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Paper #2

**Socrates: The Philosopher who could see, but not show.**

Socrates in *Plato’s Republic* explores various aspects of justice through unraveling the opinions of others. While he is able to convince his peers that their answers are far from accurate, Socrates encounters difficulty when convincing them to reach a state of absolute truth. He is effective at outlining his ethical framework, but fails to inspire others to not only practice it, but also believe in it. As Socrates approaches members of the republic, the term justice is continually redefined. But, the invariable idea that the republic faces is the need for just and effective leadership. While a philosopher such as Socrates exemplifies profound thinking reinforced through a combination of his logic and reasoning, he is unable to arrive at a definite answer himself. This is not a necessarily negative attribute in a leader as long as he can motivate those around him to discover a universally and not independently accepted answer. Socrates’s dialogues highlight three main ideas that comprise just leadership. But, while he preaches this way of thinking, he does not use his ability to understand human nature to effectively teach it. Socrates understands the importance of empathy, but he lacks the ability to use it. These three ideas that reoccur throughout the dialogue are the act of reasoning, recognition, and reflection. These are three overarching concepts that Socrates instructs people to consider. Unfortunately, Socrates fails to realize that by proving the opinions of others wrong only leaves them further stranded in darkness, and provides no actual direction towards the light.

The idea of reasoning is fundamental to just leadership because those who decide to follow need a sense of purpose more powerful than what they perceive as right and wrong. Like any other belief, a moral compass can change or be over powered by any natural desire or need. It takes more than understanding a set of ethics, to actually pursue it. A purpose allows an individual to anchor their motivation into an absolute direction, despite the challenges and hardships that ensue. Like a rope leading out of a cave, there will be times when one is unaware of the path in front of him, but the rope is an unchanging object that one can always follow. A leader, with the intention to bring people out of the darkness, must provide a rope or more conceptually a purpose to leave. In respect to the allegory of the cave, this means possessing the ability to reach the light, even if it is not expected to actually exist. The light is no more than a state of mind that frees one from the perceived walls that shadow the darkness within. I interpret the light to be fueled by the recognition of one’s peers, but maintained by the passion of the individual. Socrates describes the importance of having a purpose when he defines the origin of a republic:

Because we have many wants, many people are needed to provide for them; we need one kind of helper for one purpose and another kind for another purpose. When these helpers and partners come together in one place, we call that collection of people a republic . . . So they trade goods and services, one giving and the other receiving, each thinking that the exchange is good for them. (Plato 57)

Whether this purpose is to craft a well-designed tool, compete in an athletic sport, or compose an artistic masterpiece, the result of binding oneself to this purpose is a step towards enlightenment. A purpose acts as a guide, especially necessary when one is lost and the genuine feeling of happiness seems inexistent. Instilling a sense of purpose that is both tailored towards the individual, but appreciated by the masses leads into the role of how my next idea of recognition offers itself to effective and just leadership in a republic.

The idea of recognition plays an innate role in just leadership of a republic because of one’s uncertainty in measuring the progress toward one’s purpose. As portrayed by characters like Thrasymachus, progress is measured through the accumulation of materialistic wealth. While society at this time may allow for money to deceptively endow one with the ability to control or influence others, this sense of recognition is tied to a currency that can easily be lost or gained. The only currency in life that is resistant to all forms of manipulation is time. The time in a person’s life is dictated by only one factor, and that is the uncertainty of death. Recognition for someone’s contribution of his or her time is the only absolute way of measuring progress towards his or her purpose. Someone that is recognized for their ability to accomplish something that other members in society cannot is what will give them true power to influence others. Whether this is inventing a high quality tool or the ability to reverse a 95 mph fastball to surpass the green monster at Fenway, people will respect your ability to do what they cannot. And in return, they will offer recognition, both verbally and tangibly through offering an ability that the inventor and baseball player do not possess. This exchange of abilities seeded by individual purpose, is a transaction that is not represented by appearance, but by thought. In order to catalyze a republic’s ability to facilitate this exchange, money and other perceived value objects were introduced into the human society. While economically this allowed people to store away the recognition they received for their abilities, it also undermined their ability to realize the meaning of the true transaction that takes place. This is the absolute exchange of one member’s purpose for another. With money as a medium of exchange, their recognition is no longer an intrinsic transaction of mutually benefiting abilities, but instead converted into a currency that associates an appearance of their self worth and not their genuine self worth. Socrates elaborates on this notion when he investigates how people settle for appearance, but really seeks the meaning of what is good:

And isn’t it obvious that many people are willing to settle for the appearance of justice or beauty in what they possess, in how they act, or in the opinion people have of them? But when it comes to possessing what is good, nobody is satisfied with mere appearance. They seek what is really good and scorn what only seems to be good. (Plato 247)

People want something genuinely good, not what appears to be good. Genuine recognition provides a measure for whether one finds good in his purpose. Money on the other hand, inadvertently distorts this recognition from a feeling to an appearance because the currency is a tangible object. This causes humans to be susceptible to settle for what they see and not what they think is good. No longer are people motivated by what they are passionate about, but by the stored recognition in money that continues to be vulnerable to manipulation. With the exponential growth and development of a republic, money is necessary because it can exponentially grow with the increasing demand and need to exchange goods and services. But, as money should act as only a way to facilitate the collaboration of human beings, the idea of true recognition is lost in the conversion from one’s time to one’s stored value. Attaining a tangible object such as money becomes easier for human beings to grasp, than the actual meaning of their purpose. This transitions into my final idea of how reflection ties both reason and recognition together, so a leader can make achieving happiness possible in a republic.

Reflection is what connects self-reasoning to self-recognition. Reasoning is the sense of purpose, and recognition is the sense of accomplishment. An artist does not know if he has accomplished his purpose as a painter, unless people recognize it as a valued contribution to society. This recognition can be characterized through many different ways, from the paintings ability to capture a moment in time to its ability to inspire others. Reflection allows for people to look into a past experience, a record of time that is unchanging and understand more about the causes and effects on their happiness. Socrates exemplifies this practice of reflection when he unravels the meaning of justice to Glaucon:

When we were seeking justice and the perfectly just person, as well as injustice and the entirely unjust person, we were actually looking for a paradigm that we could use to judge our own happiness and unhappiness. We should compare ourselves to them in order to evaluate our lives-not with the expectation that they might actually exist. (Plato 204)

Reflection in itself allows for an individual to see their life in a larger picture, and reflect on the journey traveled. I would not conclude that happiness is a direct effect of recognition. I see happiness as the ability to reflect upon and appreciate my purpose to society, and how the republic recognizes my contribution. Reflection is what converts a universally recognized accomplishment into the most absolute currency that human beings can understand, which is the time they put in, and the difference it made. It is an idea and way of thinking that allows one to see his or her genuine purpose and not just the mere reflection from the gold coin that can be associated with it.

I agree the allegory of the cave is an effective visual representation of the pursuit for happiness. The cave is the unknowing, a state of mind where people have yet to find true purpose. The fire is a form of light created by humans, similar to how money intends to create and environment where humans can collaborate. This fire prevents people from leaving because it is the easiest and most tangible source of light for them to attain. When really, it hinders them from seeing the actual light that can exist in the cave. Like money, the fire should serve only as an aid. It is a source of energy that allows human beings to see and interact, but if used correctly by a just leader, he can effectively guide those from the darkness to a new light that is unchanging and everlasting. This light becomes an infinite source of gratification that cannot be manipulated like a shadow or a fire. It resembles a constant source of enlightenment, because it is no longer fueled by anything else except your ability to believe in its existence. Each member in the cave will serve a specific purpose, like a doctor or a cook on a ship. The fire allows them to see and recognize their abilities and work together. Socrates understands that a just leader can hold the torch without being blinded by it, but he must realize a crew must be inspired to sail towards a light far more meaningful than the one that is nearest to them. Socrates is right when he describes why a just leader needs to be a philosopher: “Philosophers are able to grasp what is eternal and unchanging . . .” (Plato 219). He may be able to genuinely see the light, but can he show people the light? The real question is not whether an effective leader can be just, but if a philosopher can be an effective leader?

In my life, I encountered certain hardships that are rare among my peers. In particular, I lost my mother to cancer when I was only four years old. As I grew up, I realized that I was different from most other people. As a result, I constantly questioned the events that occurred around me. I was forced to discover on my own the limits of what is right and what is wrong. While those limits continue to change as I continue to discover more about my self and the people around me, I reflect upon one principle that never changes. I recognize that the absence of my mother left a gaping hole in my heart that may never be repaired. After 17 years without her, I understand now not to fill that hole with retribution for the unfairness of life, but instead with the happiness I get from helping others. I discovered a purpose for my self, and it is the one unchanging and eternal rope that I can always hold onto. Everyday I continue to tell myself: “why fill the hole in my heart with darkness, when I can fill it with light.” As I strive to become a just and effective leader, I utilize my ability to reason, recognize and reflect. I understand I can only teach my friends and family so much, but by placing my self in their shoes, I myself must understand that they may not be prepared to learn. Instead of trying to teach them to see the light, it is more effective to show them the light. Hopefully, the compassion and empathy I show for others will exemplify to them what it means to be eternally enlightened. As I pursue my passion to create new technology with programing and life experience, I will always remember to strive towards my ambitions to create meaning and not money.

Works Cited

Plato. *Plato's Republic*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett; rev. Albert A. Anderson. Millis, MA: Agora Publications, 2001. Print.

***“I pledge my honor that I have neither received nor provided unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.”***