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Costly Convenience

Throughout history, oppressive governments often grow to power because they face little to no opposition, a result of people choosing the convenience of order and security over freedom. In Kurt Vonnegut Jr.'s "Harrison Bergeron", George's choice to accept the government's unjust ideas and decisions reflects an ethos that empowers their government by doing nothing to oppose it. This acceptance of the government's injustices enables the government to continue oppressing intelligent people and repressing creativity.

George rationalizing the government's unjust actions leaves him unable to recognize the government's injustices. George accepting his handicaps as necessary for the proper functioning of society renders him incapable of recognizing the core values the government has stripped from their society. This is shown after Hazel tries to convince George to take off his handicaps: "'If I tried to get away with it,' said George, 'then other people'd get away with it - and pretty soon we'd be right back to the dark ages, with everyone competing against everybody else'" (Vonnegut, 2). George rationalizes his earpiece and his weights as a fair price to pay for a fair and harmonious society, but his perspective leaves him incapable of appreciating that diversity in intelligence and ability can lead to a prosperous society in which the ideas produced are multidimensional. Without diversity, there cannot be resistance to controversial political ideas and decisions, further enabling the government to continue their oppressive rule. Furthermore, by ignoring his handicaps and accepting them as part of his

identity, George loses part of his own identity to better fit into the H-G men's mould of the ideal citizen. This is shown as Hazel tries to convince George to rest his handicap bag, and George replies, "'I don't mind it,' he said. 'I don't notice it any more. It's just a part of me'" (Vonnegut, 2). By being a willful participant of the extremely egalitarian society, George consents to the systemic abuse that prevents him from even "toying with the vague notion that maybe dancers shouldn't be handicapped" (Vonnegut, 1). His insistence on keeping his handicaps on pushes him to become cynical about the importance of diversity and specifically, his own individualism.

Moreover, George's indifference towards his son's callous and brutal murder speaks to his resignation to the government's unjust oppression. George encouraging Hazel to dismiss their son's murder promotes ignoring the government's actions. George tells Hazel to "forget sad things" (Vonnegut, 6) after she witnesses her son's murder; he effectively encourages her to sanitize her thoughts to be more aligned with what the government wants her to believe. Moreover, by instructing Hazel to forget about the government's injustices, he creates a precedent of ignoring these events that gradually excuses larger and more serious unjust acts, even if they are as personal as watching their son's murder, being broadcasted on television no less. Furthermore, Hazel is just as culpable in promoting the government's position as her blanket dismissal of her emotional shock advances the government's unjust practices. When George instructs her to dismiss her jumbled feelings, she replies, "I always do" (Vonnegut, 6). Although her "average" intelligence only allows her to think in short bursts, she is able to acknowledge her emotional shock, but follows George's instructions and dismisses it anyway. This dismissal leaves her incapable of challenging the government's injustices, leading her to blankly accept them. Moreover, her use of "always" in her response to George reveals a long pattern of consistent dismissal to increasingly severe government

injustices. In their society, Hazel's intelligence and reaction to the government reflects an ethos the government is striving to cultivate. This absurd equality causes George's ignoring and Hazel's blank acceptance of the government's injustices to be representative of societal mentality, thus enabling the government to continue its oppressive rule with very little opposition.

George's choices throughout the story define his character, but his choice to accept the government's ideas and decisions reflects an ethos that empowers the government by demonstrating little opposition to the government's injustices. His acceptance comes from an inability to recognize the government's injustices because he rationalizes them, as well as an indifference towards the government's gross atrocities. George's choices to accept the government's actions speaks to a terrifying, dystopian society in which evil triumphs because good people do nothing.