

Dikaiosyne in Herodotus and Xenophon: A Persian Skill?

The ancient Athenian virtue of *dikaiosyne* raises questions for us beginning with Book 1 of Plato's *Republic*, where it is confusedly translated as "justice" (Sternberg 2023). Zhu (2003) posits that it is deployed to supplant *dike*. Plato's Polemarchus, quoting a fragment of Simonides, says *dikaiosyne* means helping one's friends and harming one's enemies: Τοῦτο μὲν ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ ἔτι, ὠφελεῖν μὲν τοὺς φίλους ἢ δικαιοσύνη, βλάπτειν δὲ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς (Plato, *Resp.* 334b13-15). Socrates then shifts the definition of justice away from traditional vengeance (tit for tat, the *lex talionis*) to a strikingly novel idea, that *dikaiosynê* can only make men better (335c18-d24) and *ho dikaios*, the just man, harms no one: Οὐκ ἄρα τοῦ δικαίου βλάπτειν ἔργον, ὃ Πολέμαρχε, οὔτε φίλον οὔτ' ἄλλον οὐδενα, ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἐναντίου, τοῦ ἀδίκου (335d27-29).

A highly lauded virtue in Classical Athens, *dikaiosyne* evidently has a history of its own – one that may begin in Persia. My ongoing scrutiny of every instance of *dikaiosyne* in 5th- and 4th-century Athenian historiography and oratory led me to Herodotus and Xenophon, from whose work we derive our most complete literary depictions of Persia. First, we find that *dikaiosyne* is "justness," a talent for judgment (like that possessed by Deioces, Hdt. 1.96) – and then that it is a skill (*tekhnê*), a teachable thing (Xen. *Cyrop.* 1.6). In other of his works, Xenophon takes that thought in a different direction, so that *dikaiosyne* is equated with incorruptibility, especially the rejection of bribes (Xen. *An.* 7.7 and *Ages.* 4)

The theme of incorruptibility had long been a problem for Athenians (as seen in the poetry of Solon; see also Dover 1974, 170-175) and perhaps more broadly in Greek culture (as seen in Hesiod *W&D*).

Ironically, during the 5th century BCE, when Persians were the arch-enemy of Greeks, members of the Athenian elite were freely borrowing from Persian culture a wide range of luxury items, from sun-shades to peacocks (Miller 2004). *Dikaiosyne* is a more abstract borrowing than peacocks, of course, but the propensity of Herodotus to draw upon his version of Persian history to explore and weigh Greek approaches to governance and society is demonstrated conspicuously in the “Constitutional Debate” that appears at Hdt. 3.80-82 (Brennan 1963 summarizes scholarly discussion of that debate up until his time.) Borrowing the concept of “justness” (we don’t know the Persian word) would fit with that.

Zhu’s suggestion (2003) that Socratic δικαιοσύνη essentially replaced Homeric δίκη opens an interesting line of inquiry, but it ignores *dikaiosynê*’s -osunê suffix, which flags or denotes a personal quality (Havelock 1969, 51) seen in numerous feminine abstract nouns, including *sophrosyne*, with which *dikaiosyne* is often paired.

In conclusion, I propose that one of the cardinal virtues of Athenians in the classical period (Whitehead 1993) derived from Persia, a possibility never before suggested so far as I know.

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