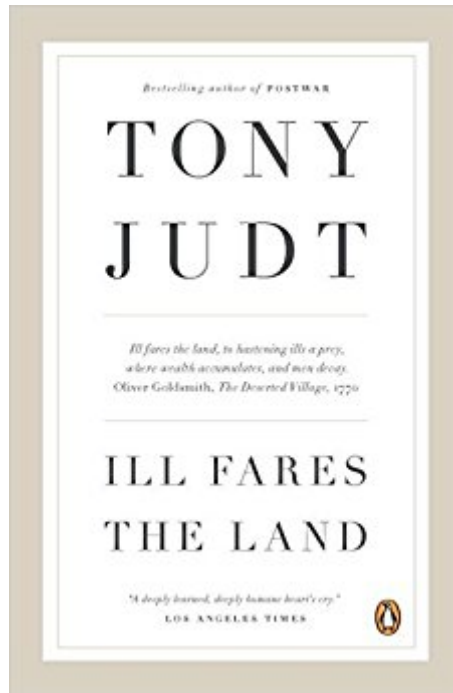




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# Ill Fares The Land



## Synopsis

A gift to the next generation of engaged citizens, from one of our most celebrated intellectuals. As the economic collapse of 2008 made clear, the social contract that defined postwar life in Europe and America—the guarantee of security, stability, and fairness—is no longer guaranteed; in fact, it's no longer part of the common discourse. Tony Judt, one of our leading historians and thinkers, offers the language we need to address our common needs, rejecting the nihilistic individualism of the far Right and the debunked socialism of the past. In reintroducing alternatives to the status quo, Judt invigorates our political conversation, furnishing the tools necessary to imagine a new form of governance and a better way of life.

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## Customer Reviews

Tony Judt was the Erich Maria Remarque Professor of European Studies at New York University, as well as the founder and director of the Remarque Institute, dedicated to creating an ongoing conversation between Europe and the United States. He was educated at King's College, Cambridge, and the École Normale Supérieure, Paris, and also taught at Cambridge, Oxford, and Berkeley. Professor Judt was a frequent contributor to [The New York Review of Books](#), [The Times Literary Supplement](#), [The New Republic](#), [The New York Times](#), and many journals across Europe and the United States. He is the author or editor of fifteen books, including [Thinking the Twentieth Century](#), [The Memory Chalet](#), [Ill Fares the](#)

Land, *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century*, and *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*, which was one of *The New York Times Book Review*'s Ten Best Books of 2005, the winner of the Council on Foreign Relations Arthur Ross Book Award, and a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. He died in August 2010 at the age of sixty-two.

Tony Judt is an early conscience of our society regarding such as the imbalance between rich and poor, for example. Many have written on the issues he outlines but his clear and concise observations could provide a simplicity facilitating further discussion. A case can be made this simplicity would be useful, perhaps necessary, for our federal government for example, to develop understandable and efficiently implementable legislative solutions for our problems. There must be, for example, more articulate if perhaps lengthy formulations than ponderous efforts such as Dodd/Frank or Affordable Care Act legislation. Unfortunately few in government have probably read this book.

Un gran pensador contemporáneo con raíces en la izquierda nos hace reflexionar sobre los problemas actuales de este mundo global. Es necesario, según el, reforzar de nuevo el papel que juegan los gobiernos en las sociedades para poder desarrollar todo aquello que no motiva al sector privado pero que es necesario para el buen funcionamiento de un estado. La crisis de valores y de individualismo a la que hemos llegado por el gran énfasis que se ha hecho en la privatización de todo lo público, está aumentando sensiblemente las diferencias entre ricos y pobres, ha desestimado su valor, muestra la indiferencia de las nuevas generaciones hacia las tareas y cargos públicos y concluye que por esta senda no llegaremos a una buena comunidad que comparte y que trabaja para que en equipo el país pueda progresar. En conclusión, la social democracia será a un comportamiento político adecuado siempre y cuando volviera a sus raíces que crearon tanto bienestar en sus momentos posteriores a la guerra. Un libro obligado para pensar en la actualidad política y reflexionar sobre nuestra participación como líderes de una comunidad.

The late Tony Judt was a broad-based intellectual with a talent for speaking plainly and wisely. He was a realist but (despite the hint in the title) not a pessimist. I so liked this book that I bought three additional copies for my children, all in their 50s. I am now reading other Judt books, to my education and pleasure.

"What kind of idea are you?" Gibreel Farishta, the biggest movie star in India, ponders as he tries to make sense of his nebulous identity after a sudden mid-air explosion leaves him floating in the clouds. Gibreel Farishta's question from Salman Rushdie's controversial work *The Satanic Verses* comes to my mind after reading the first sentence of Tony Judt's *Ill Fares the Land*: "Something is profoundly wrong with the way we live today." This is a portentous observation, especially after the near depression-level financial downturns in the world, the recent what appears to be racial related riots in London, and the call to slash government social programs even in the most liberal countries. Tony Judt's posthumous contribution is this lingering question: What kind of government are we today? To help address this modern-day riddle, Judt maps where we are today, describes a previous world that has disappeared, and invites us to vigorously discuss what government can still accomplish in order to counter the "Ill [that] fares the land" today. Part of Professor Judt's popularity is his ability to use language to direct us toward an understanding of our relationship between the present and the past. No more is this skill apparent than in his rather somber depiction of contemporary times. Today, according to Judt, the major social ill of market deregulation and under-regulated capitalism is inequality. "Over the last thirty years, we have thrown all of [pursuit for equality] away," leaving us with the consequences of a lack of social mobility, universal health care, less educational opportunities, sharp increases in mental illness, a lack of civic trust, and, as we have seen recently in London and Philadelphia with flash mobs, a spike in youth and racial crimes. Leading the way in all of these inglorious categories are the UK and the United States, those two, besides Ireland, who have been at the forefront of the free market philosophy. Growing up hearing buzz words such as "markets," "deregulation," and "globalization," Judt makes us pause enough to realize one important idea: this model needs serious revision similar to what socialists had to admit when the Berlin Wall tumbled in 1989. Another aspect of Judt's renown is his insistence that we not forget the past. In his book *Reappraisals*, for example, Judt argues that an unfortunate trend is that history is poked and prodded for largely individual purposes, such as to build a display for a museum or to retell the local stories of ignored cultural groups. These uses, of course, are not wrong and should be encouraged, but such a trenchant focus on the individual, largely begun by liberals in the 1960s, becomes excessive to the point that we forget our country's shared sacrifice and that we support any measures that best advance private interests. In his rendering of the past up to the 1970s, the world was much different for several reasons--i.e. the Great Depression, world wars--but the key difference was the pivotal role the state had in protecting its citizens from harm. Indeed, the government played a vital function in forging trust and cooperation among its people, addressed the ills of inequality through progressive taxation, provided for the well being of

people through social programs, and intervened in the private sector when necessary to protect middle class jobs from being gobbled up by-- contrary to modern conventional wisdom--the unpredictable markets. This type of governance was not socialism but social democracy, where the government genuinely believed, along with its citizens, that faith in governance was as necessary an ingredient as capitalism in shoring up the quality of life for all Europeans and Americans. According to Judt, this trust in this balance has radically disappeared, and that, if we are to be honest with ourselves, our politics and ourselves are to blame for it. In the final section of Judt's book, all is not lost, but nothing can be gained unless we willingly dissent from conventional solutions and instead be honest about the role government can play in the world we envision for ourselves and for our children. This is not to suggest that Judt subscribes to a "one size fits all system" for solving our current problems. In his book *Postwar*, for example, he emphasizes one important truth: Never again should we place faith in a political system that promises happiness through control and uniformity. To him, social democracy thrives on compromise, and that what social democracy means to one country likely may not apply to another. For example, hearing the term "social democracy" makes many Americans uneasy because they assume that it runs counter to the values of the self-made man. What is necessary, according to Judt, is our willingness to foster a new public debate that uses a new and effective narrative that reengages people on the shared principles that we want in our lives now and for future generations. Admittedly, that is much to ask in this hostile political climate, but, if we have learned anything from the fall of Communism, it is that our hubris for our way of life could lead us down the same path as the Soviets. At only 237 pages, the beauty of Judt's book is that it so clearly encapsulates his evolving views over the course of his academic career. I expect that those who object to Judt's analysis would like to characterize him as nothing more than another leftist, socialist, or even a communist. If you have read his books or listened to him, he makes no excuses for those on the left who maintained almost a blind faith in socialism even as it decayed around the world. Socialism is indeed dead. We witnessed that with the fall of the Berlin Wall. But after the financial collapse of 2008, can we ourselves return to the policies of deregulation and unlimited growth, the very things that have helped contribute to the malaise under which we suffer? As Judt emphasizes in his book, we must promote a state that does more than simply bail out the colossal mistakes of the private sector.

I am sending this book to my mid-twenties daughter. She already has an excellent attitude and outlook toward others which makes me proud. This book will provide background knowledge and support for her positions. While the 60's and 70's begat much of the me generation that followed

from the 80's until now, it also stimulated many to believe and work toward social democracy. Unfortunately, the word 'social' has been preempted to nether meanings, but man is ultimately a social animal. This author does an excellent job reminding us of the good past and political progress of the last century that has become somewhat unraveled. Read it. You'll be somewhat saddened, but perhaps reenergized to speak up for social justice and change.

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