



Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?

By Michael J. Sandel

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"For Michael Sandel, justice is not a spectator sport," *The Nation's* reviewer of *Justice* remarked. In his acclaimed book based on his legendary Harvard course, Sandel offers a rare education in thinking through the complicated issues and controversies we face in public life today. It has emerged as a most lucid and engaging guide for those who yearn for a more robust and thoughtful public discourse. "In terms we can all understand," wrote Jonathan Rauch in *The New York Times*, *Justice* "confronts us with the concepts that lurk . . . beneath our conflicts."

Affirmative action, same-sex marriage, physician-assisted suicide, abortion, national service, the moral limits of markets? Sandel relates the big questions of political philosophy to the most vexing issues of the day, and shows how a surer grasp of philosophy can help us make sense of politics, morality, and our own convictions as well.

Justice is lively, thought-provoking, and wise?an essential new addition to the small shelf of books that speak convincingly to the hard questions of our civic life.

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Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do? By Michael J. Sandel Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Harvard government professor Sandel (*Public Philosophy*) dazzles in this sweeping survey of hot topics—the recent government bailouts, the draft, surrogate pregnancies, same-sex marriage, immigration reform and reparations for slavery—that situates various sides in the debates in the context of timeless philosophical questions and movements. Sandel takes utilitarianism, Kant's categorical imperative and Rawls's theory of justice out of the classroom, dusts them off and reveals how crucial these theories have been in the construction of Western societies—and how they inform almost every issue at the center of our modern-day polis. The content is dense but elegantly presented, and Sandel has a rare gift for making complex issues comprehensible, even entertaining (see his sections entitled Shakespeare versus the Simpsons and What Ethics Can Learn from Jack Benny and Miss Manners), without compromising their gravity. With exegeses of *Winnie the Pooh*, transcripts of Bill Clinton's impeachment hearing and the works of almost every major political philosopher, Sandel reveals how even our most knee-jerk responses bespeak our personal conceptions of the rights and obligations of the individual and society at large. Erudite, conversational and deeply humane, this is truly transformative reading. (Oct.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Sandel, a Harvard law professor, effortlessly integrates common concerns of individuals with topics as varied as abortion, affirmative action, and family loyalties within the modern theories and perspectives on freedom. He reviews philosophical thought from the ancient to more modern political philosophers, including Immanuel Kant and John Rawls. Sandel critiques three ways of thinking about justice: a utilitarian perspective that seeks the greatest happiness for the greatest number; the connection of justice to freedom with contrast between what he calls the laissez-faire camp that tends to be market libertarians and the fairness camp with an egalitarian slant that acknowledges the need for market regulation; and justice tied to virtue and pursuit of the good life. Although the last is generally associated with the cultural and political Right, he exposes connections across political lines. Sandel reveals how perspectives on justice are connected to a deeper and reasoned analysis, a moral engagement in politics, and a counterintuitive conclusion in modern politics. Whether or not readers agree with Sandel's conclusions, they will appreciate the encouragement to self-examination on the most mundane topics. --Vernon Ford

Review

"[Sandel] The most famous teacher of philosophy in the world [has] shown that it is possible to take philosophy into the public square without insulting the public's intelligence." ?*Michael Ignatieff, The New Republic*

"Michael Sandel. . . is currently the most effective communicator of ideas in English." ?*The Guardian*

"This book is absolutely indispensable for anyone who wants to be a good citizen. It shows how to balance competing values, a talent our nation desperately needs nowadays." ?*Walter Isaacson, author of Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*

"More than exhilarating; exciting in its ability to persuade this student/reader, time and again, that the principle now being invoked--on this page, in this chapter--is the one to deliver the sufficiently inclusive guide to the making of a decent life." ?*Vivian Gornick, Boston Review*

“Sandel explains theories of justice . . . with clarity and immediacy; the ideas of Aristotle, Jeremy Bentham, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, Robert Nozick and John Rawls have rarely, if ever, been set out as accessibly . . . In terms we can all understand, *Justice* confronts us with the concepts that lurk, so often unacknowledged, beneath our conflicts.” ?Jonathan Rauch, *The New York Times*

“Sandel dazzles in this sweeping survey of hot topics . . . Erudite, conversational and deeply humane, this is truly transformative reading.” ?*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

“A spellbinding philosopher . . . For Michael Sandel, justice is not a spectator sport . . . He is calling for nothing less than a reinvigoration of citizenship.” ?Samuel Moyn, *The Nation*

“Michael Sandel, perhaps the most prominent college professor in America, . . . practices the best kind of academic populism, managing to simplify John Stuart Mill and John Rawls without being simplistic. But Sandel is best at what he calls bringing ‘moral clarity to the alternatives we confront as democratic citizens’ . . . He ends up clarifying a basic political divide--not between left and right, but between those who recognize nothing greater than individual rights and choices, and those who affirm a ‘politics of the common good,’ rooted in moral beliefs that can’t be ignored.” ?Michael Gerson, *Washington Post*

“Justice, the new volume from superstar Harvard political philosopher Michael Sandel, showcases the thinking on public morality that has made him one of the most sought-after lecturers in the world.” ?Richard Reeves, *Democracy*

“Hard cases may make bad laws, but in Michael Sandel’s hands they produce some cool philosophy . . . *Justice* is a timely plea for us to desist from political bickering and see if we can have a sensible discussion about what sort of society we really want to live in.” ?Jonathan Ree, *The Observer (London)*

“Every once in a while, a book comes along of such grace, power, and wit that it entralls us with a yearning to know what justice is. This is such a book.” ?Jeffrey Abramson, *Texas Law Review*

“Using a compelling, entertaining mix of hypotheticals, news stories, episodes from history, pop-culture tidbits, literary examples, legal cases and teachings from the great philosophers--principally, Aristotle, Kant, Bentham, Mill and Rawls--Sandel takes on a variety of controversial issues--abortion, same-sex marriage, affirmative action--and forces us to confront our own assumptions, biases and lazy thought. Sparkling commentary from the professor we all wish we had.” ?*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

“Michael Sandel is . . . one of the world’s most interesting political philosophers. Politicians and commentators tend to ask two questions of policy: will it make voters better off, and will it affect their liberty? Sandel rightly points out the shallowness of that debate and adds a third criterion: how will it affect the common good?” ?*Guardian*

“Michael Sandel transforms moral philosophy by putting it at the heart of civic debate . . . Sandel’s insistence on the inescapably ethical character of political debate is enormously refreshing.” ?Edward Skidelsky, *New Statesman*

“A remarkable educational achievement . . . Generations of students and educated citizens will be very well served by Sandel’s introductory overviews.” ?Amitai Etzioni, *Hedgehog Review*

“Reading *Justice* by Michael Sandel is an intoxicating invitation to take apart and examine how we arrive at our notions of right and wrong . . . This is enlivening stuff. Sandel is not looking to win an argument; he’s looking at how a citizen might best engage the public realm.” ?Karen R. Long, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*

“A road map for negotiating modern moral dilemmas . . . For those seeking a short course through moral philosophy from a witty writer, fast on his feet, and nimble with his pen, this thin volume is difficult to beat.”
?Kevin J. Hamilton, *Seattle Times*

“Michael Sandel, political philosopher and public intellectual, is a liberal, but not the annoying sort. His aim is not to boss people around but to bring them around to the pleasures of thinking clearly about large questions of social policy. Reading this lucid book is like taking his famous undergraduate course ‘Justice’ without the tiresome parts, such as term papers and exams.” ?George F. Will, *syndicated columnist*

“*Justice* is Sandel at his finest: no matter what your views are, his delightful style will draw you in, and he'll then force you to rethink your assumptions and challenge you to question accepted ways of thinking. He calls us to a better way of doing politics, and a more enriching way of living our lives.” ?E. J. Dionne, *syndicated columnist*

“There have been various attempts over the decades to bury moral philosophy -- to dismiss convictions about right and wrong as cultural prejudices, or secretions of the brain, or matters so personal they shouldn't even affect our private lives. But moral questions always return, as puzzles and as tragedies. Would we push a hefty man onto a railroad track to save the lives of five others? Should Petty Officer 1st Class Marcus Luttrell, in June of 2005, have executed a group of Afghan goatherds who, having stumbled on his position, might inform the enemy about his unit? (Luttrell let them go, the Taliban attacked, and three of his comrades died.) These examples and others -- price-gouging after Hurricane Katrina, affirmative action, gay marriage - - are all grist for the teaching of Michael Sandel, perhaps the most prominent college professor in America. His popular class at Harvard -- Moral Reasoning 22: Justice -- attracts about a sixth of all undergraduates. For those lacking \$49,000 a year in tuition and board, he has written "Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?" which has been further translated into a PBS series and a Web site, JusticeHarvard.org.” ?Michael Gerson, *The Wall Street Journal*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Frank Johnson:

Here thing why this Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do? are different and reputable to be yours. First of all looking at a book is good however it depends in the content of it which is the content is as tasty as food or not. Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do? giving you information deeper as different ways, you can find any book out there but there is no guide that similar with Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?. It gives you thrill examining journey, its open up your personal eyes about the thing in which happened in the world which is possibly can be happened around you. It is easy to bring everywhere like in recreation area, café, or even in your way home by train. If you are having difficulties in bringing the paper book maybe the form of Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do? in e-book can be your alternative.

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Marlene Tiggs:

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