

Focus points of platos republic philosophy essay



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Plato's Republic focuses on one particular question: is it better to be just or unjust? Plato begins to argue that injustice is never more profitable to a person than justice. Glaucon, however, is not satisfied and proposes a challenge to Plato to prove that justice is intrinsically valuable and that living a just life is always superior. This paper will explain Glaucon's challenge to Plato regarding the value of justice and ethical egoism, followed by a detailed explanation to whether or not Glaucon has shown ethical egoism to be true. Finally, it will give my belief of what philosopher John Stuart Mill's response to Glaucon would be and my opinion to whether ethical egoism is true. Glaucon uses three case examples to justify his argument and his challenge is a good source of debate for whether or not ethical egoism is true.

Glaucon begins his argument to Plato by separating goods into three classes. The first class is composed of intrinsic goods that we welcome for our own sake, stripped of their consequences, such as happiness. The second class is the type of good that we like for our own sake as well as its consequences, such as health and knowledge. The third class is an extrinsic good that we desire only for their consequences, such as physical training and medical treatment. Plato believes that justice belongs in the second class of goods that we like because of itself and its consequences, while Glaucon suggests that it belongs in the third class of goods we desire only for their consequences. Glaucon presents that, "The best is to do injustice without paying the penalty; the worst is to suffer it without being able to take revenge. Justice is a mean between these two extremes" (Plato, Republic 359a). Therefore, it is common nature to come to an agreement neither to

commit nor suffer injustice and laws are created accordingly. His second case is made in the story of the ring of Gyges, which illustrates a situation where a man has a ring that makes him invisible. He realizes that when he is invisible, he can act unjustly with no fear of negative consequences, so he kills the king to rule the kingdom. Glaucon claims that even the most just man would behave unjustly with this ring. People are only just because of their fear of punishment for unjust acts. Glaucon presents his third case by comparing the lives of the most unjust man and the most just man. If a man is to be fully unjust, his actions of injustice will go unnoticed due to persuasion and force, and he will be believed to be just. Therefore, he will have a reputation for justice while doing great injustice. The just man would be stripped of a reputation of justice because that would bring him positive consequences, and he will be left with justice alone. Therefore, he will have a reputation for injustice while committing no injustice. Glaucon decides that the happiness of both men must be compared. The just man will be punished for his reputation and unjust man will gain many benefits from his just reputation, which will ultimately produce a happier life. To summarize Glaucon's speech, if justice produces happiness and is desirable in itself, regardless of its consequences, then it would be preferred. If the consequences are as negative as Glaucon portrays, no one would choose a life of justice. Therefore, justice can only be dependent on its consequences.

In making these claims about the origin of justice, Glaucon is arguing for the position that has come to be known as " Ethical Egoism". Ethical Egoism is a theory according to which the only thing that a person ought to pursue is his/her well being. Glaucon uses the myth " the Ring of Gyges" to illustrate

the concept of egoism. In “ The Ring of Gyges”, a shepherd named Gyges finds a magical ring that can make him invisible. Gyges uses this power to seduce the Queen and murder the King. Glaucon argues that anyone would have done exactly what the Shepherd had done since there would be no way of getting caught. Now this is a clear concept of psychological egoism, so how is it that Glaucon asserts ethical egoism exists and is true? Glaucon uses the idea of justice and injustice to utilize ethical egoism. Glaucon claims that justice is not really something good, but merely necessary, and that when examined at a base level, you find that no one is just willingly but because they have to be. He puts forward an argument for the nature and origin of justice in an attempt to try to defend the claims of the many that justice is not loved for its own sake, but only for whatever beneficial consequences one can glean from it. Thus, he simply states that being openly just is in one’s best interest and that is why people follow the rules set forward by a justice system, rather than a code of morality that tells them to do so. This is evident because through Glaucon’s arguments he states it is difficult to live justly, and therefore justice is only pursued insofar as it yields rewards and popularity. In fact, that is the only reason that anyone values justice: for what it can give them. Further, he claims, those who are able to get away with it live much more happily if they live the life of injustice than the one of justice. So, with these basic claims in mind, Glaucon states that he is going to speak at length in praise of injustice, in the hope that he could put forward the most damning arguments against justice, in order that Socrates might vanquish the strongest of his opposition and provide Glaucon with solid grounds upon which to cling to justice as truly good in itself. To conclude, Glaucon’s argument in the Republic criticizes justice and morality leading to <https://assignbuster.com/focus-points-of-platos-republic-philosophy-essay/>

the explanation that people live by the rule that they ought to do what is in their own benefit, thus proving the truth behind ethical egoism.

Many people are able to debate or use Glaucon's argument to further their own beliefs regarding ethical egoism and justice. John Stewart Mill is a philosopher that founded a belief called Utilitarianism. Utilitarianism basically promotes the idea that actions are judged right or wrong according to the amount of happiness that comes from those decisions. However, Utilitarianism's view of happiness is not defined in terms of the single being making the choice or action. The Utilitarianism view of what happiness means is what is for the good of all, rather than the one. Therefore using Utilitarianism, an individual would make decisions according to which one would provide the greatest good for the greatest number of people. An example of this would be self sacrifice. If the survival of a group of people rests on the sacrifice of a single person, happiness as defined by Utilitarianism would state that this person would sacrifice himself for the greater good. However, this person may be against self sacrifice or dying. This would cause self sacrifice to be the "least bad" solution, but not necessarily a good solution. In Glaucon's views and the views of ethical egoism one ought to act in their own self interest, as that is what creates happiness. Consequently, in the self sacrifice situation, a decision made by an ethical egoist would be to allow the group of people to die or suffer as their own self preservation is in their own best interest. Thus, Mill and other Utilitarianists would disagree with the beliefs set out by Glaucon in his argument in the Republic and respond negatively to the views of ethical egoists. I believe that ethical egoism must exist, as it is a driving force to

preservation of the self. Without ethical egoism, everything would be “ for the greater good” and no one would do the things that benefit themselves. This may seem selfish, but what if people never got rich and started vast companies to stay rich? Those people staying rich is their own personal interest and as a by-product a large cooperation gives jobs to others and can make various scientific, technological or biological contributions to society. As a final point, it is in the best interest of society to be ethical egoists as individual actions tend to have positive ramifications on others, such as everyone obeying the law because it is in their best interest not to get arrested.

Glaucon uses three case examples to justify his arguments in Plato’s Republic and the truth behind ethical egoism and his challenge is a good source of debate for whether or not ethical egotism is valid in today’s society. Glaucon proposed a challenge to Plato to prove that justice is intrinsically valuable and that living a just life is always superior. This paper has explained Glaucon’s challenge to Plato regarding the value of justice and ethical egotism, followed by a detailed explanation to how Glaucon has shown ethical egotism to be true. Finally, it gave my belief of what philosopher John Stuart Mill’s response to Glaucon would be and my opinion to whether ethical egotism is true. In conclusion ethical egoism is true by Glaucon’s arguments, and his methods and views can be agreed with, unless you already hold some other philosophical standpoint such as Utilitarianism.