

Harvard Lectures

Michael Sandel

<http://justiceharvard.org/justicecourse/>





Born into a Jewish family

BA-1975 Brandeis University (Massachusetts)

PhD-1985 Balliol College (Oxford, England)

Justice: What's the Right Thing To Do? (Episode 1, part 1) "The Moral Side of Murder"

If you had to choose between (1) killing one person to save the lives of five others and (2) doing nothing even though you knew that five people would die right before your eyes if you did nothing—what would you do? What would be the right thing to do? That's the hypothetical scenario Professor Michael Sandel uses to launch his course on moral reasoning. After the majority of students votes for killing the one person in order to save the lives of five others, Sandel presents three similar moral conundrums—each one artfully designed to make the decision more difficult. As students stand up to defend their conflicting choices, it becomes clear that the assumptions behind our moral reasoning are often contradictory, and the question of what is right and what is wrong is not always black and white. Plus overview of what philosophy is.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBdfcR-8hEY>

start to 24:40 (24 min, 40 sec)

Justice: What's the Right Thing To Do? (Episode 1, part 2) "The Moral Side of Murder"

Sandel introduces the principles of utilitarian philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, with a famous nineteenth century legal case involving a shipwrecked crew of four. After nineteen days lost at sea, the captain decides to kill the weakest amongst them, the young cabin boy, so that the rest can feed on his blood and body to survive. The case sets up a classroom debate about the moral validity of utilitarianism—and its doctrine that the right thing to do is whatever produces "the greatest good for the greatest number."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBdfcR-8hEY>

24:40 to 53:40 (29 min)

Justice: What's the Right Thing To Do? (Episode 13, part 1) "A Lesson in Lying"

Immanuel Kant's stringent theory of morality allows for no exceptions. Kant believed that telling a lie, even a white lie, is a violation of one's own dignity. Professor Sandel asks students to test Kant's theory with this hypothetical case: if your friend were hiding inside your home, and a person intent on killing your friend came to your door and asked you where he was, would it be wrong to tell a lie? If so, would it be moral to try to mislead the murderer without actually lying? This leads to a discussion of the morality of misleading truths. Sandel wraps up the lecture with a video clip of one of the most famous, recent examples of dodging the truth: President Clinton talking about his relationship with Monica Lewinsky.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqzW0eHzDSQ>

9:00 to 22:30 (13 min, 30 sec)

Justice: What's the Right Thing To Do? (Episode 5, part 1) "Hired Guns"

During the Civil War, men drafted into war had the option of hiring substitutes to fight in their place. Professor Sandel asks students whether they consider this policy just. Many do not, arguing that it is unfair to allow the affluent to avoid serving and risking their lives by paying less privileged citizens to fight in their place. This leads to a classroom debate about war and conscription. Is today's voluntary army open to the same objection? Should military service be allocated by the labor market or by conscription? What role should patriotism play, and what are the obligations of citizenship? Is there a civic duty to serve one's country? And are utilitarians and libertarians able to account for this duty?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yT4RZy1t3s>

start to 27:00

Justice: What's the Right Thing To Do? (Episode 5, part 2) "Motherhood for Sale"

In this lecture, Professor Sandel examines the principle of free-market exchange in light of the contemporary controversy over reproductive rights. Sandel begins with a humorous discussion of the business of egg and sperm donation. He then describes the case of Baby M—a famous legal battle in the mid-eighties that raised the unsettling question, "Who owns a baby?" In 1985, a woman named Mary Beth Whitehead signed a contract with a New Jersey couple, agreeing to be a surrogate mother in exchange for a fee of \$10,000. However, after giving birth, Ms. Whitehead decided she wanted to keep the child, and the case went to court. Sandel and students debate the nature of informed consent, the morality of selling a human life, and the meaning of maternal rights.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yT4RZy1t3s>

27:25 to 53:50