

0001 Doing the Right Thing

0002 This is a course about Justice and we begin with a story

0003 suppose you're the driver of a trolley car,

0004 and your trolley car is hurtling down the track at sixty miles an hour

0005 and at the end of the track you notice five workers working on the track

0006 you tried to stop but you can't

0007 your brakes don't work

0008 you feel desperate because you know

0009 that if you crash into these five workers

0010 they will all die

0011 let's assume you know that for sure

0012 and so you feel helpless

0013 until you notice that there is

0014 off to the right

0015 a side track

0016 at the end of that track

0017 there's one worker

0018 working on track

0019 you're steering wheel works

0020 so you can

0021 turn the trolley car if you want to

0022 onto this side track

0023 killing the one

0024 but sparing the five.

0025 Here's our first question

0026 what's the right thing to do?

0027 What would you do?

0028 Let's take a poll,

0029 how many

0030 would turn the trolley car onto the side track?

0031 How many wouldn't?

0032 How many would go straight ahead

0033 keep your hands up, those of you who'd go straight ahead.

0034 A handful of people would, the vast majority would turn

0035 let's hear first

0036 now we need to begin to investigate the reasons why you think

0037 it's the right thing to do. Let's begin with those in the majority, who would turn

0038 to go onto side track?

0039 Why would you do it,

0040 what would be your reason?

0041 Who's willing to volunteer a reason?

0042 Go ahead, stand up.

0043 Because it can't be right to kill five people when you can only kill one person instead.

0044 it wouldn't be right to kill five

0045 if you could kill one person instead

0046 that's a good reason

0047 that's a good reason

0048 who else?

0049 does everybody agree with that

0050 reason? go ahead.

0051 Well I was thinking it was the same reason it was on

0052 9/11 we regard the people who flew the plane

0053 who flew the plane into the

0054 Pennsylvania field as heroes

0055 because they chose to kill the people on the plane

0056 and not kill more people

0057 in big buildings.

0058 So the principle there was the same on 9/11

0059 it's tragic circumstance,

0060 but better to kill one so that five can live

0061 is that the reason most of you have, those of you who would turn, yes?

0062 Let's hear now

0063 from

0064 those in the minority

0065 those who wouldn't turn.

0066 Well I think that same type of mentality that justifies genocide and totalitarianism

0067 in order to save one type of race you wipe out the other.

0068 so what would you do in this case? You would

0069 to avoid

0070 the horrors of genocide

0071 you would crash into the five and kill them?

0072 Presumably yes.

0073 okay who else?

0074 That's a brave answer, thank you.

0075 Let's consider another

0076 trolley car case

0077 and see

0078 whether

0079 those of you in the majority

0080 want to adhere to the principle,

0081 better that one should die so that five should live.

0082 This time you're not the driver of the trolley car, you're an onlooker

0083 standing on a bridge overlooking a trolley car track

0084 and down the track comes a trolley car

0085 at the end of the track are five workers

0086 the brakes don't work

0087 the trolley car is about to careen into the five and kill them

0088 and now

0089 you're not the driver

0090 you really feel helpless

0091 until you notice

0092 standing next to you

0093 leaning over

0094 the bridge

0095 is it very fat man.

0096 And you could

0097 give him a shove

0098 he would fall over the bridge

0099 onto the track

0100 right in the way of

0101 the trolley car

0102 he would die

0103 but he would spare the five.

0104 Now, how many would push

0105 the fat man over the bridge? Raise your hand.

0106 How many wouldn't?

0107 Most people wouldn't.

0108 Here's the obvious question,

0109 what became

0110 of the principle

0111 better to save five lives even if it means sacrificing one, what became of the principal

0112 that almost everyone endorsed

0113 in the first case

0114 I need to hear from someone who was in the majority in both

0115 cases is

0116 how do you explain the difference between the two?

0117 The second one I guess involves an active choice of

0118 pushing a person

0119 and down which

0120 I guess that

0121 that person himself would otherwise not have been involved in the situation at all

0122 and so

0123 to choose on his behalf I guess

0124 to

0125 involve him in something that he otherwise would have this escaped is

0126 I guess more than

0127 what you have in the first case where

0128 the three parties, the driver and

0129 the two sets of workers are

0130 already I guess in this situation.

0131 but the guy working, the one on the track off to the side

0132 he didn't choose to sacrifice his life any more than the fat guy did, did he?

0133 That's true, but he was on the tracks.

0134 this guy was on the bridge.

0135 Go ahead, you can come back if you want.

0136 Alright, it's a hard question

0137 but you did well you did very well it's a hard question.

0138 who else

0139 can

0140 find a way of reconciling

0141 the reaction of the majority in these two cases? Yes?

0142 Well I guess

0143 in the first case where

0144 you have the one worker and the five

0145 it's a choice between those two, and you have to

0146 make a certain choice and people are going to die because of the trolley car

0147 not necessarily because of your direct actions. The trolley car is a runaway,

0148 thing and you need to make in a split second choice

0149 whereas pushing the fat man over is an actual act of murder on your part

0150 you have control over that

0151 whereas you may not have control over the trolley car.

0152 So I think that it's a slightly different situation.

0153 Alright who has a reply? Is that, who has a reply to that? no that was good, who has a way

0154 who wants to reply?

0155 Is that a way out of this?

0156 I don't think that's a very good reason because you choose

0157 either way you have to choose who dies because you either choose to turn and kill a person

0158 which is an act of conscious

0159 thought to turn,

0160 or you choose to push the fat man

0161 over which is also an active

0162 conscious action so either way you're making a choice.

0163 Do you want to reply?

0164 Well I'm not really sure that that's the case, it just still seems kind of different, the act of

0165 pushing someone over onto the tracks and killing them,

0166 you are actually killing him yourself, you're pushing him with your own hands you're pushi

0167 that's different

0168 than steering something that is going to cause death

0169 into another...you know

0170 it doesn't really sound right saying it now when I'm up here.

0171 No that's good, what's your name?

0172 Andrew.

0173 Andrew and let me ask you this question Andrew,

0174 suppose

0175 standing on the bridge

0176 next to the fat man

0177 I didn't have to push him, suppose he was standing

0178 over a trap door that I could open by turning a steering wheel like that

0179 would you turn it?

0180 For some reason that still just seems more

0181 more wrong.

0182 I mean maybe if you just accidentally like leaned into this steering wheel or something li

0183 or but,

0184 or say that the car is

0185 hurtling towards a switch that will drop the trap

0186 then I could agree with that.

0187 Fair enough, it still seems

0188 wrong in a way that it doesn't seem wrong in the first case to turn, you say

0189 An in another way, I mean in the first situation you're involved directly with the situati

0190 in the second one you're an onlooker as well.

0191 So you have the choice of becoming involved or not by pushing the fat man.

0192 Let's forget for the moment about this case,

0193 that's good,

0194 but let's imagine a different case. This time your doctor in an emergency room

0195 and six patients come to you

0196 they've been in a terrible trolley car wreck

0197 five of them sustained moderate injuries one is severely injured you could spend all day

0198 caring for the one severely injured victim,

0199 but in that time the five would die, or you could look after the five, restore them to hea

0200 during that time the one severely injured

0201 person would die.

0202 How many would save

0203 the five

0204 now as the doctor?

0205 How many would save the one?

0206 Very few people,

0207 just a handful of people.

0208 Same reason I assume,

0209 one life versus five.

0210 Now consider

0211 another doctor case

0212 this time you're a transplant surgeon

0213 and you have five patients each in desperate need

0214 of an organ transplant in order to survive

0215 on needs a heart one a lung,

0216 one a kidney,

0217 one a liver

0218 and the fifth

0219 a pancreas.

0220 And you have no organ donors

0221 you are about to

0222 see you them die

0223 and then

0224 it occurs to you

0225 that in the next room

0226 there's a healthy guy who came in for a checkup.

0227 and he is

0228 you like that

0229 and he's taking a nap

0230 you could go in very quietly

0231 yank out the five organs, that person would die

0232 but you can save the five.

0233 How many would do it? Anyone?

0234 How many? Put your hands up if you would do it.

0235 Anyone in the balcony?

0236 You would? Be careful don't lean over too much

0237 How many wouldn't?

0238 All right.

0239 What do you say, speak up in the balcony, you who would

0240 yank out the organs, why?

0241 I'd actually like to explore slightly alternate

0242 possibility of just taking the one

0243 of the five he needs an organ who dies first

0244 and using their four healthy organs to save the other four

0245 That's a pretty good idea.

0246 That's a great idea

0247 except for the fact

0248 that you just wrecked the philosophical point.

0249 Let's step back

0250 from these stories and these arguments

0251 to notice a couple of things

0252 about the way the arguments have began to unfold.

0253 Certain

0254 moral principles

0255 have already begun to emerge

0256 from the discussions we've had

0257 and let's consider

0258 what those moral principles

0259 look like

0260 the first moral principle that emerged from the discussion said

0261 that the right thing to do the moral thing to do

0262 depends on the consequences that will result

0263 from your action

0264 at the end of the day

0265 better that five should live

0266 even if one must die.

0267 That's an example

0268 of consequentialist

0269 moral reasoning.

0270 consequentialist moral reasoning locates morality in the consequences of an act. In the sthe

0271 world that will result

0272 from the thing you do

0273 but then we went a little further, we considered those other cases

0274 and people weren't so sure

0275 about

0276 consequentialist moral reasoning

0277 when people hesitated

0278 to push the fat man

0279 over the bridge

0280 or to yank out the organs of the innocent

0281 patient

0282 people gestured towards

0283 reasons

0284 having to do

0285 with the intrinsic

0286 quality of the act

0287 itself.

0288 Consequences be what they may.

0289 People were reluctant

0290 people thought it was just wrong

0291 categorically wrong

0292 to kill

0293 a person

0294 an innocent person

0295 even for the sake

0296 of saving

0297 five lives, at least these people thought that

0298 in the second

0299 version of each story we reconsidered

0300 so this points

0301 a second

0302 categorical

0303 way

0304 of thinking about

0305 moral reasoning

0306 categorical moral reasoning locates morality in certain absolute moral requirements in

0307 certain categorical duties and rights

0308 regardless of the consequences.

0309 We're going to explore

0310 in the days and weeks to come the contrast between

0311 consequentialist and categorical moral principles.

0312 The most influential

0313 example of

0314 consequential moral reasoning is utilitarianism, a doctrine invented by

0315 Jeremy Bentham, the eighteenth century English political philosopher.

0316 The most important

0317 philosopher of categorical moral reasoning

0318 is the

0319 eighteenth century German philosopher Emmanuel Kant.

0320 So we will look

0321 at those two different modes of moral reasoning

0322 assess them

0323 and also consider others.

0324 If you look at the syllabus, you'll notice that we read a number of great and famous books

0325 Books by Aristotle

0326 John Locke

0327 Emanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill,

0328 and others.

0329 You'll notice too from the syllabus that we don't only read these books,

0330 we also all

0331 take up

0332 contemporary political and legal controversies that raise philosophical questions.

0333 We will debate equality and inequality,

0334 affirmative action,

0335 free speech versus hate speech,

0336 same sex marriage, military conscription,

0337 a range of practical questions, why

0338 not just to enliven these abstract and distant books

0339 but to make clear to bring out what's at stake in our everyday lives including our politic

0340 lives,

0341 for philosophy.

0342 So we will read these books

0343 and we will debate these

0344 issues and we'll see how each informs and illuminates the other.

0345 This may sound appealing enough

0346 but here

0347 I have to issue a warning,

0348 and the warning is this

0349 to read these books

0350 in this way,

0351 as an exercise in self-knowledge,

0352 to read them in this way carry certain risks

0353 risks that are both personal and political,

0354 risks that every student of political philosophy have known.

0355 These risks spring from that fact

0356 that philosophy

0357 teaches us

0358 and unsettles us

0359 by confronting us with what we already know.

0360 There's an irony

0361 the difficulty of this course consists in the fact that it teaches what you already know.

0362 It works by taking

0363 what we know from familiar unquestioned settings,

0364 and making it strange.

0365 That's how those examples worked

0366 worked

0367 the hypotheticals with which we began with their mix of playfulness and sobriety.

0368 it's also how these philosophical books work. Philosophy

0369 estranges us

0370 from the familiar

0371 not by supplying new information

0372 but by inviting

0373 and provoking

0373 a new way of seeing
0374 but, and here's the risk,
0375 once
0376 the familiar turns strange,
0377 it's never quite the same again.
0378 Self-knowledge
0379 is like lost innocence,
0380 however unsettling
0381 you find it,
0382 it can never
0383 be unthought
0384 or unknown
0385 what makes this enterprise difficult
0386 but also riveting,
0387 is that
0388 moral and political philosophy is a story
0389 and you don't know where this story will lead but what you do know
0390 is that the story
0391 is about you.
0392 Those are the personal risks,
0393 now what of the political risks.
0394 one way of introducing of course like this
0395 would be to promise you
0396 that by reading these books
0397 and debating these issues
0398 you will become a better more responsible citizen.
0399 You will examine the presuppositions of public policy, you will hone your political
0400 judgment
0401 you'll become a more effective participant in public affairs
0402 but this would be a partial and misleading promise
0403 political philosophy for the most part hasn't worked that way.
0404 You have to allow for the possibility
0405 that political philosophy may make you a worse citizen
0406 rather than a better one
0407 or at least a worse citizen
0408 before it makes you
0409 a better one
0410 and that's because philosophy
0411 is a distancing
0412 even debilitating
0413 activity
0414 And you see this
0415 going back to Socrates
0416 there's a dialogue, the Gorgias
0417 in which one of Socrates' friends
0418 Calicles
0419 tries to talk him out
0420 of philosophizing.
0421 calicles tells Socrates philosophy is a pretty toy
0422 if one indulges in it with moderation at the right time of life
0423 but if one pursues it further than one should it is absolute ruin.
0424 Take my advice calicles says,
0425 abandon argument
0426 learn the accomplishments of active life, take
0427 for your models not those people who spend their time on these petty quibbles,
0428 but those who have a good livelihood and reputation
0429 and many other blessings.
0430 So Calicles is really saying to Socrates
0431 quit philosophizing,
0432 get real
0433 go to business school
0434 and calicles did have a point
0435 he had a point
0436 because philosophy distances us
0437 from conventions from established assumptions
0438 and from settled beliefs.
0439 those are the risks,
0440 personal and political
0441 and in the face of these risks there is a characteristic evasion,
0442 the name of the evasion is skepticism. It's the idea
0443 well it goes something like this
0444 we didn't resolve, once and for all,
0445 either the cases or the principles we were arguing when we began
0446 and if Aristotle
0447 and Locke and Kant and Mill haven't solved these questions after all of these years
0448 who are we to think
0449 that we here in Sanders Theatre over the course a semester
0450 can resolve them
0451 and so maybe it's just a matter of
0452 each person having his or her own principles and there's nothing more to be said about
0453 it
0454 no way of reasoning
0455 that's the
0456 evasion. The evasion of skepticism
0457 to which I would offer the following
0458 reply:
0459 it's true
0460 these questions have been debated for a very long time
0461 but the very fact
0462 that they have reoccurred and persisted
0463 may suggest
0464 that though they're impossible in one sense
0465 their unavoidable in another
0466 and the reason they're unavoidable
0467 the reason they're inescapable is that we live some answer
0468 to these questions every day.
0469 So skepticism, just throwing up their hands and giving up on moral reflection,
0470 is no solution
0471 Emanuel Kant
0472 described very well the problem with skepticism when he wrote
0473 skepticism is a resting place for human reason
0474 where it can reflect upon its dogmatic wanderings
0475 but it is no dwelling place for permanent settlement.
0476 Simply to acquiesce in skepticism, Kant wrote,
0477 can never suffice to overcome the restless of reason.
0478 I've tried to suggest through theses stories and these arguments
0479 some sense of the risks and temptations
0480 of the perils and the possibilities I would simply conclude by saying
0481 that the aim of this course
0482 is to awaken
0483 the restlessness of reason
0484 and to see where it might lead
0485 thank you very much.
