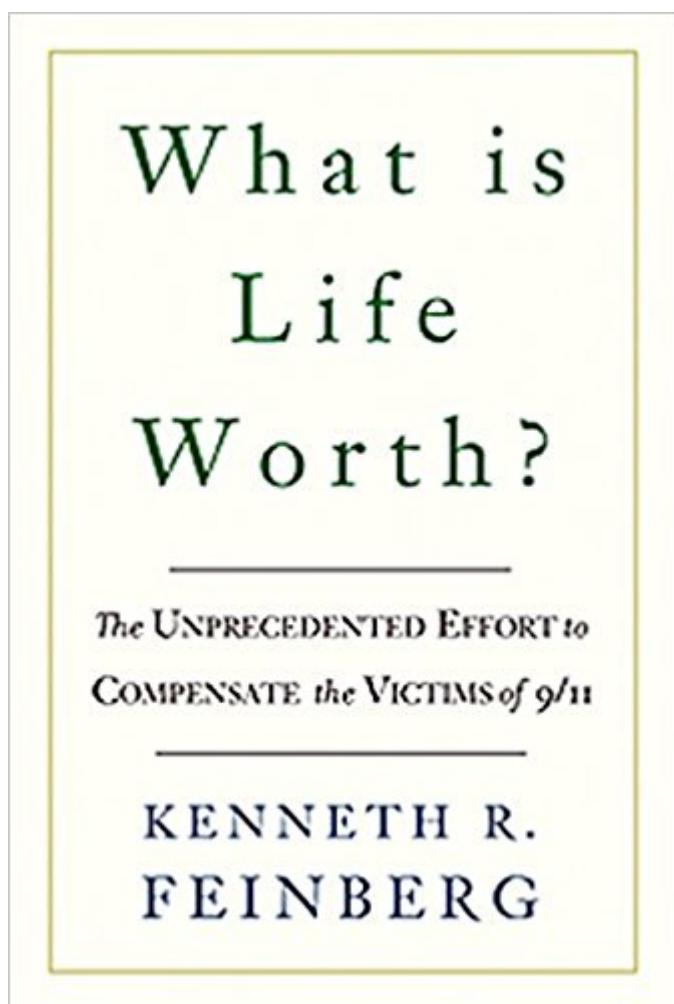


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What Is Life Worth?: The Inside Story Of The 9/11 Fund And Its Effort To Compensate The Victims Of September 11th



Synopsis

Just days after September 11, 2001, Kenneth Feinberg was appointed to administer the federal 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund, a unique, unprecedented fund established by Congress to compensate families who lost a loved one on 9/11 and survivors who were physically injured in the attacks. Those who participated in the Fund were required to waive their right to sue the airlines involved in the attacks, as well as other potentially responsible entities. When the program was launched, many families criticized it as a brazen, tight-fisted attempt to protect the airlines from lawsuits. The Fund was also attacked as attempting to put insulting dollar values on the lives of lost loved ones. The families were in pain. And they were angry. Over the course of the next three years, Feinberg spent almost all of his time meeting with the families, convincing them of the generosity and compassion of the program, and calculating appropriate awards for each and every claim. The Fund proved to be a dramatic success with over 97% of eligible families participating. It also provided important lessons for Feinberg, who became the filter, the arbitrator, and the target of family suffering. Feinberg learned about the enduring power of family grief, love, fear, faith, frustration, and courage. Most importantly, he learned that no check, no matter how large, could make the families and victims of 9/11 whole again.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. When Feinberg writes that "[t]he cacophony of arguments validated my original preference: to refuse to evaluate individual suffering" midway through this frank memoir, the reader

already trusts him enough to know that he is not being crass or unfeeling: he is being honest. By then, Feinberg, a lawyer who has been on two presidential commissions and has done Agent Orange litigation, has established his judicious forthrightness and his dedication to "the success of the fund" — getting as many families as possible to opt in to the trust, which he headed and which was established to award cash to the 9/11 victims, rather than sue the government. The problem: how, and how much? Feinberg's willingness to put himself into the book makes what could have been an alternately dry and self-serving case study crackle with care, frustration, intellectual energy and good writing. Feinberg and his team ran through every argument and counterargument for compensation and its various possible permutations, and he presents the debate, and his ultimate conclusions as head of the 9/11 fund, with an earned conviction and clarity, even on stat-heavy pages. With its combination of a strong personality, undeniably compelling subject matter and a great title, this understated, passionate trek into the dismal terrain is likely to be a major surprise bestseller. Anything but macabre, it ends up, in its own way, celebrating life. (June 13)

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Feinberg's experience as an attorney and a mediator, having mediated the suit between Vietnam vets and manufacturers of Agent Orange, made him uniquely qualified to handle the delicate task of compensating families victimized by the 9/11 terrorist attack and reducing the prospects for lawsuits against the airlines and the U.S. government. But his experiences did not prepare him for the emotional toll of the unprecedented task. In this personal account, Feinberg calls his charge one of the most harrowing yet rewarding experiences of his life. For 32 months, he tried to "fill the hole in a family's life with money," attempting to bring some fairness to settlements for the families of wealthy stockbrokers, middle-class firemen and policemen, and immigrant restaurant workers. What Feinberg struggled with most was the awesome task of deciding the value of human life, acknowledging his own clumsy insensitivity at the beginning, and gradually learning to deal with grieving families who wanted as much to be heard as to be compensated. Vanessa Bush

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This book was required reading for a Public Policy course I am taking. For those concerned, it is an easy read that can easily be completed in 1-2 days, with the last two chapters giving a very nice summary of the story. Many of the previous reviews criticize the author for self-promotion. True,

there are many parts in the book where his writing style seems to support this criticism. However, in all, in order to write a fair and scientific recount of his task, the author had to look back and appraise the experience, and tell what went right and what went wrong. I believe it just so happens that, objectively, a lot went right in how Mr Feinberg decided to handle this Fund. The book is a relevant read for those interested in public policy and rationing. This is especially important in healthcare, where costs are staggering and citizens seem to brush off personal good health responsibility in the comfort that Medicare/Medicaid/pooled risk will come to the rescue when needed. The rationing of the 9/11 Fund is a great analogue that reminds us that although the American people are compassionate and valiant, there are many unique circumstances where public aid just cannot fill the economic gap. i.e. we cannot feel entitled to an endless amount of compensation from public funds under certain circumstances. Overall, this is a good read, which captures a moment in American history that should never be forgotten and whose victims were compensated with best judgement and maximum compassion.

I've met Mr. Feinberg a few times, casually and briefly, and although my favorable impression of him didn't influence those I formed of his book while reading it, that impression did remove the sting of cynicism I'd almost certainly have brought to reading a stranger's account of a program that I thought was bad law. In the days following the 9/11 murders, congress wrote and President Bush signed into law the victim compensation fund, giving monetary awards to anyone who was killed or injured at the Pentagon or World Trade Center. The fund was created to protect the US economy by encouraging a return to business as usual and discouraging litigation against industry. There had been nothing like it in US law before. Congress set no limit on the awards, the special master had sole responsibility in administering the fund, and the amounts were largely unregulated. Mr. Feinberg, former counsel to Ted Kennedy in his role on the Senate Judiciary committee, interviewed with attorney general John Ashcroft who gave him the job. I'll let the reader discover for himself the details given of the administration of the fund because that's not the heart of the book, its soul, although historians and legal professionals are repaid for reading it. The soul of the book is part of Mr. Feinberg's own. 'What's a Life Worth?' refers both to Mr. Feinberg's account of his prosecution of the role of special master determining the dollar amount awarded for each death or injury and his unfavorable opinion of the law's precedent, and the reflection his work caused him to make on the nature of life in America and a person's role in it. It's a part of the public record and a keen legal brief, as well as a discourse on the unique way of life Americans enjoy and reminder that each of us is part of the life of others and we have a role to play in public and private. Sitting here, typing this

out, I suddenly realized that this is the most patriotic book I've read in years. 'What's a Life Worth?' will be read and referred to, with admiration, long after the story of 9/11 stops being part of living memory and the faces of the murderers forgotten or placed as bogeys in text books along with John Wilkes Booth or Lee Harvey Oswald. I'll vouch for the veracity of the man who wrote it and the genius for simplicity he brought to his role of special master and his philosophy, that work and life he shares with us here.

Ken Feinberg waded deep into America's spent battlefields and industrial wastelands to help America pick up the pieces. He should receive the Congressional Gold Medal for his selfless acts. At first, I was reluctant to purchase Feinberg's two books; I was afraid that it would be full of lawyer speak that I wouldn't be able to understand. Boy was I wrong. Not only does he tell the story in a clear, succinct way but makes the entire story very interesting and readable. In a Graduate Business Ethics class, that I once attended, we discussed various scenarios within the context of Duty Ethics and Utilitarian Ethics. Ken's two books would be a good choice for inclusion in these types of classes (Business Ethics, or a Philosophy Ethics Classes). But mainly it's just a darn good read, personal, and very informative. Ken Bingham

I was so impressed by Kenneth Feinberg, as I listened to his statements about his method he would use to be fair to all the families of those who were killed in the Boston bombing and those who were injured. He designated a time deadline for applying for funds. Then, later I learned that he had written this book about his managing the 9/11 Fund and knew I needed to read the book. I wasn't disappointed. It was telling honestly and in-depth how he personally pledged to be sure to be fair in distributing the 9/11 Fund. I found the book enlightening and quite moving. It left me no doubt that he would do his utmost to work hard to be sure the Boston Fund would be given out in a fair manner...TO THE BEST OF HIS ABILITY. He seems a compassionate and kind man. I believe anyone would find this book very worth reading and would learn many things in regard to the 9/11 Fund choices that were made in order to help as many families and individuals as possible.

Read Kenneth Feinberg's "What Is Life Worth". He was the man in charge of the personal compensation fund to individuals, and determining the impossible task of deciding what each life was worth. He also details how the task (performed pro-bono) changed him as a person, and how he now looks at life. Great book.

Not just about a fund administered by government. This book is as much about human spirit and philosophy in facing tragedy. A quick and interesting read, as timely today as a decade ago.

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