

The ones who walk away from omelas analysis essay



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“ The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” The short story “ The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” by Ursula Le Guin concerns itself with the utopian society Omelas.

The story begins with the festival of Summer where the town is described in all of it's glory. From the beautiful streets, to the successful craftsmen, and the joyous people, Omelas seems to be perfect. What is not made immediately clear is the fact that the town's perfection is contingent upon the misery of one child. The relationship is such that as long as the child is treated inhumanely, the citizens of Omelas will enjoy continued success and perfection. The town embodies the Utilitarian idea that the apparent suffering of one child is made less when compared to the good that is bestowed upon the rest of Omelas.

Made popular by John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism is the “ greatest happiness principle” which dictates that people “ choose the action that creates the greatest happiness for all concerned” (Ethics 34). The people of Omelas operate under the principle of Utilitarianism by the opinion that the suffering of one child hurts less people than the good of thousands of happy citizens, “ they all understand that their happiness, the beauty of their city, the tenderness of their friendships, the health of their children, the wisdom of their scholars, the skill of their makers, even the abundance of their harvest and the kindly weathers of their skies, depend wholly on this child's abominable misery” (Le Guin). Utilitarianism concerns itself with the consequences of an action. Here, in the story, the action of maltreating a child is not judged, but only the resulting happiness for everyone else justifies the act through Utility.

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The belief that the act is judged as oppose to the consequence is called a Kantian perspective. Immanuel Kant believed that the action carried more value than the result. He believed in the categorical imperative, “ which is a command that applies to all rational beings, independent of their desires” (Ethics 31). Through this belief, assuming they are rational, the citizens of Omelas would be found wanton because they are acting in their desire to be happy; and as such are actively maltreating someone to attain their desire. In the story, Le Guin mentions that some citizens do not accept the city’s practice and acting on their categorical imperative “ walk straight out of the city of Omelas, through the beautiful gates” (Le Guin).

The people who leave reject the theory of Utility, and realize that the worth of their happiness is lessened knowing that it comes as the cost of someone’s harm. I agree with the latter argument because I feel that actively participating in something universally acknowledged as dishonorable diminishes the subsequent good. Our actions must be judged, and not simply overlooked because a small evil is overshadowed by a larger good. People need to hold themselves to a higher level and take into account their actions.