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QCQ#9

Quotation:

“The trouble is that we have a bad habit, encouraged by pedants and sophisticates, of considering happiness as something rather stupid. Only pain is intellectual, only evil interesting. This is the treason of the artist: a refusal to admit the banality of evil and the terrible boredom of pain. If you can’t lick ‘em, join ‘em. If it hurts, repeat it” (p. 1).

“To exchange all the goodness and grace of every life in Omelas for that single, small improvement: to throw away the happiness of thousands for the chance of the happiness of one: that would be to let guilt within the walls indeed” (p. 3).

Comment:

This short piece of work is not at all what I had expected. The narrator depicts a summer festival in the utopian city of Omelas. The city is described as brilliant, lovely, beautiful. There is no monarchy, no secret police, no bombs. Everything is happy and content. Except, that the entire prosperity of Omelas is dependent on the perpetual misery and abuse of a single child. It’s almost trippy to think about as is described. The first quote I picked comes from the first page, after the description of the beauty of the summer festival in the city. The narrator has continually emphasized that the people of Omelas are not stupid, they are not simple people, even though they live the way they do. She then goes on to explain that people so often think that happiness arises from stupidity and that pain and evil are what is interesting. The quote initially caught my attention because of something one of my professors used to say: “life is boring without chaos.” I think the concept that we find meaning through pain and evil is interesting, and a little bit true. However, I wonder if it is because life so often is filled with it (and unlike Omelas, there is no way to avoid it), so we have to find answers and think deeply and write about such things. I also just found this quote to be oddly beautiful, in a sort of tragic way. The second quote I picked comes after the description of the child in the basement. The explanation for why Omelas gets to be the way it is. This part is disturbing to think about because although the world is not at all like Omelas, although there is no place that is so seemingly perfect or happy, in many ways there are people living in misery and those who rely on them for their “dirty work” so they themselves can live in luxury. The notion that it would not be worth it to trade one life for so many, to ruin the happiness and bliss of the entire city of a mere one child, is troublesome because, as I said above, it is so often easy to justify one person’s pain for the happiness of many. I think this comes into play more times than we may like to admit.

Question:

Is the misery and abuse of one (or a few) person(s) in order to sustain the happiness of many worth it or ethical?