

# Justice

Fairness, equality, tolerance

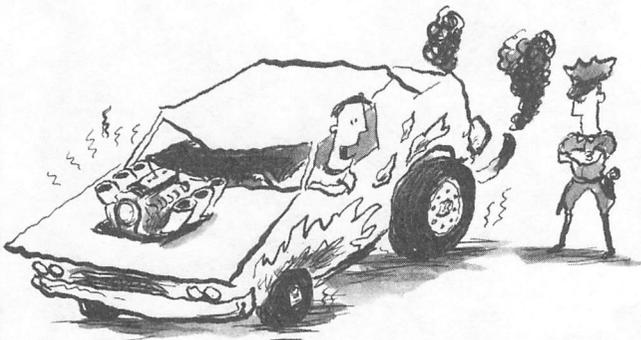
"Justice is . . . the conscience of the whole of humanity."

*Alexander Solzhenitsyn*

## Justice

**Y**ou're driving down a city street where the posted speed limit is 35 miles per hour, but you're doing 50. You're stopped by the police and given a speeding ticket. Is this justice?

What if you were doing 50 because you're late for work? You explain this to the officer, but she gives you a ticket anyway—and advises you to get up earlier tomorrow so you won't have to speed. Is this justice? Would it be justice if the officer decided *not* to give you a ticket because you had a "good reason" to speed?



"I'm positive I wasn't driving too fast. Are you sure your radar is accurate?"

And what if we were doing 35 and you got stopped anyway? When you ask the officer why she stopped you, she explains that a robbery just happened nearby. The robbery was committed by a young black man. You're a young black man, and the street you're driving down is in a predominantly white neighborhood. Is this justice? What do you think?

Here's how *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*<sup>1</sup> defines justice:

- 1 a: the maintenance or administration of what is just esp. by the impartial adjustment of conflicting claims or the assignment of merited rewards or punishments  
b: JUDGE  
c: the administration of law; *esp*: the establishment or determination of rights according to the rules of law or equity
- 2 a: the quality of being just, impartial, or fair  
b: (1): the principle or ideal of just dealing or right action  
(2): conformity to this principle or ideal: RIGHTEOUSNESS  
c: the quality of conforming to law
- 3: conformity to truth, fact, or reason: CORRECTNESS

"What is just" means what is reasonable, proper, righteous, deserved, and lawful. "Impartial" means treating and affecting everyone equally, without bias. Getting a speeding ticket for going 15 miles over the limit is justice, even if you had a good reason. Getting stopped because you're a black man in a white neighborhood is not justice.

<sup>1</sup> *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth Edition (Springfield, MA: 1993).