few of them have assimilated the spirit of the book or taken advantage of the marvelous history as a text for sermons or a basis for patriotic meditations in the manner that versicles from the Gospel are used for making homilies, sermons, and pious counsels for a better and more inward life. As much as we meditate on *Don Quixote*, as the Greeks meditated on the Homeric poems or the English on the dramas of Shakespeare, we cannot consume all the marrow of wisdom that it contains.”⁸¹

The importance of el Quixote was that he was fearless despite others opinions of his actions. He did not fear to ridicule himself. On the contrary to make a fool out of himself is a sort of virtue in Unamuno's view. His actions reflected a *will* that operates under the sole direction of its own volition. The authentic *will* is a self-legislator of his actions. Authenticity in this sense does not need to pursue neither objective truth nor faith in God or the afterlife. It only adjusts to life's present circumstances and acts upon it. El Quixote is the true hero that spearheaded his way out of the tragic achieving immortality.

“ ‘What has Don Quixote bequeathed to Kultur?’” And I shall

81. Unamuno, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, 367.

answer: ‘Quixotism! Isn’t that enough?’ And it is a whole method, a whole epistemology, a whole aesthetic, a whole logic, a whole ethic, above all, a whole religion, that is to say, a total economy of the eternal and the divine, a total hope in the rationally absurd.’⁸²

Quixotic philosophy of life will produce for humanity the possibility of living an authentic life. Its authenticity rests upon the notion that life’s affairs are not aimed to the production of knowledge, but rather intended to function for itself for what he *feels*.

Quixotic philosophy swaps ‘knowledge for the sake of knowledge’ for ‘life for the sake of life.’

B. Quixotic Philosophy and the Spanish Situation

The Quixotic outlook has also an alternate side it smears into the collective realm and is also the model for Spain to overcome its collective tragic sense. A sense that if true in the flesh and blood individual, is reflected on the interactions of him with others. Therefore the tragic sense, in the collective sense becomes a source of identity. Not a static notion of identity, but a dynamical notion of identity. The whole collective tragic condition of Spain generates its own cultural identity, a culture that legislates its own interpretation and way of life. This Unamuno calls *Kultur*, which for Spain and Spaniards should fall under the Quixotic outlook.

82. Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, 352-353.

“What I have called the tragic sense of life in men and in nations is at any rate the Spanish tragic sense of life, that of Spanish people and of the Spanish nation, as it is reflected in my consciousness, which is a Spanish consciousness, made in Spain. And this tragic sense of life is essentially the Catholic sense of it, for Catholicism, above all popular Catholicism, is tragic.”⁸³

The sense of the tragic outlays a way to address Spain’s situation of national and cultural identity. Unamuno establishes Quixotism as a foundation for the emergence of a Spanish philosophy conceived by Spanish thinking by way of its own history and circumstances. The tragic ontology creates the framework to affirm a philosophy based not on reason but also on the quintessential literary figure in Spanish literature and history, Don Quixote. Unamuno’s intentions take into account the Spanish circumstances, but also take into consideration a strong sense of individualism that smears into the collective realm.

From roughly the thirteenth century on, Spain has systematically disentangled itself from Europe, and Europe has tacitly accepted the brittle disconnection. Key factors that contributed to this are first, racial difference between Spain and the rest of Europe. Second, Spain’s counter-reformist approach led to creating an ultra-conservative Catholic stronghold that prevented Spain staying relevant in intellectual topics from the rest of Europe. Thirdly, Spain’s fall as a world power at the end of the 19th century led to the creation of a sense of disappointment and mistrust. During this period Spain suffered multiple political and economical downturns. With the Hispano-American war of 1898,

83. Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, 320.

Spain lost its last two colonial possessions in the Americas, Cuba and Puerto Rico. Spaniards felt a great deal of despair, solitude, and confusion. These tensions between Spain and Europe are at the core of the collective tragic sense.

Spanish intellectuals were seeking different solutions to their national and individual afflictions. Miguel de Unamuno was one of the most prominent of these intellectuals and part of a group known as the Generation of 98. These individuals were searching for an endemic Spanish identity. One of their options was to look back on history in order to affirm the basic values and principles of the Spanish people. Some members of this generation of 98 argued for a return to traditional Spanish values, while others undertook a vanguardist approach in order to rediscover, redefine, and recast the Spanish identity.

1. The Generation of 98

To capture the essence of the Generation of 98 is nearly impossible since its members and its following scholarship are not in agreement about the purpose and belonging of the group. The term was first coined by Ortega y Gasset to describe the class of intellectuals that came about the “disaster of 1898.” The Generation of 98 is distinguished from a younger generation as denounced by Azorín, and their fundamental intellectual differences. Azorín includes prominent intellectuals in that class, such as himself, Maeztu, Valle-Inclán, Machado, Unamuno, and a younger class of intellectuals that included Ortega y Gasset.

These intellectuals did not have a unified theory or common purpose. Given that

the group was to portray the intellectual class after 1898, they lacked a hegemonic view. They did share basic preoccupations about their country and existential condition. However, each man created their own set of theories and projects about Spain's future, often resulting in conflict with the positions of other members of the Generation of 98. They of course share some common influences, although these influences had multiple, and quite often contrary interpretations of them. The influence of Schopenhauer is evident in almost all of them, but most importantly the influence of Nietzsche.

Azorín, Baroja, and Maeztu are clear examples of this Nietzschean influence. Azorín is influenced by his eternal return. Baroja is seduced by his revaluation of values as an escape from morality. We find in Maeztu the Nietzschean view of the *übermensch* as a prescription to Spain's afflictions. Maeztu thinks that Spain needs Superior men. Far different is the effect of Nietzsche in Unamuno. The latter publicly and explicitly repudiated Nietzsche's anti-Christian views.

It is also important to note that Schopenhauer and particularly Nietzsche were introduced in Spain in the mid 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century respectively. It is in this period that these Spanish intellectuals were in their most active and prolific literary and philosophical stage. The first decade of the Century marked an embryonic creative environment. Maeztu's ingenuity about Nietzschean views and Unamuno's introverted philosophy serve as examples that led to arise a sense of futility and dissatisfaction in the younger intellectuals.

Ortega y Gasset, although considered a late member of this group, distanced himself from the rest to advocate against the Generation of 98's introverted attitude and

advance a “concrete and practical ideology”⁸⁴ under a younger class, a Generation of 1914. The Generation of 98 represents a renaissance of a renewed and creative idiosyncratic Spain. The scope of influence exercised by this Generation is too broad to articulate in these few lines. Doubtless this intellectual class broadcasted and gave birth to new ideas not only to Spain, but also to every Spanish Speaking territory across the globe. Their reach goes beyond any political, economical, or cultural boundaries. They have exerted influence on almost all literary and critical genres in the Hispanic culture. The peculiar aspect of this generation is that it underscores the terrible contradicting forces that enable, through the tragic, the possibility of authenticity. Unamuno casts a peculiar approach for the search of a Spanish identity. His view is far different from the rest of the Generation of 98 intellectuals. Although this group held no common view or agreement in a particular solution about the problems of Spain, it was assumed that indeed a problem needed their attention.

Through the concept of tragedy Unamuno focuses his examination to establish an inquiry regarding the problem of Spain. This move by Unamuno opens up a different chapter that must bring to the forefront the development of the concept of tragedy. Namely, Unamuno gives path to a whole historical evaluation of the meaning of tragedy. Unamuno’s philosophy aims at creating a soothing outlook for the agonies of the political, cultural, and existential afflictions of the Spanish people, being himself the object of his own inquiries. “Philosophy, then, is also the science of the tragedy of life, a reflecting upon the tragic sense of life. And what I have attempted in these essays is an

84. Donald Shaw, *La Generación del 98*, 279.

exercise in this philosophy, with its inevitable contradictions or inner antinomies.”⁸⁵

Ultimately, there need not be a distinction between the individual and the collective realms. The nation is only the mirroring effect of multiple individuals with roughly the same existential agony. This special type of philosophy is conceived by Unamuno not to logically justify Spanish thought and identity, quite the opposite, he demands a system that has the philosophical qualities to address the Spanish predicament; while at the same time creating a framework that fits the needs to satisfy the existential and ontological problems in both the national and the personal fronts. Here is the crucial point of fusing his theory of tragedy with his Quixotic philosophy, a fuselage that will yield the discovery of a theory of the self, in his particular case, a theory of the Spanish people and its legacy, its place in history and culture. For Unamuno these two cannot be separated, he is an instantiation of Spain, and as such Spain suffers the same afflictions he does. No other system is suited to fit this notion than Quixotism through the tragic sense. Both fuse together to create an outlook that dethrones fanatic rationality and puts the authentic being at the center.

Quixotism is an overflowing affirmation of the sentiments towards life and against death. It is an autonomic philosophy that needs not rational justification or refutation, and intended to fit solely the individual that created it. Nor is this philosophy a relativist position towards life. Quixotism is the approach Unamuno conceived to cope with his existential condition as both an individual and an organic part of a community and the problems that those realms entail.

85. Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, 347.

“The philosophy in the soul of my people seems to me the expression of an inner tragedy analogous to the tragedy in the soul of Don Quixote, the expression of a conflict between what the world appears scientifically to be and what we want the world to be in accord with the faith of our religion. And in this philosophy lies the secret judgment made of us to the effect that we are basically irreducible to *Kultur*: in other words that we will not submit to it ”⁸⁶

The conclusion of *The Tragic Sense*, ending in the “tragi-comedy of Don Quixote and Spain”⁸⁷ brings to the foreground a philosophy of life. Its immediate effect is reflected on the tension and struggle between reason, faith, and the struggle for immortality. All this is accomplished and fulfilled by Quixotic philosophy. He bases a model in which a fictitious character is the “hero of our thought”⁸⁸. The hero, although not a real flesh and bones person possesses something more than the flesh and blood individual, something the author feels jealous about. That is, perhaps, the process of the character being immortalized in the novel. The Quixotic move is a strategy to try to escape rationality. Unamuno wants to go outside the boundaries of reason. In *El Quixote*, the main character is an old man who had a passion for cavalry books. He mimicked the activities of a medieval knight. In his world, he thought of himself as a grandiose knight in *La Mancha*, but in truth his was nothing but an old mad man. He fought with windmills thinking they were giant monsters. That kind of “insanity” or divergence with reality is what Unamuno suggests as a methodology to replace the primacy of reason.

86. Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense*, 348.

87. *Ibid.*, 322.

88. *Ibid.*, 350.

Unamuno's insistence between philosophy and literature is evident throughout his work and life. The cross-referencing between literature, philosophy, and real life is a recurrent topic in his works. Literature is for Unamuno a communicative device of history. It is through this process that humans interact with their predecessors. The product of this process sometimes yields evolution, and progress, and sometimes it yields destruction and regression. History is not determined or created by this relational process. History, for him is the actions of all humans, actions that will never be recorded in books, or will ever reveal themselves to future generations. This history, which he calls *intrahistoria*, lies at the very core of the Quixotic collective philosophy. It is a history not based on rational equations, but rather, on how these people as individuals and as a community conduct themselves through time. Unamuno defines *Intrahistoria* as the real history of peoples. The everydayness and the unconscious doing of the everyday cultural agent putting into motion the customs and habits of this becoming and development of history. *Intrahistoria* shifts away from preconceptions of identity and is in constant revision to define its very own agent.

Unamuno finds himself in a very difficult predicament. He is immersed in a rational discourse that has annihilated his irrational faith, a faith that once was untouched by reason. He was extirpated from that faithful realm of existence and brought by force to rationality and knowledge. Flustered by reason, and wishing to go back to that previous state, and feeling a deep resentment towards reason and knowledge he envisions a way out of that state. Aware of the impossibility of return, he aims to move forward or beyond reason and knowledge. Humans ought not to revolve around knowledge; life must revolve around and for itself.

Human activity, in terms of the individual and the collective, must work upon creating the conditions to affirm their own existence. Quixotic philosophy produces the alignment and composition of the two, the collective and the individual, to create the sense to affirm life. As with el Quixote, the individual will legislate its own truth, a truth of life, this is the Quixotic epistemology. This epistemology will link and relate all humans to the common goal of living life to its fullest. Quixotic philosophy of life is the blueprint of the possibility of living an authentic life. Its authenticity rests upon the notion that life's affairs are not aimed to the production of knowledge, but rather intended to function for itself. Quixotic philosophy swaps 'knowledge for the sake of knowledge' for 'life for the sake of life.' The quixotic philosophy is an approach that is able to survive the uncharted realms of existence.

This new philosophy will become the new possibility for an effective replacement of life-denying rationality. It is a philosophy born out of the tragic sense of life against rational skepticism and religious dogmatism. This tragic sense of life creates the demand of a special religious solution. A religion that still maintains faith at its very core; it distances itself from scientific knowledge, but also overcomes the simplistic faith it once held in the pre-tragic attitude. It is a faith centered on the concrete living being's inner structure.

Quixotism is Unamuno's attempt to arouse a sense of intellectual awareness and enlightenment. The germination of a philosophical class endowed with an outlook conscious of its 'tragic condition' and able to muster a method consistent with the essential features of both the biological and the cultural realms; an approach anchored in its identity while managing to cope with the ever-contradicting fluxes of life.

V. Concluding Remarks

Unamuno's journey through the tragic has developed into an outlook that proposes to examine life through the optics of the existing being. The thinking being that *feels*, man itself, is placed at the center of the stage. The flesh and blood man plays the central character in the most real of all dramatic performances, the tragedy of life. As we have seen, the application of the tragic in Unamuno to a special awareness of life's condition is the only path toward authentic life; a life that creates a whole dimension that offers a renewed faith, religion, and philosophy, an outlook that strengthens the *will to live* and leave an immortal footprint of its existence.

His philosophy became a religious endeavor, instead of looking for facts in the real objective realm; the goals shift to find the subjectively true. That is, the attempt of guiding life toward finding immortality. Unamuno sought his immortality by eternalizing himself at least through the legacy of his work. His religiosity strives in the modality of becoming a search of life and not truth in reality and finding a creative faith to affirm life.

Out of the tragic we have, through the opposing forces within the human intellect, a philosophy of madness, life, and a messianic exercise to save God and ultimately ourselves. The tragic has become a truly creative human device for the modern mind to articulate the worst fears, preoccupations, and frustrations of human existence.

Therefore the concept of the tragic acts, in Unamuno, as a grid that encompasses every aspect and action of human life; while at the same time offers a sense of liberation

from objectivity and teaches a way to find one's true self by being sensitizing our perception and experience of life. This work has presented a general overview about Unamuno that presents the intricacies and complexities of his thought. However, many questions were left unanswered. Many of them will remain topics subject of interpretation, others have been exploited and developed.

The depth and scope of Unamuno's thought is too vast to attempt addressing singlehandedly. However I have attempted to establish a conceptual landmark that provides a sense of cohesiveness to his philosophical views; this concept is the *tragic sense*. Its meaning and applications oscillate from the individual to the collective, the religious to the political; it is a term that for Unamuno has no boundaries.

He has not only influenced his generation, he also influenced his own history, Spain, and the Spanish-speaking world. Unamuno, a true rebel and revolutionary, unafraid about the consequences of his thought strived to leave a mark of his existence by heralding the will to live, and cherish authentic life; an agonizing mind that found his worst tribulations in knowledge and hope in madness. For once Unamuno established a philosophy that aims not only at abstractions but reflects and immerses itself in the inner core of human life.

His work marks the dawn of existential thought of the Twentieth Century. Existential philosophers such as Heidegger and Sartre run along parallel threads to Unamunian thought. This shall suffice to support, not only the claim that his philosophy is a 'philosophy of the tragic,' but also that Unamuno's validity and relevance are up to par compared with the rest of European thought.

Furthermore, his influence and idiosyncrasy, as mentioned earlier, extends to the

whole Latin American, Hispanic continent. As mentioned in previous chapters the Generation of 98, and its most influential character in Miguel de Unamuno, served as the intellectual model for some Latin Americans to cope with their own cultural dilemmas and the forging of identities; A process that has been and continues to be a truly Quixotic quest.

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