Sinead Scott

Writing Assignment 1

4/2/20

The reading I discussed was “The One’s Who Walk Away from Omelas.” I chose this text because I really liked this reading as I thought it raised interesting questions that have made me think, especially in regards to how we live, often in ignoring the suffering or injustices of others if it does not affect us directly. I also chose this text because I thought it would be easier for the person I was talking about it with than, say, Rawls as the ideas and the writing are much more related to our lives. I discussed this reading with my boyfriend, Adam, as he had never read it before (and was willing to talk about it).

The reading has to do with the town/community of Omelas which is filed with art, music, science, etc, and people who are able to prosper. However, the entirety of their success is dependent on the suffering of one child, who is locked in a basement and barely survives. The people of Omelas know the child is there, and even though it makes some of them sick or want to do something, they know they cannot without disrupting their prosperity and way of life. Thus, even those are sickened by the child’s suffering come to terms with it. However, there are some people who, after seeing the child, leave. They walk away, not towards anything specific, necessarily, but away from the suffering child and Omelas.

What I really focused on when discussing this text was whether or not the suffering of the child, of *one* person, was justified because it allowed the rest of the people to live in happiness and prosper. While there were not necessarily any disagreements, neither of us could figure out how to justify the suffering of one for the many. Though I brought up how we could arguably be hypocritical for having this stance as we also rely on the suffering of others for our benefit, Adam pointed out that in some sense it is a lot more difficult to change the injustices and suffering in our lives because unlike the child in Omelas, we often don’t get to see the suffering of others. However, I also argued that while this may be true, we do get to see some and we also have the resources and information to learn and perhaps “see” more virtually. We also talked about how human beings tend to be selfish, we want the best for ourselves and our families and we are often inclined to ignore the hardships or injustices of others if we are benefitting in anyway. I think Adam brought up an interesting point that I had not thought of before which was that both the people living in Omelas who know about the child and the people who walk away are selfish. The injustice of one child does not justify the happiness of the rest of the society, instead it just shows how selfish we are as people. Instead of splitting the suffering and happiness, instead of at least attempting to alleviate such suffering, even if it is only one person, people will pick whatever gives them the best outcome (regardless of how it may affect others).

While the reading itself was not that difficult to explain (partly why I chose it), the concepts were sometimes difficult to discuss. I think it’s rather difficult to discuss topics such as this and with a more academic mindset with people who are not used to it as sometimes if felt like I was providing too much of my own opinion and thought. However, I also think this was a good reading to start with because though not simple, necessarily, it uses simple ideas to raise complex questions.