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The media virus

The last two decades of the 19th century, dominated by a positivistic faith in progress as well as in science, had led people to finally believe in a rationalistic view of life, where everything made sense and where human misery could and would be swept away thanks to the scientific advancement.

And so, with this mindset came the 20th century, an age of transformation, marked by two world wars along with the launch of the atomic bomb. New and faster means of transportation and communication were designed and psychology, with the figure of Sigmund Freud, assumed at last a scientific status. This however was accompanied by a profound and growing cultural crisis, after a period in which people started to conceive that material gain implied some sort of spiritual loss, therefore decency should always be maintained. A new period of instability came along. The First World War left humanity in a disillusioned and cynical mood: stability and prosperity belonged solely to the privileged classes and the gap between the younger generation and the older one grew larger and larger. Nothing seemed to be right or certain, religion could not seem to offer any comfort at all and science with its new set of ideas just seemed to bring more and more ambiguity. An example of this would be the figure of Albert Einstein and his introduction of the concept of “relativity” in science. It is important however to talk about the creation of the concept of “unconscious” by Sigmund Freud as well, a concept that stated that not only the world, but also human personality could be perceived as fragmented. The fundamental problem that followed all this was the inability to arrive at a universally accepted picture of man or the universe, which led to the creation of a variety of views. This whole social climate can very much be compared to our current situation with the pandemic outbreak of the corona virus. The lack of clear answers in part due to novelty of such illness and in part due to the overflowing of information the media have presented us with, has led people to become anxious and in some cases entering full panic mode. Speaking of information overload, I am very much convinced that all this apprehension is primarily caused by a poor portray of the current events by mass media. All these useless articles about coronavirus and its different effects as if it is evolving by the minute, not to mention the ridiculous amount of notifications I constantly get on my phone about the number of infected in addition to the number of death, never the recovered, mind you! This has created chaos among populations, in which people either ignore the situation completely, thinking it’s just the usual media overhyping, or go full panic mode, stocking up food and other goods, making it actually difficult for the people who genuinely need these valuables such as the one with compromised immune systems.

It is incredible how much media can influence us, and it is appalling how badly everything is being handled right now. Incidentally the book 1984 analyses in a very accurate manner the power of propaganda and information control. In 1984 dystopia every information, past present and future, is under constant control, or rather, constant manipulation. Of course, the circumstances in 1984 are remotely close to the ones of today, and yet there are in my opinion some indisputable similarities. If in 1984 publishing data is simply a mean for Big brother to push his agenda nowadays it seems as if new documentation is just a way for big journalistic corporations to get more views or clicks on an article, to make more noise and consequently acquire more visibility, to sell more essentially. It used to mean something to be a journalist, finding and making the truth public, guiding and educating the masses. Now it’s all a big joke.

I suppose that is one reason, among many, why the majority of young people very rarely watch the news or even read articles, there is merely any trust in those resources and that can be honestly very catastrophic, especially in moments like the ongoing one. It is fundamental that everyone collaborates to minimize the spreading of corona as much as possible, but how can one even begin to do that without a clear and trustworthy picture of what is currently happening. A couple of days ago I stumbled across a video made by Virginia Raggi in a park in which she was, very angrily, saying how

dreadfully astounded she was by the amount of people in said park who were just acting as if everything were normal. Some people were taking a walk, others were chatting with friends and some even sunbathing. She then ended the video by begging to please take the situation more seriously or there would be consequences. I too became quite annoyed after hearing this message, at this point I honestly can not understand if this is real misinformation or just a complete lack of care. People on the internet have been joking quite a lot about corona virus, making a lot of memes, hilarious memes I might add, which is fine, that is just the internet way of coping with stress, through humour, and there is nothing wrong with that, but something that has really been frightening me is that people really do tend to assume that this is really just not “that big of a deal”. A phrase that has been going around a lot on the internet is that the corona virus is just a, and I quote, “boomer remover”, which is all fine and dandy until said “boomer” is a loved one. However, can we really be upset or shocked? Again, look at what was happening at the beginning of the year, news sources were all over the place, talking about a possible WWII occurring in months and yet after the second week of January everything was already forgotten, so it is no surprise that people are making fun of this situation.

I myself did not really take this situation too seriously at first and I am only recently realizing the actual impact of this virus on our society. I cannot even begin to comprehend the disastrous effects that this pandemic will have on worldwide economy, which was already sustained by a precarious balance. However, this is not something I cannot control: the thing I can do is stay to and try to get the true information from the right sources. Information that is incredibly hard to find in a deluge of useless content uploaded on the internet. One of my favourite things about this and something, I am certain, these news outlets are very happy for, is the fact that people want the news and they want it right away, thus they go to a site and here is what happens when you go to the site: there is a paywall where you have got to pay, let us say, a dollar a month to get the information and that is really irritating because that data could actually be important. I find it incredibly frustrating because I want to be informed not because I want to be anxious all the time, but because I want to be alert and realize what is happening, where is happening and how it is happening. The point being is how can I keep up on that information if you are either hiding it from me or if it is being buried under an infinite number of listicles about how many people are dying, or how the virus is similar to the Spanish flu, or what kind of things plague doctors used to do, why is that an article, who cares, why is it important. This has created an overabundance of information which had led to an overabundance of panic because you have all this information that says bad things and they are all really just saying the same thing but it is making you feel bad nonetheless because it is all bad news. I suppose the only solution is to maybe stop reading so many articles and get statistics from where you know you can trust.

I am certain however that by now we all somewhat know the actionable steps that we have to take in order to help contain the virus, but I want to reiterate why they are important, not for the majority, but for the

immunocompromised, people who can not fight off the disease alone with ease, and thus they rely on everybody to work together in order to get through it. So while it might not directly impact the majority it surely can impact a weaker loved one. It blows my mind how, at a time where we should try to be as humanitarian as possible and put aside our political and social differences or put aside things that are quite honestly in the grand scheme of the universe not a big deal, such as sacrificing a night out with friend, many people are willing to say that they are not going to distance themselves or take the necessary precautions to make sure that people do not die. It is essential now to seek comprehensive solutions in the face of a necessary human solidarity. As Pope Francis said in his Encyclical Letter “Laudato Si’” *“Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment”* a statement that could not be truer than now.

To sum up, the only solution at times like this seems to be alert, not anxious, and take all the necessary steps to safety.



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