

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

Post by "Don" of November 16, 2024 at 2:48 AM

I think I've mentioned this before in this thread, but to update:

The apparent innate ability in psychological experiments of babies and animals to identify fairness seems to me to be connected with the idea that there is a prolepsis of justice or just behavior.

[PD31](#) through [PD33](#) have always seemed to me to emphasize the fact that the book [Principal Doctrines](#) was not divided into tidy "sayings" but rather topical sections. 31-33 to me have always read as one unit (Saint-Andre translation with my own edits):

31. Natural justice is a covenant for mutual benefit, to neither willfully harm one another nor to be willfully harmed. With regard to those animals that do not have the power of making a covenant to neither harm one another nor to be harmed, there is neither justice nor injustice; similarly for those peoples who have neither the power nor the desire of making a covenant to not harm one another or be harmed. Justice does not exist in itself; instead, it is always a compact to not harm one another nor to be harmed, which is agreed upon by those who gather together at some time and place.

τὸ τῆς φύσεως δίκαιόν ἐστι σύμβολον τοῦ συμφέροντος εἰς τὸ μὴ βλάπτειν ἀλλήλους μηδὲ βλάπτεσθαι. ὅσα τῶν ζώων μὴ ἐδύνατο συνθήκας ποιεῖσθαι τὰς ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ βλάπτειν ἄλληλα μηδὲ βλάπτεσθαι, πρὸς ταῦτα οὐθὲν ἦν δίκαιον οὐδὲ ἄδικον· ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν ὅσα μὴ ἐδύνατο ἢ μὴ ἐβούλετο τὰς συνθήκας ποιεῖσθαι τὰς ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ βλάπτειν μηδὲ βλάπτεσθαι. οὐκ ἦν τι καθ' ἑαυτὸ δικαιοσύνη, ἀλλ' ἐν ταῖς μετ' ἀλλήλων συστροφαῖς καθ' ὀνηλίους δήποτε ἀεὶ τόπους συνθήκη τις ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ βλάπτειν ἢ βλάπτεσθαι.

To me, there is an inherent connotation of willful harm being done to or by people. I realize that's maybe common sense but Epicurus is not saying we should never come to harm, either by chance or accident or neglect or something else. Δίκαιος to me conveys the need for intentionality by either party involved within a social context. If a wild animal attacks you, there is no justice or injustice. If you are hurt in a hurricane, there is no justice or injustice. However, if a person lies in wait or plots hurting you and carries that out, that's when justice can be brought into the discussion.