

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

Post by "Don" of March 22, 2021 at 10:40 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Maybe we need to be very precise as to what it is that justice relates to. For example what does "courage" relate to? Will power? What does "temperance" relate to? Self-control? What does "wisdom" relate to? Practical application of knowledge?

Cicero gives the spectrums as a starting point:

- Wisdom < > Rashness
- Temperance < > License
- Courage < > Cowardice
- Justice < > Unrighteousness

Of course, you know I want to see the original Latin and various translations. For now, I won't digress. It seems to me that these each relate to a different decision-making process, i.e., to which end of the spectrum do we gravitate:

- How do we decide on courses of action?
- How do we decide on which desires to pursue?
- How do we respond to danger?
- How do we treat other people?

Cicero - and possibly Epicurus - seems to imply that a more pleasurable life will be lived by the person who gravitates to the left than to the right.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Perhaps the area of human life that "justice" relates to is simply "our relationship with other people" and the question involved is "does this or that relationship in fact lead to pleasure for each person concerned, or does it lead to pain for one of more of the people concerned?"

Is it possible that the question of just or unjust is as simple as that?

I think it is. Look at the experiments with children and monkeys and fairness (i.e., justice). They know when the puppet or they themselves are being cheated. I believe that's the concept of fairness (Lisa Feldman Barrett maybe) or prolepsis (Epicurus) that forms the basis of our idea of

justice.

I think it's important to look at PD 31 and the exact words used:

Quote

31: Natural justice is a covenant for mutual benefit [σύμβολον τοῦ συμφέροντος, lit. "an agreement of interests"], to not harm one another or be harmed.

Τὸ τῆς φύσεως δίκαιόν ἐστι σύμβολον τοῦ συμφέροντος εἰς τὸ μὴ βλάπτειν ἀλλήλους μηδὲ βλάπτεσθαι.

[St-Andre note to PD 31] The word σύμβολον refers to a covenant, contract, or other mutual agreement, especially (in a legal sense) a treaty between two city-states to safeguard trading between them. The verb βλάπτω means to hurt or damage someone or something, but not in a way that reflects willful injustice or wrongdoing (for which the verb ἀδικέω is used)

Τὸ τῆς φύσεως δίκαιόν is a little more complex than "natural justice" would imply. To dikaion (Τὸ ... δίκαιόν) has to do with behaving in an orderly manner, adhering to mutual obligations in contracts, observant of duties to gods and men, etc. The modifying phrase (...τῆς φύσεως ...) tēs physeōs is literally "of nature" or to paraphrase natural, but also the natural form or constitution of something. "The most fundamental form of the mutual obligations of two parties" is a long-winded way of getting at the nuance of the topic of PD 31.

And what is this "natural form"? To not harm or be harmed refers "to not hurt or damage someone or something in a way that reflects willful injustice or wrongdoing." Therefore, willful injustice or wrongdoing are not "just" ways of acting. You have to consider intention in deciding if one's actions are just or not.

Injustice ἀδικία rears its head then in PD 34:

Quote

34: Ἡ ἀδικία οὐ καθ' ἑαυτὴν κακόν...

Injustice (ἀδικία) or "hurting or damaging someone or something in a way that reflects willful injustice or wrongdoing" is not purely bad in itself... (but only because of the fear caused by a suspicion that you will not avoid those who are appointed to punish wrongdoing.)

So, do we act justly or righteously to simply avoid this disturbance and anxiety? Is Epicurus just saying you will lead a pleasurable life if you act justly because you won't be looking over your shoulder your whole life? I think this is part of it, but there also seems to be a societal component as well. But that can wait until tomorrow!