

Phaedrus's Optimism

1. Fable 1.1: The Wolf and the Lamb¹

Ad rivum eundem lupus et agnus venerant,
siti compulsi. **superior** stabat lupus,
longeque **inferior** agnus. tunc fauce improba
latro incitatus iurgii causam intulit:
5 "Cur" inquit "turbulentam fecisti mihi
aquam bibenti?" laniger contra timens:
"Qui possum, quaeso, facere quod quereris, lupe?
a te decurrit ad meos haustus liquor."
repulsus ille veritatis viribus
10 "Ante hos sex menses male" ait "dixisti mihi."
respondit agnus "Equidem natus non eram."
"Pater hercle tuus" ille inquit "male dixit mihi."
atque ita correptum lacerat iniusta nece.
Haec propter illos scripta est homines fabula
15 qui fictis causis innocentes opprimunt.

A wolf and a lamb had come to the same river,
compelled by thirst. The wolf was standing **higher up**,
and **far below** was the lamb. Then, urged by his wicked gullet,
the brigand brought a cause for a quarrel:
"Why," he said, "did you disturb the water where I am
drinking?" The wool-bearer answered, afraid: "Tell me,
how could I have done what you are complaining about, wolf?
The water flows downstream from you to where I drink."
Driven back by the strength of the truth, the wolf said:
"Six months ago, you slandered me."
The lamb answered, "Actually, I was not born."
"By Hercules," the wolf said, "your father slandered me."
Thus he seized and tore the lamb to pieces in an unjust slaughter.
This fable has been written because of those men
who oppress the innocent with invented charges.

2. Other Versions of This Fable²

Aesopica 155:

Λύκος θεασάμενος ἄρνα ἀπό τινος ποταμοῦ πίνοντα, τοῦτον ἐβουλήθη μετά τινος εὐλόγου αἰτίας καταθoinήσασθαι. Διόπερ στὰς ἀνωτέρω ἤτιᾶτο αὐτὸν ὡς θολοῦντα τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ πιεῖν αὐτὸν μὴ ἔωντα. Τοῦ δὲ λέγοντος ὡς ἄκροισ τοῖς χεῖλεσι πίνει καὶ ἄλλως οὐ δυνατὸν κατωτέρω ἐστῶτα ἐπάνω ταράσσειν τὸ ὕδωρ, ὁ λύκος ἀποτυχὼν ταύτης τῆς αἰτίας ἔφη· "Ἄλλὰ πέρυσι τὸν πατέρα μου ἐλοιδόρησας." Εἰπόντος δὲ ἐκείνου μηδὲ τότε γεγενῆσθαι, ὁ λύκος ἔφη πρὸς αὐτόν· "Ἐὰν σὺ ἀπολογιῶν εὐπορήῃς, ἐγὼ σε οὐχ ἤττον κατέδομαι."

Ὁ λόγος δηλοῖ ὅτι οἷα ἢ πρόθεσις ἐστὶν ἀδικεῖν, παρ' αὐτοῖς οὐδὲ δικαία ἀπολογία ἰσχύει.

A wolf saw a lamb drinking at a certain river, and he wished to eat him through some plausible excuse. Therefore, standing upstream, he accused the lamb of dirtying the water and of not allowing him to drink. The lamb replied that the wolf was drinking on a higher bank and that in any case the lamb was not able, since he was standing downstream, to dirty the water upstream. Since he failed in that excuse, the wolf said, "But last year you insulted my father." When the lamb replied that he had not been born then, the wolf said to him, "Even if you succeed in arguing against me, I will not eat you any less."

This story shows that when people intend to be unjust, a just defense holds no power.

¹ The Latin of Phaedrus comes from Perry 1965. All translations are my own.

² The Greek of Babrius is from Perry 1965; the text of the *Aesopica* is from Perry 1952. Translations are my own.

Babrius 89

Λύκος ποτ' ἄρνα πεπλανημένον ποιίμνης
 ιδὼν βίη μὲν οὐκ ἐπῆλθεν ἀρπάξων,
 ἔγκλημα δ' ἔχθρης εὐπρόσωπον ἐζήτει.
 “σὺ δὴ με πέρυσι μικρὸς ὢν ἐβλασφήμεις.”
 5 “ἐγὼ σε πέρυσι; οὐκ ἐπ' ἔτος ἐγεννήθην.”
 “οὐκουν σὺ τὴν ἄρουραν ἦν ἔχω κείρεις;”
 “οὐπω τι γλωρὸν ἔφαγον οὐδ' ἐβοσκήθην.”
 “οὐδ' ἄρα πηγὴν ἐκπέπωκας ἦν πίνω;”
 “θηλὴ μεθύσκει μέχρι νῦν με μητρῶη.”
 10 τότε δὴ τὸν ἄρνα συλλαβὼν τε καὶ τρώγων
 “ἀλλ' οὐκ ἄδειπνον” εἶπε “τὸν λύκον θήσεις,
 κἂν εὐχερῶς μου πᾶσαν αἰτίην λύσης.”

A wolf once saw a lamb who had wandered away from his flock.
 He did not wish to seize him by force,
 but rather sought a fair-seeming excuse for his hostility.
 “Last year, when you were small, you insulted me.”
 “Me? Last year? But it hasn't been a year since I was born.”
 “Aren't you grazing on this field which I own?”
 “I haven't yet eaten grass nor have I grazed.”
 “Haven't you drunk from the fountain that I drink from?”
 “Up to now I drink only from my mother's breast.”
 Then the wolf seized the lamb and while eating him said,
 “You will not make a wolf go without food,
 Even if you handily escape all of my accusations.” (6.35)

3. Fable 1.16: The Sheep, The Stag, and the Wolf

Fraudator homines cum vocat sponsum improbos
 non rem expedire, sed malum ordiri expetit.
 Ovem rogabat cervus modium tritici,
 lupo sponsore. at illa praemetuens dolum:
 5 “Rapere atque abire semper adsuevit lupus;
 tu de conspectu fugere veloci impetu.
 ubi vos requiram cum dies advenerit?”

When a deceiver calls wicked men to act as a surety,
 he is not trying to do business, but rather seeks to begin evil.
 A stag was asking a sheep for a peck of wheat, with a wolf
 as his surety. But she, suspecting a trick in advance, said,
 “The wolf has always been accustomed to steal and then depart;
 and you to flee from view at a swift pace.
 Where should I ask for you, when the time comes?”

4. App. 19: The Sow and the Wolf

Faciendum prius de homine periculum quam eius
 te committas fidei
 Premente partu scrofa cum gemeret iacens,
 accurrit lupo et obstetricis partibus
 se posse fungi dixit, promittens opem.
 quae vero nosset pectoris fraudem improbi,
 5 suspectum officium repudiavit malefici
 et “Satis est” inquit “si recedis longius.”
 quodsi perfidiae se commisisset lupi,
 pari dolore fata deflesset sua.

A man must be tested before you give yourself over to his
 promises.

When a sow, about to give birth, was groaning on the ground,
 a wolf ran up and said that he could act as a midwife
 to the birth, promising his help.
 But she knew the fraud in his wicked heart,
 and she refused the untrustworthy services of the evil-doer
 and said, “It is enough if you back off further.”
 But if she had entrusted herself to that perfidious wolf,
 she would have bewailed her own death with equal grief

5. A Few Other Examples of the Weak Winning

- 1.17: A wolf who cheats a sheep is later found dead in a pit
- 1.25: A crocodile tries to lure a dog into drinking from the Nile; the dog refuses
- 1.26: A stork takes revenge on the fox who wronged her
- 1.28: A fox burns down an eagle's tree to rescue her stolen children
- 3.2: A trapped panther escapes from a pit and kills the humans who hurt her

- 4.2: A weasel tries to lure a mouse by pretending to be flour; the mouse is not tricked
App. 25: A lizard uses a branch to escape from a snake's mouth
App. 32: A ground swallow escapes a predatory fox by flying into the air at the sight of him

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