

# ***Fall 2019***

## ***“Justice: What’s The Right Thing To Do”***

***With your coordinator Mike Wood***

***Tuesday 11:00 til 12:45, Paradise Campus***

- Sep 17     The Morality of Murder & A Case for Cannibalism
- Sep 24     How Much is a Life Worth & The Greatest Good
- Oct 1      Redistributive Taxation & Freedom to Choose
- Oct 8      Natural Rights & Giving Them Up
- Oct 15     Avoiding the Draft & Avoiding Parenthood
- Oct 22     Motives & Morality
- Oct 29     Principles (Rawls) & Community
- Nov 5      What’s Fair & What’s Deserved
- Nov 12     The Good Citizen & Individual Freedom
- Nov 19     Same Sex Marriage & The Good Life

# ***“Justice: What’s The Right Thing To Do”***

More than 14,000 students have taken JUSTICE, making it one of Harvard's most popular courses. In this DVD series Professor Michael Sandel's course aims to help viewers become more critically minded thinkers about the moral decisions we all face in our everyday lives. Sandel presents students with ethical dilemmas on modern day issues -- such as affirmative action and same-sex marriage -- then conducts lively, engaging, and remarkably intimate debates that challenge students' moral reasoning.

Each session contains two 25 minute DVD episodes in which Professor Sandel introduces the principles and then engages with the students. We will take time in each class to discuss the subjects.

## **What will this course be about?**

Excerpts from the introduction to *Justice: What’s The Right Thing To Do?* by Michael Sandel

To ask whether a society is just is to ask how it distributes the things we prize—income and wealth; duties and rights; powers and opportunities, offices and honors. A just society distributes these goods in the right way; it gives each person his or her due. The hard questions begin when we ask what people are due, and why.

[We will explore the three major] ways of approaching the distribution of goods: maximizing welfare, respecting freedom, and promoting virtue. Each of these ideals suggests a different way of thinking about justice.

We begin with the idea of maximizing welfare. Much contemporary debate is about how to promote prosperity, or improve our standard of living, or spur economic growth. Why do we care about these things? The most obvious answer is that we think prosperity makes us better off than we would otherwise be—as individuals and as a society. To explore this idea, we turn to utilitarianism, the most influential account of how and why we should maximize welfare, or, as the utilitarians put it, seek the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

Next, we take up a range of theories that connect justice to freedom. Most of these theories emphasize respect for the individual rights, though they disagree among themselves about which rights are most important. Some of the most hard-fought political arguments of our time take place [within the poles of the freedom approach to justice]. [At one pole are] libertarians who believe that justice consists in respecting and upholding the voluntary choices made by consenting adults. [At the opposite pole are egalitarians] who argue that justice requires policies that remedy social and economic disadvantages and give everyone a fair chance at success.

Finally, we turn to theories that see justice as bound up with virtue and the good life. Some people...find the virtue argument discomfiting. The reason: It seems more judgmental than arguments that appeal to welfare and freedom. The virtue argument...rests on a judgment that the state should [encourage certain virtues and discourage certain vices]. But who is to judge what is virtue and what is vice? This dilemma points to one of the great questions of political philosophy: Does a just society seek to promote the virtue of its citizens? Or should law be neutral toward competing conceptions of virtue, so that citizens can be free to choose for themselves the best way to live?

Some of our debates reflect disagreement about what it means to maximize welfare or respect freedom or cultivate virtue. Others involve disagreement about what to do when these ideals conflict. Political philosophy cannot resolve these disagreements once and for all. But it can give shape to the arguments we have, and bring moral clarity to the alternatives we confront as democratic citizens.

This book [and this course] explores the strengths and weaknesses of these three ways of thinking about justice.