

# The "Non-Aggression Principle" And Its Relationship To Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Cassius" of July 18, 2021 at 9:16 AM

Discussion of the "Non-Aggression Principle" (abbreviated NAP) can skate perilously close to violating our rule against discussing modern politics, so that is something that I want us all to keep in mind in this thread. However the topic is also closely related to the concept of "Justice," which is specifically discussed at length by Epicurus, so it is a subject we should tackle.

[Wikipedia](#) defines the Non-Aggression Principle as follows:

Quote

The **non-aggression principle (NAP)**, also called the **non-aggression axiom**, is a concept in which aggression, defined as initiating or threatening any forceful interference with either an individual or their property,<sup>[note 1]</sup> is inherently wrong.<sup>[1][2]</sup> It is considered by some to be a defining principle of [libertarianism in the United States](#)<sup>[3]</sup><sup>[better source needed]</sup> and is also a prominent idea in [anarcho-capitalism](#) and [minarchism](#).<sup>[4][5][6][7]</sup> In contrast to [pacifism](#), the NAP does not forbid forceful defense.<sup>[3]</sup><sup>[better source needed]</sup> There is no single or universal interpretation or definition of the NAP as it faces several definitional issues, including those revolving around intellectual property, force, abortion, and other topics.

This is a definition that deserves close examination in relation to the Epicurean view of "Justice" as stated by Epicurus in the last ten Principle Doctrines:

Quote

[PD31](#). The justice which arises from nature is a pledge of mutual advantage, to restrain men from harming one another, and save them from being harmed.

[PD32](#). For all living things which have not been able to make compacts not to harm one another, or be harmed, nothing ever is either just or unjust; and likewise, too, for all tribes of men which have been unable, or unwilling, to make compacts not to harm or be harmed.

[PD33](#). Justice never is anything in itself, but in the dealings of men with one another, in any place whatever, and at any time, it is a kind of compact not to harm or be harmed.

[PD34](#). Injustice is not an evil in itself, but only in consequence of the fear which attaches to the apprehension of being unable to escape those appointed to punish such actions.

[PD35](#). It is not possible for one who acts in secret contravention of the terms of the compact not to harm or be harmed to be confident that he will escape detection, even if, at present, he escapes a thousand times. For up to the time of death it cannot be certain that he will indeed escape.

[PD36](#). In its general aspect, justice is the same for all, for it is a kind of mutual advantage in the dealings of men with one another; but with reference to the individual peculiarities of a country, or any other circumstances, the same thing does not turn out to be just for all.

[PD37](#). Among actions which are sanctioned as just by law, that which is proved, on examination, to be of advantage, in the requirements of men's dealings with one another, has the guarantee of justice, whether it is the same for all or not. But if a man makes a law, and it does not turn out to lead to advantage in men's dealings with each other, then it no longer has the essential nature of justice. And even if the advantage in the matter of justice shifts from one side to the other, but for a while accords with the general concept, it is nonetheless just for that period, in the eyes of those who do not confound themselves with empty sounds, but look to the actual facts.

[PD38](#). Where, provided the circumstances have not been altered, actions which were considered just have been shown not to accord with the general concept, in actual practice, then they are not just. But where, when circumstances have changed, the same actions which were sanctioned as just no longer lead to advantage, they were just at the time, when they were of advantage for the dealings of fellow-citizens with one another, but subsequently they are no longer just, when no longer of advantage.

[PD39](#). The man who has best ordered the element of disquiet arising from external circumstances has made those things that he could akin to himself, and the rest at least not alien; but with all to which he could not do even this, he has refrained from mixing, and has expelled from his life all which it was of advantage to treat thus.

[PD40](#). As many as possess the power to procure complete immunity from their neighbors, these also live most pleasantly with one another, since they have the most certain pledge of security, and, after they have enjoyed the fullest intimacy, they do not lament the previous departure of a dead friend, as though he were to be pitied.

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Just to begin the discussion, however, I see an immediate red flag in the part of the definition which says "is inherently wrong." Can that stand up to Epicurean scrutiny?

This post just opens the topic. Let's discuss the whole issue in detail as it comes up over and over, especially in terms of *Voluntaryianism* and *Autarchy*.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2097-the-non-aggression-principle-and-its-relationship-to-epicurean-philosophy/?postID=12842#post12842>