

It's raining -- that's unjust

Hugo Cyr asked, "When we say 'It's raining.' or 'It's nice', what is the "it" that is doing the raining or the being nice?"

He meant the question to follow Wittgenstein, who says "it" is not a thing, it is a linguistic device, a tool of language. All language is a tool and this tool is a common one. One can ask what is the "it" that is doing the raining? (We are not supposed to think "it" is "he". It is masculine but not. It is linguistically masculine, which is sort of like magic.)

In Chinese, the "it" that is nice is *tien*, unless the place it is nice is inside, in which case what is nice is *li mian*. I don't know about rain in Chinese and I cannot speak for every language, but I suspect that many, if not most, if not all, have something – some word or other – that does the raining or the being nice.

We do not have one name for the "it" that does the raining ("environment" has been suggested, as have "sky" and "weather") and this is what leads Wittgenstein to say "it" is not a thing. It is a thing. It is a metaphysical thing. The rain is physical; the "it" that does the raining is metaphysical.

Aristotle's explains to himself the difference between the physical and the metaphysical with the example of a signet ring. He says, when you see a signet ring make an impression in wax. You see the ring; that's physical. You see the wax; that's physical too. And on the one hand, the impression is physical, too. You can even smear it with your thumb before it hardens, but if a signet ring leaves an impression in wax, the impression is metaphysical. What would be physical, Aristotle says, is if the ring left gold in the wax.

This is brilliant because it makes the difference so easy to understand. Another example Aristotle found useful was "health". Aristotle says "health" is the name of the metaphysical thing we see in a healthy person, or in that person's diet or their way of living.

Aristotle also says, "justness" is the metaphysical thing we see in a person or an action of whom or of which we approve on moral grounds. It is what we praise. What we blame is "unjustness."

People say “Everyone has their own idea of justice” and Aristotle says, sure, “there are many justices” and one of them – which he calls *ison* – has to do with the evaluation of things and people. *Ison* is equality, equality between people and things. Justness is giving *ison* to *ison*, Aristotle says, but of course, figuring out what is *ison* and who is *ison* is very hard and we disagree about it.

It is hardest, Aristotle says, when you are dividing something between yourself and someone else. You tend to overrate yourself. You don't give yourself *ison*; you take extra, *pleonektês*. (In some things, you underrate yourself, but no one worries about that, unless it's excessive and then we do not call it “unjust”, but neurotic.)

Pleon-ektes, extra-taking, is a particular kind of *anison* and we might be tempted to say that treating people unequally, *anison*, is the first or primary injustice. Aristotle says no, another unjustness comes ahead of *anison*, it is *para-nomon*, against-law.

Aristotle says legality is justness. We find this strange. We know that some laws are unjust and even when the laws are not unjust, we think being just requires doing something more than simply what is legal. We may even think that “just” is what a person must be to stand up to unjust laws.

Right, Aristotle says, that is one of the justnesses. When the law is unjust, justice requires standing up to it, but *paranomon*, against-law, is such an important unjustness that according to Aristotle, some people, equate it with the whole of badness and equate *nomima*, legality, with the whole of goodness.

In a typically Aristotelian aside, Aristotle says, legal is not the whole of goodness, because justness and unjustness are toward another person, *pros heteron*, and there is a kind of goodness that is only about yourself.

But even if it is not the whole of goodness, the justness that is legality is very important, indeed, Aristotle calls it *teleia arete*, completed goodness.

Aristotle says, that when the law isn't *orthos*, straight, we have all kinds of problems, but when the law is *orthos*, obeying it is completed goodness. If we fail to notice this it is because in a country like Canada, law is mostly *orthos* and mostly obeyed.

Notice that natives would not say this. Natives say Canada is unjust:
Canadian law is neither *orthos* nor obeyed. This is Aristotle's point.
Anyone, living where the law was not *orthos* or not obeyed, would say, "All
I want is justice", meaning, *orthos* law, obeyed.
