

Justice and civil disobedience essay examples

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



Introduction

Justice is essentially a concept of moral aptness based on rationality, ethics, religion, natural law, fairness and equity, as well as administration of law, taking into consideration the inborn and inalienable rights of all the citizens and human beings. Justice as a virtue refers to a trait of a person. The understandings of the concept of justice differ in each culture, since cultures are normally dependent upon a certain shared history, religion, or mythology. The ethics of each culture create values that influence notion of justice.

On the other hand, civil disobedience is actually the active, declared refusal to obey certain demands, laws, and commands of an administration. I personally understand civil disobedience as non-violent law breaking, which is conducted in public in symbolic protest of the perceived injustice. In this paper, I focus on justness of the civil disobedience in relation to the “ Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King Jr. and Plato’s “ Crito.” Through the analysis of the two works by these two influential individuals, I intend to discuss the justness of the civil disobedience. What are the responsibilities of a legal resident to obey the law of the land? Socrates and Martin Luther king Jr in their works answer this question, but from conflicting perspectives as discussed below.

Without a doubt, Martin Luther King Jr and Socrates are among influential people in terms of the critical reading as well as getting masses on board using their plan of action. Nevertheless, they both hold dissimilar opinions when it comes to civil disobedience topic. On one side, you have Martin Luther King, who strongly stands by his famous argument that the concept of

civil disobedience is in fact justifiable in the situation that original law is unfair. His “ Letter from Birmingham Jail” conveyed an imperative statement on civil disobedience and civil rights (Rieder 73).

In this letter, Martin Luther King Jr meets 8 white priests who had wrote 4 days previously a letter entitled, “ A Call for Unity.” Although conceding social injustice existence, they articulated belief that battle against the racial segregation should occur in courts and not in street. Luther King replied that without the powerful and direct efforts like the ones he undertook the civil rights would under no circumstances be achieved. What he argues is that civil disobedience is essentially justified to deal with unjust law and that everyone possesses a moral responsibility to defy unjust laws.

In the same letter, he goes in detail in describing his opinion on the concept of civil disobedience. Luther King Jr makes his argument for being capable to bypass law. According to him, “ injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Luther King also repeats Thurgood Marshall’s words, “ A justice too long delayed is justice denied” (Bass and Martin 45). By stating this, Luther King honestly believes that if there is a given unjust law, an individual is in turn allowed to break it to make his or her point clear. Nonetheless, he cautions that when an individual is doing so, he or she should not act violently. What he simply means is that one must break these unjust laws in a peaceful or a nonviolent manner such as through rallies, marches, among other ways. He goes further and states that one should accept his or her punishment for breaking these unjust laws.

If many individuals will make sacrifices for instance, through going to jail, ultimately it will be reported everywhere and persons all over the country

will know how unjust and corrupt their laws truly are. It is worth noting that Martin Luther King Jr was not only an extraordinary public speaker, but was similarly a man of his word (Rieder 73). After reading his letter, we understand that he was among the many individuals who took the risk as well as accepted his punishment. Through going to jail, King proves his opinion about civil disobedience. Thus, this shows that he seriously means what he is talking about that is, the justness of civil disobedience in the situations that original law is unfair. Actually, he shows that no one is above the law by going to the jail. In contrast, he used unethical or corrupt law as a vital tool to create awareness. His letter has many religious references that I believe is the core reason for his opinions on the concept of civil disobedience to be how they are.

Martin Luther King Jr remains opposed to violence and radicalization advocated by Black Power. According to him, riots do nothing. He says that this method is ineffective even beyond the nature he opposed riots. He is against the guerrilla war hence prefers discipline of the civil disobedience that according to him is not only a tribute but also a right to the democratic untapped energy. He recognized difficulty of this task but he asked individuals not be intimidated by the people who scoff at non-violence.

Moreover, Martin Luther King Jr in his letter addressed accusation that civil rights movement was ‘ extreme,’ initially disputing the label then accepting it. Jesus and the other heroes according to King were extremists (Bass and Martin 39).

On the other hand, Socrates in Plato’s “ The Crito” believes that the concept of civil disobedience is at no time justified and must by no means be course

of action. Socrates argues that it is his responsibility to comply with the law of his city, on all the occasions. This is opposite of King's argument about obeying the law. The reason for their differing views on civil disobedience topic lies in places and times in which these two great men existed. Socrates goes further and argues that a citizen who had profited from his or her city, had in fact entered into an agreement of sorts and that required him or her to obey all the laws, regardless of their aims or fairness. Nonetheless, this argument can be defined as circular because Socrates at no time defined what is in fact right or wrong to Crito. He argued that all men must do what is correct at all the time (Plato 39). Assuming that a general understanding of "right" exists then this argument by Socrates would be virtually difficult to argue contrary to, much less defeated.

Nevertheless, Plato, or rather Socrates never totally gives an explanation of why it is right to obey laws of one's state or city. Simply it is assumed that a good individual will conform to the laws, which have been set out by the city. Looking keenly at this assumption, it is problematic because there is no any justifiable good reason why one should obey laws, other than idea that disobeying results to problems, which can result to law breakdown hence causing anarchy. In my opinion, this argument is definitely valid; however, it has not been made explicitly as it has just implied in the entire conversation between Crito and Socrates.

The greater assumption that is being made is that people are like slaves, or beasts, who should be ruled by a single or various political systems; if not, each individual and state or city would suffer. During Socrates' place and day, open democracy was actually based on the laws, which formed a

council of men considered worthy of vote and put in place to represent all the citizens. Socrates and Crito come to a consensus that it is at all the time right to conform to all the law and at all times wrong to disobey. If a person makes this assumption alongside Crito and Socrates, it becomes easy to be convinced that he (Socrates) has made a tough argument as to the reason why he should remain in prison and accept his death sentence, as a worthy citizen should (Plato 39).

Between the two men, I think that King makes a more influential case as to what a civilian must and must not endure from his or her nation, state, or city. From his letter, it is apparent that he was in midst of the extreme injustice that was placed upon the American Black citizens originating not only from the white citizens but even government itself. Considering that throughout the civilization history there is no any evidence of the perfect justice, it is crucial that citizen start practicing civil disobedience in face of the unjust laws. This approach is not only necessary for the society betterment in that governments or authorities are made aware that the citizens will refuse to obey all the laws unquestionably as well as without retort, but also it is imperative for every citizen to use disobedience as a better way to help in creating a more just city, nation, and world.

Works cited

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