

Prudentia

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On holidays of remembrance, specifically Memorial Day and Veterans Day, I watch things that make me cry. It's not intentional, trust me. I'm not an emotional person by nature, and I avoid emotional situations at all costs. However, I always seem to make myself the eye of an emotional maelstroms on holidays of remembrance. It's the movies and the shows about soldiers that get to me. I don't know why I put myself through it every year to be honest. Maybe I just want to understand what war was like for the average soldier—though I don't think any show could paint that picture accurately. Maybe I want to feel less guilty that so many people have died so that I could waste my time watching movies, because I do sometimes feel guilty, and I do keep watching movies.* This year my Memorial Day selection was *Band of Brothers*, Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg's famous dramatization of Easy Company's exploits in World War II.¹ Shockingly, after eight episodes I had not shed a single tear, but the ninth episode and its emotional affect caused a downpour that made all previous Memorial Days and Veterans Days look like drizzles.

In the episode *Why We Fight*, the war in Europe is coming to a close and the disillusioned members of Easy Company wonder why they were sent to fight in the first place. Though each member of the company seems to be coming to their own conclusions, they discover a universal answer in Bavaria. Kaufering IV was one of several subcamps of Dachau concentration camp where Jews, Poles, Catholics, and gypsies were forced into backbreaking work. When Easy Company liberated the camp in 1945 it had already been converted into a sick camp.² Those too ill to work were not spared further torment. They

* I do not think watching movies is bad, I actually think watching movies is great. This is just an example of the various thought I have when I watch these movies and see how much people have suffered so that I can choose to live how I want. It is during those moments that I think there are better, more productive things that I could be doing than watching movies.

¹ Richards, Mary, Tom Hanks, Steven Spielberg, et al. 2001. *Band of brothers*. New York: HBO Home Entertainment.

² Fenner, Barbara. 2012. "Emotions, Historical Awareness and Topic-Centered Interaction (TZI): the Example of the Teaching Project for the External Warehouse Complex Kaufering / Landsberg" Ph.D. thesis. University of Augsburg.

were starving, suffering from disease, and confined to hovels unsuitable for living. Conditions in the camp led many prisoners to commit suicide and others to resort to cannibalism.³ Rather than leave all the prisoners to be rescued by the fast-approaching American army, SS guards marched many of the mobile prisoners to death. Prisoners incapacitated with illness were locked in their bunkers and burned to death. Those whom the SS had no time or ammo to kill were locked inside the camp with no means of survival. In the *Band of Brothers* depiction, several soldiers happen upon the camp and quickly alert their comrades. I wonder if the E Company of the 101st Airborne believed they had seen the extent of the horrors that human beings can inflict on one another; they had been involved in some of the bloodiest battles of the European front. No doubt the shock and terror they experienced increased when they were faced with the atrocious conditions of the camp, the remains of those killed, and the skeletal survivors. The shock and terror probably increased more when they learned there were 1,100 such camps.⁴

I started to cry when newly liberated prisoners began to crawl from their huts. I cried harder when an inmate informed an American officer they were imprisoned simply because they were Jews, or Poles, or gypsies. I wept when they were told they had to return to and remain in that hell so their medical care could be monitored. I had watched this episode before, but it never affected me so deeply. It was like learning about the Holocaust for the first time. I was disturbed that human beings could treat other human beings so abominably. I couldn't form any clear thoughts about it in that moment, so I just scrawled a note in a tear-stained journal that will make no sense to anyone who reads it in future: "no human being should ever be treated like that." Reading it now reminds me exactly how I felt in that

³ Lowenberg, William. 1993. "Oral history interview with William J. Lowenberg." Retrieved 18 September 2021. Quotation RG Number: RG-50.030.0139, Part 3/5, min 01:45:55–01:46:59.

⁴ Stone, Dan. 2017. *Concentration Camps: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

moment. I cried for hours. The only relief I felt was in knowing that some of the perpetrators of those terrible crimes faced justice.

That's the universal answer Easy Company discovered in Kaufering IV: they were fighting for justice. They were battling the culprits of some of the greatest injustices in history. That's why I cheered inwardly when the actor portraying Major Winters informs a colleague that the Germans in the town near Kaufering IV would be ordered to bury the victims of the camp, it was a little bit of justice for the victims. I felt the same way as I watched Easy Company members confront German townspeople who undoubtedly knew about the horrors occurring in their back yard and did nothing about them, but my relief and approval morphed into confusion as I kept watching. Was forcing civilians to bury the dead real justice for the victims of Kaufering IV? How could any retaliatory action equal the injustices committed in concentration camps? I can't blame anyone who experienced or witnessed the Holocaust for wanting justice, I would. I just wonder if true justice for the victims of atrocities would come by way of exposing more people to more atrocity. On the other hand, was marching civilians through the death camps they ignored enough? Can we even blame those civilians for their efforts at self-preservation to avoid the fate of sympathizers? Were the quick trials and executions of most Nazi officials in the Nuremberg trials sufficient to satisfy justice? Does justice even exist?

You can usually find her standing in front of or inside of court buildings. Most of us would probably walk right past her without a second thought. That is what usually happens when something becomes familiar to us, we no longer appreciate it. Despite our indifference, she stands firm with a sword brandished in one hand and a set of scales balanced in the other, but most of us would probably recognize her for the blindfold covering her eyes. Even with

Justicia's many oddities, we always seem to remember the blindfold and the age-old adage that justice is blind. It's a little ironic since originally, Justicia was never depicted with a blindfold. It was only after ideas of impartiality began to enter the zeitgeist of the 1500s that she was first blinded.⁵ Is Justicia the embodiment of true justice? Is this the justice we truly want? Artists' interpretations of a blind justice are meant to be an "allegorical personification of the moral force in judicial systems;" the action figure of an ethical entity.⁶ That is fitting since we like to see justice in action. It is a noun that is served, administered, and brought. I wonder – if we serve justice blindly, are we administering a justice that is truly impartial? How can true justice be brought without seeing all the circumstances? Does blinding ourselves for impartiality's sake blind us to the plights of others?

"It is the same!" I groan emphatically, dragging my hands exasperatedly down the sides of my face.

"It isn't!" Mary insists, obviously frustrated that I'm not dropping the matter.

Our conversations often run like a rollercoaster—climbing from lulls of drivel to witty repartee teetering on aggression before plummeting rapidly into discordant debates. In the end we always end up back at the bottom of the track ready for another round of verbal whiplash. Today's conversational coaster made the wild drop as I told her I will never watch the new *Mulan* movie. It was partially filmed in Xinjiang, China and features the lovely mountain ranges that house the Chinese government's "re-education camps" where thousands of Uighurs are imprisoned.⁷ The thought of captive Uighurs conjures that disturbing scene

⁵ Gieng, Hans. 1543. "Lady Justice." Stone. Bern, Switzerland.

⁶ Hamilton, Marci. 2005. *God vs. the Gavel*. Cambridge University Press.

⁷ Shibli, Nawroos. "Political Geographies of Islamophobia: Chinese Ethno-Religious Racism and Structural Violence in East Turkestan." *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 6, no. 2 (2021): 150–66; "Who Are the Uyghurs and why is China Being accused of Genocide?" *BBC News*. June 21, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037>.

from *Band of Brothers* and the emotional upheaval it caused. I point out the similarities between the two atrocities to Mary, but she says she doesn't see it. Jews in camps, Uighurs in camps, but she doesn't see it. I was probably very annoying as I lectured her from my soapbox about the comparison and how we have a responsibility to speak out against injustice. Maybe we don't, but it sounded right at the time.

She finally either yields or gets tired of my nagging, "okay, but in the end what can we do about it? Honestly, I just don't have the energy to care." Of course I am disturbed that Mary denied the similarities shared by the evils, but more disturbing to me is the fact Mary doesn't care at all. Even after I tell her about the Uighurs being sterilized, tormented for the sake of technological development, and killed for their internal organs, she doesn't care. Her blood-boiling apathy is too much to bear any longer, so I tell her I should probably leave. I feel annoyed, but I feel a little pride in myself too. I brought a little justice into the world. I didn't back down, I fought for people that matter. I stood up for the little guy, so I smile as I shoulder my backpack, check the time on my cell phone powered by child-mined metals, and prance proudly home in my sweatshop-produced sneakers.⁸ But I really stood up for the little guy.

I could be irrational for wanting justice for people I don't even know. I am certainly a hypocrite for telling my friends to stand up for justice while I benefit from injustices I keep tucked away in the dark corners of my consciousness. Even worse is that I benefit from the very injustices that I speak out about.* We don't go about our lives saying, "which evil acts

⁸ Xiuzhong Xu, Vicky and James Leibold. "Your Favorite Nikes Might Be Made From Forced Labor. Here's Why." The Washington Post. March 17, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/03/17/your-favorite-nikes-might-be-made-forced-labor-heres-why/> (Accessed October 10, 2021)

* Fall down the rabbit hole of which products come from slave labor in general and you'll feel sick to your stomach too. If you're reading this on a phone or computer, it's very likely your battery is powered by precious metals and minerals dug out of the ground by African children as young as 4 years old. Many products are also

will I be outraged about, and which will I ignore,” but we all seem to choose. Why is it we feel so strongly about some unjust actions and ignore others? In the long course of human evolution, did our ancestors discover that the need for self-preservation required indifference to the struggles of their peers? Is this some sort of modern tribalism that our humanity cannot overcome? There is the possibility that the desire for justice is all in our head and there is no outside force or entity acting on the world. Psychological research into why we want justice builds on the observation that humans are excellent at evaluating other people on one hand, and their experiences and resources on the other. Psychologists refer to the combination of experiences and resources as a person’s outcomes.⁹

We can rapidly decide whether a person is good or bad; it’s actually one of the first things we want to know about a person. We are also great at evaluating others’ outcomes and comparing them with our own. So, when we are experiencing life and our brains recognize an imbalance in outcomes, we interpret it as injustice. Humans are especially sensitive to positive outcomes for those we see as bad people. When those who we believe to be undeserving are rewarded for unjust actions, our brains react as if we ourselves have lost out on some reward.¹⁰ We take it personally. We feel as though some unnamed thing has been taken from us. To restore the sense of balance that we crave, we wish justice on the bad person who has been rewarded unjustifiably. We wish *Justicia* would put a finger or two or three on the scale of justice and tip them more in our preferred direction. Simply put, injustices are mentally unsettling to us, and correcting injustices puts our minds at ease.¹¹ According to Melvin Lerner, this is because we need to believe in a just world where we experience justice in our own lives, but also where it is important that others experience

produced in sweatshops, but the problem here is that impoverished people often choose to work in these environments because they offer steady income. So is it just to take that source of income away from them?

⁹ Hafer, C. L., & Begue, L. (2005). Experimental research on just-world theory: Problems, developments, and future challenges. *Psychological Bulletin*, 131, 128-167.

¹⁰ Hamilton, V. Lee. *Contemporary Sociology* 11, no. 2 (1982): 236–37.

¹¹ Lerner, M. J. (1980). *The belief in a just world: A fundamental delusion*. New York: Plenum.

justice as well. Simply put, we all love to think that in this world people get what they deserve.¹² This is why I cry about innocent people dying in concentration camps and why we get angry when our friends brush off shocking injustices, because it disrupts our belief in a just world. This desire for justice isn't founded in some desire for additional benefits; we need no other motive than justice itself.

Socrates would agree with psychologists that justice is pleasing to the human mind. He was a firm believer that “the just man is the much happier than the unjust...”¹³ We could rely on the philosophers' definitions of justice. Some amalgamation of their many thoughts on the matter could clarify things for us. Plato saw justice as one of the highest virtues.¹⁴ In fact, Socrates's star pupil wrote an entire book on the subject. *The Republic* is Plato's famous Socratic dialogue on justice that no one seems to know about anymore. In the book, Socrates describes justice as a human virtue inseparable from the human soul. Plato, through Socrates, explains that the soul has three parts: appetite, spirit, and reason. These three parts must be balanced. We cannot be just unless our souls are functioning as they should, and for our souls to function properly, we need to be not only just, but also moderate, wise, and courageous. The four virtues are a necessity, in Socrates view, to being a just person.¹⁵ So telling Mary about the Uighurs might have been courageous, but I certainly wasn't wise nor moderate in holding her to a standard I myself wasn't meeting.

Ever since the *Band of Brothers* episode, I find myself posing the justice question to every unfortunate soul I think might be willing to engage in the complex conversation. I want to hear their personal philosophies on the matter. In the dozens of times I've posed the questions—*is there such a thing true justice? Can we get justice?*—I have only had one

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Plato, and Allan Bloom. 1968. *The Republic*. New York: Basic Books.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ Penner, T., 1990, “Plato and Davidson: Parts of the Soul and Weakness of Will,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, s.v. 16: 35–74.

person tell me that there is. Kaela, a dear friend, who has had her fair share of hard knocks in this life and who I believed would respond to the question with an annoyed “please, let’s not talk about anything profound while we watch Saturday Night Live,” was the only believer in true justice.

“Of course there is,” she responded to my questions through a mouthful of popcorn. “I just don’t get why we think it’s our place to give what only God can give, we aren’t God.” In her moment of deep theological reflection, Kaela never looked away from Weekly Update, but she did open a new lane of thought for me. Perhaps the philosophers got it half right and there is some moral force in the universe trying to maintain righteousness; they just got the origins wrong. Maybe, in the end, it’s the theologians and religious believers who have justice figured out.

Christians and non-Christians alike believe God is the ultimate judge and, like Kaela, feel that only He can dole out the justice we all wish to see in this life. Jews believe that while God is the ultimate arbiter of justice, He still expects His people not only to believe in the values of righteousness, but also to promote justice. This is rather apparent considering God gave the Israelites entire books of laws they were to follow and promote. The type of community God wanted the Israelites to build mirrors Plato’s just Republic in many ways as well. When every individual is just, the society is just, but this isn’t often seen in practice. Humans are fallible and our best attempts at Israel often fall to Babylons of our own invention.

Imam Omar Suleiman, a Sunni Muslim, looks on justice as an approach to life with fairness being its tangible manifestation. He sums it up with a quaint little thought: “if justice is the tree, fairness is the fruit.”¹⁶ Muslims believe that God cannot be blamed for any of

¹⁶ Kuruvilla, Carol. “How Can We Make It Right? What the World's Religions Have to Say about Justice.” Vox. Vox, May 10, 2021. <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/22419487/religion-justice-fairness>.

life's unpleasant experiences because our perspective is limited while God's is complete. What we perceive as injustice in a particular moment, is ultimately fair in the context of God's plan. That perspective won't always come in this life, we might have to wait until the next. Imam Suleiman says that:

Many people in this world are dealt with unfairly or they are unfair to others, and the scales never seem to be balanced in their case until they pass away. From an Islamic perspective, they are only moving on to receive God's inevitable, perfect justice. So Muslims believe that all matters will ultimately end in the fairest way, but the timeline for reaching that point extends beyond this life, to the Day of Judgment and the eternal life to come.¹⁷

For some of those skeptical of an all-powerful being in charge of dishing out comeuppance in this life or the next, cosmic justice is a popular alternative. A lot of people mistakenly call it Karma, though that is actually a religious belief of Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and Taoists.¹⁸ Cosmic justice is just Karma stripped of its religious connotations. When you do something good, something good comes to you in return and the same is true when you do something bad. Believers of cosmic justice see justice as an unembodied, universal force that exists in the ether and doles out justice to those who have earned justice, and injustice to those who have sown injustice.

Subscribers to the Karmic persuasion could be correct in believing that universal law hold the answers to justice, but maybe it is the physical and not the spiritual aspect of universal law which is key to answering the question of justice. Maybe we should look to the natural laws that govern the universe for a solution. Consider a Newtonian approach.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Singla, Parvesh. 2011. *The Manual of Life – Karma*. Parvesh Singla; Bowker, John. 1997. "Karma" in: *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, Oxford University Press.

Newton's third law of motion states that "to every action there is always opposed an equal reaction: or the mutual actions of two bodies upon each other are always equal, and directed to contrary parts."¹⁹ To put it in simpler terms, every action has an equal, opposite reaction. To put it more descriptively, if a criminal committing an assault hits his victim in the face, the victim's face exerts just as much force on the criminal's hand as the criminal's hand exerts on the victim's face. Equal and opposite. No doubt you recited this phrase in a high school physics class and, if you are like me, quickly forgot upon graduating that it applies in every physical interaction in your life. Maybe 25-year-old Isaac Newton was solving more than the laws of motion in 1686, maybe he found the solution for achieving true justice. Should every injustice committed be met with an equal punishment? It would certainly simplify things for us. If justice was simply matching the injustice, then there wouldn't be much ambiguity. Followers of Judaism might find this principle similar to the Torah teaching in Leviticus, "eye for an eye,"²⁰ and Muslims might find it allows for the principle of qisas, or "retaliation in kind."²¹ If every person was getting the equal punishment we thought they deserved, then we would be at ease psychologically, and I doubt the philosophers of old would be turning in their graves at the idea of every offender of justice having justice hit back with equal force.

Taking a Newtonian approach shifts the question from what is justice to what is equal and opposite. If the rectifying justice has to be equally proportioned to each injustice, we just have to decide when justice is satisfied – as if that is an easy thing to do. The problem is that physics, like justice, is complicated, and Newton's Third Law doesn't always hold true. The exceptions to the law are known as non-reciprocal interactions, or interactions where the

¹⁹ Newton, Isaac, Alexandre Koyré, and I. Bernard Cohen. 1972. *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

²⁰ Leviticus 24:20

²¹ Mohamed S. El-Awa. 1993. *Punishment In Islamic Law*. American Trust Publications.

action exerted by one particle or object is not met with an equal reaction. Our current systematic approach to justice seems to fit this exception more than the rule. Arbitrary sentencing regulations seem to throw out random prison terms and plea bargains just to see what sticks. The result is a one size fits all justice that leaves some stuffed into a sentence that's too small for the crime and others drowning in a verdict meant for an offense with greater girth. That's why you'll find drug users who had 5 grams of crack cocaine in prison for at least 5 years, while their counterpart can roam free with 4.9 grams. Maybe that sounds rational, but other crimes with five-year mandatory minimums include 1st degree manslaughter, 1st degree assault, injury or risk of injury to a minor, and computer crimes in the furtherance of terrorism.²² It seems that equal and opposite was not considered when crafting these laws and doing so could have produced punishments which actually fit the crime. However, abandoning the exception to the 3rd law for Newton's original rule does not simplify every situation.

Take for instance the case of Sarah Everard. She was a young marketing executive in London who was abducted by a police officer as she walked home from a friend's house. She was only thirty-three; she had a long successful life left to live, but her bright future was snuffed out by a man who abused his authority to deceive, rape, and kill her. Her family didn't even get to see her face one last time before her burial because her killer burned her body. Her murderer was quickly apprehended, put on trial, and sentenced. What was the sentence that was meant to match his crime? Life imprisonment. Would this satisfy the Newtonian approach? Is life imprisonment equal to the monstrous injustice of ending an innocent person's life in a gruesome way? Sarah's family says her death "leaves a yawning

²² "Crimes with Mandatory Minimum Prison Sentences—Updated and Revised." OLR Research Report. <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2008/rpt/2008-R-0619.htm>

chasm in [their] lives that cannot be filled.”²³ Her mother spends her days tortured by thoughts like “how long was she conscious, knowing she would die?”²⁴ She spends her nights hoping to dream of her daughter. Her father said that “no punishment that [Sarah’s killer] receive[s] will ever compare to the pain and torture [he] inflicted.”²⁵ To add insult to injury, the Everard’s taxes will pay to sustain Sarah’s murderer in prison until his probable natural death.²⁶ Applying a Newtonian justice would require Sarah’s killer face capital punishment. How exactly does one decide what form the death penalty should take if it is to equal Sarah’s death. Should every vile detail be repeated, and every measure taken to be sure his family suffers to the same extent the Everards suffer? How exactly could this man’s death ever equal Sarah’s murder? Is it enough that this monster will simply sit in prison every day knowing the anguish he caused and the evil he introduced into the world? Assuming he even cares, is the psychological torture of reliving his mimicry of the devil sufficient punishment for the living hell into which he dragged the Everards? For petty crimes and injustices, sure, you might find an equal punishment. Restore the stolen object, pay a fine, say you’re sorry. For some crimes, there are no easy answers. There are some injustices that cannot and will never be made right through human efforts. There are some disturbing injustices that will never find their equal and opposite justice.

How could equal opposite reactions solve the genocide of the Uighurs in China? Would the nations of the world ban together to imprison, torture, and force labor upon the Chinese government? Should we eradicate two in every three Germans just as they did with

²³ “He Stole Her Future’: Sarah Everard Family’s Impact Statements.” The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, September 30, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/sep/30/he-stole-her-future-sarah-everard-family-impact-statements>.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ “Cost of Keeping a Prisoner in the UK Penal System Higher than Rest of Europe.” The US Sun. The US Sun, December 29, 2019. <https://www.the-sun.com/news/196890/the-sun-reveals-cost-of-keeping-one-prisoner-in-uk-penal-system-is-118-a-day-higher-than-elsewhere-in-europe/>.

two in every three European Jews in the Holocaust? If this would bring balance to the universe, or justice to the victims of injustice, it is beyond my comprehension.

Maybe justice is conserved like energy.²⁷ Justice simply exists at a constant level and no unjust or just act can disrupt the level of justice that exists in the universe. Justice is neither destroyed by injustice or created by our attempts to enforce it, just as energy is neither destroyed nor created.²⁸ Maybe justice swings like a pendulum. Pendulums work by converting their potential energy into kinetic energy and back into potential energy. At no point does the pendulum create new energy, it simply converts existing potential energy at the top of its arc into the energy that allows it to swing from side to side. When the pendulum of justice is swinging, our brains, that are so entranced by the idea of a just world, are at ease. But when the pendulum appears stalled at the top of its course, and it looks like justice isn't swinging, we think the amount of justice in the world has decreased. Red flashing lights behind our eyes flash "Injustice! Injustice!" But really the level of justice has never changed. It was just a moment of potential justice, a moment where we become aware of just how low the baseline of justice really is, then forget about it once the pendulum is swinging again. If justice is preserved like energy, our attempts to pull more justice out of the universe would be for nothing because we can't actually change how much justice there is. We can only watch as the pendulum builds up potential justice, hoping that the pendulum will swing back in our chosen direction.

Maybe what makes us most uncomfortable is waiting for justice that could come. When the pendulum reaches the edge of its arch and builds potential justice, we can't calculate outcomes for ourselves or others. If we can't compare others' outcomes with our

²⁷ "First Law of Thermodynamics." 2021. NASA. <https://www.grc.nasa.gov/www/k-12/airplane/thermo1.html>.

²⁸ "Law of Conservation of Energy" 2021. *Energy Education*. https://energyeducation.ca/encyclopedia/Law_of_conservation_of_energy

own, then we can't determine how just our own outcomes are. The world is at the same time just and unjust; a Schrödinger's justice that upsets us because it prevents us from fulfilling our psychological desire to see the world as just.²⁹ It isn't satisfying to know that that justice could *potentially* come. Potentiality falls flat in fulfilling our subconscious need to see people get what we believe they deserve. The difficulty is realizing when our desires for justice are twisted into biased wishes of revenge and retaliation.

On a sunny day in sub-Saharan Africa, I sat on a cinder block and listened as my friend Francisco cried. The noticeable problem was that a storm had blown his roof in, but this architectural failure hid the fact that before Francisco's roof collapsed, thieves had cleared out the limited possessions beneath it. Mozambique has serious problems with petty crimes like theft and most people can find ways to fend them off, but Francisco can't even walk. He has a degenerative disease that confines him to a broken plastic lawn chair. His three sons, who usually act as his private security, were not at home during the night, but they were all there fuming over the theft now.

"We could go get them!" The youngest boy, Alexe, yelled. "Paulo knows who did it and we can go get them." His brothers were just as enthusiastic as he was about the prospect. Alexe and his brothers were thinking of the kind of justice typical of villages like theirs, vigilante justice. Angry villagers, tired of the abuse they suffered, would band together and hunt down the cause of their injustice. I had seen justice like this several times in Mozambique, mobs marching down the street to wield justice like a club, beating suspects to a pulp and leaving no justice for God to serve. Francisco's sons knew no one else was going

²⁹ Gribbin, John R. 1984. In *Search of Schrödinger's Cat: Quantum physics and reality*. Bantam Books.

to do anything about their situation. Their brains, sensing an imbalance in the thief's outcomes and their own, alerted them to the need for justice to be served.

Francisco took a deep breath, smeared his tears across his cheeks and looked at his sons. "I don't want revenge; I just want justice." I don't know how I would react in the same situation. I will probably never be in the same situation. I do know that I could never, in a moment of anger and frustration and despair, want justice more than vengeance. Looking at the justice question from this perspective simplifies things a bit. Maybe our own desires for retribution are what prevent us from getting true justice. We don't trust God or the Cosmos, our friends, or the justice system to serve justice properly, so we take advantage of Lady Justice's blindfold and tip the scales a little in our own favor. We profess to leave the administration of justice to higher authorities than ourselves, but are unsatisfied when judges, the Cosmos, or God don't throw enough revenge in the mix. I feel like the two concepts have become the same in our minds, at least I think they have in mine.

In the wake of the September 11th attacks, Americans were widely united in the belief that the war on terror would give the victims of the attacks and their families justice. 2,977 innocent people died in a catastrophic and brutal act of terrorism and the survivors are constantly haunted by the memory of that day. Seeing the terrifying images of the attack and experiencing the feelings of violation that they invoke, made it easy to support a war that had the promised result of justice. Those responsible would receive what they were due. I doubt all those who saw the war as an act of justice, myself included, recognize that over 300,000 innocent civilians have been killed throughout the war on terror.³⁰ About one hundred times more innocent civilians have died in the response than in the initial attack. Is that reciprocal justice or the price of vengeance? Can we truly justify it?

³⁰ "Body Count." Physicians for Social Responsibility. Accessed October 19, 2021. <https://www.psr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/body-count.pdf>.

I find myself wanting retribution and vengeance more than I want justice. Though I always tell myself it is justice. In times where I feel life is unjust, I often try to remind myself of Francisco crying in his broken plastic chair in front of his broken hut with no earthly possession left, wanting nothing but true, pure, unadulterated justice. Most days when the world seems too full of injustices, I want to leave the serving of justice to God and live quietly in my own corner of the world. Some days I think Socrates would smile knowing that I was living a just life and trying to be good and fair, but I do so knowing full well the injustices that others suffer. So is it fair of me to sit idly by? Even when my mind tries to shake me into action, I push down the psychological urgings to act because then I would be responsible, I would be involved, and I would feel obligated to end my compliance in the global injustices from which I benefit. I think I understand Mary's stance a little better now, but I still disagree with her: we should care about and speak out against injustices, I just don't know how best to do that. I don't expect the whole world to give up their shiny new cell phones or laptops because the manufacturer uses supply chains tainted with forced labor; I haven't thrown mine out. Imagine a world where consumers took on their favorite businesses and held them to higher standards. It would certainly calm our unsettled minds. It would reinforce the belief that we live in a just world. If only we could overcome our apathy and actually act. The problem with the psychological just world theory is that it's a fallacy. People almost never get what they deserve, and we are never motivated enough to ensure that they do. In a perfect world there would be no injustice, but in a just world each of us would ensure that injustices were dealt with justly, but we don't, and we probably won't.

Easy Company didn't get to Kaufering IV until irreversible injustices were committed, and the memory of the Holocaust didn't prevent us as a society from allowing a new field of concentration camps to crop up in China. We can be upset, we can throw a fit, we can beg for change, but in the end the only thing we can really do is change ourselves. But

when you think about it, that's a pretty powerful change to make. In fact, I think that might be the best thing we can do *if* we don't know what else to do: be better, more just people, and keep from adding to the innumerable injustices that already plague the world. Maybe as we realize how little we truly care about justice until it's knocking at our door, and the pendulum is pausing at its peak, we will start to unite in demanding justice for others as much as we demand it for ourselves.

Near the end of the second World War, Louis "Louie" Zamperini probably didn't know much, if anything, about the Holocaust. He didn't know that his counterparts in Easy Company were busy liberating labor camps in Bavaria and trying to cope with the shock of genocide. Louie had been hostage for almost half of his military service. As a prisoner of war in Japan, he wasn't given much accurate information about the war. He had already been drifting at sea, starving for forty-six days when he was captured. During his two and a quarter years in various camps, his life consisted of near-daily beatings, demoralizing humiliation by the guards, medical experiments, and exhausting labor under extreme conditions. His status as a famous Olympic runner made him a favorite target of Japanese corporal Mutsuhiro Watanabe, or "the Bird" who was always watching and listening to his victims.³¹ As a special target of the Bird, Louie's already horrific treatment was made crueler and more vicious. That's probably why, when he finally made it home to the United States, he kissed the ground.

Louie's suffering did not end when he returned home. A whole new tormentor awaited him: his own anger at his suffering and his desire for vengeance. When his attempts to return to a normal life failed, he fixated on revenge. Terrifying flashbacks of his time

³¹ Hillenbrand, Laura. *Unbroken: An Extraordinary True Story of Courage and Survival*. London: 4th Estate, 2018.

drifting at sea and his suffering in the prison camp enveloped his mind. His attempts to return to his athletic career were crushed by an ankle injury sustained in the camps. Defeated, he began drinking and let his rage fester. His rage hardened into ambition, and he swore he would return to Japan, find his captors and bring them to justice. He was determined to hunt down the Bird and strangle him. Louie's anger began to tear his family apart. His wife left him when his mental state endangered their daughter. Even that couldn't wake Louie up from his need for retribution. What did begin to shake Louie out of his rage induced delirium was a religious experience. At his wife's request he went to hear to a preacher, but after two nights of listening angrily to the minister speak about sin and its consequence, Louie stood to storm out. Before he could leave his pew, he was in a flashback, adrift on the open sea, still unaware of the further horrors he would face in Japan. He was dying of thirst and demoralized. Miserable, he whispered a prayer to God: "If you will save me, I will serve you forever."³² Rain began to fall over the raft; the rain that God sends to fall "on the just and the unjust."³³

It was a promise made to God that began to shift Louie Zamperini's focus. He saw the world and his darkest moments differently and he reevaluated his desire for justice. I like to think of this as his Francisco moment. Imam Suleiman would say Louie was seeing from God's perspective; Plato would say he was resisting his passions and accessing the virtue within himself. Louie looked deep into his own heart and saw that what he had wanted was not justice, but vengeance. "At that moment, something shifted sweetly inside him. It was forgiveness, beautiful and effortless and complete. For Louie Zamperini, the war was over."³⁴ Louie saw that he had all the justice that could be had in this life. There was no matching his misery, so why try? Why force that on another person? He didn't want to be a captive any

³² *Id.*

³³ Matthew 5:45

³⁴ *Id.*

longer and he found that “to forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.”³⁵

A year after letting go of revenge, Louie Zamperini travelled to Japan, looked his former captors in the eye and forgave them. When he learned that the Bird was too ashamed of his actions to meet him, Louie wrote him a letter expressing his forgiveness. Think just how different Louie Zamperini’s life might have been if he had mistaken revenge for justice. Imagine the damage red-hot rage could have had on Louie and those close to him. I doubt taking revenge on his captors would have filled the black chasm in his heart that injustice had created. The rage would have kept burning though him, deepening his wounds. Luckily, Louie recognized in time that the inherent nature of injustice is that it is unfair and sometimes there is nothing we can do to remedy the injustices we face.

We all recognize *Justicia*. We know the blindfold and the scales and the sword. What most don’t know is that *Justicia* was always meant to be displayed with a sister statue, *Prudentia*. This lesser-known depiction of a moral force is meant to embody what the ancient Greeks and philosophers like Thomas Aquinas viewed as the mother of all virtues, prudence.³⁶ Today we see prudence as cautiousness, but it isn’t so simple. To be prudent is to have foresight; the function of prudence is to discern the correct course of action in a given situation, not to will into existence the good that it recognizes. Those who possess prudence have the ability to judge between virtuous and vicious action,³⁷ especially where justice is concerned. “Prudence...lights the way and measures the arena for the exercise of [justice].”³⁸

³⁵ Smedes, Lewis B. *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007.

³⁶ Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologia*. Nürnberg: Anton Koberger, 1496.

³⁷ Delany, Joseph. 2014. "Prudence." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 12. New York: Robert Appleton Company.

³⁸ *Id.*

In her statue form, Justicia's sister holds a mirror in one hand, representing self-reflection, with a serpent representing wisdom curled around the other. She and Justicia represent two of the Plato's four cardinal virtues which operate in unity. They represent external judgment of the world and internal judgement of oneself and one's motives. Justice is the action we take in response to the guiding prudence within ourselves. Why, then, did we separate Justicia from Prudentia? Perhaps because we don't wish to see our own biases in our desires for retribution. We all love to see ourselves as Easy Company-esque defenders of justice charging in to liberate the oppressed, but really we are more like the German citizens near Kaufering. We ignore the stench of death and the cries of the tortured, we are unconcerned with fighting injustice unless it creeps into our own lives. Then when injustice does befall us, we usually create more injustice through our vengeful reactions. So maybe the blindfold is really meant to keep us from seeing into Prudentia's mirror. I think the blindfold should stay though. It stands for a higher, more equal justice we should strive for. If nothing else, it is a reminder of the justice that *could* be, a truly equal justice. We all want justice – whether it is divine, cosmic, or just the classic human variety, but what we truly need is prudence. If we remove the blindfold, it should be to look in Prudentia's mirror and see ourselves as we truly are. After some reflection, we will see our desires for revenge as they are rather than the desires for justice we think them to be. Then, when we approach the bar and ask the judge, or whisper a prayer to God in a lifeboat at sea, or beg a cosmic force “give me justice,” we will be asking for the kind of justice that is blind, and prudent.

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