

Is Every Breach of Every Agreement "Unjust"?

Post by "Elayne" of October 19, 2019 at 9:27 AM

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/baby-justice/>

Todd and Cassius, great questions, thanks-- I do want to be clear. I was using harm to mean causing pain to the subject, the one experiencing the perceived injustice. I want to emphasize this is a subjective faculty, like vision-- we can observe general times when our sense of injustice would be triggered, but there will be no absolute rule. We can describe, not control or even recommend, when that sensation happens. So Cassius, that means whether a particular asymmetry triggers a sense of injustice depends on the person involved. I think asymmetry is required to trigger the sensation, but it doesn't always.

So Todd, I think the sense of asymmetry does tend not to get set off unless there's some kind of at least mildly painful consequence involved, yes-- but for me, there are still two aspects to the experience, the asymmetry and the pain, and they are not always in a direct proportion. I could detect a trivial asymmetry but a large pain, and in that case I wouldn't be experiencing a strong sense of injustice necessarily. Whereas if the asymmetry is large, and there's even a little pain, I'm usually going to experience a "hey, that's unjust", even if it's not enough pain to motivate me to address the situation. If there's a large asymmetry but zero pain, I won't sense injustice.

Envy is also based on asymmetry but doesn't always go along with a sense of injustice-- however, I have to say I'm saying this from my own experience. Envy is when I want something someone else has, but it doesn't mean I think they specifically harmed me by breaking some sort of agreement between us.

I linked above one example of research on innate recognition of asymmetry and the relationship to sense of justice. I've also observed this behavior as highly reliable in my own patients. When a particular human behavior emerges predictably at certain ages, it's more likely that it involves an innate faculty, which shows up as the nervous system matures, rather than as something an organism would have to learn from scratch each time. Sensing injustice is vital to survival-- like the sense of thirst-- so I can't think why it would be surprising for us to have many innate faculties, considering our complexity!

The "tit for tat" game theory computer models are predictive of when cooperative behavior between organisms will occur, to maximize their self-interest, so it would make sense if evolutionary pressures selected for the ability to sense injustice.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1219-is-every-breach-of-every-agreement-unjust/?postID=4902#post4902>