

Justice for Hedgehogs



Perhaps the most famous living legal scholar, **Ronald Dworkin**, has recently published a new book, effectively bringing together the many strands of his life's work (*Justice for Hedgehogs*, Harvard University Press, 2011). He is well known as an advocate of the position that what is just is discovered by reason, rather than decided according to the current fashions and customs of particular societies. The title is intended as a reply to Isaiah Berlin's famous essay *The Hedgehog and the*

Fox, the title of which was taken from the Greek poet Archilochus who wrote that *the fox knows many little things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing*. Berlin is a fox, while Dworkin defends the hedgehog position.

So what is the **one big thing** that Dworkin knows? What he argues is that value, in all its forms, is one big thing: that what truth is, what life means, what morality requires, and what justice demands are different aspects of the same large question. In particular he wants to argue that there is no conflict between equality and liberty.

There is no space to give his arguments here, but he identifies two reigning principles. First that government must show **equal concern for the fate of every person**. Second that government must **recognise the responsibility and right of every person to make something of value out of his or her life**.

So there is a role for government: a hugely demanding role which has never been, and is unlikely ever to be, fulfilled by an earthly government. Even in a perfect democracy with the fairest voting system imaginable the interests of some group are inevitably served in preference to the interests of another. But God **does** have equal concern and love for every person: ***Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God... you are worth more than many sparrows***" (Luke 12:6).

And what is it to make something of value of one's life? Dworkin makes it clear that this has nothing to do with what one leaves behind, certainly not money, and not even great art or literature, but rather in how life is lived. In particular it should be lived with a proper concern for oneself, and a proper concern for others. My choices should be made with an awareness of how they will affect others. Again, this has a familiar ring: ***love your neighbour as yourself*** (Mark 31)..

Dworkin believes that reason can reveal the ideal society where justice prevails. A lifetime of reflection has shown the greatest scholar in his field that it looks like the kingdom of heaven as shown to us in the life of Jesus and the Gospels.

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