

Episode Ninety-Eight - The Epicurean View of Justice (Part One)

Post by "Cassius" of November 27, 2021 at 3:14 PM

We'll plan to devote the whole of Episode 98 to justice based on the above text. If anyone has topics related to justice they they would like us to be sure to talk about, please add those suggestions here.

One aspect I want us to be sure to cover is a set of questions that underlies all of the virtues, but is particularly stark as to justice:

If justice (or any other virtue) is not absolute - and it seems clear that Epicurus held that it was not absolute - then what exactly IS justice (or any other virtue)?

Is justice (or any other virtue) recognizable only in retrospect? (Meaning that we don't know whether an action was just/virtuous or not until we know the result?)

Is justice (or any other virtue) simply a name which we apply to certain categories of human action? (Such as "courage" being a label we apply to how we face adversity?)

If we decide to talk about "examples" in the field of justice, let's try to be sure to pick examples that are at least several hundred years old so that we don't run afoul of our "no-politics" guideline. Perhaps we can even use examples like the Roman Civil War, and the conflict between Julius Caesar and the Conspirators, since it's very difficult for most of us nowadays to figure out what the fighting was all about.

[Principal Doctrines](#) Which Are Relevant to Justice:

[PD06](#). Whatever you can provide yourself with to secure protection from men is a natural good.

[PD07](#). Some men wished to become famous and conspicuous, thinking that they would thus win for themselves safety from other men. Wherefore if the life of such men is safe, they have obtained the good which nature craves; but if it is not safe, they do not possess that for which they strove at first by the instinct of nature.

[PD08](#). No pleasure is a bad thing in itself; but the means which produce some pleasures bring with them disturbances many times greater than the pleasures.

[PD10](#). If the things that produce the pleasures of profligates could dispel the fears of the mind about the phenomena of the sky, and death, and its pains, and also teach the limits of desires (and of pains), we should never have cause to blame them: for they would be filling themselves

full, with pleasures from every source, and never have pain of body or mind, which is the evil of life.

[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. [see note below]

[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.