April 2010

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CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING HYPOTHETICAL: you are the driver of a runaway trolley car that is hurtling down the track. Up ahead, there are five workers who will all die when you crash into them. If, however, you turn the car to the side track where there is one worker, you will only kill the one. What should you do? Most people would say that they would turn the trolley car and kill the one worker, sparing the five. Consider now an alternate hypothetical: there is no side track and you are an innocent bystander on a bridge watching this scenario unfold. Standing next to you is a very heavy man, who, if you push into the path of the oncoming trolley, would die but stop the trolley car from killing the five workers. Would pushing the heavy man to his death be the right thing to do?[2]

Michael J. Sandel's *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* uses contemporary political, social, and legal debates—such as those over price gouging, affirmative action, same-sex marriage, disability accommodations, and physician-assisted suicide—to illustrate the fundamental disagreements over different philosophical frameworks of modern moral philosophy. Frequently, the author presents a problem to help identify the moral principles that we appeal to in assessing our options, showing us how difficult it is to determine exactly what the "just" solution is. His deliberations over morality not only call into question how individuals should treat one another, but how society should be organized and what the law should be.

Sandel suggests that there are three main ways to approach what justice is or should promote: the maximization of welfare, the respect of freedom, and the cultivation of virtue. The doctrine of utilitarianism, often associated with

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1. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009) 308 pages.
2. *Ibid.* at 21.

Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, posits that we should strive to maximize the good or utility for the greatest number of people. By contrast, Robert Nozick's libertarianism, Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative, and John Rawls's egalitarianism present variations on the concept that morality should be concerned with individual rights. Sandel, as is revealed towards the end of the book, subscribes to a community-oriented virtue theory that is critical of both utilitarianism and deontology. Virtue ethics emphasizes the character of the moral agent and holds that we cannot make moral judgments divorced from our cultural framework.

Justice is based, in part, on Sandel's extremely popular undergraduate "justice" class, taught at Harvard University. These lectures have also been filmed for a twelve-part television series on PBS and are currently available on Apple's iTunes U. Addressing a mass audience, Sandel makes what otherwise might be dry and abstract material accessible, provocative, and relevant. He easily engages the reader by using hypothetical and real-life cases to challenge various points of view and to show how different moral principles can result in different conclusions as to what is "just." It should be noted that this book is not intended for those already versed in moral or political philosophy, who may find its treatment of the theory oversimplified. For the rest of us, Sandel's book is an enjoyable crash course on moral philosophical reasoning.