Justice And Sovereignty Essay, Research Paper

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Justice and Sovereignty

There are two basic questions in this world. Who governs? And to what ends do they govern? These questions raise concerns over the limits of power given to people. How much power is just? In their writings, Plato, John Locke, and Robert A. Dahl address the question of what is the meaning of justice and sovereignty. Each of them has distinct definitions on what justice is and how it can be applied to power.

In The Cave, Plato writes that justice comes from truth. In Plato?s opinion truth is the path to ultimate good. It is supreme over everything else in this universe. He allows truth to guide his perception of what justice is and should be. Plato thought that justice had to come from that which was absolute. Knowledge and those things that are irrefutable led to truth. Truth in turn led to reason, which led to the ultimate good, which in Plato?s eyes was wisdom.

?Without having a vision of their truth, no one can act with wisdom either in his life or in matters of state.? Plato believes that in order for someone to reach justice, they must first find out what the truth is. Therefore Plato was saying that in order for one to be just, he/she must also be knowledgeable. They must understand all of the facts surrounding them and accept them as being true to them.

Because Plato believes that justice should be based upon truth and knowledge, he then also believes that philosopher kings should be the ones who carry out justice. Since justice derives from wisdom, which guides the minds of the philosopher kings, it is only right that they are the ones who should rule over the people. The philosopher kings will rule over the people justly and unselfishly because their only desire is to reach the absolute truth without any personal gain.

While in theory Plato?s ideas are very reasonable they lead one to believe that they are unattainable. Plato?s reasoning is based upon wisdom, that which is the ultimate good. He believes that the opinions of the people, that which is relative, should have nothing to do in the quest for justice or in sovereignty. However, can he really expect that all people keep their opinions out of play? It is human nature for people to want what is best for them, and what is best for the people usually derives from their opinions. Plato?s theory is impossible to attain unless this world is full of selfless people, which it has proven itself to not be.

John Locke believed that all men are entitled to certain inalienable rights; life, liberty, and property. Locke believed that everyone is subjected to these natural laws and these laws are supreme over all. Locke believed that justice should be the same for everyone since everyone in his mind was born the same. All humans were born with a tabuleraza, a blank slate where their mind is clear of everything. Locke believed that everyone should have access to power, but it is what he or she does with power that would determine if it is just or unjust.

?As usurpation is the exercise of power which another has a right to, so tyranny is the exercise of power beyond right, which nobody can have a right to.? Locke is saying that while anyone and everyone should have the right to assume power, when they abuse their power it becomes unjust. Through the natural laws, Locke unlike Plato is saying that everyone should have the right to rule. In direct contradiction with Plato, Locke says that up to a certain extent it is just for people to do that which is best for them. Because everyone was born the same, they should have the same opportunities in life.

Locke?s ideas make a lot of sense in a utopian world. While it is irrefutable that all men have the right to life liberty, and property (pursuit of happiness) how many people on this planet are given the freedom to exercise those rights? In a perfect world, everybody would be given a chance to pursue that which makes him or her happy, but in the real world others often infringe upon these rights. So, while Locke?s ideas are good, in the real world they are unattainable due to the fact that human beings, by nature, stand in each other?s paths.

In his After the Revolution, Robert A. Dahl clearly discusses his ideas of justice and sovereignty. ?I cannot satisfactorily gain my own ends unless I allow others an opportunity to pursue their ends on an equal basis.? Dahl?s idea is rather simple, he believes that everyone should be equal. In his eyes nothing is just unless everyone has an equal voice and an equal share in it. Nothing to Dahl is just unless equality is exercised one hundred percent through out the entire process. In the question of sovereignty once again Dahl brings equality into play. His ideal form of rule is a democracy where all of the members of the commonwealth have an equal voice in the decisions made.

Once again, just as with the two other thinkers mentioned in this paper, the question of whether or not the above ideal is attainable comes up. As with the other two theories, while Dahl?s idea makes sense in a utopian society, in the real world it would make no sense. It is impossible to make everyone have an equal voice. Everyone has a different idea of what is just because their idea of justice is based upon what is best for them. To satisfy the whole of the commonwealth is completely impossible and therefore Dahl?s ideas of justice and sovereignty are beyond one?s reach.

Although each of the three ideas is completely different in their messages about justice and sovereignty, ultimately neither of the three is unattainable. If I were to choose one, however, I would probably choose the theory provided by John Locke. His theory of certain inalienable rights is completely irrefutable and forces one to believe that the natural laws are the laws which should govern the world. His idea of tabuleraza makes more sense than Plato?s idea; that philosopher kings should govern the world. It is also more attainable than Dahl?s theory of equality. Locke?s theories allow a person to pursue that which makes them happy, and that is as close to universal satisfaction as one could probably get.

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