This is a course about justice. We begin with a story. Suppose you are the driver of a trolley car. Your trolley car is hurtling down the track at 60 mph. On the end of the track, you notice five workers are working on the track. You try to stop, but you can’t, your brakes don’t work. You feel desperate, because you know if you crash into these five workers they will all die, but to soon you will know that for sure. So you feel helpless until you notice there is, off to the right, a side track, at the end of that track, there’s one worker working on the track. Your steering wheel works, you can turn the trolley car, if you want to, onto the side track, killing the one, but sparing the five.

Here is our first question, what’s the right thing to do? What will you do? Let’s take a poll. How many would turn the trolley car onto the side track? Raise your hands. How many wouldn’t? How many would go straight ahead.

A handful of people would. A vast majority of people would turn. Let’s hear first. Now we need to investigate the reasons why you think it’s the right thing to do. Let’s begin with those in the majority. Who would turn to go onto the side track? Why would you do it? What would be your reason? Who is willing to volunteer a reason?

Student: Because it can’t be right to kill five people if you could only kill one people instead.

Sandel: That’s a good reason. Who else? Does anybody agree with that reason?

Student: I think it’s the same reason on the 911. We regard the people who flew the plane into Pennsylvania field as heroes, because they chose to kill people on the plane, and not kill more people in the building.

Sandel: So the principle there is the same as 911 to tragic circumstance. Better to kill one so that five can live. Is that the reason most of you have those will turn? Let’s hear now from those in the minority, those wouldn’t turn.

Student: I think it’s the same type of mentality to justify genocide and, In order to save one type of race, you wipe out the other.

Sandel: So what would you do in this case? To avoid the horror of genocide, you would crash into the five and kill them?

Student: Presumedly yes.

Sandel: Ok, who else? That's a brave answer, thank you.

Let's consider another trolley car case, and see whether those of you in the majority why would here to the principle, better one should die so that five should live. This time you are not the driver of the trolley car, you are an onlooker. You are standing on the bridge, overlooking a trolley car track. Down the track come the trolley car, at the end of the track are five workers. The brakes don't work, the trolley car is about to creen into the five and kill them. Now you are not the driver, and you really feel helpless until you notice standing next to you, leaning over the bridge is a very fat man. And you could give him a shove, he would fell over the bridge onto the track, right in the way of the trolley car. He would die, but he would spare the five. Now how many would push the fat man over the bridge, raise your hands. How many wouldn't? Most people wouldn't. Here is the obvious question. What became the principle, better to save five lives even if it means to sacrifice one. What became the principle that almost everyone endorse in the first case? I need to hear from someone who is the majority in both cases. How do you explain the differences between the two?

Student: The second on I guess involves an act of choice of push the person down. The person himself would otherwise not have been involved in the situation at all. To choose on his behalf, I guess, involve him in something he otherwise would escape, is more than in what you have in the first case where the three parties, the driver, the two sets of workers are already in the situation.

Sandel: But the guy working on the track off the side, he didn’t choose to sacrifice his life more than the fat man did, did he?

Student: That’s true, but he is on the track.

Sandel: This guy was on the bridge. Go ahead, you can come back if you want. All right, That’s a hard question, you did very well. Who else can find a way of reconciling the two reaction in these majority in the two cases?

Student: I guess in the first case, we have the one worker and the five. It’s choice between those two, and you have to make certain choice. People are gonna die because of the trolley car, not necessarily because of you direct action. The trolley car is run away, and then you are making a split second choice, whereas pushing the fat man is an actualized murder on your part, you’ve control over that whereas you may not control over the trolley car. So I think it’s slightly different situation.

Sandel: All right. Who has a reply? That’s good. Who wants to replay? Is there a way out of this?

Student: I don’t think that’s a good reason. In either way you have to choose you die, because you either choose to turn and kill a person which is an act of conscious thought to act, or you choose to push the fat man over which is also an act of conscious action. So either way you are making a choice.

Sandel: Do you want to reply?

Student: I’m not really sure that’s the case, it’s just seem kind of different to act actually. Pushing someone over on a track and killing them, you are actually killing him yourself. You are pushing him in your own hands. That’s different from steering something that’s gonna to cause death into other. It doesn’t really sound right.

Sandel: That’s good. What’s your name?

Student: Andrew.

Sandel: Andrew, let me ask you this question, suppose standing on the bridge next to the fat man I didn’t have to push him. Suppose he was standing over trap that I could open by turning a steering wheel like that. Would you turn?

Student: So some reasons, that’s just seem more wrong. I mean maybe you accidentally like lean into the steer wheel, there’s something like that, or say that the car isn’t hurtling towards a switch or drop the track, I could agree with that.

Sandel: Fair enough. It’s still seem wrong in a way it doesn’t seem wrong in the first case to turn.

Student: In another way, in the first situation you’re involved directly with the situation, in the second one, you are an onlooker as well. So you have the choice of becoming involved or not by pushing the fat man.

Let’s forget a moment about this case. That’s good. Let’s imagine a different case. This time you are a doctor in an emergency room, and six patients come to you. They’ve been in a terrible trolley car wrack. Five of them were moderately injured and one was severely injured. You could spend all day caring for the one severely injured victim, but in that time the five would die. Or you could look after the five restore then to help the one, but during the time the severely injured person would die. How many would save the five? Now is the doctor. How many would save the one? Very few people, just a handful of people. Same reason I assume, one life versus five. Now consider another doctor case. This time you are a transplant surgeon. You have five patient each in desperate need of an organ transplant in order to survive. One needs a heart, one a lung, one a kidney, one a liver, and the fifth a pancreas. You have no organ donors. You are about to see them die. And then it occurs to you that in the next room, there’s a healthy guy who came in for a check up. He’s taking a nap. You could go in very quietly, yank out the five organs that the person would die, but you can save the five. How many of you would do it? How many wouldn’t? All right, what would you say? Speak up in the balcony.

Student: I actually like to explore a slightly alternative possibility that just taking the one of the five who need an organ who dies first using therefore the healthy organ save the other four.

Sandel: That’s a pretty good idea except for the fact that you just wrecked the philosophical point

Let’s step back from these stories and these arguments. To notice a couple of things about the way the arguments have began to unfold. Certain moral principles have already began to emerge from the discussion we had. Let’s consider what those moral principles look like. The first moral principle emerged in the discussion said, the right thing to do, the moral thing to do, depends on the consequences that we resolve from your action. At the end of the day, better the five should live even if one must die. That’s an example of consequentialist moral reasoning. Consequentialist moral reasoning locates morality in the consequences of an act, in the state of rule that we resolve from the thing you do. But then we ran a little further, we consider those in other cases, and people wouldn’t so sure about consequentialist moral reasoning.