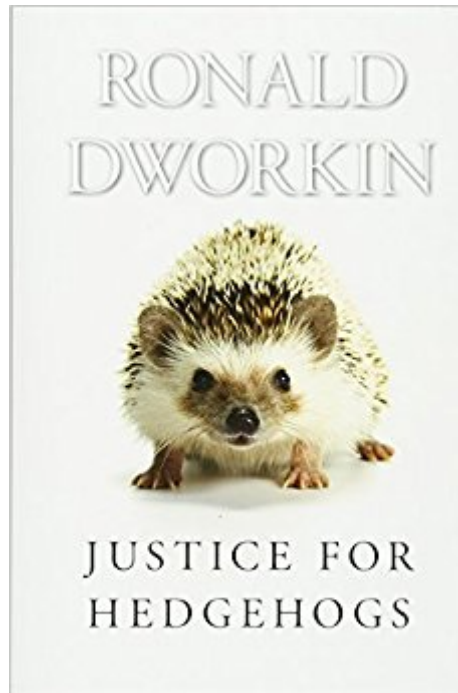




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Justice For Hedgehogs



Synopsis

The fox knows many things, the Greeks said, but the hedgehog knows one big thing. In his most comprehensive work, Ronald Dworkin argues that value in all its forms is one big thing: that what truth is, life means, morality requires, and justice demands are different aspects of the same large question. He develops original theories on a great variety of issues very rarely considered in the same book: moral skepticism, literary, artistic, and historical interpretation, free will, ancient moral theory, being good and living well, liberty, equality, and law among many other topics. What we think about any one of these must stand up, eventually, to any argument we find compelling about the rest. Skepticism in all its forms—philosophical, cynical, or post-modern—threatens that unity. The Galilean revolution once made the theological world of value safe for science. But the new republic gradually became a new empire: the modern philosophers inflated the methods of physics into a totalitarian theory of everything. They invaded and occupied all the honorifics—reality, truth, fact, ground, meaning, knowledge, and being—and dictated the terms on which other bodies of thought might aspire to them, and skepticism has been the inevitable result. We need a new revolution. We must make the world of science safe for value.

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Customer Reviews

In a sustained, profound, and richly textured argument that will, from now on, be essential to all debate on the matter, Ronald Dworkin makes the case for the unity of value. Dworkin writes as an applied philosopher; the topics he discusses are matters of practical importance. They affect

whether and how people can give meaning to their lives. They make a difference in legislatures and courts of law whose decisions touch hundreds of millions of lives. That is what gives the overall argument its urgency, for Dworkin's principal aim in establishing the unity of value is the familiar and central one for him: to show how law and government can be based on political moralityâ | He completes, in [the] final chapter, a chain of reasoning that can be seen as uniting convictions of personal morality with principles of political justice, and then showing how these are all gathered together in a larger system of moral ideals that he believes lawyers and judges must deploy in discovering what the abstract principles of the American Constitution really mean and require. We are in at the birth, here, of a modern philosophical classic, one of the essential works of contemporary thought. It is bound to be a major debate-changer, because even the many who will find much to disagree withâ •Dworkin, after all, disagrees with them in advance, and robustlyâ •will not be able to ignore the challenges he poses. And out of the heat to come, much light will shine. (A. C. Grayling New York Review of Books 2011-04-28)The most profound legal book of the season is Justice for Hedgehogsâ | This book is [Dworkin's] theory of everything and rests on the notion that 'value' is the one big philosophical thingâ | For the first time, all pieces of Dworkin's jurisprudential thinking fall formidably into place. (Richard Susskind The Times 2011-08-03)[Dworkin's arguments] display great intellectual rigourâ | A daring and demanding treatiseâ | Defining morality as the standards governing how we ought to treat other people, and ethics as the standards governing how we ought to live ourselves, Dworkin argues that living morally and living ethically are inseparable. What we achieve is less important than the manner in which we live our lives, and that is judged in part by how we treat other people. To live well, Dworkin writes, is to live one's life as if it were a work of art. In a work of art the value of what is created is inseparable from the act of creating it. A painting is not only a product; it embodies a particular performance. For Dworkin, it isn't the product value of a human life that is most important but its performance value. A life should be an achievement 'in itself, with its own value in the art in living it displays.' â | Justice for Hedgehogs attempts to give human beings their due, not in any spirit of self-congratulation but so that we may build a better life for all. (Richard King The Australian 2011-03-26)Justice for Hedgehogs represents a powerful account of what our moral world would have to be for our moral life to be harmonious. (William A. Galston Commonweal 2011-07-15)The 79-year-old professor of philosophy's grand, perhaps culminating, statement of what truth is, what life means, what morality requires and justice demandsâ | [Dworkin] builds up a comprehensive system of valueâ •embracing democracy, justice, political obligation, morality, liberty, equalityâ •from his notions of dignity and self-respect. (Stuart Jeffries The Guardian 2011-04-01)The first thing to strike you about this

remarkable book is its ambitionâ | In Justice for Hedgehogs all of Dworkin's great talent is on display, the themes overwhelming in their sheer bigness. The basic point is that like the hedgehog in a famous essay by Isaiah Berlin, there is one big thing Dworkin knows above all elseâ •it is what makes sense of how we act as persons, how we relate to others and how we construct our societyâ | The nineteen substantive chapters stand as a great statement of a life well lived (and with, it is hoped, many years still to go). (Conor Gearty New Humanist 2011-03-01)Justice for Hedgehogs is Dworkin's most ambitious book to dateâ | It is full of sustained argument and arresting observations drawn from a lifetime of thought and a great armory of knowledge. (Jonathan Sumption The Spectator 2011-03-19)

Ronald Dworkin was Frank Henry Sommer Professor of Law and Philosophy at New York University.

Ronald Dworkin, an NYU professor influential in the disciplines of philosophy, law, and politics, has written a monumental study in values theory, a monograph reflecting his life's work in all these areas. "Justice for Hedgehogs" boldly but responsibly challenges much, perhaps most, contemporary and conventional thinking regarding ethics, morality, and values and therefore is a potential watershed of new thought here.Basing his title in a metaphor from an ancient Greek poem that the fox knows many things while the lowly hedgehog knows one "big thing", Dworkin sides with the hedgehog against the smug and relativistic fox. The "ordinary view" of the hedgehog--meaning a kind of intuitive view of the objective reality and relevance of values in individual lives and political society--is essentially correct, and therefore it merits sophisticated philosophical defense and explication. " . . . I believe that there are objective truths about value. I believe that some institutions really are unjust and some acts really are wrong . . ." (p. 7) Dworkin asserts " . . . that all true values form an interlocking network, that each of our convictions about what is good or right or beautiful plays some role in supporting each of our other convictions in each of those domains of value." (p. 120) To put this differently and as is often stated in in the text, there is a unity of all values, a unity which cannot be evaded by the wily fox without engaging in self-contradiction. All this strays far from orthodox positions found in learned circles. At the same time Dworkin disavows any dependence on metaphysics, scientism, or religion--his thinking is purely secular. As he insists over and again, the realm of values is independent "as a separate department of knowledge with its own standards of inquiry and justification." (p. 17)Part One argues for this independence and challenges various forms of skepticism both from outside as well as from within the realm of values study. In Part Two

Dworkin argues a major sub-thesis, that values thinking (what I would call axiology) is a hermeneutic enterprise--it is thoroughly interpretive. " . . . interpretation knits values together. We are morally responsible to the degree that our various concrete interpretations achieve an overall integrity so that each supports the others in a network of value that we embrace authentically." (p.101) He is unapologetic about the necessity of a certain circularity in the interpretation of values, a circularity which is not restricted to philosophy but also is at the foundation of politics and law. (Later in the book he considers and defends such matters as judicial review.) Parts Three and Four are discussions of ethics and morality respectively. "I emphasize here . . . the distinction between ethics, which is the study of how to live well, and morality, which is the study of how we must treat other people." (p. 13) Part Five explicates the implications of this values theory for politics and law. Ethics and morality are foundations of social values, hence the political activities upon which governments are based and also the laws that reflect human values. Ethics, again, is defined as the study of how to live well, how to live one's life as a "performance" that achieves meaning and integrity. Morality relates to our interactions with others, how we interpret our own living well in such a way that it enhances social relationships. An essential principle underlying ethics and morality is human "dignity", and dignity has two subordinate principles, self-respect and authenticity. Self-respect means to take our own life seriously, to treat our own living-well as important. Self-respect could have no real meaning if it did not also imply supporting the self-respect of others, i.e. the unity of values also means the unity of our evaluative and interpretive understanding of ourselves and others in the cooperative project of living well. Authenticity means taking responsibility for a life narrative that serves to unify one's various life projects, to achieve conscious consistency in our living well and social interactions. Dworkin in this light defines what it is that legitimizes government. This is an application of the principle of dignity. A legitimate government must, in its policies and laws, express an equal concern for every person, and it also must respect the responsibility of each person to create his or her own life. Professor Dworkin's politics undoubtedly leans toward the "liberal" side of the spectrum, but these two political principles also encompass to some extent the "socialist" side of our current politics as well as the "libertarian" side, conceptually uniting the two within the scope of his values theory. While aesthetics does not play a significant part in the overall values scheme, it is not ignored. Still an expansion of this values theory to include "beauty" in the classical sense more explicitly with "truth" and "goodness", which are emphasized in "Justice for Hedgehogs", would be important to what could become a new direction in axiology. A more significant criticism relates to religion. While actually it is important that this theory not be tied to any particular religious tradition, Dworkin offers what can only be seen as a

simplistic caricature of religion. Values probably are an essential part of human religion, and one could accuse him of either running the risk of contradicting himself as an external skeptic of religion (which is apparently where he places himself) or betraying a kind of internal skepticism, which would make him too fox-like in his secular stance. Probably the major difference I would have with Dworkin, however, relates to the actual locus of value. While I agree with his argument that value studies are independent--of science and metaphysics as well as theology--the whole argument of "Justice for Hedgehogs" implies that values form a kind of ontological substrate of our living, and of the possibility of living well. He believes that it would be "foolish" to think of ourselves as "in some way trapped within the realms of value" (p. 67, relating to external skepticism) because, apparently, these realms rather define who we are in a positive sense, and they also may be the locus of our freedom to be and become who we are. In other words, throughout the argument there is an implicit assumption that values are real--"objectively" real--and that we live and move and have our being within them. It seems therefore that this assumption implies a kind of ontological-axiological ground of our reality. Such an assumption need not require a scientific-empirical proof any more than it would dependence on any god. That said, I am deeply impressed with what Dworkin has done. We struggle to have a coherent theory of values in the midst of the fox-like cultural background we have inherited from the Enlightenment, and our fox-like scholars tend to derogate all the "ordinary" hedgehogs among us. This book does indeed bring justice to what many of us have known intuitively all our lives, and it does so without being beholden to any particular religious tradition or metaphysics. It should be read by all who think seriously about values.

Difficult reading if one does not have much philosophy background, but I found this book opened a lot of avenues of thought about ethics and lives well lived, worth the time spent.

cute cover picture. don't be fooled. this is a sophisticated, complex read. get ready to think about what you are reading, and go back to read a sentence or paragraph over if you're not sure you got that last idea the first time around. I've read four other books since I started this one - now on page 50. Dworkin addresses concepts of politics, law, custom, freedom, and liberty which strike at the heart of contemporary society. I strongly recommend this book.

Deep analysis of ethic and moral concepts, Dworkin walks the reader through the development of his positions. You could disagree with him along the way, but after finishing the book, you will certainly feel enriched.

My Son said:Amazing! I finished on Wednesday . I already have a seminar to present the next class on chapter three (External Skepticism).

Great book, should be a must read for everyone.

I don't know much about the hedgehog or the fox. But Mr. Dworken does and shares with us in great detail what is what.

A Dworkinian statement is usually clear, sharp, and pointedly thought-provoking. This book contains 423 pages of such statements covering a range of subjects from skepticism to morality, living the good life, interpretation, dignity, free will law, and truth. Dworkin's thesis here is that all these abstracts can be unified and grounded on the value he described as "Dignity". By conventional interpretation of the phrase "A fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing", the fox hesitates to form one single, all-encompassing value that attaches to all things on earth. The hedgehog, on the other hand, believes that it has its thumb pressed against that solitary, centrifugal nerve and the value that controls all values. It is Dworkin's thesis that a single principle (which he identifies as "dignity") unifies all moral values. He claims that the pluralism of thinkers like Isaiah Berlin cannot be sustained, let alone function because one cannot have two values diverse but equally true. Dworkin does not mask his intention to show us that he is an hedgehog, but can he assume that role without grasping and reconciling the truth in all the disparate values that philosophers, scientists, and theologians, have hitherto been unable to reconcile? If Dworkin could, and had done so, one wonders if he might not have been, like Tolstoy, a fox who thinks he is an hedgehog? How strong is his foundation based on "dignity"?To have expressed all his views as emanating from one stock value in such a relatively short book, Dworkin might have had to omit steps in arguments which, no doubt, his critics will pursue. Indeed, Dworkin invites responses in a specially created website: www.justiceforhedgehogs.net (I have used a space instead of a period otherwise, for some strange reason, the website name does not appear on the review). There have already been comments and criticisms: See Michael Smith: 2009 Boston Law Review vol 90 p.509 (commenting on the draft manuscript). Nonetheless, "Justice for Hedgehogs", like most of Dworkin's books, is an elegant, charming, and provocative intellectual work.

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