How Much of What Makes Me Angry is Due to Not Understanding?

Samuel Powell

2023-04-29

1 Problem Statement

A friend said something that made me think about this, I wish I could remember what. I think this idea has some merit: some of the things that make me unreasonably and instantly angry (litter, poor driving decisions, just to name a few trivial examples) come along the lines of "how could they..." or "I don't understand why anyone would...".

2 Ideas

I've made an effort, in light of my struggles with a bad temper and strict standards of righteousness or self-righteousness, to allow room for not understanding how others are motivated or how they perceive things. When I apply my values and perceptions, it is obvious what is the right thing to do, and I often become angry when people don't behave accordingly. Something that came up un Epictetus' Discourses, 1.18: Epictetus contends that we shouldn't be angry with evildoers because it simply indicates that they have a poor value system; that they are confused on what is good and bad. He suggests that we should rather pity them because they don't see things clearly. I want to return that it is wrong to allow them to continue doing wrong and that it is good to prevent any suffering to others, but Epictetus contends that when we suffer from the loss of such bad actors, it is because we value what they can take from us too much. This still doesn't address the issuses of justice in general or harm against others, but I think this is a relevant counter-argument to my own struggle here.

I do often get frustrated or angry that people do wrong, regardless of suffering. I think Epictetus' ideas are relevant. I do get angry when I don't understand things, particularly when people do wrong. I think the stoic mode is useful here: I can't control what other people do, so I should not become angry about it. I think it may also be a too-great confidence that I know what is right, and that it is best that people do right (not knowing the outcomes, though I don't like to justify anything on the basis of outcomes).