



## EVOLUTION OF IDEAS OF JUSTICE

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### Abstract

In today's day and age, and in a scenario like ours, everyone is entitled to their opinions and they also have a right to express those opinions, even though the expression of the same may be contrary to the popular opinion or belief. The same goes with Justice. The meaning, definition and expectations of justice have never been the same for everyone at any given point, these have also changed and evolved with time, and even the people living in the same age/ era have never really shared an unanimously agreed idea of justice. With this paper, the author aims to identify the various ideas of justice that have existed over a certain period of time. The paper seeks to do so, with the help of poetry named 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' as a central theme, and has opinions of various philosophers, spread over a large period of time, explain what idea of justice (with respect to animal rights) they would have stood for, done on the basis of the reading by the author. The philosophers that the paper includes are: Pythagoras, Protagoras, Marcus Tullius, Thomas Hobbes, Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham.

### Introduction to the Author of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner': Samuel Taylor Coleridge

He was an English poet, critic, and philosopher, who lived from 1772- 1834. He was a poet, literary critic, and philosopher, who was considered as a pioneer of the Romantic Movement, along with his friend, William Wordsworth. Romantic Movement

was an artistic, literary and musical movement that began in Europe, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The movement is characterized by emotion and individualism, and it glorifies the past and the nature. The main poets under the movement were, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous works are The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Kubla Khan, Biographia Literaria, or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions, is an autobiography in discourse by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, which he published in 1817.

### Summary and Plot of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner':

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is a lyrical ballad by Samuel Taylor Coleridge which begins with the introduction of the ancient mariner, who at the wedding, stops a guest and without any introduction, begins to tell his tale. The ballad is essentially the conversation between the mariner, and a guest at the wedding.

The Mariner's tale begins with how the ship leaves the harbor and begins to sail, and when a strong wind blows, they start sailing towards a place with snow, mist, glaciers, and extensive cold. According to the tale, the place that the ship was stuck in, was a very cold and lonely place, with no trace of any person, or any animal also, for that matter.

The Mariner states, that when him and his fellow sailors weren't expecting any company, an albatross, flew in to interrupt the pristine lifelessness of that place. The sailors consider the coming of the albatross as a good omen, as after its coming, a new wind rose



and this wind propelled the ship in the right direction.

Every day, the albatross would appear, and would fly along with the ship, while it sailed. But, as the other sailors cried in dismay, the mariner shoots the albatross, the reasons of both, being unexplained.

The sailors at the beginning condemned the mariner due to the killing of the albatross, but later, as the clouds cleared and the mist reduced, the sailors were convinced that the albatross was the cause of the misery, and that its killing was justified. But later, when the crew of the ship ran out of food and water supplies, they thought that the spirit of the albatross followed to trouble them. Thus, as a mark of punishment and penance, the dead albatross was hung around the mariner's neck.

Since, the ship was trapped in the ocean, and the sailors could not drink that water, most of them began to die. The mariner was surrounded by some dead and some very weak sailors, and in this state of mind, he tried to pray, but failed. It was only in the moonlight, after enduring the horror of being the only one alive among the dead crew that the Mariner noticed some water snakes swimming beside the ship. At this moment he became inspired, and had a spiritual realization that all of God's creatures were beautiful and were supposed to be treated with respect and appreciation. With this realization, he was finally able to pray, and the albatross at that moment, fell from his neck and sunk into the sea.

The mariner falls into a stupor and when he wakes up, he finds himself safe and in

another ship. The Mariner concludes his tale by explaining that as he travels from land to land he is always plagued by that same compulsion to tell his tale, that he experiences a peculiar agony if he doesn't give in to his urge to share the story, and that he can tell just from looking at their faces which men must hear his tale. He ends with the explicit lesson that prayer is the greatest joy in life, and the best prayers come from love and reverence of all of God's creation. Thus he moves onward to find the next person who must hear his story, leaving the Wedding Guest "a sadder and a wiser man."

#### **Ideas of Justice:**

#### **Pythagoras (Ionian Greek Philosopher):**

In Pythagoras' opinion, the killing of the albatross would not be justified in any given scenario, as he was a central figure of animism, he advocated against the mistreatment of animals and also urged respect towards.<sup>1</sup> Though, the killing of the albatross was under the conditions, that have not been very clearly explained, but, considering that the bird was harmless, the killing of the same for whatever reasons, is not justified, and the act is that of cruelty, which is worthy of moral objections against mistreatment of any living being, for any reason, whatsoever. He believed that all souls were deserving of the same treatment, he also believed that the soul was immortal and went through a series of reincarnations.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Protagoras (pre-socratic Greek philosopher):**

<sup>1</sup> Gary Steiner, Anthropocentrism and its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor, Angus. Animals and Ethics. Broadview Press, 2003, p. 34.



Protagoras was of the opinion that ‘Man is the measure of all things’.<sup>3</sup> Though this opinion is of his stirred a lot of controversy, according to Plato’s interpretation of what Protagoras said, there is no absolute truth but that which individuals deem to be the truth. Thus, according to him, the killing of albatross would be justified, if the man, that is the sailors in this case, thought that the killing of the albatross was needed, it would be considered right, also, later when the mariner concludes, that all creatures of God are deserving of appreciation, even that is justified, as in Protagoras’ opinion, whatever man deems to be truth is the truth.

#### **Marcus Tullius Cicero (Roman Statesman)**

After the news about Pompey’s death arrived, Caesar was made the dictator and he could make peace and war on his own initiative. In retrospect, Cicero was of the opinion that “once a single man came to dominate everything, there was no longer any room for consultation or for personal authority, and finally I lost my allies in preserving the republic, excellent men as they were.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, in a way, he criticized Protagoras’ opinion that men were the measure of all things.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, if man were the measure of everything, it would be equivalent to one man dominating everything. Thus, according to my understanding of Cicero, he would condemn the killing of the albatross.

#### **Thomas Hobbes (Political Realist)**

Hobbes’ political theory stated that a society shall be secure only if, it was at the disposal of an absolute sovereign. Thus, according to his social contract theory, no individual can hold rights of property against the sovereign, and that the sovereign may therefore take the goods of its subjects without their consent.<sup>5</sup> In his book, ‘Leviathan’, Hobbes published his doctrine of the foundation of states and legitimate governments and creating an objective science of morality. It demonstrates the necessity of a strong central authority, to avoid discord and war.

Thus, according to Hobbes’ if the killing of the albatross was valid according to the Leviathan, the act of the Mariner could be justified, whereas, if the act was to be prohibited according to the same, the killing of the albatross would not be justified, even if the subject, that is, the bird in this case, was capable of giving consent.

#### **Immanuel Kant (German philosopher in the Age of Enlightenment)**

Kant believed that reason was the source of morality.<sup>6</sup> Thus, if the reasons to kill the albatross were convincing, then, maybe, according to him, the killing would be moral. But, when he says that one shall not be used as a means to achieve anything, but only as an end, the killing of the albatross for reasons whatsoever, becomes unjustified. Thus, his

<sup>3</sup> The Sophists, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (First published Fri Sep 30, 2011; substantive revision Wed Sep 9, 2015), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sophists/#Pro>> accessed 10 August 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Ancient Political Philosophy, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (First published Mon Sep 6, 2010; substantive revision Fri Dec 7, 2018), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ancient-political/>> accessed 10 August 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Hobbes’s Moral and Political Philosophy, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (First published Tue Feb 12, 2002; substantive revision Mon Apr 30, 2018), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hobbes-moral/>> accessed 08 August 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Duignan, Immanuel Kant, <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Immanuel-Kant>> accessed 03 August 2020.



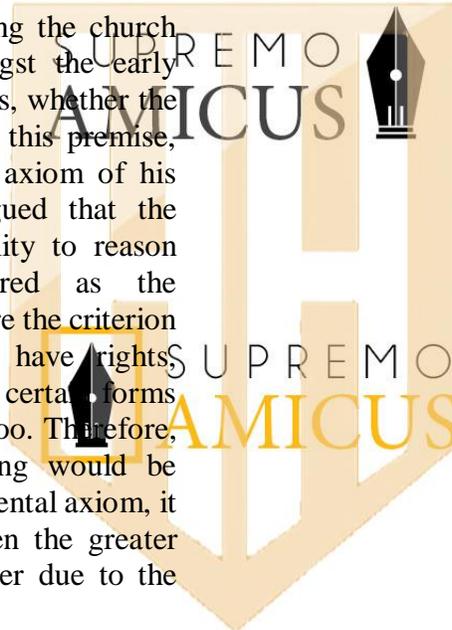
philosophy can be subject to philosophical dispute, as using one as a means to achieve something may be a reason, which shall have the capacity to act as a source of morality.

### Jeremy Bentham (1748- 1832)

He was an English philosopher, and is regarded as the founder of modern utilitarianism. The fundamental axiom of his philosophy was the principle that the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the measure of right and wrong.<sup>7</sup> Thus, if the killing of the albatross gave greater happiness to a greater number, the killing was just. But, amongst advocating for individual and economic rights, and separating the church and the state, he was amongst the early advocates of animal rights, thus, whether the killing was just or not, under this premise, may oppose the fundamental axiom of his philosophy. Because, he argued that the ability to suffer, not the ability to reason alone, should be considered as the benchmark, if reason alone were the criterion to determine who ought to have rights, human infants and adults with certain forms of disability might fall short, too. Therefore, under this premise, the killing would be unjust, while under his fundamental axiom, it had a chance to be just, when the greater number of sailors were happier due to the killing of the bird.

our belief. At the same time, we must also ensure, that the idea of justice that a certain demographic seems fit, must not be entirely different for each other when seen individually, as a stark difference or too varied an opinion may make it hard for a standard justice system to deliver/ administer the justice to different people, who have entirely different ideas of justice, which consequentially may result in lesser satisfaction and faith in the judiciary of a country.

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### Conclusion:

Thus, in lieu of what T.S. Eliot says in his play named 'Murder in the Cathedral', that *human kind cannot bear too much reality*; and since reality shall differ from person to person, we shall honor all opinions, while it has been absolutely left upon us to determine

<sup>7</sup> Jeremy Bentham, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (First published Tue Mar 17, 2015; substantive revision Mon Jan 28, 2019), <

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/bentham/>> accessed 09 August 2020.