

Généalogie d'Hermarque - traduction anglaise

Auteur(s) : Hermarque ; Porphyre

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English translation of the critical transcription of Nauck's edition

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Hermarchus' Epicurean Genealogy

Translation based on the critical transcription of the Nauck edition

Porph. *De Abst.* 1.7

Marginal Scholia : Doctrines of the Epicureans concerning not abstaining from consuming animate beings Those who follow Epicurus say, developing what sounds like a vast genealogy, that the ancient lawgivers, having closely observed the community of life of men and their conduct towards each other, denounced as unholy the killing of a man and attached to it unprecedented punishments; first of all they quickly identified a certain appropriation of men with men, owing to their resemblance of form and soul, and concluded that this kind of living thing should not be recklessly immolated, confounding it with the living things for which it is admitted: nevertheless < they say that > according to these lawgivers the main reason why it was considered unbearable and denounced as ungodly was that it was disadvantageous to the general organisation of life. From this principle, those who understood the advantage of this decision needed no other reason to depart from this conduct, but those who could not have a sufficient sense of it, fearing the magnitude of the punishment, refrained from recklessly killing one another. Even today, both attitudes are observed. And indeed those who have the intuition of the advantageous character of the above-described convention hold to it zealously, but those who are not able to apprehend it fear the threats of the laws, which were fixed because of those individuals lacking the understanding of the useful, this having been accepted by most < men >.

Porph. *De Abst.* 1.8

For no rule, written or unwritten, of those which have hitherto subsisted and which by nature will subsist, was instituted as just by violence, but yielded to it by those who had the use of it. For it was by the wisdom of their souls, not by the force of their bodies or the power of their tyranny, that those who brought such rules to the masses distinguished themselves from the masses, leading to the empirical reasoning of the useful those who before felt it without reasoning, and often forgot it, and frightening the others by the magnitude of the punishments. For there was no other remedy for the ignorance of the useful than the fear of the punishment prescribed by the law. This very fear even today is the only thing that inhibits ordinary men, and prevents them from acting in a harmful way, either in public or in private. And if all could in the same way discern and keep in mind what is useful, the laws would be of no use, but each one of his own free will would abstain from what is forbidden and do what is prescribed. Sufficient indeed is the contemplation of what is useful and harmful to dispose oneself to reject or choose. But the tension of punishment < is > sufficient for those who do not know how to anticipate the useful. It is imminent and forces them to constrain their impulses towards harmful acts, and compels them to do the right thing.

Porph. *De Abst.* 1.9.

And for this reason also the legislators did not place involuntary murder beyond punishment; they did not wish to give any pretext to those who voluntarily choose to imitate the acts of those who commit their crimes involuntarily, but wished such an act to be neither unguarded nor neglected, lest many truly involuntary crimes should occur. For this was not in accordance with the useful, for the same reasons that voluntary mutual destruction was not. So that, of the involuntary crimes, some are produced by a cause unforeseeable and beyond the vigilance of human nature, and others by our negligence and blindness to disagreements; and wishing to prevent that negligence which harms man and his neighbourhood, the legislators did not leave involuntary action free from punishment, but by fear of punishment they eliminated most of the faults of this kind. And as far as I am concerned, I think that if even the murders authorised by the law admit of ritual atonement by purification, it is for no other reason than, on the part of the first who remarkably instituted these rites, the desire to keep men away from voluntary crime as much as possible. For the ordinary man needed all sorts of restraints to prevent him from committing acts that were not in accordance with the useful. That is why the first who were aware of this not only imposed punishments, but also created another irrational fear, by making those who had killed a man and had not undergone the purifications seem impure. For the irrational part of the soul has been led by a varied education to the clemency established today, by the action of the first organisers of the crowd, who have built up brakes to tame the desires proceeding from an irrational movement; among which also the fact of not killing each other blindly.

Porph. *De Abst.* 1.10.

But the first who delineated what we must do and what we must not do were reasonable and did not forbid the destruction of all other living beings. For it was not possible to preserve oneself without trying to defend oneself by mutual aggregation. And some of the excellent then remembered that they refrained from killing because it was in the interest of survival, and they reminded others of the purpose of mutual groupings, and how, by refraining from eliminating one's fellow creatures, the community, which contributes to the individual salvation of each, was preserved. And the point was then to gather together without harming any of the neighbours living in the same place, not only with a view to expelling the living of another species, but also men who came with dangerous intentions. Therefore they refrained from harming their fellow creatures, so long as they adhered to the same community of necessities and provided for some of the needs in view of the two aforesaid expulsions. But much time passed, and great was the increase of the community by reason of mutual unions: the living of another species were expelled and became scarce; some developed an empirical reasoning of the usefulness of mutual food resources, and were no longer satisfied with an irrational recollection.

Porph. *De Abst.* 1.11.

So that they tried to neutralise more precisely those who tended to kill each other and made the relief < constituted by the community > weaker by forgetting the past. For this enterprise they established the legislations still in place to this day in certain cities and peoples ; followed in this with goodwill by the crowd, because it had a keener sense of the usefulness of coming together in aggregation. For, to be at peace, the destruction of all harmful beings and the protection of all beings contributing to their destruction are equally useful. So that the healthy decision is made not to kill some, and not to forbid each other to kill others. And there is no need to mention the case of certain living creatures which by their nature are not dangerous to man nor in any way harmful to his life, but which the law permits us to kill. For none, as has been said, of those which we are allowed to kill, is such that, if allowed to grow too large in number, it would become a menace to us ; but kept in their present quantity, they prove useful for our life. For the sheep, the ox, and all such beings, in measured quantities, are of help to us in the necessary conduct of our existence, but if they attain too great a quantity and far exceed what has been fixed, they become harmful, either by turning their aggressiveness against us, since this is not contrary to their true natural disposition, or simply by consuming the food produced for us by the earth. For this reason it is not forbidden to kill these living creatures as well, so that their use remains as useful as possible and we can easily dominate them. For it is not as in the case of lions, wolves, and simply the beasts that are said to be wild, both small and large, for which there is no reason to suppose that leaving a certain quantity of them would in any way alleviate the necessities of our existence ; which is the case with oxen, horses, and all that is called cattle. So that we destroy the former altogether, and of the latter we eliminate only that which exceeds the proper measure.

Porph. *De Abst.* 1.12.

It was probably for causes similar to these that the decrees describing the consumption of animals were instituted by the first legislators who framed these laws, and the reason why some of them were considered inedible was because of their usefulness or unusefulness. So that those who say, with regard to legal prescriptions, that the beautiful and the just always depend on one's own opinions, are full of profound stupidity. For this is not the case, but in the same way as in other useful things, as in health and in a thousand other cases, <...> but one is mistaken in many cases about the common and the proper. For some do not discern the legal prescriptions which are suitable for all, but either disregard them, thinking that they are indifferent, or hold the opposite opinion about them and believe useful everywhere rules which are not of universal interest. So that, by this very error, they support rules that are ill-suited to them, even though in some cases they distinguish very well between what is good for them and what is in the general interest. Among these cases, the rules concerning the consumption of animals and their destruction in most nations depend on a local peculiarity, by which it is not necessary for us to adhere since we do not inhabit the same place. But if it had been possible to establish the same pact with other living beings as with men, so as not to be killed by them or to kill them indiscriminately, justice could easily have been extended to them; for what is just has indeed been set up for safety. But since the fact that reason is lacking in these living beings has prevented us from establishing common laws with them, in the same way the means of ensuring security could no more be set up with regard to these other animate beings than with regard to the inanimate, and hence taking the liberty, as is our case today, of killing them, remains the only means of ensuring our security. So these are the Epicurean arguments.