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Tolerance, Responsibility and the Coronavirus

An essay comparing past to present with facts and some personal opinions

According to the current events, the spread of the COVID-19, the environmental disaster and the crisis of democracies, taking in consideration the Age of Anxiety both as an example in literature and historical context, and the Holistic nature of the essay, the following subjects will be explained.

Primarily, an explanation of what are the limits of holism, defined as “Characterized by the belief that the parts of something are intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole.” and the degree in which I will deepen into the details.

Afterward, a comparison between how the society of the Age of Anxiety and ours has dealt with similar issues with an emphasis on Tolerance, Democracy and Environment.

Moreover, a reference to the Encyclical Letter “Laudato Si’”, specifically the part about social Ecology with a reflection on its effectiveness and its philosophy.

Furthermore, a link how our society has dealt with climate change and ocean pollution to the spread of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-1), with a mention to Tolerance.

In the end, this essay will present the connection between past and current literature, and then go on to explore its applications and consequences in politics and everyday life, talking about responsibility and whataboutism.

Taiwan

Due to its aforementioned definition, it is not possible to be completely holistic; however, I will broaden as much as I can the thoughts to include quotes, data and different opinions, to better understand the topic in a wider way. It is important to me to follow direct cause and consequences because we cannot analyze those separately. The Holistic approach derives from Hegel’ historical view, for which, we should consider history as a whole, studying the aspects together to better know them. In this essay, I will link responsibility and democracy to climate change ocean pollution and the novel Coronavirus, spacing from the Second World War to the Chinese authoritarian regime. linking all with the paradox of tolerance of Karl Popper .

During the Age of Anxiety, we had the single deadliest conflict in human history: the Second World War. Historians and politicians tried to understand what lesson should we learn from it and which mistakes shall not be repeated: the first was the “Appeasement” which enlarged the territory of the Third Reich under the eyes of France and UK, then the antidemocratic ideologies, which brought to the massive manslaughter of concentration camps and civilians. Karl Popper defined the paradox of Tolerance in 1945 in “The Open Society and Its Enemies”: it states that to maintain its existence tolerance cannot tolerate intolerance, for which it will destroy the tolerance. This lesson was partially learnt by politicians, for example the Eisenhower Doctrine, which states: "to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism" is clear that communism should not be tolerated because it is a menace to democracy. On the other hand there are those who say “Let them do what they want in their home, it is none of our business”, and criticize the Imperialism of the United States. The first point is obviously wrong: there are many instances in history other than WWII where that did not work out: the international terrorism, the migrant crisis, the climate change and the COVID-19 epidemic. The second is more complex because a single nation cannot be the “policeman of the world”, it will follow its economic interests over the moral ones: that is why the UN exists, however the Veto power of Russia and China makes every tangible action impossible. The Eisenhower Doctrine was right on its purpose but lacked in execution. After the collapse of the USSR, the world took a sigh of relief, ignoring the upcoming climate change and the rise of China. It really seems like History repeats itself: China is an Authoritarian state, which is

implementing politics similar to Nazi Germany such as concentration camps, territorial claims and censorship. The difference is in the nature of the “Appeasement” that we are conducting: It is not war that we fear, it is economic crisis: we outsourced too much of our manufacturing industry and we are paying the consequences. If we think about it, their internal politics is almost equal to 1989 with their facial recognition technology. Far more severe is their foreign politics called “Debt-trap diplomacy” where once the indebted economies of a country fail to service their loans to China, given for the construction infrastructures, they will be pressured to support China's geostrategic interests. China is also claiming territories such as Taiwan to a degree in which the World Health Organization did not allow Taiwan a seat the COVID-19 commission due to pressures from China. However, we are not able to menace of War because it would mean total annihilation on both parts, something which many of the authors of the Age of Anxiety reflect upon. Politicians also fear the Economic War, which is the only thing that I approve of Trump’s politics, but other entities such as the EU did not implement making it less effective.

The “Laudato Si” letter has started a movement all around the world, called Global Catholic Climate Movement that since 2015 has brought up many Catholics to a deeper understanding of the climate change and plastic crisis. Why no one talks about it? Why there are no visible effects on our everyday life? Why Greta Thunberg’s protest was much more effective to move the general public? By definition the objective of the Catholic church is to spread its word and obtain salvation. There are two main problems about it, first: the need to diffuse the word of God makes other objectives less appealing, such as the environmental one, seen as secondary. Secondly, the salvation: obtaining it in the afterlife really neglects actions in this life even though you are judged by those. Some would say that actions in terrestrial life should be also about the environment because of all the reasons in the Laudato Si’ chapters 137 and 142; and that is a fair argument but it misses the point that I am trying to make, why those who do not believe in climate change are often Christians? The Laudato Si’ movement did not work out because it did not appeal to those who really need to change their minds, It appealed to those who already where concerned about the environment. The church is doing too little to stop its ignorant adepts, tolerating them: the paradox of tolerance returns: a church driving environmental movement is not something the public is going to take seriously until the church takes a deliberate actions against the more conservative ones and “clears its name”.

The above-mentioned paradox of Tolerance applies clearly in all of the mayor problems of the contemporary society. We tolerate how developing countries pollute the air and the oceans not taking the responsibility to stop them. However, polluting is their only option to catch up with the developed countries. Also all the environmental campaigns are useless because the actions of the private citizen are irrelevant compared to those of the government. I personally follow many self-imposed restrictions to try limit my carbon emissions, however if I take the plane even once a year I already failed my objective. We should impose a change towards electric means of transport, such as high speed trains to substitute cars and hydrogen rockets to substitute planes. The point is that we cannot because we tolerate oil lobbies and car lobbies that want the status quo. This is a perfect example of what happened in China: the authoritarian government brought local officials of Wuhan to censor the first news about COVID-19 and that is exactly what happens with the climate change: we are unable to take responsibility because that would be a risk to the status quo.

We should not accept intolerance at any level because like those who wrote about how the world could have ended, and recognize dystopias and intolerance, we ourselves should recognize the enemy: intolerance. It is our responsibility to take action and do something good. In our everyday life, we can encounter the effect of intolerance: every map produced in China has Taiwan as a province of mainland China, which is absurd: the UN does not recognize it. In addition, the fear of economic repercussions and being called “racist” scares many of our politicians when they try to criticize China

for their violation of the carbon emissions rules. We should not forget Facebook's campaign pro Trump paid by Russia that had a major impact on the US democratic system, for which China has taken notes. We have the responsibility to understand the world we are living in and to not succumb to demagogic rhetoric such as whataboutism: "a variant of the tu quoque logical fallacy that attempts to discredit an opponent's position by charging them with hypocrisy without directly refuting or disproving their argument". In conclusion, it is our responsibility to not tolerate intolerance: the COVID-19 epidemic is our fault because we accepted the health standards in China and we are paying the consequences.