

RELEASED

I stare at the street where passersby parade by, smiles on their faces.

They all live so serene, peaceful in infinite happiness...

I have come to give them pain.

Trembling slightly, I step into the middle of the public square.

"Ladies and gentlemen, citizens!

I am Auguste Weird. A few months ago I was like you, twenty years old, happy, drunk on joy.

'Ah, what a beautiful society!' I used to think, scientific progress having allowed us, by a small correction of the hemispheres of the brain at birth, to no longer suffer like our ancestors, and misfortune had now become forbidden in our best of worlds!"

I was like you, I am no longer, that is why.

I had a friend, beautiful, intelligent. We were magnificent, both happy in a perfect sphere of life that seemed to stretch to infinity. She was my source, my life, my mind; we could spend entire evenings at a restaurant laughing, only to be brought home by taxi at dawn. What, then, happened?

Ah... the driver had been drinking, drunk on joy. The road gave way beneath the car, she and he lost their lives. I did not.

I was invited to the burial several days later, and what a shock it was. In her family, her brothers, her father, her mother, none of them seemed to feel the slightest regret at her death. They all maintained a serious attitude, yet you could sense that they were struggling to hold back their smiles and laughter. Then, inside my skull, I felt a dull shock, and I collapsed in tears.

Yes, I cried. I know you find this reaction hard to understand, but within me surged, for the very first time, that forbidden feeling. Then came disgust and anger at these people, this "family," who felt no love for their daughter. Love, so pure, is still permitted by the State, and yet it seemed to have completely vanished.

The old emotions resurfaced, as if triggered by a switch. I immediately understood, upon returning from the funeral, that I had left the forced path, that I had "escaped" the system, and that it would now try to silence me.

From then on, I founded the Community of the "Sensitive," along with others who, like me, refused to be deprived of their feelings, to fight and to convince the world of the errors shamefully hidden by the Government.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is why I stand before you, with my own experience, to offer you a way out of this cage, this happiness in which society seeks to imprison you. This perpetual ecstasy is in no way human; this euphoria deprives you of the other facets of your personality, of your identity.

The fact that you perceive only a few emotions prevents your mind from facing reality, from engaging with your surroundings, and keeps you from discovering your own nature, from reinterpreting yourself in a new light, from changing your thoughts and evolving, yes!

You will remain convinced of the same opinion for the rest of your life, fixed on a single vision of the Universe, rigid and dull.

Believe me, since I have felt fear, anger, sorrow, I have questioned myself many times, improved myself out of the fear of suffering, myself and my relationship with others.

(I pause to look at the group of people beginning to gather to listen to me)

Then, citizens of our nation, who live under the ideal of Equality, I have come to show you the terrible Injustice upon which our beautiful society prospers, the one that glorifies the happy and hides from the world those who suffer.

Since I gave up eternal Happiness to live with the range of unauthorized emotions, what has happened to me?

My family, my friends, my work, everything that made up my life gradually rejected me.

"Depressive." "Asocial." "Misanthrope."

I was given those names against my will; I was advised, sometimes even forced, to see doctors, to hide my feelings in public, for a time...

And then, all at once, I fell out of the system.

Crack. Fired, rejected, denied, pushed away. By everyone.

Now I am part of that population that must be hidden away, taboo, the poor, the sick, the mad, the outcasts, the people who suffer, and who, contrary to what we are ordered to be, live or die in the shadows. We are forgotten, too imperfect reflections of a perfect world. No help, no acceptance comes or ever will.

Go back?

Ah, impossible.

Once you fall out of the sacred mechanism of Happiness, exclusion is final. So, citizens, I ask you: by what right are those who suffer, who cry, denied the right to exist in the eyes of the world, while only those who laugh are shown? Renouncing emotions has led us to accept ignorance and the rejection of those in need. Human progress has always been about solving suffering, not ignoring it. Selfishness.

(The crowd begins to fill the entire square, like a shifting swarm surrounding me.)

Thirdly, my friends, I would like to remind you what you are, in case you have forgotten.

What, you ask?

Free human beings. Yet the operation performed at birth to prevent you from feeling anything other than happiness... did you choose it? Do you truly choose to smile, to laugh when a little dog bites your leg in the street, to shrug when you are rejected? Do you choose that?

If so, then prove to me that infants, still barely aware of their own existence, sincerely agree to have their skulls altered so they may feel only the happiness they are ordered to experience.

If you believe that no, it is not in complete freedom that one "chooses" to be born happy, then that means you admit that the government, having legalized these operations, controls our minds to shape and adapt them to the mold it intends for us. Your freedom of thought... think about it! It does not belong to you; it is the product of the State's work, its property. And so, since your mind is not your own, you do not exist as a unique identity but as a component, a tool, to be replaced once worn out. Is that how you see yourselves?

(Someone shouted an exclamation from far away in the dense crowd.)

Finally, happy people, do you ever think of Death? Of your sudden disappearance from the universe? The end of your peaceful life, your own end? Everyone thinks of it, no one fears it... so what then?

All those who die, as with my friend, are erased, no one mourning their disappearance. Is that what you want? For even your loved ones to forget you? To have never existed, never spoken, never lived? Do you accept being nothing more than an interchangeable piece of our universe? Can you even define yourselves as existing? Are you sure you want to live?

(A rumble rose.)

Death is the essence of life; fearing it has shaped our minds, has allowed us to acquire our ultimate gift: Consciousness.

Consciousness, which exists only through the awareness that our death will inevitably come sooner or later, yet you ignore this, you reckless ones!

(Voices rose in uproar, but I continued.)

We, the Sensitives, believe that all it would take is a single spark, just a complete shift from happiness to another emotion, whatever it may be, for a mind to refocus and once again perceive the world as it truly is, not as it is meant to be shown. But deep down, is that even possible? Or am I standing before sheep, and not men, the obedient herd of the Government?

Am I truly standing before human beings?

Or of stupid automatons, stupid slaves who believe themselves to be citizens, stupid beasts proudly claiming the title of human?

The choice is yours.”

At these last words, several strong men burst out from the crowd and rush toward me. In less than a second, I am thrown to the ground amid the screams; one of them kicks me in the stomach, sending a surge of searing pain through me. Another blow follows, then another, and another... The crowd joins my attackers in their frenzy.

My vision slowly begins to blur...

A click...

The pain is everywhere, unbearable, it seems to flood my entire being, my whole soul.

... and I suddenly feel released.

One last surge of pain overwhelms the back of my head, keeping me from thinking any further...

And then suddenly, nothing.