

The Dialectics of Justice and Revenge: A Radical Compromise

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Theme: [History](#)

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The virtue of justice consists in moderation, as regulated by wisdom.” - Aristotle

“Revenge is a kind of wild justice; which the more man’s nature runs to, the more ought law to weed it out.” — Francis Bacon

“ If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge?” - William Shakespeare

“There is a higher court than courts of justice and that is the court of conscience. It supercedes all other courts.” - Mahatma Gandhi

“Man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.” - Martin Luther King, Jr.

“It is essential that justice be done, it is equally vital that justice not be confused with revenge for the two are wholly different.” - Oscar Arias

“Justice is revenge.” — Saad Hariri

“Revenge is simply justice with teeth.” — Simon Green

The Ethics and Logic of Justice Versus the Persistence of Hatred and Revenge: An Idealistic Platform

The issue of justice is one of ethics and is basically founded on the human sense of fairness. It is something desired in every act or circumstance that respects the value of meaningful life both human and non-human. Justice is the very principle that sustains the condition of existence in its spontaneous flow towards higher and greater levels of refinement. It is a fundamental standard that bestows dignity to humanity. **As such, human dignity is inalienable, inviolable, and thus, non-negotiable on the basis of the moral principle of justice.**

Justice promotes human flourishing which, in a more comprehensive sense ties up and connects with ecological flourishing without which human flourishing doesn’t make sense at all. If ever there is a *summum bonum* or the highest good of morality, justice should stand as the uncontested beacon that gives direction to a more reasonable and proper understanding of the virtues of compassion, courage, freedom, honesty, humility, and responsibility, among others. In the light of justice, these virtues transcend their theoretical configurations and hence take their respective concrete forms of pragmatic expression in actual *Sitz-im-Lebens*. Justice, therefore, gives credence to and protects the essence of

these virtues. From such a condition, justice itself draws its legitimacy as a supreme virtue that in turn should likewise be protected by the human agents who uphold and value it over and above the others.

Justice – as it is represented by the blindfolded woman holding up a weighing scale at the façades of halls of justice and supreme courts – is impartial and does not subjectively look at the superficial aspects of persons, things, and events. The weighing scale definitely represents the analytical character of justice with the “syllogistic” potency of a cold logic that takes its ethical signification as the major premise:

“If x then y. And x. Therefore, y.” Or, “If x then y. And not y. Therefore, not x.”

In other words, the “logic of justice” takes the same rational path trodden by a logical argument where something meaningful has to be proven (technically, the conclusion of a formal logical argument) through an orderly presentation of reliable pieces of evidence (technically, premises in a formal logical argument). As in the application of the formal logical procedure in true-to-life circumstances, the full satisfaction of the “logic of justice” is not simply hitched on an argument’s validity but more on its soundness.

All these matters henceforth considered, justice is by and large a virtue that transcends subjective perception. In this connection, there is supposed to be nothing emotional in the process of rendering justice to whom justice is due. Justice, as we have seen its objective configuration, follows a logical trajectory whose premises exactly lead to their inevitable conclusion. The true essence of absolute justice is devoid of subjective feelings and emotions. With this in mind, not a single matter of feeling or emotion may ever be construed to trigger an act of justice. Having the character of cold logic, the procedural path that leads to justice cannot emanate from a sensation of anger or elation, hatred or affection, sadness, or pleasure.

Can Revenge be Justice or Vice Versa?

Turning now our attention to the question, “Can revenge be justice or vice versa?”, one important issue to focus on is the basic idea that highlights an understanding of revenge. We may start off with the question: Does it emanate from rationality or is it basically a feeling fired up with hatred? In practically all instances, revenge is loaded with a highly aggressive feeling of resentment and loathing. It is characterized by a strong drive to retaliate – and to retaliate viciously – towards a specifically defined adversary. But can revenge draw a supportive push from reason? In certain instances, people would justify the reasonableness of revenge (or vengeance). In the process, a flurry of opinions could be developed as considerable factors that make revenge seemingly reasonable and hence could be construed as an act of justice. But this manner of looking at the issue at hand distorts the logic of justice. The confusion created by putting revenge within the range of justice and vice versa desecrates justice and elevates revenge at the level of the virtuous. This is a case of making a mess out of the ethical landscape where justice is held supreme. Having true rationality at the core of justice, revenge cannot truly emanate from it for the conceptual components of revenge rest on one’s feeling of hatred and abomination.

A god acting on the basis of revenge is not a just god. The logic of justice cannot operate in such a statement as “Vengeance is mine, says the Lord.” However, knowing the theological background that triggers contradictory statements which put the god of believers on the

spot does not cast any negative notion about such a god if he really exists for such statements of conviction are only mental formulations of people who have never really known the mind of the god they say they believe in but merely imagined ideas such a god they have conceived would say according to their wishes and desires.

Justice takes a logical trajectory sans any feeling of hatred or loathing. At the end of the day after justice has been rendered to whom it is due, victims of previous injustice would certainly have a feeling of exhilaration and triumph for in the most superficial sense, their cause has been avenged. But one thing is very clear: they finally achieved the justice they long sought for not on the basis of hatred and revenge but through the “logic of justice” whose major premise is drawn from the “ethics of justice”.

Social Justice and Human Rights Amidst the Challenge of Social Injustice: Revenge Deconstructed

Nowadays, justice is a seriously sought-after ideal in a lot of places where dominant forces of oppression and tyranny operate and trample on people’s rights as human beings. In this sense, the issue of justice connects with that of human rights.

Being just is basically being fair. If justice reigns in a society, it is commonplace to see people doing things fairly with and for others. There’s no deception, manipulation, and exploitation. A society of this nature we call a just society.

A just society is a humanizing society. This is a situation where people experience the dignity of their humanity. Everybody has the opportunity to exercise her/his rights in such a way that doesn’t infringe on the rights of others.

A just society is a moral society where what is good and what is right are measured in terms of how people respect each other. A respected human being feels that her/his life is worth living. And having such a mental frame under normal circumstances, a respected person develops in her/himself a sense of responsibility to likewise give the same respect to others. This is fundamental justice.

In light of the above descriptions, we can examine the kind of human societies we have in practically all parts of the world. Lamentably, we don’t have a single perfect model of a society where honest-to-goodness justice is prevalent. What we actually have are societies where people experience injustice in all forms and patterns, shades, and textures at different levels of intensity and harshness. On planet Earth, we have manifold unjust societies. Through ages, injustice has always been a horrible root cause of serious problems, both personal and social.

In many instances, injustice is caused by countries of immense power. They look at others who are, of course, not as powerful as they are, like insignificant entities that may be exploited and manipulated, controlled, and dominated. We have witnessed how US imperialism has undermined the governments of countries like Cuba, Venezuela and Syria. Until the present time, the US-imposed economic embargo over Cuba has been going on for more than half a century. Another extremely debilitating embargo has likewise been more recently imposed by the US on Venezuela as a punitive reaction against the unrelenting defiance of the latter to the aggressive posturing of the US to impose control over Venezuela’s petroleum industry. In the case of Syria, US-sponsored terrorism has tremendously devastated this once flourishing nation which has never capitulated to the

continued aggression of US imperialism supported not only by Zionist Israel but also by Wahabbist Saudi Arabia and their western European allies.

There are however cases where the justice system is simply a semblance of the real. In other words, we cannot really expect true justice from such a system because the people behind it are the very agents themselves of injustice at its most distorted form who have caused irreparable damages to society. In fact, many people who have experienced injustice in such a society have resigned themselves in the corner of hopelessness believing that they will never avail of the justice they seek, for such justice is nowhere found. We can cite at this point Zionist Israel which has long been oppressing and dehumanizing the original Palestinian inhabitants of the land they have colonized and occupied for many decades. The injustice committed against the Palestinians is commonplace and has been condemned in the strongest possible ways by the international community with the exception of the United States of America and its western European allies which are all solid supporters of Israeli Zionism both in terms of logistics and finances.

In certain societies, their very own governments could be the purveyors themselves of the worst kind of injustice. People experience tremendous difficulties in life because of unjust policies and practices that their government imposes on them. In this particular situation, the government becomes the people's enemy. And on many occasions, corrupt and unscrupulous government officials who are closely associated with their equally corrupt and exploitative counterparts in the business realm intensify the degree of injustice experienced by the people in general and the poor sector of the population in particular. The Philippines is a clear case where the present government under the leadership of a gangland warlord is a pain in the necks of the people particularly those in the impoverished locales. In partnership with big-time business tycoons and their billionaire Chinese counterparts, the present Philippine government has not really improved the economic situation of the people on the social fringes but further pushed them into the quagmire of seemingly insurmountable sufferings. A situation of disempowerment is one of injustice. In an unjust condition, justice is muffled. In other words, we don't expect justice served in a situation where justice is desecrated and at worst, where there is no rationally functional justice system at all.

In such circumstances, we see ordinary people being robbed of their dignity, and at worst, even murdered when they have crossed paths with the powers-that-be. How and where do their families seek justice afterward while their voices are muted by further threats of aggressive violence and outrageous brutality? When the dominant system itself precludes the call for justice, where do we go to redress the wrong that has been done to us? Can we not resort to putting justice in our hands when there's no legal agency to turn to? Having this in mind, isn't it logical to construe justice with revenge?

Synthesizing Justice and Revenge

We do not want to mangle justice; its superior worth remains to be our incontrovertible ideal. We will always promote the virtue of justice as one of the most important - if not the most important - of the human values in us. However, there could be a distortion of its very essence if we necessarily bind it with the concept of legality. Of course, it is one more ideal point to realize such an association but the risk is when legality itself gets distorted and unabashedly identified with the powers that be. What then becomes legal is anything that favors the interests of the powerful and if justice is defined in such a context, it is absolutely stripped off of its moral essence.

Justice devoid of its morality is the corruption of justice. Justice corrupted is justice falsified. When such a tragic transformation happens, an individual who puts justice in his hands is simply fulfilling an act of reclaiming its moral essence. In this connection, revenge becomes a just act – an act of justice. In the final analysis, we arrive at the synthesis of justice as revenge and revenge as justice and who will have the guts to question it? Only those who have redefined justice according to their own demented conception that accommodates, gratifies, and satisfies their criminal interests.

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