

Kassidy Rushing

SOC-250-001

19 September 2025

Reflection of Justice

The book "Justice: What's The Right Thing To Do" by Michael Sandel explores a variety of political and ethical philosophers and their ideologies regarding justice. We read and discussed topics such as Kantian ethics, Rawls's theory of justice, and Aristotle's teleological view. Each topic can be viewed from the libertarian or utilitarian framework and can be applied to real-world issues such as the ethics of military service and surrogacy, the fairness of college admissions, and individual civic responsibility.

In the book, we were given two opposing philosophies: utilitarianism and libertarianism. The ideology of utilitarianism was founded by the moral philosopher and legal reformer Jeremy Bentham. This framework suggests that the correct actions are the ones that lead to majority happiness. The focus is on the consequences of outcomes. An example of this would be the lifeboat story that opened chapter two. Four sailors were lost at sea and began to run out of food. After several days of deliberation, the captain decided they would eat the cabin boy. They consider him the most expendable. A key criticism of utilitarianism is that it could justify sacrificing the happiness of some for the benefit of the majority. In contrast, the libertarian model suggests that justice means respecting everyone's rights and freedom. The focus is on individual liberties. This framework would consider the rights of the cabin boy as an equal to the captain and other sailors. The primary criticism for libertarianism is that it could overlook social inequalities and only favor personal autonomy. For example, a libertarian would oppose taxing

the rich, even if that meant helping the poor. They would view this as a violation of the rich person's rights. I am not in favor of one approach over the other. I can see the positives and negatives in each ideology. My decision would be based on the given circumstances.

In chapter 4, we discussed the moral market. We covered topics such as paying people to fight in war and bear children. The question arose: Is it ethical to sell our bodies and risk death? According to philosopher Immanuel Kant, the answer is no. "What we commonly think of as market freedom or consumer choice is not true freedom, Kant argues, because it simply involves satisfying desires we haven't chosen in the first place" (Sandel, p. 44). Kant is a notorious critic of utilitarianism, which prioritizes maximum happiness. Regarding paid military service and surrogacy, Kant would argue that exploiting the human body violates a moral law that states we should treat people as ends in themselves. This means we should not use people for our own personal gain and respect human worth. I would argue that true consent plays a key role in these scenarios. Every individual should be properly informed, and their actions must be voluntary. Denying a capable adult's wishes to serve in the military or become a surrogate, regardless of why they chose to make this decision, can be seen as condescending. Furthermore, when individuals make a decision with a complete understanding of the risks and responsibilities, then I would argue this is not exploitation of human life. Instead, it is an expression of personal agency that should be respected unless they are being forced or manipulated. Kant also emphasizes moral agency. He believes people should want to do things out of moral duty and not personal gain, manipulation, or desperation. I can agree to this to some extent. We discussed in class how many join the military due to low socioeconomic status or lack of resources. My father joined the military when he was only seventeen years old. He was raised in a single-mother household and had a lower socioeconomic status. He knew his best shot of attending a four year

university and achieving his goals was to join the military. He also had several family members in the military so this option seemed fitting. This example shows how social pressures and economic status can influence people's choices. I believe it is important to acknowledge these factors and focus on securing true consent that is free from coercion. This could be achieved through equal access to education, legal protection, and mental health support for those contemplating making life-changing decisions. Overall, my father is proud that he got to serve the nation and had a long, fulfilling career working with the military for over twenty years. He was grateful for the opportunity to provide a better life for me and my family. The utilitarian framework would promote both voluntary and conscription military service. It would find individual sacrifice acceptable if that meant protecting the majority of the people in that nation. Surrogacy under this framework would be acceptable if all parties benefited. If the parents receive their child and the surrogate mother is compensated for her service, then the transaction is seen as morally justified. The libertarian framework would promote only voluntary military service. It would find conscription service as a violation of individual rights. Libertarians would oppose government mandates of national defense, such as the draft. Surrogacy would be morally justified as long as the surrogate consents to doing the service. This agreement would likely consist of a legal contract signed by both parties.

Chapter 6 poses a thought-provoking question provided by political philosopher John Rawls. "In *A Theory of Justice* (1971), he argues that the way to think about justice is to ask what principles we would agree to in an initial situation of equality" (Sandel, p. 56). Rawls refers to this initial situation of equality as the original position. This is a scenario in which we would create rules for a society without knowledge of who we will be. For example, right now, I am a white female who was raised in a middle-class household and who has a disability. In Rawls's

scenario, I could wake up tomorrow as a Latino male from a working-class household with no disability. The possibilities are endless. By removing our identities such as race, gender, class, ability, or personal beliefs, Rawls believes we would choose a fairer society for all, especially for those in disadvantaged positions. He called this method the veil of ignorance. By making these decisions blindly, we are forced to eliminate bias. I agree that this method could be effective. By eliminating bias, we are able to think more about others and their positions in life because it could easily become our new reality. We so frequently in life only think about how we could benefit. I believe this method would be a refreshing and interesting change of pace. This idea can be applied to the college admissions process. Using the veil of ignorance, we as a society would likely design a system that is fair for everybody, not just privileged individuals. I believe affirmative action would be set in place to help people with social disadvantages. It would consider not only race but also gender, disability, and socioeconomic status. In Chapter 7, Sandel addresses affirmative action and questions whether it is a fair practice or a threat to merit. I believe affirmative action is a way to promote diversity and social mobility for disadvantaged groups. College is a place for academic and social growth. As students, we have a unique experience to learn from others who might have different backgrounds and beliefs from our own. Personally, coming from a small town, I love the opportunity to meet and interact with fellow students from different cultures and lived experiences than myself. Rawls's idea challenges us to imagine a better society for all. Unfortunately, I see it as just an idea. I don't find it realistic for our current structure of society that, frankly, lacks a lot of empathy and fairness.

In chapter 8, Sandel introduces us to Aristotle's theory of justice. "He believes that debates about justice are, unavoidably, debates about honor, virtue, and the nature of the good life" (Sandel, p. 72). This is based on the idea of teleology, which is the belief that everything has

a purpose or end goal. Aristotle believed that justice is about giving people what they deserve. For example, the best football team deserves the best equipment, training facility, and coaches. This idea can be reflected through civic responsibility. According to Aristotle, the purpose of politics is to help people within the community live good, virtuous lives. Therefore, by exercising our rights as citizens and engaging in politics by voting, staying informed, and being active members in our community, we are contributing to the common good. I believe everybody should vote in order to make a difference within their community and or country. We can contribute to the change we want to see. Staying informed keeps us educated on matters that are affecting the world around us and allows us to engage in conversations with others. Being an active member in our communities builds trust and fellowship with other community members. This can be achieved by volunteering, engaging in local politics, or simply checking in on a neighbor. These actions might seem small, but they can make a major difference in our society. Aristotle's theory of justice reminds us that living a good life is about shared responsibilities. By accepting our civic responsibility, we are not only exercising our rights but are contributing to a greater purpose.

In conclusion, the book "Justice: What's The Right Thing To Do" taught me that justice is not a one-size-fits-all concept. Justice can not be summed up in one theory but rather is something we practice daily through our actions and decisions. Each philosopher, whether it be Kant, Rawls, or Aristotle, offers a unique insight in their theories of justice and helps prompt thought provoking questions. After applying these theories to real world issues and sharing my personal opinions and lived experiences, I recognize that justice requires reflection and responsibility. We as a society have the power to help create a fairer world.