Peter Plotas 9/4/15

RP 2 FYS 100-50

How does Plato Teach the Reader about Justice through Socratic Dialogue?

By utilizing Socratic dialogue in his work, Plato takes advantage of a very straightforward and immersive style of writing. His main topic through this constant, discussion-based questioning is “what is justice,” which eventually morphs into an argument about “injustice being more profitable than justice,” a claim which Socrates would never affirm (Plato 35). With Socrates incessantly questioning and building off of his friends’ and enemies’ responses, the reader experiences the direct reasoning and logic of Socrates in a discussion-based setting. The reader learns that justice is not universally valued by people as a “benefit [to] its possessor” but rather as a necessary evil and an unfortunate virtue “of the burdensome kind” (Plato 45; 36). Even Glaucon himself, a friend of Socrates with a desire to believe in justice but a lack of evidence to do so, explains justice as a sort of coward’s way out. He says, “People love it … because they are too weak to do injustice with impunity,” essentially stating that people only settle to have justice because they cannot be freely unjust without consequences (Plato 37). All of these fervent questions and hypothetical analogies show both the hunger of the pupils to fight for justice for its own sake, and the pupils’ severe lack of faith in this virtue of justice.

However, only one side of the story is the students’ confusion on the benefits and advantages of justice. The counterpoint is Socrates’ constant and unyielding defense of the inherent goodness of justice. He reasons against Thrasymachus, a heavy proponent of injustice, that “justice is a soul’s virtue” and “a just soul and a just man will live well” and he actually manages to attain a reluctant concurrence from Thrasymachus (Plato 34). Plato shows through Socrates’ dialogue that justice is healthy and positive for the human soul, including both the soul of the just man and the souls of those affiliated with the just man. This Socratic discourse on justice is meant to show the reader that justice is not easily defined or explained, even by the finest philosopher of human history. Justice can be a controversial subject, and, unfortunately, many of the characters in Plato’s story can only see the personal benefits and drawbacks of justice and injustice instead of their inherent qualities of vice and virtue. They struggle to see what Socrates sees, which is that “just people … live better and are happier than unjust ones” (Plato 32). They will not accept the intangible benefits of justice as true; rather, they question them without end.

Ultimately, Plato is relaying to the reader that justice should hold a great importance to us personally. The subject is necessary and present in some capacity in our society, as it is in any society. Justice is not easily comprehended or defined by people, nor is it a burden of societies in order to avoid the suffering of injustice. On the contrary, justice is a good, virtuous quality that we should strive for if we wish to lead good and happy lives. Justice is the root of goodness and happiness in Plato’s view, and he aims to demonstrate and bolster that fact to the readers through direct Socratic reasoning.

I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work. Peter George Plotas

4.5/5

Wonderful response paper! Don’t forget to include the full bibliographic citation of the work, Republic, under a “Works Cited” section at the end of the paper.