Peace, Unity, and Changing the World by Disobeying

The obligation to abide by the rules and to obey the law is an essential feature of today’s society. Surely, most citizens of any modern society would not bother to question their obligation to obey laws on the assumption that they believe their country’s legislation to be just. But what if that is not the case? Henry David Thoreau famously said, “One has not only a legal, but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.” **Although disobeying the laws may have uncertain consequences such as public humiliation or even jail time, Thoreau is correct. Civil disobedience is necessary in the face of unjust laws as it builds a whole new society, can bring peace and unity, and sometimes, it’s even possible to change the rules of the system.**

From the ashes of a broken society, sometimes disobeying unjust laws is required in order to rebuild a completely different but truthful world. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the story follows Montag on a journey as he finds banning books to be “unjust” and tries to find answers in the process. In the concluding pages of the book, one of the professors that Montag meets states,

“We know all the damn silly things we've done for a thousand years, and if we know that and always have it around where we can see it, someday we'll stop making the goddam funeral pyres and jumping into the middle of them. We pick up a few more people that remember, every generation” (Bradbury, 76). Granger is saying eventually, through all this mess, including the laws they have disobeyed in order to get to where they were, humanity will not make any of the same mistakes anymore and won’t turn into such a totalitarian society as the one clearly shown in *Fahrenheit 451*.

A rather interesting argument for civil disobedience would be the fact that it can bring peace and unity which is a concept that was demonstrated as early as the year 411 BC. In Lysistrata, a play written by Aristophanes is about the Peloponnesian War which has been ravaging for many years between Athens and Sparta. To put an end to the war, a woman named Lysistrata gathers up women from all over Greece (including women from Athens and Sparta), to deny having sex until the men agree to settle for a peace treaty. Eventually, the men come to their senses and a deal is set, the war is over, and everyone celebrates. Although this play was meant to be a comedy and completely exaggerated, it does present some truth in how some civil disobedience handled in the correct manner can go as far as bringing peace to war.

Quite surely, the main reason to disobey unjust laws, despite the uncertainty of the aftermath, would be to change the system. For Emma Gonzalez, a victim of the Parkland School Shooting, her reasons for civil disobedience was in the hopes that there would be more strict gun laws enforced to prevent tragedies like school shootings from ever happening again. Emma Gonzalez states in the conclusion to her viral speech, “Fight for your lives, before it’s someone else’s job.” (The March) Today in Florida, one year after the incident, big steps have been taken to improve school safety. Politicians have been working towards allowing teachers to carry guns, school security has been upgraded, and up to 11 states have banned guns to people associated with domestic violence. It would be safe to say that the actions taken in this act of civil disobedience have had a substantial change to society, making lives better for many.

Civil Disobedience and the moral obligation to disobey unjust laws has been an important aspect of human behaviour since the beginning of our history, shown in many situations such as fighting for gun control, dystopian books, or even shown simply by a comedic play written over two millenniums ago. It is reasonable to argue that when it comes to moral obligation people who are treated unfairly, there can many fears associated when people think about thrust through the brick wall of authority such as going to jail. Although this is true, and many others will instead decide to take a step back and willingly let the fear of uncertainty reign over them, it is important to know that the words of Thoreau and King show great truth when it comes to civil disobedience. One should let their moral obligation take control, face their fears, and fight unjust laws by breaking them if they truly want to make a better society, bring peace and unity, or maybe, even change the rules itself.

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