

2023 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Children's Category – 3rd Prize】

What Is Justice?

(Original in Japanese)

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Two questions were posed to us in our social studies class: "What is justice?" and "Does war exist for the sake of justice?"

I answered as follows:

Justice is what I myself believe to be right. Because it is about my own beliefs, I think that justice means something different to everyone. There are 36 students in my class, so we will have 36 different views on justice. There are more than 7.8 billion people in the world, so there are over 7.8 billion different definitions of justice.

Because of this, it sometimes happens that two people's views on justice do not mesh well. When this happens, people fight. When it happens between countries, the countries go to war. If country A and country B are at war, country A is at war because it thinks it is 'right,' and country B is at war because it thinks it is 'right.' Therefore, I do think that war exists for the sake of justice. At the same time, I also think that what makes war so terrible is that neither side wants to stop fighting because both sides believe that they are right.

However, when I showed my answer to my friend, he was surprised. He said, "There's no such thing as a war for justice." I listened to my friend's answer, but I didn't understand it. Although I didn't say it out loud, I felt that my answer had better logic and was the right one. Then, I realized something amazing.

Wasn't this a form of justice, too?

I was sure about my answer. But I guess my friend felt the same way. He was confident in

his answer, and that's why my answer surprised him. When I thought about that, I broke out in a cold sweat. Just a little while ago, I was thinking that war is terrible because each side is proclaiming its own self-righteous view of justice, and without realizing it, I was imposing my own self-righteous view of justice on my friend.

Right now, there are various conflicts taking place around the world, starting with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We young people see these scenes on TV, but all we can do is raise money and provide temporary support. Only a few cabinet ministers and others are involved in finding fundamental solutions, and young people can't do anything about it. So, it seems that there is very little that young people can do. But that is wrong, because we young people can change the future. We have the greatest advantage, and so we carry the greatest responsibility. Whether we create a peaceful future or a future filled with war is up to us.

Of course, everyone wants peace, but for many people, the feeling of "I should do something for peace!" is too vague, and they don't know what to do. So, what kinds of things can we do right away for the sake of peace? What I think is important here is to recognize the differences in our views on justice. For example, we can try to see the other person's view of justice in a positive light, and even we don't like the person much, we can listen carefully to their view of justice. When some kind of conflict arises with another person, rather than striking first, we can share each other's views of justice and make efforts to understand one another. By broadening our perspective, starting with the word 'justice,' we will find more and more things that we can do. Justice can be troublesome at times, but if we give it careful thought and deepen our understanding of it, justice can also be a reliable ally. Justice and peace are connected.

In the end, there are no shortcuts to peace. The tiny measures of care and consideration that we take, though nearly invisible on a global scale, are a long but sure path to a peaceful future.

Justice means something different for everyone. With this as my foundation—or rather, as the foundation for all youth, who bear the future on our shoulders—I would like to build a peaceful future.