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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

Social protest is the way in which an oppressed minority group pursues some form of social change on their own behalf. Without social protest, the decisions of the majority population would go unquestioned and the needs of the suppressed minority would be ignored. For beneficial changes to be made for the oppressed minority, social protest is in order. Social protest has long paved the way for societal change, and without the creative minority, these changes would never occur.



Kyra Krieg

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Introduction

Social protest is the way in which an oppressed minority group pursues some form of social change on their own behalf. Without social protest, the decisions of the majority population would go unquestioned and the needs of the suppressed minority would be ignored. For beneficial changes to be made for the oppressed minority, social protest is in order. Social protest has long paved the way for societal change, and without the creative minority, these changes would never occur.

Social Justice according to Judaism

Social justice is considered to be an essential part of Judaism. It is considered an element of Jewish ethics, an idea for each individual to be concerned with for the sake of all mankind. The idea of social justice in Judaism first stems from the Bible itself. The Bible emphasizes "... 'justice and righteousness,' ...it is based on the idea that God imparts to rulers, and, indeed, to all humans, a sense of justice, and this helps the ruler to judge the people and the poor fairly" (Graetz 118). Rather than social justice being an issue concerning only a nation's leaders, the Bible tells us that social justice is the responsibility of every person regardless of one's place in society. With this sense of justice comes the responsibility of each person to recognize the basic human rights of all people. The issue of social justice is not confined to merely the rulers despite the unique power they hold. Each person is born with a sense

of the importance of basic human rights, and these rights should be extended to all people. The importance of the preservation of these rights for all people in Judaism is based on the emphasis placed on the importance of the common good.

Old Jewish culture places a large emphasis on the common good of all people. The importance to the Jewish people of preserving the common good is evident in the Old Testament of the Bible. According to Harmon, in the Old Testament “four categories emerge as representative of those specially subject to mistreatment, and thus particularly in need of protection: the poor, the orphan, the alien, and the widow.” Each of these four categories represents members of the population in need of special care. There was a strong emphasis placed on generosity for the poor given their less fortunate circumstances. The poor were allowed the same rights as more wealthy members of their society and allowed to collect any leftovers after harvest time without accusation of stealing. Laws were made for the care of orphans who would otherwise be left to fend completely for themselves. Widows in ancient Israel would have nothing to their name after the death of their husbands as all property went to the oldest male child in the family. The Bible places special emphasis on care for widows, and wills were often made for widows to stay in the house of their deceased husband long after their death. Even foreigners were allowed certain rights in ancient Israel such as gleaning and participation in some religious events if they were circumcised. In ancient Israel, the common good extended not to just the average Jewish family but also to outsiders and the less fortunate.

In order for the common good to be reached, each person requires “freedom, justice, and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel” (Graetz 118). With freedom, justice, and peace in the lives of each person, we would be living in a world considered socially just in Judaism. When an individual’s freedom and peace is put into jeopardy, social justice requires that action be taken to end the unjust suffering of others. It is then that social protest becomes necessary. It is considered important by many Jewish leaders to look to religious texts to first understand how to approach the great social issues of the world. According to Rabbi Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz, “Jewish texts, values, and laws...inform how we are to

respond to our greatest moral challenges...all Jews must engage in social justice thinking and activism...all must make their own informed choices on how to proceed” (14). Here, Yanklowitz emphasizes the importance of being informed in order to make a better world.

In Judaism, social protest has been used to fight for social justice since the beginning of times. In ancient Israel, social protest began with the Exodus. The Exodus was very important “ The story of Exodus is the central salvation event in the Old Testament. The account of the liberation of a band of Hebrew slaves from horrific oppression in Egypt is the event that shaped virtually everything in the biblical imagination” (Dempster 4). The Exodus marked the beginning of social protest in world history. In their attempt and success in being liberated from oppression and slavery in ancient Egypt, the Israelites set the stage for the right to social protest around the world. They showed that social protest was essential and achievable in their successful liberation from Egypt. According to Dempster, “the exodus was nothing less than one of the events that shaped ancient Israel’s worldview, and made it essentially a foreigner in the ancient world” (5). The Exodus showed that the Jewish people were different in what they were willing to endure as a cultural group, and also in how they believed human lives were to be lived. The first Jewish people saw that something needed to be changed, took a stand, and improved the lives of an entire culture, saving themselves from slavery.

My Views and Understanding of Social Justice

Social justice in the modern world is largely absent due to the change in our society’s morals and values. In the modern era, emphasis is placed less on the needs of society as a whole and more on the needs of the individual person. According to McLeod, “Most protests represent the collective interests and issues of activist groups, coalitions, or social movements that challenge mainstream institutions. In the process, they serve a number of important democratic functions, including providing opportunities for participation and expression for individuals and as a potential engine of social change for communities and nations” (1). The minority population must work much harder to see the changes they want made in society because the majority population does not support their needs. In general, the changes that minority populations want to make in society do not support the interests of the vast majority population. The ‘here

and now' are the focus of attention while the future and welfare of the less fortunate is often left out of the current mindset of the majority population. This current focus on the self and only the present day has negative effects on our nation's poor, and will have disastrous effects on the world's future populations if changes to the way we are living are not made.

In his encyclical letter *Laudato Si* Pope Francis points out the issues in the argument that blames the problems of the world on its large population. Some believe that a smaller world population would solve much of the world's social inequalities. In response to this Pope Francis writes: "To blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some is one way of refusing to face the issues. It is an attempt to legitimize the present model of distribution, where a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized, since the planet could not even contain the waste products of such consumption" (50). Here Pope Francis points out the dangers that consumerism and society's current focus on the self are imposing on society. The focus should not be on blaming the issues of the world on things that cannot be changed, but on what society as a whole can do to change so future generations and the poor can lead more humane lives. Changes can begin to be made when individuals see what can be done in their own communities to reduce consumerism and spread resources to those who are most in need.

The idea of focusing less on the self and more on the spreading of resources can be traced back to the idea of what social justice meant to the ancient Israelite people. To the early Jewish people, helping others in their community was considered an essential part of their religion. In the secular world of today, religion is no longer considered relevant in the lives of many. The unfortunate truth of this has much to do with the reasons why the people of today are increasingly focused on themselves and their own communities and less concerned with the larger scheme of things. This lack of concern will lead the world in the opposite direction of valuing social justice.

In today's society, issues of social justice are more centered on the differences between the social classes, the rich and the poor. It is difficult to achieve social justice when there are such large gaps between the wealthy and the less fortunate members of society. It is especially difficult when many members of the world's upper class make little efforts to aid the poor and instead focus on their own self-serving interests. The Holy Father Francis states: "It is remarkable how weak international political responses have been. The failure of global summits on the environment makes it plain that our politics are subject to technology and finance. There are too many special interests, and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected" (54). The indifference of big corporations towards the needs of the less fortunate is adding to an increasing social gap between the wealthy and the poor. Economic opportunities for the members of these lower socioeconomic groups are being decreased due to this indifference. If the tactics of these corporations change, then those in poverty will have a greater chance of having equal economic opportunities.

Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of changing the way our society thinks before anything can be achieved in the realm of social justice. He believes that "We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, ... It is time to acknowledge that light-hearted superficiality has done us no good. When the foundations of social life are corroded, what ensue are battles over conflicting interests, new forms of violence and brutality, and obstacles to the growth of a genuine culture of care for the environment" (229). In order to have social justice in our world, we humans need to collectively realize the importance of one another's wellbeing over our own self-centered desires. In this realization we can finally achieve changes to make a more socially just world. Our own form of social protest against the mainstream "lighthearted" view of the world's issues must be made in order for true progress to be made for the world.

Conclusion

In their decision to pursue the needs of their own minority population, the ancient Israelites were the first to use social protest. This allowed them to break free from oppression and deliver themselves

from injustice. In doing so, they set the stage for future generations to follow their example and create a better world by taking a stand for the oppressed. The social issues of today's world present the members of our collective society with a great challenge. However, examples of social protest have been set before us by leaders once oppressed by odds seemingly impossible to overcome. With these examples set before us, we are able to see that change is in fact possible for the world. To end social injustice the world must come together as a collective whole to achieve equality for all people.

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