

CollabOrate

Justice #8

Moses

LADY JUSTICE, JUSTITIA, GOES TO HER SEVENTH PSYCHIATRIC APPOINTMENT. *Justitia arrives early, to find an empty office. From nowhere appears a wild-haired ugly little man of piercing eyes. A smell of burnt flesh wafts with his pungent body odor. Justitia begins to sit, but the hoary oracle gestures for the marble icon to remain standing. Moses juts his hands over his head. Loud Hebrew bursts from his mouth. His blessing complete, the prophet points where Justitia is to sit. She removes her sword, and stashes her blindfold and scales near her feet. The black box of conscience sits on the coffee table next to Israel's divinator.*

MOSES: I have read your file. You have been talking with some tremendously confused people. Small wonder your mind is a mess.

JUSTITIA: Perhaps you can help me. I seek guidance.

MOSES: My message is simple. The hard part lies in your will. You are stone statuary. But does your constitution match your physical stuff, or are you yet one more among billions of flabby wafflers.

JUSTITIA: I see so many alternatives! They muddle me. Shall I believe Rawls or Nozick, Jesus or Nietzsche? And there's that cute little capuchin. The issues are many, and solutions elusive.

MOSES: Cease whining! Your troubles spring from delusions of competence.

JUSTITIA: I, sir, have been revered by a hundred billion humans.

MOSES: Idiots all. Your troubles, Justitia, are not psychological. They are voluntary. You rebel.

JUSTITIA: Me? A rebel? I have been working my stony little butt off sorting myself here....

MOSES: To what end. You rummage through conceptual trash, a starving mongrel gorging on rancid pork. Humans cannot fathom justice, much less sort its myriad issues. Yahweh has spoken: 613 mitzvot (that is, commandments) given once for all men and times. Your job, Lady Justice, is to enforce those rules. If you imagine otherwise, you err.

JUSTITIA: As I recall, your idea of the administration of justice is monosyllabic. Murder—death. Fornication—death. Burning a pigeon instead of a dove—death. Parking tickets—death.

MOSES: I have occasionally winked at peccadilloes. But overall, you get the picture. Why would any community suffer those who flout its strictures? Tolerance amounts to communal suicide....

The black box of conscience flips open. A six-inch tall Mohandas Gandhi arranges his tiny little towel to obscure his bits. "Moses, yours is not the lone conception of god. Multiple divine perceptions tickle human fancies. Yours is not widespread. Neither is it terribly coherent. Justitia, resist my friend's absolutist bill of goods. He means well. He really does. But his approach to divine ethics makes war, not justice. It is peace that matters, not theological conformity. Moses, my beloved brother, make room in your heart for the rest of us." Gandhi sits. The ebony lid closes over him.

MOSES: Blasphemer.... You know, I love Gandhi, but would be rid of him, if I could. If he lived in my time, we would stone him. Cast his fractured corpse upon a heap of dung.

JUSTITIA: Harsh. Is there no room for compassion, understanding, flexibility, inclusion?

MOSES: I include those who conform. Ours is a harsh world, Justitia. In morality, latitude breeds lassitude. Are your abundance of confusions not the fruit of your journey toward ethical subjectivism? Yacking of many beckons cacophony of all. Would people not prosper if they knew boundaries, rigidly enforced limits?

JUSTITIA: Rugged specificity would help some, but crush others. Millions or billions would die.

MOSES: As generations passed, survivors would wax obedient. Rebellion would drain from human fiber. Tractability to divine command would set the habits of billions. There are those of other times who sing my tune. There was that scrunch-faced little senator from Wisconsin, McCarthy. And the evangelical proponents of American Prohibition. And Seyyid Qutb, al Qaeda's Muslim Brotherhood theoretician. And those eremitic desert monks. And Calvin. I just love Calvin. I am not the lone voice of divine rigor.

JUSTITIA: This conversation leaves a black pit in my rocky stomach, Moses.

MOSES: And therein lies the problem, Justitia. Look in a mirror! You are the henchman of Hobbes's Leviathan. Buck up. Get a grip. Execute those who merit termination. Make the world safe for the obedient. God has spoken.

JUSTITIA: I feel the same intensity from you I found in Nietzsche--dark and scary.

MOSES: The dung heap for him too. Nietzsche was insane. He believed himself to be god.

JUSTITIA: Are you different? You quake with absolute conviction, and suffer adamant certainty how others must live.

MOSES: Yahweh scorched me in unquenchable fire, spoke from his Sinai bush. Do you not smell the cinders?

Justitia opens her mouth to object, but Moses vanishes. His smoky stench lingers.

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