Two Kinds of Justice

A Greek philosopher was walking along one day, thinking about things, when he saw two very tall women towering away in the distance; they were the size of several men placed one on top of another. The philosopher, as wise as he was fearful, ran to hide behind some bushes, intending to listen to their conversation. The huge women came and sat nearby, but before they could start speaking the King's youngest son appeared. He was bleeding from one ear and shouted pleadingly towards the women: "Justice! I want justice! That villain cut my ear!" He pointed to another boy, his younger brother, who arrived wielding[[1]](#footnote-1) a bloody sword.

"We will be delighted to give you justice, young Prince," replied the two women.

"That's why we are the goddesses of justice. Just choose which of the two of us you would prefer to help you."

"What's the difference?" the victim asked. "What would each of you do?"

"I," said one of the goddesses, who looked more weak and delicate[[2]](#footnote-2),

"will ask your brother what was the cause of his action, and I will listen to his explanation. Then I will oblige him to protect your other ear with his life, and to make you the most beautiful helmet to cover your scar and to be your ears when you need it."

" I, for my part," said the other goddess, "will not let him go unpunished for his action. I will punish him with a hundred lashes and one year of imprisonment, and he must compensate[[3]](#footnote-3) you for your pain with a thousand gold coins. And I will give you the sword and you can choose if you're able to keep the ear or, on the contrary[[4]](#footnote-4), you want both ears to end up on the ground. Well, what is your decision? Who do you want to apply justice for the offence?"

The Prince looked at the two goddesses. Then he put his hand to the wound, and on touching it his face gave a gesture of undeniable pain, which ended with a look of anger and affection for his brother. And in a firm voice, addressing the second of the goddesses he gave his answer.

"I'd rather it was you who helps me. I love him, but it would be unfair if my brother doesn't receive his punishment."

And so, from his hiding place in the bushes, the philosopher saw the culprit get his comeuppance[[5]](#footnote-5), and watched how the older brother was content[[6]](#footnote-6) to make a small wound on his brother's ear, without seriously damaging it.

A while passed and the Princes had left, one without an ear and the other served justice, and the philosopher was still in hiding when the least expected thing happened. In front of his eyes, the second of the goddesses changed her clothes and took her true form. She wasn't a goddess at all, but the powerful Aries, the god of war. Aries bid goodbye to his companion, with a mischievous smile:

"I've done it again, dear Themis. Your friends, mankind, can barely distinguish between your righteousness[[7]](#footnote-7) and my revenge. Bwahahaha! I will prepare my weapons, a new war between brothers is approaching ... ha, ha, ha, ha."

When Aries had left and the philosopher was trying to quietly make off, the goddess spoke aloud, "Tell me, good philosopher, would you have known how to choose correctly? Did you know how to distinguish[[8]](#footnote-8) between the past and the future?"

And with that strange greeting began many long and friendly talks. And that's how, from the very hand of the goddess of justice, the philosopher learned that true justice lies in improving the future, moving it away from past wrongs, while false justice and vengeance is incapable of forgiving and forgetting past wrongs, and doing so fixes the future, it always ending up being just as bad.

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1. Holding or using (verb) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Easily broken or fragile (adjective) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Make up for or pay for (verb) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The opposite (noun) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Punishment or fate one deserves (noun) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Satisfied (adjective) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Quality of being morally right (adjective) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Recognize as different (verb) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)