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Political Theory- Civil Disobedience

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Class Section 3010

Your assignment is to take a position regarding civil disobedience based on what you have read in The Apology, Crito, and the Letter. Defend your position by referring to these writings.

By taking government courses, I have learned that for an act to be considered civil disobedience, it has to meet these 3 criteria’s: you must break the law, you must do it for something that you believe in, and most importantly, it must be done in a nonviolent matter (civilly). Civil disobedience is something useful we have as a society. It is at least one affective way to make a change because it brings attention to the matter. Civil disobedience keeps our voices as the public equal with the voices behind the laws. These acts are unharmful and are done for change. People committing civil disobedience are not criminals in my mind; instead they are people willing to sacrifice their freedom in order to make a change. While I still find it necessary for people who break the law to be rightfully accused, these people will not be seen as criminals to me. If there was never any resistance to power enforced on us; there is no telling where our society would be currently. Civil disobedience is the first step towards change.

In the *Apology*, the people have charged him with the corruption of children and disrespecting the gods. While at this time both of these things are illegal, Socrates did these things peacefully, he did them for something that he believed in (his teachings) and he supposedly broke the law. This means Socrates fits into all three categories of civil disobedience. I feel that Socrates did not deserve the death penalty. His agenda was to spread truth and honesty through his society to better the people but was then seen as corruption. In *Crito*, Crito is trying to convince Socrates to escape prison since he was found guilty unjustly, that he could commit an unjust act. Socrates did not comply because he did not want to disobey the law because that is something he respected, and the law never disrespected him. The people around Socrates are the ones who disrespected him but once again, he will not disrespect them back but instead he will take this disrespect. Socrates says to Crito “One shouldn’t return injustice or ill-treatment to any human being, no matter how one may be treated by that person.” He says such a thing because if one would return an unjust act, one is no better than the other. Socrates might have displayed the first act of civil disobedience in history. He was a person who was dedicated to what he believed in so strongly that he died for it.

Martin Luther King Jr. fought for equality of whites and blacks in public places and for it to happen in every state. His message spread and created impacts so great that he changed our society forever. King Jr.’s movements brought attention to the matter of equality which caused him to gain support and become a threat to the current situation of separate but equal. He faced the punishment for the law breaking, with a bold demeanor. He said, “Fill the prisons, fill them all!” By filling the prisons, they attracted attention to their cause. His letter explained the urgency of needing a change; how change could not wait any longer. One of the most powerful quotes I have read by Martin Luther King Jr. is “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” This quote is an amazing representation on the effect civil disobedience can have. Staying silent on a matter leads to no change being made. America had to change right in that moment while Martin Luther King Jr. had all the support from his community and followers all over the states. Up until his assassination, he continued to make improvements to society; he knew that his followers would have their voices heard and could not be avoided anymore.

Henry David Thoreau is famous for his book on civil disobedience he wrote while in prison for refusing to pay taxes to the ongoing war. He thought it was unjust for the law to use his tax money on something he was against, therefore he refused to pay his taxes. “There will never be a really free and enlightened state until the state comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived.” ― Henry David Thoreau in *Civil Disobedience.* This explains the power that us individuals have on government decisions; the government and society benefit from each other when citizens choose to be disobedient. Society benefits since people bond together over their cause; and the government benefits because once they make the change, they gain support from the people. Therefore, we keep checks on one another. These acts of showing the government that people will resist their power leave a great impact on society.

With all three of these men, we can see they wanted something done to improve society. Socrates wanted honesty, Martin Luther King Jr. wanted equality, and Henry David Thoreau wanted people to have a say in where tax money was spent. Without these acts of resistance, changes would not have been made. My position on civil disobedience is that it is a successful tool that us citizens have against the government and when it needs to be used, it should be. These men prove that civil disobedience is effective and nonviolent. Continuing this trend of accepting everything that is implemented by the government must stop. We, as citizens, have a powerful voice. When we choose to give up that voice, we choose to give up our freedom. Our voices even help the government to realize that it is time for a change. It is easy to see why these men and many others have dedicated their lives to their causes. Freedoms cannot speak for themselves, they speak through us as a society.

Work Cited Page

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