

The search for the justice philosophy essay



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For centuries the meaning of justice has been discussed between men. What exactly is the standard of being Just? One's search for the meaning of Justice can be found in the Book Plato's Republic. Through different dialogues with various characters, Socrates will lead the reader to two definitions, " Justice is Harmony". (G. M. A. Grube Book 4, 434c) and " Justice is Doing one's own [job]." (G. M. A. Grube Book 4, 443b). Socrates uses the division of parts in the soul (psyche) as well as the makeup of the state to give a light to the meanings of being Just and upholding Justice.

First viewing the breakdown of the Soul (psyche) we find that according to Socrates the soul is divided into three separate parts, the appetite, the rational insight and the spirit. The appetite is the part " with which it lusts, hungers, thirsts and gets excited by other appetites" (G. M. A. Grube Book 4, 439d). It is the part of the soul that can be ambitious for unjust items and has no balanced consciousness in its desires. That leads Socrates to give us another view in the soul, the one that can keep the appetite restrained, the part that allows the soul to differentiate between good and bad. The rational part is the part in the soul that calculates risks and makes balanced decisions having the good of the whole soul as its interest. The third part is the spirited, the part of the soul that is courageous, vigorous and strong willed. The " spirited part preserves through both pleasures and pains the commands of reason about what is and is not to be feared." (G. M. A. Grube Book 4, 442c) if " it has not been corrupted by a bad upbringing" (G. M. A. Grube Book 4, 441a), it works with the rational part. By the account of the parts of the soul we are shown how a soul has different wills, yet in order for a soul to stay in the Just path it must have some sort of hierarchy. Socrates

describes the spirited part as the courageous ally of the rational part which has the control over the appetitive part. Although the description of the soul might provide an idea regarding the definitions of Justice I mentioned above, we should next examine Socrates structure of the state.

The second view of Justice presented to the reader by Socrates is the division of the state. Socrates envisions a city in which only justice will prevail and there will be no corruption. The Macrocosm or “ Philosopher City” is divided into three part social class, the artisans, the guardians and the Philosopher Kings. It is obvious that particular sort of division seems awkward when placed over our own democratic society. The reader must keep in mind that in the Republic that Socrates is describing each individual as if directed by great education and the utmost care towards the work he could do with excellence. The youth in the “ Philosopher City” are separated from their parents at birth and therefore receive the same equal chance of becoming workers or rulers without any prejudice regarding their upbringing or family background; rather, they are gauged personally, totally according to their natural qualities. Starting from the bottom up first off the “ Artisans” are the people that are best fitted to practice a specific form of labor. This part of the Society whose role is to provide food, clothes and any other necessities the state requires. They are required to be moderate and obedient to their ruler. Next on the chain of command we see the “ Guardians”, who are the people that are best fitted to fight, people that are spirited and that pass the tests of the state by holding firmly to the loving of justice as well as patriotic attitude needed in order to defend the state from foreign and domestic enemies. They must possess the virtue of courage and be well educated in order to

stay loyal and not harm the citizens; they are to uphold the laws set forth by the Philosopher Kings and keep Justice. Last but not least we see the “Philosopher Kings” which are people that possess the virtue of wisdom, they must not seek the glory and fame of being a ruler rather it should be perceived as the duty of those who are fitted to rule to take on the burden of ruling their state. The Philosopher Kings are people that have the interest of the whole in mind, they love their state, and they understand Justice within its rules and therefore will do everything within their power to preserve it. Both representations have a similar structure; Socrates claims that Justice is the same in the soul and in the state. The similarity suggests that both the artisans and the appetitive part of the psyche rely on the attribute of moderation for they have to be moderate in their desires. The guardians and the spirit share the attribute of courage in order to protect the whole. Finally, both the Philosopher Kings and the rational part of the psyche share the attribute of wisdom in order to rule the workers and the appetitive virtue, with the help of the guardians upholding the spirited virtue, all together they reach a harmony and collective goal that is the good for the whole as well as the state and soul.

Would a psyche that allows the appetitive attribute take over and commit unjust acts regardless of their consequences or allows the spirited attribute to burst in crazy anger be considered a just soul? This rhetorical question supports the definition of “justice as harmony” (G. M. A. Grube Book 4, 434c). The condition in which the rational rules, the spirited guards and the appetitive remains moderate while they all agree to this condition out of understanding that it is the best for the whole. Could a state in which the

craftsman rule, the guardian is a farmer and the natural ruler plays the role of a soldier. Can a good and just state be a good and just state? We must understand that in Socrates's city there will be no mistakes in the division of the classes. In order to understand the idea of a just state we must consider that each individual is practicing the very best activity he is naturally fit for. That society has the most talented craftsmen, the most fearsome warriors and the wisest ruler, each practicing their part with excellence that is considered a virtue. In the analogy of the state Socrates supports the definition of justice as "doing one's own work" (G. M. A. Grube Book 4, 443b). It becomes obvious that in order for justice to remain in the state each person has to do his own work and not overstep the bounds of their duties.

Now that we have found and understood Socrates's definition of justice, the question that has to be asked is how this justice could exist. In other words, why should the workers stay in their own work or why should the appetitive obey the rational. The answer to that comes in the form of both understanding and control. Ideally, all the parts know that maintaining the harmony is good for all and for the exception there are the guardians and the spirited to help maintain order. The dilemma is who should be the rulers, who could be wise enough to rule and to keep the interest of the whole in mind? Socrates responds with his belief that justice will not exist in its entirety until the philosophers became kings. Socrates claims that a king could rule in a just manner, therefore maintain justice, only if he has knowledge of the true form of justice. That is, true knowledge of the forms. The forms represent the ultimate truth, the way things really are in a more knowledgeable sight than the one offered by science.

In order to explain what the “definitive truth” is Socrates uses the theory of the divided line. A vertical line, representing different conditions of the soul, it is divided into two unequal subsections. The lowest subsection is smaller and represents the visible or the tangible; the highest subsection represents the intelligible. Both subsections are divided again in the same proportion whereas the high subsection in each is longer. The lowest part of a soul exists out of inexperience, consisting of images, shadows and the mere reflections of the objects they represent. This phase of the soul is regarded as merely nothing more than imagination. The second stage, still to in the visible, consists of objects that previously were only known by their shadows and now that the soul is in the stage of belief, it can see the objects as they really are. The third stage comes out of investigating, that is when the soul grasps for the reason things are and makes a wise guess based on the objects discovered in the previous stage. This condition of the soul is in the logical form, it consists of physical entities and how they come to be and is referred to as a stage of thought. The fourth, and most tricky part of Plato’s divided line theory, is the understanding of the forms. In this stage the soul reaches an understanding far beyond the stage of thought, and begins the understanding of the true forms. The true form of justice is “Goodness”. Only after enormous difficulty and vast education can a soul reach this level of understanding. By the time philosopher-king’s soul reaches that intellectual height of understanding he is no longer interested in the common rewards of fame and fortune, rather he is occupied with the true forms and seeks to guide his people towards the truth and justice. Once acquiring this knowledge of the forms, can a ruler be fit to rule in a wise manner for he is

able to truly put the interest of the whole as his own? Therefore, ruling in a manner where justice exists and is carefully preserved.

In the end we see that Socrates theory of justice is that we allow each part of the psyche to do what it is intended to do as well as well reaching a part in our life where we can reach above the intelligible form of thinking and truly understand the forms of life that shape the theory of Justice. Justice is caressed in the hand of Goodness and by not educating ourselves to what is good or bad and suppressing our rational we damn our souls to everlasting devastation due to the ignorance of not staying Just.