



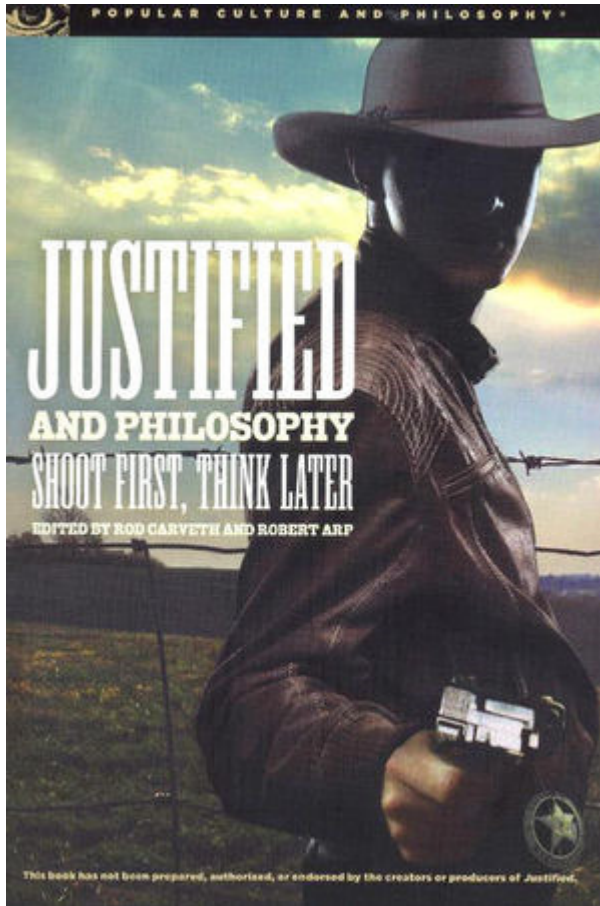
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# DAILY NEWS

## 'Justified and Philosophy' a good read

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*"Justified and Philosophy: Shoot First, Think Later"* edited by Rod Carveth and Robert Arp. (Volume 88 in the series *"Popular Culture and Philosophy"*) Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 2015, 269 pages, \$19.95.



"Justified" resonates with its audience because, at its core, it's a series about believable human beings, not 'black hats' and 'white hats,'" Rod Carveth and Robert Arp explain near the beginning of *"Justified and Philosophy: Shoot First, Think Later,"* their new edited volume based on the popular TV show that's currently in its sixth and final season. "And the issues and topics addressed are too complicated to be considered 'black-and-white' too. It's corporate exploitation of the people in Harlan by the coal industry that has bred many of the ills, and you find yourself empathizing not only with the desperation of folks in the fictional scenarios of Harlan, but also with real-life coal mining towns where this kind of exploitation is occurring right now."

One of the reasons "Justified" has such a loyal following, especially in this region, no doubt relates to the show's realistic depiction of the people and culture that form the backdrop for most of the storylines playing out week after week. Each episode is literally filled with references to places, things and events indigenous

to Kentucky. In fact, one of the pleasures I derive from watching the show comes from the familiarity of the dialogue. Whereas viewers from other parts of the country are obviously able to enjoy the show for a variety of their own reasons, those who live in and around where the show is supposedly set can't help but smile with each passing nod to a way of life they know so well.

Carveth is an assistant professor of Public Relations and Advertising in the School of Global Journalism and Communication at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. He previously edited *"Mad Men and Philosophy: Nothing Is As it Seems"* with James B. South. Arp conducts research for the U.S. Army; his previous books include *"One Thousand and One Ideas That Changed the Way We Think,"* and *"Contemporary Debates in Bioethics"* with Arthur L. Caplan. The eighteen chapters comprising *"Justified"* were written by twenty-two academics selected by the co-editors for their diverse perspectives. Most are faculty members with doctorates who teach in a wide variety of programs and institutions around the world.

"Rayland Givens is exactly the kind of marshal one would expect in the twenty-first-century wild west of Eastern Kentucky," Clint Jones explains in *"The Crimes of Old King Coal,"* the third

chapter in the book. “He possesses the exact mix of lawman and lawbreaker that so many of the legends of the west embodied. Though he is willing to bend the rules very near to breaking them, his transgressions are shallow compared to the local law enforcement in Harlan.”

Jones, who is a visiting professor of philosophy at the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point, then goes on to explain the dynamics central to the drama within the context of Friedrich Hegel, the influential German philosopher. And whereas many fans of the show may not be intimately familiar with the work of this highly influential nineteenth century thinker, the relevance of his ideas for the socioeconomic conditions in modern-day Appalachia are undeniable.

“Leaving Harlan is exactly what Hegel would argue is necessary in order to escape the ravages of life in the rabble,” Jones explains. “A rabble is created ‘when a large mass of people sinks below the level of a certain standard of living.’ So thorough is the individual devastation when social forces reduce a person to the level of the rabble that, according to Hegel, even religion cannot offer consolation. We see this in Boyd Crowder, whose own faith is completely rattled by the realities of his existence in Harlan County. Boyd’s machinations are a rebellion against the forces pushing him and his fellow Harlan Countians down to the lowest levels of society.”

Another chapter I found especially thought-provoking on several levels was “Raylan Learns to Restrain Himself,” which was co-authored by Nathan Verbaan and Adam Barkman. Verbaan is currently pursuing a graduate degree in philosophy; Barkman is associate professor and chair of the Philosophy Department at Redeemer University College in Ontario, Canada. They provide a well-developed treatise on the moral dimensions implicit in the actions of the main character in the series; i.e., a coherent framework for understanding the unconscious yet ultimately defining rationalization Raylan seems to employ in virtually every scene.

“Aristotle makes a point of discussing the just nature of an individual lacking self-restraint,” Verbaan and Barkman explain. “He says that a person who lacks self-restraint is not an unjust person, but they will commit injustices. Most, if not all of the requirements for an individual to be viewed as lacking self-restraint by Aristotle result in an injustice.”

“Raylan normally forces the people he wishes to kill to pull first,” they continue. “In doing so Raylan claims he is justified. In other words, Raylan knows that what he is doing is unjust, he cannot kill a man for the reasons that he has, even though he believes it may be the right thing to do. In order to satisfy his own conscience he forces the others to pull first, in his eyes, doing so justifies his actions.”

Admittedly, some of philosophical implications identified by a few of the writers constitute a pretty good stretch. At its core, the show is, after all, formulated primarily as an entertainment vehicle. I am fairly certain many of those enamored with this action-packed, violence-laced Tuesday night offering are blissfully unaware of the profound truths lurking just beyond the endless gunplay and steamy sex scenes that somehow find their way into each installment. Still, the metaphysical undertones and moral lessons articulated by the contributors to this interesting and provocative primer are certainly intriguing.

The bottom line is that if you like the TV show, you’ll probably find the book to be a good read. Pick up a copy before the final season ends in a few weeks. You might find you’re more of an intellectual than you previously gave yourself credit for being. Maybe.

— *Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*