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What is Justice?

Michael Joseph Sandel's book "Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?" addresses historical debates and connects them to present day issues. The Harvard professor breaks down the idea of justice with the help of philosophers Kant, Rawls, and Aristotle. This allows Sandel to dissect their ideas and give room to create a new perspective of today's justice. Sandel formed his own view of what justice really means which he applied to society through principles of ethics, moral reasoning, and government.

Throughout the book, Sandel explains to the reader how his version of justice could potentially change the way people act, think about right and wrong, and think about how society should be governed. The first theory that Sandel brought up is utilitarianism, which suggests that the best outcome would be the one that makes the most happiness for the most amount of people. When I read that, it sounded practical, but I think it depends on the situation that you are presented with. The rolling trolley and the Afghan goatherds were great illustrations of utilitarianism because they provoke the readers thought process of what you would do in that situation. Based off these examples, I don't think you can always revert to utilitarianism aspects. This is because when you are "confronted with this tension, we may revise our judgement about the right thing to do or rethink the principle we initially espoused" (pg.20), so depending on the situation, the utilitarianism outcome might not be the most beneficial or fair decision for everyone. I've learned that utilitarian thinking doesn't always respect individuals enough, and that unfortunately one person is punished even though they are innocent, for the greater good of everyone else.

Sandel also talks about libertarianism, which focuses on freedom and property rights. Libertarians do not want government interference and think that people should be free to make their own choices, even if others do not agree with them. After reading the five objections from the libertarian point of view, objections 3 and 4 really stood out to me. Michael Jordan is one of the most successful basketball players in the world. Some people do not think it's fair that he got compensated so well and that he should be sharing "... a portion of his earnings" (pg.39) which is absurd in my opinion. Although he made an insane amount of money and will never be able to spend all that money within his lifetime, it is not fair for people to assume that he owes them something. On the other hand, people are not given the same start and opportunities that Michael Jordan had. I think that's why the libertarianism aspect can only work for certain things. This is because if freedom only means "no interference," then that doesn't give people the freedom to make their own choices. Libertarianism should not just be about freedom but should include fairness as well.

Sandel addresses Kant's philosophy stating that the morality of an action isn't about the outcome but more about the motive. When I read the example about the spelling bee, all I could think about were people's moral compasses. I think a lot of people would have moved on in the spelling bee if they were put in the same situation as the young boy. The reason that this boy is different is because "he knew it was the right thing to do, his act has moral worth regardless of the pleasure or satisfaction that might attend it" (pg.63). The boy felt guilty, which means his moral compass was in the right place. I think it's important to look at Kant's perspective on morality because he explains that if you do something for the right reasons, then it is okay to feel good about it. I agree with this because you should do something because you meant it, not just to look good. Kant also brought up the idea that we should treat people as ends and not just means. This made me think about how in society, people are treated like numbers and not

rational beings. Kant reminds us that people are not things and that we deserve respect and dignity as long as we do what is right.

One of the most interesting parts of the book for me was Sandel's discussion on John Rawls. Rawls had the idea of a veil of ignorance where "we don't know our class or gender, our race or ethnicity, our political opinions or religious convictions. Nor do we know our advantages and disadvantages -" (pg.76) and I thought this was interesting because if our society was like this everyone would have a fair start. If I didn't know who I'd be in society, I would want it to be fair and equal for everyone. I wouldn't want there to be inequalities because what if I ended up at the bottom? This made me think about policies being pushed today like progressive taxes or programs that help people in poverty. This would help make society more inclusive and fairer overall.

Sandel also talks about the philosopher Aristotle, who believes justice can be teleological and honorific. Sandel states that "for Aristotle, justice means giving people what they deserve, giving each person his or her due" (pg.99) which I think is fair in a way, but depends on what is being distributed. This is because it is not just about fairness, but also about purpose. Justice can discriminate depending on the situation. For example, when you talk about merit in schools, relationships between people, or even talented artists, it's all according to relevant excellence but each is on a different scale. Everything a person does has a purpose and whether it is good or bad that person will earn what they deserve.

The last thing that Sandel addresses is the fact that we can't escape talking about values and the common good. Sandel favors this third approach because "justice is not only about the right way to distribute things. It is also about the right way to value things" (pg.135) meaning society needs to reason with each other to be able to agree on the good things in life. Sandel

made me realize that neutrality isn't possible. Issues such as marriage equality and healthcare force us to think about what we really value as a whole. Trying to avoid the question doesn't change anything but rather leaves the decision up to whoever has more power.

After reading this book, my perspective on justice has definitely changed. Sandel has helped me realize that the idea of justice is a lot more complicated and not just based off fairness. Justice needs to balance outcomes, respect people's rights, and value certain things for the common good. In regard to each philosopher, I can see where they come from to a certain extent. I do believe that people have dignity that cannot be violated, and I also think that a good society should promote fairness, responsibility and compassion. There needs to be willingness for change though, for this to be able to happen. The theories of utilitarianism and libertarianism can be helpful in some cases, but they are not strong enough to be an idea on their own.

Reading Michael Sandel's book *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* was challenging but rewarding at the same time. This book has opened my eyes to the complexities of what justice really is and has showed me that it is not only abstract, but also connected to everyday life, politics, and society. This book allowed me to reflect on my own personal values, morals, and decision making. Sandel has also helped me understand the disagreements in our society such as taxes, healthcare, and affirmative action. These debates are not just based off facts, but about moral principles and what society values as a whole. Overall, Sandel has taught me to look at issues through multiple perspectives and make a decision after exercising them all. I've learned that justice is not just about making everyone happy, protecting freedom, or rewarding merit, but is more about engaging in moral reasoning and compromising together. Justice will always need debates, reflection, and willingness to hear out different perspectives. Justice does not have a fixed or final answer but will always be an ongoing discussion. Justice will always raise questions about fairness, freedom, and virtue but it is up to us to find the solutions that respect

both individuals and our society. Our choices, the way we treat others, and the values we believe in all shape what justice looks like. It makes me think about what kind of society I want to be a part of, and what role I can play whether it's through voting or speaking up about equality or something else. I understand now that justice isn't just about the government but is also about the individuals as well. This book has become very important to me, and I look forward to applying what I learned through Sandel and philosophers Kant, Rawls, and Aristotle into my everyday life.