

MICHAEL J. SANDEL: This is a course about Justice and we begin with a story
suppose you're the driver of a trolley car,
and your trolley car is hurtling down the track at sixty miles an hour
and at the end of the track you notice five workers working on the track
you tried to stop but you can't
your brakes don't work
you feel desperate because you know
that if you crash into these five workers
they will all die
let's assume you know that for sure
and so you feel helpless
until you notice that there is
off to the right
a side track
at the end of that track
there's one worker
working on track
you're steering wheel works
so you can
turn the trolley car if you want to
onto this side track
killing the one
but sparing the five.
Here's our first question
what's the right thing to do?
What would you do?
Let's take a poll,
how many
would turn the trolley car onto the side track?
How many wouldn't?
How many would go straight ahead
keep your hands up, those of you who'd go straight ahead.
A handful of people would, the vast majority would turn
let's hear first
now we need to begin 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 side track?
Why would you do it,
what would be your reason?
Who's willing to volunteer a reason?
Go ahead, stand up.
Because it can't be right to kill five people when you can only kill one person instead.
it wouldn't be right to kill five
if you could kill one person instead

that's a good reason

that's a good reason

who else?

does everybody agree with that

reason? go ahead.

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

9/11 we regard the people who flew the plane

who flew the plane into the

Pennsylvania field as heroes

because they chose to kill the people on the plane

and not kill more people

in big buildings.

So the principle there was the same on 9/11

it's tragic circumstance,

but better to kill one so that five can live

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

Let's hear now

from

those in the minority

those who wouldn't turn.

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

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

so what would you do in this case? You would

to avoid

the horrors of genocide

you would crash into the five and kill them?

Presumably yes.

okay 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

want to adhere to the principle,

better that one should die so that five should live.

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

standing on a bridge overlooking a trolley car track

and down the track comes a trolley car

at the end of the track are five workers

the brakes don't work

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

and now

you're not the driver

you really feel helpless

until you notice
standing next to you
leaning over
the bridge
is it very fat man.
And you could
give him a shove
he would fall 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 hand.
How many wouldn't?
Most people wouldn't.
Here's the obvious question,
what became
of the principle
better to save five lives even if it means sacrificing one, what became of the principal
that almost everyone endorsed
in the first case
I need to hear from someone who was in the majority in both
cases is
how do you explain the difference between the two?
The second one I guess involves an active choice of
pushing a person
and down which
I guess that
that person himself would otherwise not have been involved in the situation at all
and so
to choose on his behalf I guess
to
involve him in something that he otherwise would have this escaped is
I guess more than
what you have in the first case where
the three parties, the driver and
the two sets of workers are
already I guess in this situation.
but the guy working, the one on the track off to the side
he didn't choose to sacrifice his life any more than the fat guy did, did he?
That's true, but he was on the tracks.
this guy was on the bridge.
Go ahead, you can come back if you want.

Alright, it's a hard question
but you did well you did very well it's a hard question.
who else
can
find a way of reconciling
the reaction of the majority in these two cases? Yes?
Well I guess
in the first case where
you have the one worker and the five
it's a choice between those two, and you have to
make a certain choice and people are going to die because of the trolley car
not necessarily because of your direct actions. The trolley car is a runaway,
thing and you need to make in a split second choice
whereas pushing the fat man over is an actual act of murder on your part
you have control over that
whereas you may not have control over the trolley car.
So I think that it's a slightly different situation.
Alright who has a reply? Is that, who has a reply to that? no that was good, who has a way
who wants to reply?
Is that a way out of this?
I don't think that's a very good reason because you choose
either way you have to choose who dies because you either choose to turn and kill a person
which is an act of conscious
thought to turn,
or you choose to push the fat man
over which is also an active
conscious action so either way you're making a choice.
Do you want to reply?
Well I'm not really sure that that's the case, it just still seems kind of different, the act of actually
pushing someone over onto the tracks and killing them,
you are actually killing him yourself, you're pushing him with your own hands you're pushing and
that's different
than steering something that is going to cause death
into another...you know
it doesn't really sound right saying it now when I'm up here.
No that's good, what's your name?
Andrew.
Andrew and let me ask you this question Andrew,
suppose
standing on the bridge
next to the fat man
I didn't have to push him, suppose he was standing
over a trap door that I could open by turning a steering wheel like that
would you turn it?
For some reason that still just seems more

more wrong.

I mean maybe if you just accidentally like leaned into this steering wheel or something like that or but,

or say that the car is

hurdling towards a switch that will drop the trap

then I could agree with that.

Fair enough, it still seems

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

An in another way, I mean in the first situation you're involved directly with the situation in the second one you're an onlooker as well.

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

Let's forget for the moment about this case,

that's good,

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

and six patients come to you

they've been in a terrible trolley car wreck

five of them sustained moderate injuries one is 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 them to health, but

during that time the one severely injured

person would die.

How many would save

the five

now as 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're a transplant surgeon

and you have five patients 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.

And you have no organ donors

you are about to

see you them die

and then

it occurs to you

that in the next room

there's a healthy guy who came in for a checkup.
and he is
you like that
and he's taking a nap
you could go in very quietly
yank out the five organs, that person would die
but you can save the five.
How many would do it? Anyone?
How many? Put your hands up if you would do it.
Anyone in the balcony?
You would? Be careful don't lean over too much
How many wouldn't?
All right.
What do you say, speak up in the balcony, you who would
yank out the organs, why?
I'd actually like to explore slightly alternate
possibility of just taking the one
of the five he needs an organ who dies first
and using their four healthy organs to save the other four
That's a pretty good idea.
That's a great 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 begun to unfold.
Certain
moral principles
have already begun to emerge
from the discussions we've had
and let's consider
what those moral principles
look like
the first moral principle that emerged from the discussion said
that the right thing to do the moral thing to do
depends on the consequences that will result
from your action
at the end of the day
better that 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 the

world that will result
from the thing you do
but then we went a little further, we considered those other cases
and people weren't so sure
about
consequentialist moral reasoning
when people hesitated
to push the fat man
over the bridge
or to yank out the organs of the innocent
patient
people gestured towards
reasons
having to do
with the intrinsic
quality of the act
itself.

Consequences be what they may.
People were reluctant
people thought it was just wrong
categorically wrong
to kill
a person
an innocent person
even for the sake
of saving
five lives, at least these people thought that
in the second
version of each story we reconsidered
so this points
a second
categorical
way
of thinking about
moral reasoning

categorical moral reasoning locates morality in certain absolute moral requirements in
certain categorical duties and rights
regardless of the consequences.

We're going to explore
in the days and weeks to come the contrast between
consequentialist and categorical moral principles.

The most influential
example of
consequential moral reasoning is utilitarianism, a doctrine invented by
Jeremy Bentham, the eighteenth century English political philosopher.

The most important
philosopher of categorical moral reasoning
is the
eighteenth century German philosopher Emmanuel Kant.
So we will look
at those two different modes of moral reasoning
assess them
and also consider others.
If you look at the syllabus, you'll notice that we read a number of great and famous books.
Books by Aristotle
John Locke
Emanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill,
and others.
You'll notice too from the syllabus that we don't only read these books,
we also all
take up
contemporary political and legal controversies that raise philosophical questions.
We will debate equality and inequality,
affirmative action,
free speech versus hate speech,
same sex marriage, military conscription,
a range of practical questions, why
not just to enliven these abstract and distant books
but to make clear to bring out what's at stake in our everyday lives including our political
lives,
for philosophy.
So we will read these books
and we will debate these
issues and we'll see how each informs and illuminates the other.
This may sound appealing enough
but here
I have to issue a warning,
and the warning is this
to read these books
in this way,
as an exercise in self-knowledge,
to read them in this way carry certain risks
risks that are both personal and political,
risks that every student of political philosophy have known.
These risks spring from that fact
that philosophy
teaches us
and unsettles us
by confronting us with what we already know.
There's an irony

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

It works by taking
what we know from familiar unquestioned settings,
and making it strange.

That's how those examples worked
worked

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

it's also how these philosophical books work. Philosophy

estranges us

from the familiar

not by supplying new information

but by inviting

and provoking

a new way of seeing

but, and here's the risk,

once

the familiar turns strange,

it's never quite the same again.

Self-knowledge

is like lost innocence,

however unsettling

you find it,

it can never

be unthought

or unknown

what makes this enterprise difficult

but also riveting,

is that

moral and political philosophy is a story

and you don't know where this story will lead but what you do know

is that the story

is about you.

Those are the personal risks,

now what of the political risks.

one way of introducing of course like this

would be to promise you

that by reading these books

and debating these issues

you will become a better more responsible citizen.

You will examine the presuppositions of public policy, you will hone your political
judgment

you'll become a more effective participant in public affairs

but this would be a partial and misleading promise

political philosophy for the most part hasn't worked that way.

You have to allow for the possibility

that political philosophy may make you a worse citizen
rather than a better one
or at least a worse citizen
before it makes you
a better one
and that's because philosophy
is a distancing
even debilitating
activity
And you see this
going back to Socrates
there's a dialogue, the Gorgias
in which one of Socrates' friends
Calicles
tries to talk him out
of philosophizing.
calicles tells Socrates philosophy is a pretty toy
if one indulges in it with moderation at the right time of life
but if one pursues it further than one should it is absolute ruin.
Take my advice calicles says,
abandon argument
learn the accomplishments of active life, take
for your models not those people who spend their time on these petty quibbles,
but those who have a good livelihood and reputation
and many other blessings.
So Calicles is really saying to Socrates
quit philosophizing,
get real
go to business school
and calicles did have a point
he had a point
because philosophy distances us
from conventions from established assumptions
and from settled beliefs.
those are the risks,
personal and political
and in the face of these risks there is a characteristic evasion,
the name of the evasion is skepticism. It's the idea
well it goes something like this
we didn't resolve, once and for all,
either the cases or the principles we were arguing when we began
and if Aristotle
and Locke and Kant and Mill haven't solved these questions after all of these years
who are we to think
that we here in Sanders Theatre over the course a semester

can resolve them
and so maybe it's just a matter of
each person having his or her own principles and there's nothing more to be said about
it
no way of reasoning
that's the
evasion. The evasion of skepticism
to which I would offer the following
reply:
it's true
these questions have been debated for a very long time
but the very fact
that they have reoccurred and persisted
may suggest
that though they're impossible in one sense
their unavoidable in another
and the reason they're unavoidable
the reason they're inescapable is that we live some answer
to these questions every day.
So skepticism, just throwing up their hands and giving up on moral reflection,
is no solution
Emanuel Kant
described very well the problem with skepticism when he wrote
skepticism is a resting place for human reason
where it can reflect upon its dogmatic wanderings
but it is no dwelling place for permanent settlement.
Simply to acquiesce in skepticism, Kant wrote,
can never suffice to overcome the restless of reason.
I've tried to suggest through theses stories and these arguments
some sense of the risks and temptations
of the perils and the possibilities I would simply conclude by saying
that the aim of this course
is to awaken
the restlessness of reason
and to see where it might lead
thank you very much.