

Learning from History: Cooperation, Belief, Scholarship, and Words

The world around us is a dense concoction of phenomena, each of which has an engaging history to be appreciated and learned from. The study of world history has been an enlightening journey and a comprehensive illustration of this enhancement of perception constitutes the essence of my response. Thenceforth, this essay will chronicle the intrinsic principles that have been imparted to me whilst studying history and conclude with the notion of how the subject has enabled me to admire its colossal, cyclical influence that encompasses every micro and macro existence in the world in which I live.

Firstly, history puts forth the functioning dynamic of the world for our collective benefit in how we encounter cataclysmic events engendered by a lack of international cooperation, whilst there are also emphatic examples of mutual triumphs that transcend the barriers of nationality, ethnicity, class, and religion. The alliance system before the First World War prevented nations from discussing their contentions with one another on a single platform, rather it encouraged the stark division of Europe into two camps, the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy) and the Triple Entente (Britain, France, and Russia), towards the close of the first decade of the twentieth century. It culminated in the compounding of rivalries in the naval and arms races along with the potentially explosive instability in the Balkans. Ultimately, it enabled a spark to be flared into an inferno that would engulf the continent in a war of attrition. Following the War, the USA cherished an economic boom and apparently supplemented it by predominantly cutting off supplies from Europe through tariffs, which caused the latter to impose tariffs of its own on US imports to protect its own industries. However, misfortune struck in the form of the Wall Street Crash in October 1929, which developed into

the, “Great Depression.” The USA ran out of markets for its goods and over-production proved to be a key instigator of this disaster. Consequently, a vicious cycle of socio-economic adversities hit the world on a massive scale and this had a detrimental aftermath: Adolf Hitler’s promise of curbing the staggering unemployment rate (6 million) amidst growing hostility for the Allies due to the Versailles, “Diktat,” coupled with the devastating effects of the Depression in Germany brought him to power as Chancellor on 30th January 1933. The Holocaust thereafter stands as a tragedy felt by humanity as a whole in how purely self-serving economic policies and political ostracism (as in the case of Germany after the War) foment hardship and resentment, which generate vehement repercussions. On the other hand, international cooperation has yielded several lasting achievements. The UN’s World Food Programme has steeply decreased the once 805 million starving people across the world by 100 million in the past decade. Also, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has assisted over 17 million asylum-seekers and refugees since 1949. The work of the World Health Organization has checked diseases such as leprosy, malaria and yellow fever with great success since its beginning as the Health Committee of the League of Nations.

Secondly, history has taught me that the world around us has been shaped for the better by individuals striving to make a positive difference through their respective artistries. For example, Alan Turing and his associates at Bletchley Park are credited for having condensed the length of the malicious Second World War by cracking German Enigma codes. Likewise, a decade earlier, John Maynard Keynes’ economic propositions formulated the basis of President Roosevelt’s New Deal, which signaled the revival of the US economy after the Crash. Subsequently, history has enriched my perception of the world by accentuating the vitality of every skill, every individual and every good will that guides the world towards the better from

critical junctures. Thirdly, history conveys that academic disciplines and the arts flourish with a unifying influence across a population once the socio-economic predicaments facing a society are eased. For instance, when Weimar Germany was experiencing reinvigoration in the mid-1920s, an era of stability was cast across the nation, commencing a streak of prosperity for all subject areas: the Bauhaus style of architecture, the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory and the philosophical approach of Phenomenology stand as a few of the epitomes of the massive academic progress within this time frame. Even more, Expressionism flourished with later literary works such as, “Death of a Salesman,” by Arthur Miller highlighting the essential advancement of human thought and empathy in how the subjective experiences of an ordinary individual in society became the nucleus of a piece of art. The aforementioned play, for example, recounts the tragedy of an ordinary person, as opposed to the once held belief that tragic works should recount the misfortune of splendid figures only. Thus, history demonstrates that scholarship blossoms substantially in an atmosphere of stability and freedom, and that the furtherance of all disciplines across time symbolizes a corresponding refinement of human thought towards one which seeks to exhort empathy for and understanding of one another.

Lastly, having often come across the word, “Lyceum,” in the names of numerous educational institutions, I experienced a profound moment of reflection while studying the history of science upon discovering that the Lyceum was the scientific academy founded by Aristotle in Athens and thereby the genesis of the name. In that moment of deep thought, history enabled me to realize that every word I encounter shares an extensive and absorbing history of its own. Ultimately, studying world history has inspired me to learn from the past, make a positive difference whilst believing in cooperation and peace, and leave behind

an enduring legacy within the incessant progression of existence. Just as every word around us has a rich history of its own to be treasured, so do we in our advancement since the inception of time.

“It is only by historical analysis that we can discover what makes up man, since it is only in the course of history that he is formed.” Emile Durkheim.