Peter Plotas 12/15/15

Revised 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 the hunger of the pupils to find the truth about justice for its own sake in spite of Socrates’s inability, or perhaps refusal, to explicitly state it. It is remarkable how the pupils could have such significant lack of faith in Socrates’s reasoning even after he “show[s] that just people are wise and better and more capable of acting” and “unjust ones are not even able to act together” (Plato 32: b6-c1). With Socrates’ yearning that justice is “the way we ought to live,” the pupils’ failure to believe in this virtue of justice is quite unfortunate (Plato 32:d6).

However, there is an antithesis to the students’ confusion on the benefits and advantages of justice. This counterpoint is Socrates’ constant and unyielding defense of the inherent goodness of justice. He reasons against Thrasymachus, who is a heavy proponent of injustice, saying that people think justice is “of the burdensome kind [of goodness]” (Plato 36:a4). However, Plato rebukes him, saying 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: e7, 10). 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” and that “anyone who is going to be blessed with happiness must love [justice] both because of itself and because of its consequences” (Plato 32; 36:a1-3). Some of the pupils will still not accept the intangible benefits of justice as true; rather, they continue to question them without end.

Plato implements Socratic dialogue into his book further by throwing Glaucon and Socrates into a sort of battle of Socratic questioning. As Glaucon renews Thrasymachus’ argument, Socrates begins to ask him many questions about an imaginary city in order to “see how justice and injustice grow up in cities” and, as a result, determine for Glaucon what justice is like and what its origins are (Plato 51:e5). As he travels through the origins of this city, he relays to Glaucon how justice and injustice affect its growth and development in positive and negative fashions, and Glaucon begins to recognize a truth within Socrates’ points.

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. Moreover, it should not be viewed as an obstacle to happiness or a nuisance that must be complied with. Plato is attempting to say that justice should not only be followed and enjoyed for its own sake, but it should also be appreciated by people. Justice is not an unfortunate occurrence that makes us “sticks in the mud.” 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

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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.

Works Cited

Plato. Republic. Trans. C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2003. Print.