**Cheating, Loyalty, Justice and Emotion (15 votes)**

[**BenChida**](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/1330541)*a day ago*

Posted by: mjtrac

I remain disappointed by the response of your Harvard class to Prof. Sandel's question about how to respond after discovering that your roommate is cheating. Perhaps the lack of any notable response from Prof. Sandel is due to his desire to keep his opinions to himself as a way of ensuring a lively class discussion.

I would appreciate it if Prof. Sandel could offer us his views on how to respond when discovering your roommate is cheating, and on a broader question as well.

For many of us, doing the right thing sometimes feels emotionally difficult. We are confronted with a conflict between our sense of loyalty and our sense of right. Personally, I view this as a conflict between emotions built into us by long-term evolutionary pressures to support kin/neighbors, and the more recent social analyses that may be emerging as a result of our status as sentient, social beings. What does Prof. Sandel think of our using our emotions as a guide to what is right and what is wrong?

Thank you, Prof. Sandel and edX, for making this wonderful class available.

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*Pinned*

(this post is about [Live Question and Answer Session with Professor Sandel, Part 2 / Top Vote-Getting Questions](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/jump_to/i4x:/HarvardX/ER22x/discussion/6efbd5d53d5241b6bf99409448272104))

1. [1](javascript:void(0))[**UpstateJoe**](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/1381095)

*about 19 hours ago*

Ratting on a cheater is a tough call. It certainly will make you very unpopular. It is true that cheaters do put honest players at a disadvantage. Cheating is habit forming. Cheaters continue the behavior throughout their careers and sometimes they are quite successful.

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* + Professor Sandel, what is your opinion of the Honor Code implemented at Princeton and other universities (but notably not at Harvard) that obligates students to report any cheating that they observe? Is such a requirement ethical, especially considering the severe repercussions for even minor trangressions? This is important to those of us who do not want to inflict great harm on our friends because of our loyalty, even if morally we do not think their actions are right.

*–posted about 19 hours ago by*[lawrenceycc](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/1459406)

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1. [1](javascript:void(0))[**yobyot**](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/1283527)

*about 19 hours ago*

Actually, this question isn't so theoretical. I wrote a blog on my personal blog about ER22x and the quizzes -- which generated a steady stream of visitors who had searched on terms like "er22x quizz answers" which persists to today. This, despite a no-cheating pledge on edx.org. All for a certificate of completion that doesn't matter. Professor, how does philosophy deal with the hard-core segments of humanity for whom no sense of honor, community or dignity apply?

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* + It’s annoying there’s quiz answers online. I have the urge to Google most things as they pop in to my head. After reading your post it’s going to be tough not to Google that. Annoying :-/ (not you).

The real value is in the learning not the certificate. Perhaps more formative, self-assessment questions would encourage people not to look up answers when it comes to summative quizzes.

*–posted about 14 hours ago by*[CarolynH](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/627269)

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1. [2](javascript:void(0))[**ChicagoBob**](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/1398672)

*about 19 hours ago*

Prof. Sandel, you ducked the narrow, literal question: Would you personally, Prof. Sandel, turn in *your* roommate for cheating, were you back in your undergraduate years?

Bob

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1. [0](javascript:void(0))[**Soup2Nuts**](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/1386590)

*about 19 hours ago*

I think the point Prof. Sandal made on the conflict between obligation to community vs. more generic morality is an interesting point. This conflict may be more common to experience than morality per se. E.g. value for something like eduction. Politician can stump on education all day, but when it comes to schools and funding, this value is not upheld. Some would say this is hypocritical, but another explanation is this conflict that Prof. Sandal discussed.

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1. [3](javascript:void(0))[**mjtrac**](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/88248)

*about 19 hours ago*

I regret that I cannot agree with Prof. Sandel's response. It strikes me as the response of a privileged insider. Loyalty to those "in the club," when the insiders behave in an unjust way, is equal and identical to DISloyalty to those outside the club.

This is also an issue I find relevant to the Snowden situation. It strikes me as disgraceful to suggest that we owe allegiance to repugnant behavior -- this is the behavior of an unthinking follower, not of a moral agent.

There's no doubt in my mind that we feel a sense of loyalty. Civilization poses us a challenge of how to respond with loyalty in a way that does not silence our personal sense of justice.

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1. [0](javascript:void(0))[**destonttanner**](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/1781016)

*about 18 hours ago*

<http://www.japanprobe.com/2007/08/01/hey-japanese-ladies-interested-in-hiring-a-foreign-escort/>

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* + <http://www.slate.com/articles/life/gentleman_scholar/2013/04/how_much_should_i_tip_the_pizza_delivery_guy.html>

*–posted about 18 hours ago by*[destonttanner](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/1781016)

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1. [0](javascript:void(0))[**Tomasandkaren**](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/1144640)

*about 18 hours ago*

The "Lynch" case in Ireland where the mayor/magistrate of a village hung his own son from an upper window rather than turn him over to a crowd come to free him; is a case of extreme membership conflict.

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1. [4](javascript:void(0))[**EdSilha**](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/1032045)

*a day ago*

In the case of a cheating roommate, would an alternative to reporting the roommate be to remind the roommate of the rules and inform the roommate that you would feel obligated to report subsequent incidents of cheating?

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* + Indeed!

*–posted a day ago by*[Christoph2](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/1674728)

* + You could even add cheating may get you there, it won't keep you there!

*–posted about 20 hours ago by*[PamKline](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/1231840)

* + Very mature comments. The cheater puts the non cheater at a clear disadvantage. Cheaters can always be dealt with in a way that is fair to all concerned, as your comments indicate. Cheaters should never be left unreprimanded for their cheating will always continue. Roommate loyalty is fleeting.

*–posted about 20 hours ago by*[sonogirl](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/1390304)

* + Yes, I think EdSilha offers an appropriate and balanced response. There's little point in doing your roommate avoidable harm, but neither is it moral to let your roommate think they can abuse your relationship by relying on your discretion when, for their own personal gain, they choose to break rules to which all have agreed.

*–posted about 18 hours ago by*[mjtrac](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/88248)

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1. [0](javascript:void(0))[**mjtrac**](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/88248)

*about 18 hours ago*

I realize that this response cannot be part of the video dialog, but I hope it can be seen by Prof. Sandel and others.

First, it's interesting that Prof. Sandel uses the anti-Vietnam War protests as an example of where loyalty may compel us to protest. At the time of the protests, appeals to "loyalty" were used by those in power in an attempt to morally diminish the protests; protesters were deemed disloyal and were regularly advised to "love America or leave it."

Second, I understand why Ben deleted from his presentation the part of my comment in which I stated that Prof. Sandel's reply sounded like one from a "privileged insider." Yet I think that comment is central to my point. People in positions of power, "privileged insiders," may be prone to overstating the importance of loyalty and its alleged moral requirements, precisely because loyalty assists the insiders (who have benefits to distribute) at the expense of outsiders (who, as outsiders, don't have nearly as many benefits to distribute).

We've seen this repeatedly, I believe, in the behavior of American elites in recent decades.

To take one simple example, I believe the 2008/2009 bailout of the banks and the subsequent lack of prosecution for crimes by those in investment banks, hedge funds, and Wall Street is a classic example of the loyalty of privileged insiders to one another at the expense of the nation and world. And, I fear, many of those privileged insiders may be Harvard-educated. It does make me wonder how much they cheated to get where they are today, and how much their cheating may have been overlooked by the guys and gals in their "hood." I think there is an increasing separation in moral attitudes between those in the elites and the rest of us, and I fear this will not play out well in the future.

To respond to one of the questions Prof. Sandel posed, yes, I agree that we have particular obligations to those closest to us. Perhaps these obligations start with our efforts to ensure that they receive no-less-than-fair treatment when others might tilt against them. They also include, certainly, that we treat those to whom we are loyal with a starting assumption that they are behaving admirably, and we should always be willing to hear them out thoroughly rather than accept a superficial appearance or an external rumor that would suggest they might be behaving less than admirably. And we are also required to know that even the most admirable of persons is capable of mistakes from time to time, and that mistakes do not disqualify someone from membership in our circle of compassion.

I don't believe that, morally, those obligations extend to our supporting them in unjust behaviors. Instead, I believe the obligations match what Prof. Sandel described with respect to the Vietnam War protesters. I recall hearing people say that the Vietnam War protesters erred in burning the flag, and that better symbolism would have consisted of*washing* the flag. I think that is a near perfect description of my sense of what loyalty should be about.

Thanks again to everyone involved in making this course available. It's been very, very interesting, and it also points out the promise of technology enabling worldwide discussions that can help lead to understanding and peace.

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* + Well stated. The interesting thing about insiders is they have usually resided there so long that they have a hard time seeing things from a different perspective. The truism about "Walk a mile in my shoes" is apt in many questions about justice.   
    And let me just say I have loved participating in this course and the prospects of having a world discussion about justice and morality is an exciting outcome of having these online courses available to "outsiders" and "insiders".

*–posted about 17 hours ago by*[sonogirl](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/1390304)

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1. [0](javascript:void(0))[**STORY**](https://courses.edx.org/courses/HarvardX/ER22x/2013_Spring/discussion/forum/users/1166083)

*about 13 hours ago*

When reasoning about justice, I'm not sure how to think about non voluntary obligations of solidarity. Were do they come from? What a mess they make of justice and our ability to reason about it.

It seems clear to me that in so much as justice is served, we rationally choose an overriding obligation to the political community (real or virtual) that most persuasively serves justice while improving upon the moral reasoning process that Professor Sandel beautifully presented to us. What am I missing?

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