

The Gospel in a Culture of Success

Living Out the Gospel in Today's World

PM Wong on Success in Singapore

There needs to be a broader definition of success in Singapore that goes beyond narrow metrics of academic and material achievements, and where everyone is valued for who they are

On June 22, 2024, PM Wong outlined his vision of the kind of society that he and his team of ministers hope to build – a Singapore where every Singaporean matters

That would mean moving away from past definitions of success, such as the much-vaunted 5Cs – cash, car, credit card, condominium and country club



PM Wong on Success in Singapore

Wong said: “Now, these were not bad things in and of themselves. Who doesn’t want a better life for themselves and their children? But we have also seen how such a narrow definition of success can lead to negative consequences”

It has led to society becoming more frenetic – and competition more toxic – as Singaporeans seek to outdo one another

“We become more anxious and stressed, and we pass this on to our children. This is not the society I want Singapore to become. It is certainly not the society that I hope our children will grow up in”

Instead, PM Wong wants to see a Singapore where every Singaporean matters, and where everyone is valued for who he or she is



Michael Sandel—*The Tyranny of Merit*

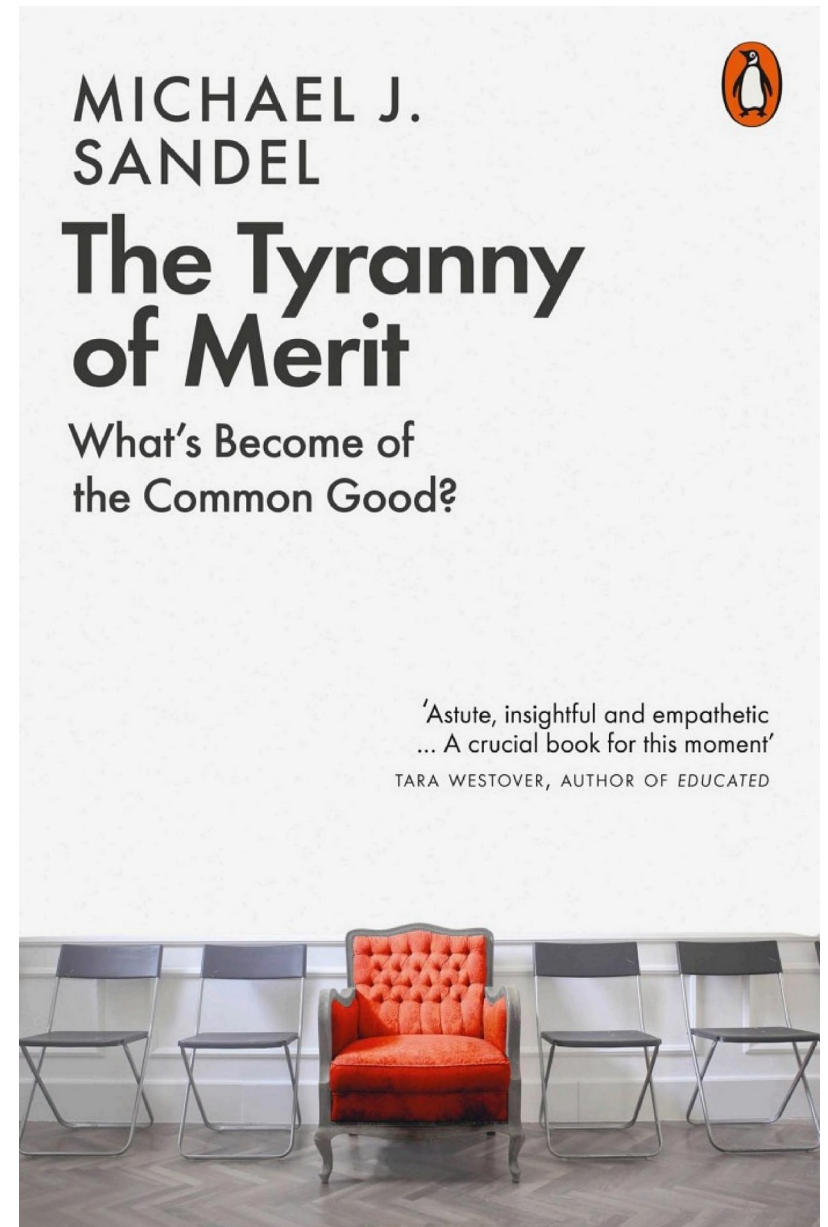
In recent decades the divide between the rich and poor has deepened

The divide is about inequity, but it's also the attitudes between winning and losing

Those who came out on top came to believe that their success was their own doing—a measure of their merit

At the heart of the meritocratic principle is that the winners deserve their winning

In practice, not everyone has an equal chance to rise



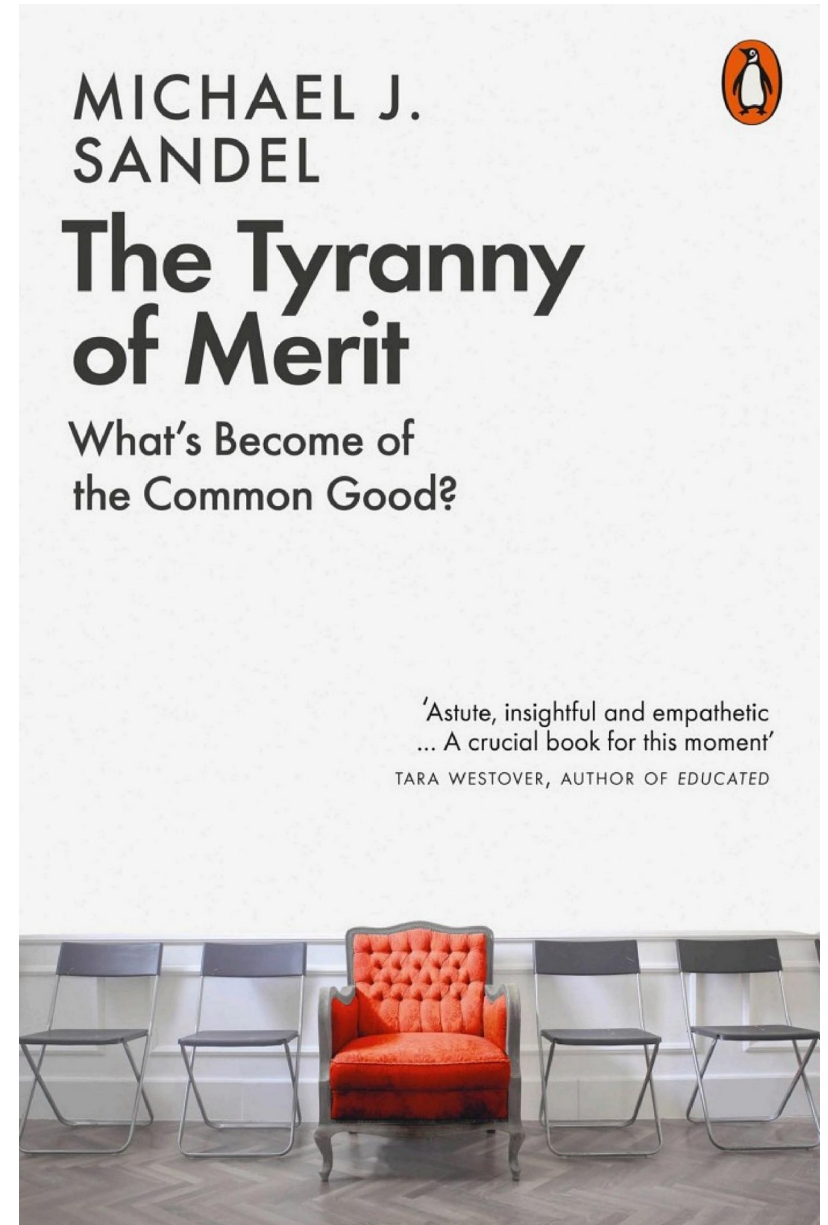
Michael Sandel—*The Tyranny of Merit*

Children from poor families tend to stay poor when they grow up

Affluent parents are able to pass their advantages to their kids

At Ivy league colleges, there are more students from the top 1% than from the entire bottom half of the country combined

Of the top 100 most selective schools in the world, 75% of the students are from the top 25% of the income scale. 3% come from the bottom quarter



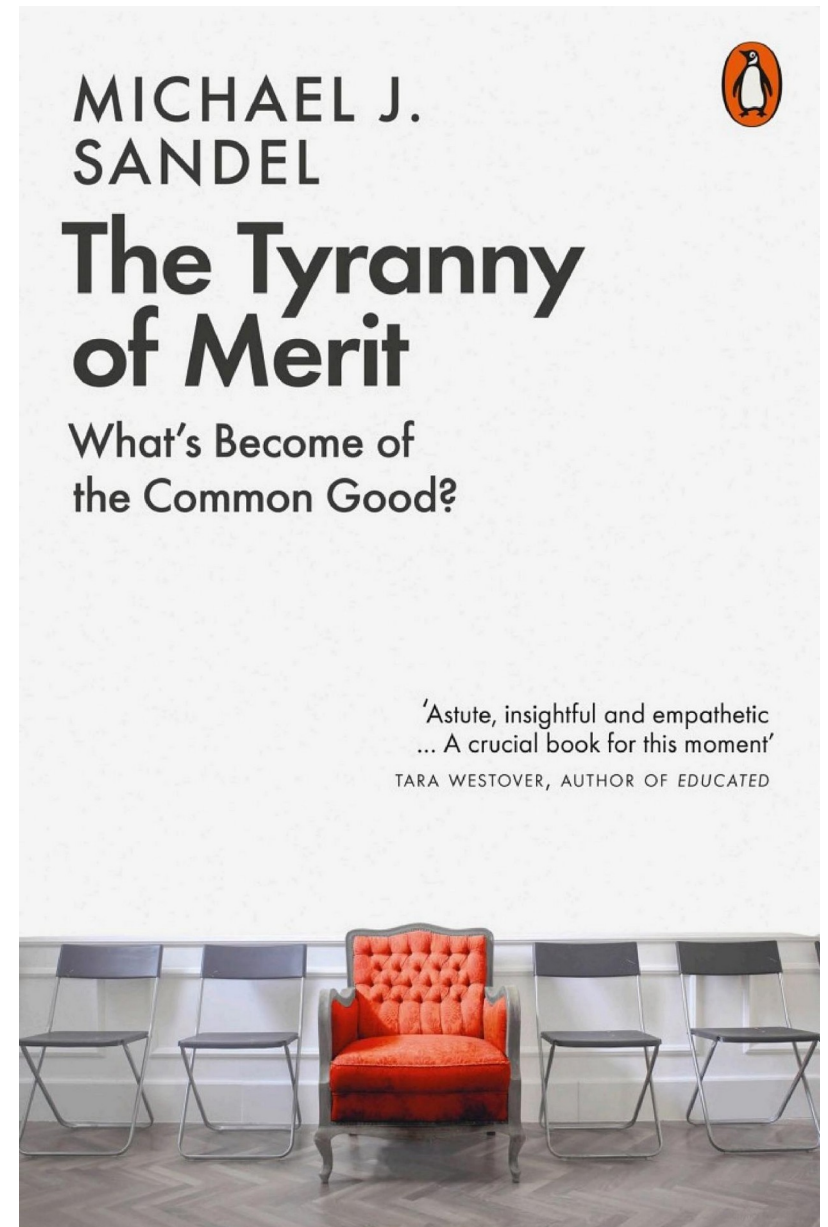
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The problem of merit has a dark side—it is corrosive of the common good

It leads to hubris among the winners and humiliation among those who lost out

It encourages the successful ones to inhale too deeply of their success, to forget the luck and good fortune that helped them along the way

It leads them to look down on those less fortunate, less credentialed than themselves



The Cross Transforms Us

- **How does the cross of Jesus transform us?**
- **Paul says you have got to “boast” in it**
- **¹⁴ May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation (Gal 6:14-15)**
- **Boasting in the cross is what turns you into a new creation**

The Cross Transforms Us

- **Originally, a boast was part of warfare**
- **The enemy boasted, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake them. I will divide the spoils; I will gorge myself on them. I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them’ (Ex 15:9; cf. 1 Kgs 20; 1 Sam 2)**
- **Paul is saying everybody has got to boast in something**
- **²³ This is what the LORD says: “Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, ²⁴ but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD (Jer 9:23-24)**

The Cross Transforms Us

- **Theologically, a boast refers to our identity—the thing that validates, strengthens you and give you confidence**
- **What does it mean to boast in the cross?**
- **It means you are seeking the applause or approval of God as the sole basis of your identity and confidence**
- **When you believe in Jesus, God clothes you in his righteousness and considers you right before God**
- **Christians are not defined by the world's terms of success, because the only opinion that counts is God's opinion of us**

Corporate Success in terms of KPIs

- **Key performance indicators (KPIs) measure a company's success vs. a set of targets, objectives, or industry peers**
- **KPIs can be financial, including net profit (or the bottom line, net income), revenues minus certain expenses**
- **Customer-focused KPIs generally center on per-customer efficiency, customer satisfaction, and customer retention**

Christian Success in terms of the Bible

- In his letter to the troubled congregation in Corinth, Paul explains that they have everything imaginable in Jesus Christ
- Instead of exalting leaders, he tells them how to appraise them:
- This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. ² Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove **faithful** (1 Cor 4:1-2)
- The apostles were faithful servants. Success in Christian terms is faithfulness to Jesus

Discussion Questions

- **Consider your Christian identity. What are the factors that shape your identity?**
- **What does faithfulness to Christ mean for you?**