

Tom Stoppard on Human Rights

Post by “Godfrey” of December 11, 2019 at 11:50 AM

From The Daily Extra on The Argyle Sweater daily calendar (a small daily pleasure):

Quote of the Day

"For me, human rights simply endorse a view of life and a set of moral values that are perfectly clear to an eight-year-old child. A child knows what is fair and isn't fair, and justice derives from that knowledge."

- Tom Stoppard

Stoppard is a playwright and screenwriter; I've probably seen some of his movies but am otherwise unaware of his views. This particular quote strikes me as pretty Epicurean however.

Post by “Cassius” of December 11, 2019 at 12:56 PM

Yes I agree that it rings that way, although I think probably the deeper implications are buried under the words "know" and "knowledge" which are probably not the exact Epicurean framework.

Possibly would be more accurate to say that children "feel" what is fair and unfair, or at the view stems from an "anticipation" that is there from the beginning rather than being something that is affirmatively "known" as if assembled from conscious thought or consideration.

And then there would need to be a discussion of whether what is being dealt with here really constitutes "human rights" or something else....

Post by “Godfrey” of December 11, 2019 at 1:09 PM

Maybe a more accurate description is "sloppily", "lazily" or "unknowingly" Epicurean. 😊

Post by “Cassius” of December 11, 2019 at 1:35 PM

Also that reminds me of this from Thomas Jefferson, which uses "ploughman" rather than "child" for the same point, [from a letter to Peter Carr](#):

Moral Philosophy. I think it lost time to attend lectures on this branch. He who made us would have been a pitiful bungler, if he had made the rules of our moral conduct a matter of science. For one man of science, there are thousands who are not. What would have become of them? Man was destined for society. His morality, therefore, was to be formed to this object. He was endowed with a sense of right and wrong, merely relative to this. This sense is as much a part of his Nature, as the sense of hearing, seeing, feeling; it is the true foundation of morality, and not the [beautiful], truth, &c., as fanciful writers have imagined. The moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of man as his leg or arm. It is given to all human beings in a stronger or weaker degree, as force of members is given them in a greater or less degree. It may be strengthened by exercise, as may any particular limb of the body. **This sense is submitted, indeed, in some degree, to the guidance of reason; but it is a small stock which is required for this: even a less one than what we call common sense. State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor. The former will decide it as well, & often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules.** In this branch, therefore, read good books, because they will encourage, as well as direct your feelings.