

Toward A Better Understanding of Epicurean Justice And Injustice (With Examples of "Just" and "Unjust")

Post by "Don" of March 21, 2021 at 9:34 PM

[ADMIN NOTE: This new thread was started so as to contain the responses to the following post, which is itself a response by Don to a post by Elayne. Please check [Elayne's post in the original thread](#) for past context. As per the title I gave the new thread, it would be good to produce some hypothetical examples of "just" and "unjust" so we can begin to see the common themes.]

[Quote from Elayne](#)

There are people who take great pleasure in actions which their current majority culture labels repugnant but who cause no actual harm to anyone-- and this is definitely a common human social situation, especially in association with religions, not a rare or hypothetical event. For instance, in some cultures, anything other than heteroromantic love and sex is treated with disgust and in some cases still today with the death penalty. Would you say that a consenting adult same-sex couple in such a culture was not Epicurean to have a relationship even at risk of death? I certainly would not.

Okay, this is helpful for me to flesh out my thinking if y'all will bear with me...

I would say this specific scenario is the exact opposite of what I had in mind when I wrote my post, but that's valuable. I do find the scenario you outline repugnant (i.e., that someone holds those beliefs, to be clear), but I want to try and analyse this from an Epicurean perspective and not my personal preference.

First, I believe your scenario can be analysed to spring from an "empty" opinion or belief on the part of the one feeling "disgust" and, as such, they are not acting morally, justly, or prudently, and so their action can be said to be not choice-worthy.

1. Nature [appears to provide abundant examples of same sex activities](#), so the "disgust" does not arise from nature.
2. If not from nature, it must arise from culture and/or law.
3. As such, is the law/custom just? Does it conform with the basic measure of justice: to neither harm nor be harmed.

4. The same sex couple are harmed explicitly. The empty belief also harms the one holding it by producing unnecessary pain. So, it does not align with the basic measure of acting justly.

5. The belief could also arise from religious (god-given) or cultural indoctrination. We know the gods do not hand down dictates from on-high. If it is cultural indoctrination, Epicurus encouraged us to free ourselves from that.

6. Therefore, I would say the person holding this opinion and getting pleasure from it is not acting justly, wisely, or morally. If they experience momentary pleasure from holding this belief, it is not choice-worthy for the reasons outlined here. The opinion will not lead to a maximally pleasurable life. A person holding that belief cannot consider themselves as following an Epicurean path.

Now, to turn to the couple.

1. The pleasure of the relationship is not an empty opinion. It arises naturally. I see no reason that specific pleasure is not choice-worthy, but...

2. In deciding to continue the relationship, the couple has to weigh multiple options in deciding choices or rejections: Is the pain at the anxiety of getting "caught" more than the pain of being apart from their partner? How long can their relationship be kept secret? Do they have alternatives? Can they migrate somewhere else? In this case, only they can decide if the resulting pleasure is worth the pain. I wouldn't have any issues with saying these two people were following an Epicurean path regardless of their ultimate choice.