

ON STOIC SELF-CONTRADICTIONS: ἀδικεῖν vs. βλάπτειν in Chrysippus (SVF III, 289)

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ABSTRACT. In this article, I offer an analysis of Chrysippus' treatment of "injustice" (ἀδικία) in SVF III, 289. First, I show that he espouses two theses: I) Every injustice is an act of harming those who suffer it; II) One who does injustice to others thereby does it to oneself. Then I discuss the two most plausible interpretations of II): a) One who does "conventional" injustice to others, i.e. causes them non-moral harm, thereby does "moralistic" injustice to oneself, i.e. makes oneself morally worse; b) One who does "moralistic" injustice to others thereby does it to oneself. I show that a) is untenable because the Stoics reject the very notion of non-moral harm, and b) fails because they believe that moral harm is basically self-regarding.

KEYWORDS: ancient ethics, Chrysippus, harm, injustice, Stoicism.

In this paper I want, first, to clarify the possible conceptual and logical structure of Chrysippus' treatment of "injustice" (ἀδικία) in SVF III, 289 and, second, to show that given its general Stoic background it should be considered very problematic or even self-contradictory.

The text of this fragment contains four separate quotations, all taken from Plutarch's treatise "On Stoic Self-Contradictions" (1041CD):

T1: A. ...in the *Demonstrations concerning Justice* he says that the one who does injustice (τὸν ἀδικοῦντα) is done injustice by himself (ἀδικεῖσθαί... ὑφ' ἑαυτοῦ) and does himself injustice (αὐτὸν ἀδικεῖν) whenever he does it to another (ὅταν ἄλλον ἀδικῆ), for he has become a cause of transgression for himself and is harming himself undeservedly (βλάπτοντα παρ' ἀξίαν ἑαυτόν);

B. The law prohibits one from becoming accessory to a transgression; and to do injustice (τὸ ἀδικεῖν) is a transgression. Now, he who has become his own accessory in doing injustice (τοῦ ἀδικεῖν) transgresses in regard to himself; and he who transgresses in regard to an individual also does that individual injustice (ἀδικεῖ ἐκεῖνον). Therefore, he who does anyone at all injustice does himself injustice too (ὁ ἄρα καὶ ὄντινόν ἀδικῶν καὶ ἑαυτὸν ἀδικεῖ).

C. Wrong action (τὸ ἀμάρτημα) is a kind of harm (τῶν βλαμμάτων ἐστὶ), and everyone in doing wrong (ἀμαρτάνων) does wrong in violation of himself (παρ' ἑαυτὸν ἀμαρτάνει). Therefore, every wrong-doer (ὁ ἀμαρτάνων) harms himself undeservedly (βλάπτει ἑαυτὸν παρὰ τὴν ἀξίαν); and if so, he also does himself injustice (εἰ δὲ τοῦτο καὶ ἀδικεῖ ἑαυτόν).

D. He who is harmed by another harms himself ('Ο βλαπτόμενος ὑφ' ἑτέρου ἑαυτὸν βλάπτει) and harms himself undeservedly (παρὰ τὴν ἀξίαν ἑαυτὸν βλάπτει). This, however, is to do injustice (τοῦτο δ' ἦν τὸ ἀδικεῖν). Therefore, anyone who is done injustice by anyone at all does himself injustice (ὁ ἄρα ἀδικούμενος καὶ ὑφ' ὅτουον πάς ἑαυτὸν ἀδικεῖ)¹.

In my opinion, this text rather obviously implies

I). Every injustice is an act of harming those who suffer it, i.e. ἀδικεῖν always involves βλάπτειν.

This idea is already present in A, where βλάπτοντα παρ' ἀξίαν ἑαυτόν is one of the expressions which are supposed to explain how it is possible to do injustice to oneself (αὐτὸν ἀδικεῖν). It is also clearly stated in C, for the fact that “every wrong-doer harms (βλάπτει) himself undeservedly” is presented here as a *reason* (“an if so”, εἰ δὲ τοῦτο) for asserting that “he also does himself injustice (ἀδικεῖ ἑαυτόν)”. The same can be said about D, where the words “harms (βλάπτει) himself undeservedly” are elucidated by the following statement: “This, however, is to do injustice (τὸ ἀδικεῖν)”². Surely, these very statements also imply that βλάπτειν is not always tantamount to ἀδικεῖν, for the second necessary condition of injustice is that harm must be inflicted *undeservedly* (παρ' ἀξίαν)³. Nevertheless, it seems clear that according to T₁ an action simply cannot qualify as an injustice unless it

¹ The translation is from Cherniss 1976, 477–481, slightly altered for the sake of terminological consistency.

² Note that D also contains a fairly obvious parallel between *other-regarding* injustice (ὁ ἄρα ἀδικούμενος καὶ ὑφ' ὅτουον) and harming ('Ο βλαπτόμενος ὑφ' ἑτέρου).

³ This calls to mind the Stoic definition of justice as the knowledge of how to distribute things according to deserts (κατὰ ἀξίαν) (see SVF I, 200–201; 374; 563; III, 125; 255–256; 262–264; 266; 280; 303; 620 and Babut 2004, 178, n. 210). The abbreviations I use are those adopted in Liddell & Scott's Greek-English Lexicon and the Oxford Latin Dictionary.

harms. This conceptual link between *harming* and *doing injustice* appears to be rather widespread. It is present in Plato⁴, very prominent in Aristotle⁵, and shared by many other ancient philosophers⁶ including some Stoic thinkers⁷. Against this background, it is probable that Chrysippus in T₁ simply adheres to this tradition.

To my mind, it is also fairly uncontroversial that the central idea of T₁A–C can be put as follows:

II). One who does injustice to others thereby does it to oneself.

In other words, *other*-regarding injustice always implies *self*-regarding injustice. Indeed, it is explicitly stated in T₁ that an unjust person “does himself injustice (αὐτὸν ἀδικεῖν) whenever he does it to another (ὅταν ἄλλον ἀδικῆ)” (A), and “he who does anyone at all injustice does himself injustice too (ὁ ἅρα καὶ ὄντινοῦν ἀδικῶν καὶ ἑαυτὸν ἀδικεῖ)” (B). In C other-regarding injustice is not clearly mentioned, but the thesis that “every wrong-doer (ὁ ἀμαρτάνων)... does himself injustice (ἀδικεῖ ἑαυτόν)” certainly can be quite consistently interpreted as subsuming this kind of injustice under the general notion of morally wrong action (τὸ ἀμάρτημα).

But what is the philosophical meaning behind II)? What is meant by other-regarding and self-regarding injustice and why the former should necessarily lead to the latter? Intuitively, one possible interpretation of this thesis may be as follows: when somebody commits a “conventional” injustice (*c-injustice*) towards others, i.e. inflicts on them some undeserved non-moral damage (e.g., kills, robs, tortures, etc.), she thereby also commits what might be called “moralistic” injus-

⁴ See R. 334d–335e, esp. 335d11–12, where harming (βλάπτειν) is presented as the “function” or the “work” (ἔργον) of the unjust person (τοῦ ἀδίκου). See also R. 343c3–6; Lg. 861e–862a; Hp. Mi. 372d5; Just. (sp.) 374bc; Clit. (sp.) 410ab; cf. Cri. 49c7–8.

⁵ E.g., EN 1136a31–32: “...if to commit injustice (τὸ ἀδικεῖν) is simply to voluntarily harm (βλάπτειν) somebody...”. See also EN 1132a4–6; 1134b11–13; 1135b19–25; 1136a1; 1138a8–9; Rh. 1368b6–7; 1373b29–30; Top. 109b33–35; Pol. 1253a14–15; MM (sp.) I, 33, 27, 6–7; II, 3, 4, 1–3; II, 3, 8, 2–3 Armstrong.

⁶ E.g., Epicur. Sent. 31–33; Alcin. Epit. 31, 2, 5–6 Louis; Alex. in Top., p. 141, 22–26 Wal-lies; Aspas. in EN, p. 107, 33 Heylbut; Anon. in EN II–IV, p. 237, 30–31; 239, 1–2; 24–38; 241, 3–4; 242, 31 – 243, 38; 245, 18–21; 252, 31–37; 253, 17–18; VII, p. 433, 40 – 434, 4; 443, 32–34 Heylbut; Helioid. in EN, p. 105, 24–29; 106, 6–7; 110, 23–26; 111, 8–10 Heylbut; Porph. Abst. III, 18, 19–21; 19, 7–10; 26, 48–52; IV, 13, 3–5 Nauck.

⁷ E.g., M. Ant. IX, 1, 1 clarifies the statement that “the one who commits injustice (‘Ὁ ἀδικῶν) acts impiously” by declaring that such an agent transgresses the will of nature, which created rational creatures “to benefit (ὠφελεῖν) one another according to their deserts (κατ’ ἀξίαν), but in no way to harm (βλάπτειν)”. See also SVF II, 1117; III, 578–579.

tice (*m-injustice*) towards herself, i.e. makes herself unjust and therefore morally harms herself⁸. Or, to put it succinctly:

IIa). One who does *c-injustice* to others thereby does *m-injustice* to oneself.

This idea would be in line with general criticism of injustice put forward by Plato: since *c-unjust actions*⁹ make the soul of the agent unjust and vicious, they bring upon her moral harm¹⁰ and evil¹¹, thereby overwhelmingly contributing to her unhappiness¹². This is why injustice is inherently disadvantageous for anyone who commits it¹³. When combined with **I**), this moral self-harming may well be construed as self-regarding *m-injustice*. In fact, Aristotle who usually emphasizes the other-regarding character of justice among other virtues¹⁴ and accordingly denies the possibility of committing *c-injustice* towards oneself¹⁵ still admits that one can “metaphorically” speak about self-regarding *m-injustice*, if one accepts, as Plato and himself did, the existence of different parts of the soul¹⁶. It seems that within this approach self-regarding *m-injustice* is nonetheless understood as essentially “social” in the sense that these soul parts are regarded as distinct agents who may commit injustices towards each other. It is important to notice that when in SVF III, 288 Chrysippus himself criticizes Plato for admitting self-regarding injustice and thus seemingly contradicts his own statements in **T1** he associates this notion precisely with this “social” understanding of the human soul, which he, of course, rejected in favour of comparatively monistic psycholog-

⁸ See Cherniss 1976, 479, c.

⁹ E.g., R. 442e–443a; Grg. 471a–c; Ap. 30cd.

¹⁰ See esp. R. 367d2–4, where Adeimantus asks Socrates to demonstrate in which way injustice (*ἀδικία*) by itself (*δι' αὐτήν*) harms (*βλάπτει*) its possessor. For the general description of this harm cf. R. 443c–445b; Grg. 511e–512b; Cri. 47e–48a.

¹¹ Moral vice is the greatest evil for its possessor (R. 366e–367a; Grg. 469b, 477a–e, 478de, 479cd, 480d, 509b, 511a; Lg. 661bc, 731c; cf. Cri. 49b). The notions of evil (*κακόν*) and harm (*βλάβη*) in Plato are almost interchangeable (R. 379b; Grg. 468c; 477c–e; 499d; 509b; Lg. 904b; Men. 77e; Hipparch. (sp.) 227a.; cf. n. 22).

¹² It is the presence of evils in human life that makes it unhappy (Men. 77e–78a) in the same way as the presence of goods makes it happy (Smp. 204e–205a; Euthd. 279a, 280d; Lg. 631b, 697ab; Alc. I (sp.) 116b; Def. (sp.) 412d10).

¹³ Unjust people are necessarily unhappy (R. 345a; 353e–354a; 580bc; Grg. 470e; 479e; 507b–508b; Lg. 660e; 661de; 899de; Epist. VII 335d).

¹⁴ EN 1129b25–1130a13; 1134b5–6; Pol. 1283a38–39; Rh. 1373b19–26; cf. EN 1130a32–b5 on injustice.

¹⁵ EN 1134b9–13; 1136a31–b1; 1136b15–25; 1138a4–28; MM (sp.) I, 33, 1–3; I, 33, 30–34 Armstrong.

¹⁶ EN 1138b5–14; EE 1240a15–21; MM (sp.) I, 33, 35; II, 11, 47–49 Armstrong.

ical theory¹⁷. But the very idea of self-regarding *m*-injustice does not crucially depend on whether one accepts the doctrine of the multipartite soul in the vein of Plato or Aristotle. There are many Stoic texts declaring or at least implying that by committing any kind of moral evil, including injustice, one morally “harms” oneself, which, given I), may be considered a self-regarding injustice¹⁸, and it seems plausible that Chrysippus in T1 could have in mind more or less the same thing.

The fundamental problem with IIa) within Stoic ethical framework concerns rather the notion of other-regarding *c*-injustice. Indeed, taken together, I) and II) must result in:

III). One who harms others thereby harms oneself⁹.

The crucial point here is that in order to commit any other-regarding injustice, implied in II), one has to somehow *harm* others (according to I)). And if we accept IIa) as an interpretation of II), then this harm must be conventional and non-moral. That is, we must also accept

IIIa). One who *c*-harms others, thereby *m*-harms oneself.

But from the Stoic point of view this would be impossible because the Stoics are rigorists who only admit the existence of moral evil and harm. Certainly, they can quite consistently say that anyone who kills, robs, tortures, etc. inflicts on others the so-called “things against nature” (τὰ παρὰ φύσιν) or, which is approximately the same thing, “dispreferred” (ἀποπροηγμένα) indifferents²⁰. But the whole point of Stoic rigorism is that dispreferred indifferents are *not* evils²¹. And since the Stoics also believe that *only* evil is harmful²², these indifferents cannot

¹⁷ SVF III, 229a; 257; 259; 260; 459; 461; 462, 82–88; 463; 471a; 476, 36–47. Cf. Opsomer 2017, 318–319.

¹⁸ See Muson. XII, 26–29 Lutz; Sen. Ben. VII, 32, 1; Epict. Diss. II, 10, 26–27; IV, 5, 10; M. Ant. II, 16; IV, 26; VIII, 55; IX, 4 and the next note.

¹⁹ Cf. SVF III, 626: “...one who harms [somebody], also harms oneself...” (...τὸν δὲ βλάπτοντα καὶ ἑαυτὸν βλάπτειν...).

²⁰ For the terminology, cf. SVF III 121; 124; 140–142; 155; 499; 759 and SVF I, 192; III, 122; 126–129; 133; 135–136; 145; 181.

²¹ E.g., SVF I, 185; 190 (= III, 70); 191; III, 35; 129; 181; Muson. I, 23–28; VI, 56–61 Lutz; Sen. Ep. 94, 7; 123, 16; Epict. Diss. I, 24, 6–7; 28, 14–27; 30, 2–3; II, 19, 13; IV, 1, 133; M. Ant. II, 11, 4; V, 36; VIII, 1; 28; IX, 1, 3; 16; 42, 2; XI, 18, 3; XII, 23.

²² Evil (κακὸν) is actually defined by the Stoics as harm (βλάβη) or something which is able to harm (τὸ οἶον βλάπτειν) (SVF III, 74; 77; 86; 93; 166 (= Sen. Ep. 85, 30); Sen. Ep. 87, 33; Epict. Diss. IV, 1, 44; cf. Muson. VIII, 8–14 Lutz). And this harm is exclusively interpreted as the moral deterioration of the rational agent (SVF III, 77–78; 117; M. Ant. II, 1; II, 11, 2–3; IV, 8; VII, 22; VIII, 1; IX, 42, 2–3; cf. Epict. II, 10, 12–23; III, 18, 5–6; IV, 1, 118–127). A

harm anyone²³. Consequently, the infliction of τὰ παρὰ φύσιν on others does not amount to harming (βλάπτειν) them and therefore (according to I)) to committing an injustice (ἀδικεῖν) towards them. But if those who inflict τὰ παρὰ φύσιν on others do not commit any other-regarding injustice, they also cannot be said to morally harm themselves by performing these actions. Therefore they do not commit any self-regarding injustice either. As a result, the whole argumentation by Chrysippus collapses. What this analysis shows is that within Stoic ethics it is logically impossible to combine I), i.e. the conceptual link between ἀδικεῖν and βλάπτειν, IIa), which implies the notion of other-regarding *c*-injustice, and basic Stoic rigorism according to which there exists no other harm than moral.

Since rigorism is quite evidently a non-negotiable position for the Stoics, the way out of this impasse could be twofold. First of all, they could in some way sever the link between ἀδικεῖν and βλάπτειν (I)). As a result, they would still be able to assert that to inflict τὰ παρὰ φύσιν on others is to act unjustly (ἀδικεῖν), even if it brings upon them no harm (βλάβη) whatsoever. However, to completely deny any connection between harming and doing injustice would ruin Chrysippus' argument in T1 anyway. For in such a case it would be impossible for him to infer that one commits a self-regarding injustice (ἀδικεῖ ἐαυτόν) from the fact that one morally harms oneself (βλάπτει ἐαυτόν). Instead, he should have opted for a more complex alternative: he should have said that *sometimes* ἀδικεῖν involves βλάπτειν, i.e. when it comes to genuine moral harm, and *sometimes* it does not, i.e. when one inflicts on others τὰ παρὰ φύσιν. But this would have looked like a rather cumbersome *ad hoc* solution, which obviously cannot be accepted as self-evident without further argumentation. Anyway, T1 in my opinion shows that Chrysippus simply sticks to I).

On the other hand, Chrysippus could reject the very notion of *c*-injustice and thereby IIa). Since according to T1 he accepts II), he would need a different interpretation of this thesis. It must be clear that the only option left is

IIb). One who does *m*-injustice to others thereby does *m*-injustice to oneself²⁴.

That is, one who commits other-regarding injustice by *morally* harming others thereby commits self-regarding injustice by *morally* harming oneself. This solution would better agree with Stoic rigorism and, perhaps, with the rather enig-

similar relationship exists between the notions of good (ἀγαθόν) and benefit (ὠφέλεια), see Tzekourakis 1974, 68–75; Forschner 1981, 178–179.

²³ SVF III, 117; 146; 166; M. Ant. V, 36; VIII, 41; 49; X, 33, 4.

²⁴ The two logically conceivable alternatives would be: IIc). One who does *c*-injustice to others thereby does *c*-injustice to oneself; IId). One who does *m*-injustice to others thereby does *c*-injustice to oneself. But they are untenable for the same reason as IIa), i.e. because they imply the notion of *c*-injustice.

matic Stoic idea that mutual harming is limited to vicious people, just as mutual beneficence to virtuous ones²⁵. But it has at least two serious problems. First of all, to put it frankly, the implications of this Stoic idea simply do not make much sense. For instance, in order to morally “benefit” one another virtuous people do not need to actually interact with each other or even to be aware of each other’s existence²⁶, and if the same is the case with moral “harming” among vicious people (which seems likely), then it is rather hard to understand what is actually meant by all this “harming” and “benefiting”²⁷. What is obvious, however, is that according to **Ib)** the Stoics, when arguing consistently, still cannot afford describing *c*-harmful acts (such as murder, robbery, torture, etc.) as “injustice”. And it *is* a problem for they surely want to describe them this way²⁸. Secondly, the Stoics often insist that it is essentially up to us whether we are virtuous or vicious²⁹, and that consequently nobody can really harm us since to morally harm us against our will is impossible whereas any infliction of non-moral damage is not really harmful by rigorist standards³⁰. Basically, according to this view, the only possible harm is moral and self-regarding³¹. But this is incompatible with **Ib)** for it amounts to admitting that other-regarding *m*-injustice is inconceivable.

To conclude, when Chrysippus in **T1** asserts that one who inflicts harm and injustice upon others thereby inflicts them upon oneself, he makes statements that are pretty unintelligible under any possible interpretation, and the main reason for this is his belief that injustice always involves harming those who suffer it (**I**). For in this case he has to explain how it is possible for an unjust person to harm

²⁵ SVF III, 93–94; 587; 625–626; 672; 674; Sen. Ep. 109, 1–13; Ben. V, 12. Cf. López 2004, 204, n. 128.

²⁶ SVF III, 626–627. Cf. I, 223; III, 630–31; 635.

²⁷ Cf. Forschner 1981, 180, Anm. 122.

²⁸ E.g., SVF I, 313; III, 347; 531; 535; 578–580; 701; Hierocl., p. 50, 7–9 von Arnim; Sen. Ep. 24, 16; 76, 33; 79, 14; 90, 39; Ben. I, 5, 3–4; 9, 5; II, 35, 2; III, 22, 3; VI, 4, 1; 26, 1; Muson. IX, 77; 138–140; X, 37–41; XII, 23; XVI, 15–28 Lutz; XX, 50–55; Epict. Diss. III, 18, 9; IV, 1, 118–123; 5, 9–11.

²⁹ E.g., SVF II, 1118; III, 32; 215; Sen. Ep. 80, 3–4; Muson. Fr. 38 Lutz; Epict. Diss. I, 25, 1–4; 29, 1–4. 12. 47; II, 5, 4–5; 13, 10; III, 8, 2–3; IV, 1, 133–134; Ench. 31, 2; M. Ant. V, 5; 10, 2; VII, 71; VIII, 29; 47; 55–56; IX, 31; 40; X, 13; 33, 2–3.

³⁰ E.g., III, 149; Epict. Diss. IV, 12, 7–9; 13, 8. 13–14; Ench. 30; 42; 48, 1; M. Ant. II, 1; 11, 2; IV, 8; V, 36; VII, 22; 33; 64; VIII, 1; 41; 49; 51; 55–56; IX, 42, 2; X, 33, 3–4; XI, 18, 4. Actually, **T1D**, which Pohlenz suspected to be an Academic parody of Stoic argumentation (Pohlenz 1939, 15), may reflect the authentically Stoic idea that those who are subjected to *c*-unjust treatment are only harmed in the sense that they erroneously believe to be harmed. Cf. Epict. Ench. 30 and Babut 2004, 180, n. 216.

³¹ Cf. Chrysippus’ words quoted in SVF II, 1000, 45–49.

others if from the Stoic point of view non-moral harm does not exist at all, and moral harm is essentially self-regarding.

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