

Out of Hours Books

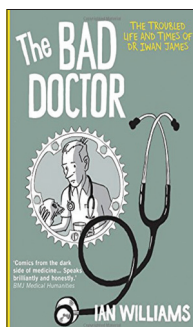
THE UNCERTAINTY SINK

The Bad Doctor

Ian Williams

Myriad Editions, 2014

PB, 220pp, £12.99, 978-1908434289



A middle-aged man named Iwan, an ex-heavy metal fan, a cyclist, and a GP. The central figure of Ian Williams' graphic novel would have a Twitter bio alarmingly close to my own. With the title in mind I approached *The Bad Doctor* with some trepidation. It is subtitled 'The troubled life and times of Dr Iwan James' and we follow Iwan as he consults, worries about being a bad doctor, and struggles to cope with his own obsessive compulsive disorder. His GP experiences with patients and partners are punctuated by cycle rides with his gay mate.

There can't be many GPs who don't worry about being bad doctors. And, in truth, we all have days when the complexity seems to run away from us; where even the simple things elude our grasp. General practice is celebrated as an uncertainty sink but that same uncertainty can overwhelm us on the bad days. That's part of the normal ebb and flow of professional life. General practice forces us to recognise and live with our own foibles. Iwan's struggle to come to terms with his own self is at the heart of this story. As he says: 'The doubt is only about myself. I can be objective about patients. I don't worry about treatment decisions.'

The monochrome images are spare but effective. The graphic novel format offers a richness and depth to this tale; it is a tribute to Williams' skills that I can't imagine reading simple prose on this topic. A short essay on burnout wouldn't have the same effect. A paper on 'doctors in difficulty' wouldn't linger in the mind the way Iwan's struggles do. More than anything, Iwan James, 'Bad Doctor', turns out to be, like all of us, a perfectly normal doctor. In other

words just a perfectly normal human being. There is much in this reflective graphic novel to help us all reconcile the personal and professional.

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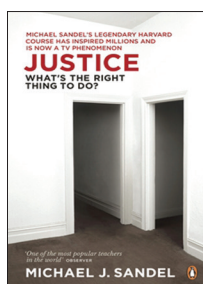
JUSTICE

Justice: What's The Right Thing To Do?

Michael J Sandel

Penguin, 2010

PB, 320pp, £9.99, 978-0141041339



According to Jiminy Cricket you should 'always let your conscience be your guide'. But what about hard cases and new problems? Yes, we have the four principles. Maybe we need no more, just as I only need the brake, accelerator, clutch, and steering wheel to drive. Do I really have to worry about what lies under the bonnet? But if, as Dunstan has suggested, doctors are society's 'accredited moral agents' then perhaps we should know about morals as well as muscles? There's more to ethics than four principles just as there's more to musculoskeletal medicine than doling out naproxen.

Justice is by far the best general introduction to moral theory that I have come across. Also the liveliest. Sure, Sandel covers Aristotle and Kant and Bentham and the gang, but the book is full of stories of real moral problems. This reminds us that ethics is not about moral theory. Ethics is about what to do when Jiminy Cricket lets us down.

The book covers the usual curriculum of moral philosophy: utilitarianism versus

duty, liberty, free markets, inequality, virtue, and human welfare. Interestingly (and very much in the tradition of Aristotle) Sandel also covers issues such as friendship and loyalty. Morality exists within a social space and within human relationships. We are also reminded that few problems are genuinely new. An open market for kidneys? Read what Kant said about the rich buying the teeth of the poor for attempted implantation.

Sandel is a lawyer and political philosopher, not a medical ethicist. It is refreshing to talk about morals in the wider world rather than just our own well-rehearsed problems. From whether it would be justified for a soldier to kill three enemy sympathiser civilians to save the lives of 19 of his comrades, to whether Clinton lied to the American people or merely 'mised' them, this book will give you plenty to think about. And you will find that you have received a pretty good education in moral theory without really noticing.

This book is easy, fun, erudite, and genuinely worthwhile. I suggest it as introductory reading to ethics students. If combined with some notes on one's own 'ordinary' cases it would be a brilliant starting place for self-certified CPD.

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WELL-VERSED IN MEDICINE

Tools Of The Trade:

Poems For New Doctors

Lesley Morrison, John Gillies, Ali Newell,

Lilias Fraser, Editors

Scottish Poetry Library, 2014

PB, 96pp, £5.00, 978-0956219169

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