

The Works and Days of Hesiod

Lines 213-285 – The Two Cities – On Justice and Needless Violence

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"Let him hear the advice of Hesiod. . . . The advice of Hesiod is good." —Aristotle

"Lampon . . . greatly honors the sayings of Hesiod, the one he declares and recommends to his sons."
—Pindar

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The Two Cities – On Justice and Needless Violence

Lines 213-285

Reading 6

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This reading comes from the Cave's
The Best of Hesiod's Theogony & Works and Days
(where it appears as chapter six of the *Works and Days*).

LISTEN, PERSES! GIVE ear to Justice (Dikē), to what is right and customary, and do not multiply needless Violence (Hubris). For needless Violence is bad for a non-noble mortal. Not even the noble man is able to bear such violence easily, but he is weighed down by it when he meets with bewildering blindness. The better, mightier pathway is to pass by needless Violence on the other side and move on toward what is just—toward what is right and customary. Going to the end of the pathway in this way, Justice restrains needless Violence—something the fool comes to know only after he has suffered.

For Oath immediately runs alongside crooked judgments. [220] And dragged along, Justice wails in confusion wherever gift-greedy men lead her—where they decide what is right by means of crooked judgments. Weeping and clothed with occluding mist, she follows along to the city and to the abodes of the people, and she brings evil to those human beings who drive her out of the city and do not make straightforward distributions.

But those men who give straight judgments to foreigners and to those who live within the city and the surrounding land and do not swerve from justice at

all, their city thrives and the people in it flourish. Then does Peace (Eirēnē), who safeguards young men, come upon the earth, and far-seeing Zeus does not ordain painful war for them. [230] Neither hunger nor bewildering blindness haunt straight-judging men, but in abundance they distribute every valued thing. For them, the earth bears much of what it takes to live. And upon mountains the topmost part of the oak tree produces acorns, and the middle part yields the bee's honeycomb. And wooly sheep are weighed down by wool. And the women give birth to children who are like their parents. Having good things, they thrive in every way and at all times.

And they don't go away on ships, but the grain-giving field bears crops of fruit and grain.

But for those who prefer needless violence and wickedness and merciless deeds, far-seeing Zeus, the son of Kronos, ordains justice for you—judgement. [240] Oftentimes the whole city all at once suffers on account of the wicked man who transgresses and contrives reckless deeds. And from the sky, the son of Kronos sends great misery upon them. There's hunger together with plague. And so the people perish, and the women do not give birth, and households shrink according to the shrewd plans of Olympian Zeus. Yet again, at other times, the son of Kronos either destroys the city's broad army or demolishes its walls, or he plunges their ships into the sea.

O kings! You yourselves should ponder this judging justice! For immortals are nearby, existing among human beings, and [250] they're aware of those who oppress others with crooked judgments, heedless of the gods' vengeance. For upon the much-nourishing earth, Zeus has countless and more immortal guardians of mortal human beings, and clothed with occluding mist they keep watch over judgments and merciless deeds, going here and there and everywhere along the earth.

And there is the maiden, Justice, born of Zeus, glorious and highly regarded among the gods who hold

Olympus. And whenever someone hinders Justice by blaming another unfairly or bringing a crooked case, she at once sits down by the side of her father, Zeus, the son of Kronos, [260] and sings about the unjust human mind and intentions so that the people may be punished for the reckless deeds of their kings when with mournful intentions and crooked speeches they turn Justice aside from her path.

Guard against this, kings! Straighten out your verdict-speeches, you gift-greedy ones! Put any thought of crooked judgments out of your mind! The man who causes harm to another causes harm to himself. So then, the plan to harm is most harmful to the one who plans. The eye of Zeus, seeing all things and knowing all things, looks upon even *this* city if that is his wish. And he doesn't forget what kind of justice this city holds within.

[270] Regardless, given the present age, I myself would not wish to be a just man among human beings, nor would I wish that for my son. Why? Because it is harmful to be a just man when the unjust man has the greater right. Still, I hope that Zeus, who is wise in counsel, will not completely let this happen.

Perses, take all these things to heart, and give ear to Justice, and put any thought of bodily strength and force out of your mind—for this is the customary law that the son of Kronos ordained for human beings. Since Justice is not among them, fish and wild beasts and large flying birds eat one another. But Zeus gave human beings Justice, which is by far the best thing that [280] has come to be.

If someone who knows what is just is willing to declare it in the assembly, then far-seeing Zeus gives him the happiness of wealth. But the man who intentionally lies in his testimony, swearing a false oath, he is incurably hurt in the very act of hindering Justice. In times to come, that man's family will be left in the dark, obscure, while the family of the man who swears well and truly will be better off.

So ends Reading 6, "The Two Cities – On Justice and Needless Violence." **See you in Reading 7, "The Easy and Hard Paths – The Goodness of Work."**

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