

Justice: what's the right thing to do?

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In the first half of Justice: What's the right thing to do, Michael, J. Sandel demonstrates his definition of justice through the eyes of an individual while also highlighting how individuals in society portrays their perspective of justice. Sandel defines and identifies justice in three different ways: “maximizing welfare, respecting freedom, and promoting virtue” (Sandel p10). This book review analyzes these three concepts of what justice is supposed to be and what individuals believe in, as well as evaluating Sandel's argumentation of how justice is a reflection of an individual's morals and opinions.

With Sandel providing historical events and examples that connect the topic of justice to our everyday lives, it can easily be seen as to how our decision-making process of what is considered to be right and what is considered to be wrong is applied and exploited in our lives. Furthermore, Sandel places an importance of examples of how our government and laws are utilized, and as individuals who are law abiding citizens, we automatically establish a sense of judgement that makes us believe in following the law as the right thing to do.

Even though, Sandel then sheds light on how our government also faces ethical dilemmas, regardless of a law-abiding citizen or an authoritative position. Relatively, throughout the first half, Sandel continues question these topics, as well as introduces his theories that help support his claim on the explanation of justice in society.

Continually, Sandel supports his theories by providing two big ideas known as utilitarianism and libertarian. Utilitarianism is described as a certain belief

that the best moral action is the one that will provide the upmost benefit to society or create a sense of overall happiness within the general public. On the other hand, libertarian is described as a “ laissez-faire” doctrine that advocates free will in the lives of individuals.

Sandel then also asserts that the main theme is that everyone should have freedom of their own choice, despite it being right or wrong, based on their morals. Throughout the first half of this book, not only does Sandel provide his own input and opinions to the theories he provided, but also the opinions on his own inputs and experiences. Similarly, his inputs and opinions can be utilized in our everyday lives, through making ethical decisions socially and academically.

The purpose of this book review is to provide an insight and perspective on what justice is through the eyes of a reader as well as evaluate on how Sandel's theory can be applied to an individual's personal life. There are no right or wrong answers in the book, which prompts me to believe that Sandel intended for us to decide what is right and wrong based on our own moral decision.

Background Information

Within our society, ethical dilemmas happen continuously due to the natural undefined line to decipher what is wrong and what is right. In context, Sandel implements a different perspective of deciding what is wrong and right in our society through the use of examples in history of our government and legal systems. In retrospect, the term “ morality” might be an easy definition to

explain and quite obvious, however Sandel provides questions that make individuals question the topic of morality and justice within our everyday life.

As I have explained previously above, there is no set definition or formula of justice, however, Sandel exposes numerous of theories that can conclude the strengths and weaknesses that have been established between philosophers over time. As theories are continuously evolving and being further researched, it is eloquently hard to establish what justice really is.

Despite these numerous theories, justice can be seen as subjective or objective depending on the reader. As there is no clear view of what justice is, I believe that Sandel wrote the book with the intent of focusing on providing an outlet for readers to question the idea of justice while also providing his own ideas as a resource. His examples and dilemmas are used to create a sense of familiarity that can be compared to our everyday lives.

For example, his dilemmas of pregnancy leaves and equality can be seen in the news today, which prompts me to question as if Sandel is using these examples as a contradictory. Are his dilemmas parallel to the strength and weaknesses he provides? Thus, I believe the input and opinions that Sandel provides, as well as philosopher's theories, creates a sense of balance between what is right and wrong due to everybody having their entitled opinions.

Summary

Right off the bat, Sandel starts off by questioning the immoral use of price gouging in a scenario where a hurricane in Florida has occurred, causing

prices to skyrocket. Price gouging occurs when there is an extreme increase in price for consumers. It gets to the point where prices are considered to be not "fair" and known as "unethical." This raises the question of whether or not it is considered to be "fair" because in the business world, the market is driven by consumers, thus who is to blame if prices were inflated? As Sandel describes this dilemma, he then goes on to introduce the three approaches of Justice: maximizing welfare, respecting freedom, and promoting virtue.

Sandel continues to explain these three ideas as how welfare and freedom is represented and connects it back to the price gouging dilemma. Within this dilemma, the people who are mad at the businesses who were taking advantage of the situation can be misjudged as "unethical," but Sandel explains it as emotion driven. He analyzes it as an emotion driven situation where an "outrage" happens, which ultimately has no set definition.

Furthermore, he mentions that greed is a parallel of price gouging and how businesses intend to take advantage of the people who are suffering.

However, in the business marketplace, this can be looked upon as a success for the economy because of an economic growth. Thus, it can also be misinterpreted as a moral thing to do in the business marketplace.

Additionally, Sandel provides his input by criticizing those individuals who believe that moral convictions are already established without the ability to change or provide a new sense of perspective to be reasoned against.

He believes that if morals were determined by faith then "moral persuasion would be inconceivable, and what we take to be public debate about justice and rights would be nothing more than a volley of dogmatic assertions, an

ideologicalfoodfight” (Sandel p19). Sandel’s argues that in order for there to be a middle ground for morality, there needs to be numerous conversations about the debate if it is right or wrong. He believes that a fixed conception can be changed and added to meet the needs of others varying from different backgrounds and opinions.

Continuing on to the next chapter, Sandel introduces Jeremy Bentham’s notion of utilitarianism of reaching ultimately for the highest utility.

Essentially, by maximizing utility, it can drive the form of happiness while factoring behind the pain of suffering. Bentham’s principle states that “ we are all governed by the feelings of pain and pleasure. They are our “ sovereign masters”. They govern us in everything we do and also determine what we ought to do” (Sandel p23). However, Sandel gives an example of how during the Ancient Roman period, Romans threw Christians into a pit of lions for “ entertainment.”

As this was a form of utility because it provided happiness for Romans, would it be justifiable to torture someone to make other people happy? Sandel provides his input by introducing John Stuart Mill’s philosophy of relying more on respecting individual rights, and that believing “ the only actions for which a person is accountable to society are those that affect others” (Sandel p49). This translates to the problem with Bentham’s theory which fails to recognize individual rights and on what grounds would it be acceptable to satisfy everybody’s values and happiness.

In the third chapter, Sandel introduces the theory of libertarianism which correlates to “ do we own ourselves.” This associates the doctrine of “

laissez-faire" and provides people with the choice of freedom. Liberals are those who oppose regulation and government involvement and ultimately believe choices should be given to the people. Sandel presents an example of a short story where the government would tax the people have more money as a viable way to help those who are poor and in need of money. For this case, liberals would object this notion because this rule comes from the government.

With these three policies that liberals follow, " 1. No paternalism, 2. No moral legislation, and 3. No redistribution of income or wealth," they believe people are entitled to their own choices and decisions (Sandel p62). Some might argue that taxation is better than forcing someone to work instead. Sandel also mentions other examples like selling kidneys, consensual cannibalism, and assisted suicide.

Another example would be if a woman were to be paid to become a surrogate mother, but eventually developed an emotional attachment to the child she bore, would it be ethical of her because she made this decision herself? Some people question this as " unethical" and if consent is enough to defy the law. However, because she has the freedom of choice, the contract and promise must be kept because it respects the theory of libertarianism. Even though in reality, this would be frowned upon in society.

Lastly, in the fifth chapter, Michael J. Sandel introduces Immanuel Kant's book that questions " What is the supreme principle of morality? What is freedom?" (Sandel p73). Kant is a philosopher who has strong beliefs regarding the " duties and rights" within society. With Sandel's three

perspectives of justice, he informs readers that Kant has strongly opposed the first and third approach of justice: maximizing welfare and promoting virtue. Kant mainly advocates for respecting freedom and being a rational individual. He believes that individuals make freedom of choice based on preference and needs.

Furthermore, Kant states freedom is not “ the best means to a given end,” instead, it is “ to choose the end itself.” (Sandel p60). This explains as to how humans choose their freedom without any limiting factors. Additionally, Kant continues to give an example of how choosing to help other people because of compassion lack the moral value of an individual because it is a motive rather than out of kindness. According to Kant, helping other people matters more because it questions the individual as to why they are helping them out. Essentially, Kant connects the idea between the three main ideas of morality, freedom, and reason, which all have similar connections that create his ideology of what is right and what is wrong.

Evaluation

Throughout the book, Sandel efficiently explains the different perspectives between what is right and what is wrong, which concretely shows an effective balance of both sides of the scale of the definition of justice. Even though Sandel does a tremendous job of providing sufficient support for the theories explained, there are too many uncertain variables to have a singular definition of justice. As mentioned above, justice can be portrayed as subjectively or objectively, which leaves a lot of unanswered questions and a lot of room for flexibility.

For example, uncertain variables for a certain situation would be a trolley problem. If a trolley was rolling down the hill and was not able to break and eventually run over a certain amount of people, would a bystander be able to alter the track and the trolley will go down a path and run over one person over a group of people. Would this action be considered as justifiable? If this were to happen, it will be hard to apply the theories proposed.

The action of one person will affect more than just yourself. According to this book, it will be correct to pull the lever and sacrifice the one person over the group of people. However, because of sacrificing one person, it brings to question whether or not does that justify our actions. The responsibility and sense of justice determines what is justified to be right or to be wrong. As one person makes the overall decision, it might bring unfairness to another party or even considered to be unethical to other people.

Furthermore, as Kant advocates for respect of freedom, his ideology about casual sex and sex before marriage can be seen as a poor judgement of lack of self-respect. His ideology stems from how sex needs to be respectful on both sides of the party, however, it is different after marriage. I personally do not agree with this idea because some people value the thought of abstinence. For example, if someone were in a situation where they have certain aspects of individual beliefs about casual sex, they might not have the same respect as another person. In these situations, there are many factors that play a role regarding sex.

Some might take into account of their culture that defines what should be done that is right and what is wrong. If these factors were not taken into

account, it leaves an uncertain variable that leaves room for questioning his theory. In this case, the uncertainty leaves people second guessing their values and beliefs. As philosophers are introduced in this book, they fail to demonstrate all aspects of fully grasping the idea of justice in all viewpoints.

Conclusion

To conclude, Sandel has ample variety of perspectives that define justice, with the three categories that he mentions: maximizing welfare, respecting freedom, and promoting virtue. As mentioned previously, there is no set formula or definition that correctly answers what justice is. Although, Sandel ultimately allows readers to come up with their own opinion or definition of understanding justice. With many different angles, variables, and resources taken into account, it can be said to create our own definition of justice as it might allow for one self to see different aspects of justice.

Sandel's theories are extremely important because it guides readers to freely think of what to do and what should be morally correct. Even today, Sande's theories can be used for certain situations in society. For example, Tesla Motors have recently provided an " auto-pilot" option the last few years. However, these " auto-pilot" functions have caused some drivers to get into car crashes. In this situation, legal matters like these are then taken into account as to whose fault would it be. As this is still an ongoing debate, the question arises if Tesla would be held accountable for the incident or the driver who turned on the autopilot function. As of right now, there are no current laws that establish these cases, thus it is important to derive and further study ethics on how to bring this situation to justice.

As companies are driven by consumers, the ethics part of the equation is not as important to them as they are more likely to fixate on generating revenue and profits. This leads to where justice needs to take place in regard to Tesla's "autopilot" incidents. Because there is no definite line between who should take responsibility of the car accidents, it is easily seen for both parties to put the blame on each other. Without creating a sufficient contract or establishment, it will leave more room for injustice to take place. If I were able to help ratify this situation, I would recommend for further research to take place before putting their goods on the market.

Establishing a clear contract between both parties when utilizing their product will help clear the unanswered variables that might occur in previous situations. For all variables to be answered, further research and study needs to take place in both the company's product placement as well as consumers doing their own research. If they were a clear understanding of how both the consumers and the businesses view ethics, it will be easier to determine the framework of ethics as a whole. To sum up, hopefully in the future, research can provide an objective stance on determining what is wrong and what is right in regard to justice. As people say, "justice is in the eye of the beholder."