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REITH LECTURES 2009: A NEW CITIZENSHIP

Presenter: Professor Michael Sandel

Lecture 2: Morality in Politics

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SUE LAWLEY: Hello and welcome to Rhodes House in Oxford for the second in this year's series of BBC Reith Lectures. Designed by Sir Herbert Baker, this is a magnificent retreat for the university's Rhodes scholars: students from around the world who've been awarded fellowships to study for degrees at Oxford.

The scholarships were set up under the will of that one-man colonial whirlwind, Sir Cecil Rhodes. He wanted his legacy to enable students who displayed qualities of truth and courage, essential to good public duty. Bill Clinton was a Rhodes scholar, and so indeed was our Reith Lecturer this year: Michael Sandel.

And public duty is very much what this year's four lectures are all about. He's called them 'A New Citizenship'. He began last week in London by addressing the issue surrounding the moral limits of markets. Tonight his subject is one that's very close to public concerns in Britain currently. It's called 'Morality in Politics'. Please welcome the BBC Lecturer for 2009: Professor Michael Sandel.

(APPLAUSE)

SUE LAWLEY: Just a few words before we begin, Michael. I mean when you were here - 1975, wasn't it - were you a kind of long-haired activist?

MICHAEL SANDEL: Well long-haired, long-haired student.

SUE LAWLEY: (LAUGHS) But you had been an activist, I think, at high school in LA, hadn't you?

MICHAEL SANDEL: I think you're thinking of the story about when I was President of my student body class in high school, yes.

SUE LAWLEY: And you went pursuing the then Governor of California, who was one Ronald Reagan.

MICHAEL SANDEL: I went to high school in Pacific Palisades, California, where he lived, he had his home. I thought it would be fun to try to bring him to the school where almost everyone, all of us, disagreed with his politics. It was a Left Liberal student body.

SUE LAWLEY: But how did you persuade him to come?

MICHAEL SANDEL: First I sent a letter, which was ignored. Then my mother learned reading a magazine that he liked jelly beans. So I bought six pounds of jelly beans, put them in a box with a bow, and delivered them to his house where there were state troopers and guard dogs barking. And about a week later, he called the school and said he'd come. (LAUGHTER)

SUE LAWLEY: So what happened? Did you really do him over?

MICHAEL SANDEL: Well I prepared ... I was a high school debater, Sue, and thought I was really very good, and Ronald Reagan held views that were anathema to me and my classmates. So I prepared the toughest questions I could muster and for 25 minutes or so grilled him in front of the 2,000 plus students. And somehow he charmed everyone in the room and then left! (LAUGHTER)

SUE LAWLEY: What is the moral of this story: beware the charm of politicians, or don't be bedazzled by celebrity? I mean what went wrong with the grilling you

prepared?

MICHAEL SANDEL: Well either I wasn't good enough or he was too good.
(LAWLEY LAUGHS) And he went on, having been Governor of California at the moment, to work his charms on the American people.

LAWLEY: Michael, I'm sure you're good enough for us and I'm sure you'll work your charms on us this evening. Can I invite you to deliver your second lecture?
Thank you.

MICHAEL SANDEL: Thank you, Sue.

(APPLAUSE)

MICHAEL SANDEL: Well thank you, thank you very much. It's a great pleasure being here. Returning to Oxford brings back many fond memories, including one related to the subject of my previous lecture about markets and morals. When I was in Oxford back in the late 1970s, they still had separate colleges for men and women and the women's colleges had rules against overnight male guests. These rules were rarely enforced and easily violated. Or so I was told. (LAUGHTER) Pressure was growing to relax these rules, which became a subject of debate at St. Anne's, which was then an all women's college. Some of the older women on the faculty were traditionalists. They opposed allowing male guests. They believed in protecting the moral virtue, as they saw it, of their young women students. But times had changed and the traditionalists were embarrassed to give the real reasons for their objection, so they translated their moral argument into an economic one. "If men stay overnight", they argued, "the costs to the college will increase". How, you might wonder? "Well", they said, "they'll want to take baths, and that will use hot water". (LAUGHTER) "Furthermore", they argued, "we'll have to replace the mattresses more often". (LAUGHTER) The reformers met these arguments by adopting the following compromise: each woman could have a maximum of three overnight guests each week provided each guest paid 50 pence a night to defray the costs to the college. The next day, the headline in The Guardian read: 'St. Anne's girls 50 pence a night'.

(LAUGHTER) So there you have a lesson in the perils of reducing moral considerations to economic ones.

My theme in these lectures generally is a new citizenship. In this lecture, my subject is morality in politics. I'm not referring here to the morality of politicians. I'm referring instead to the role that moral and religious argument should play in political discourse and in justifying laws. Many people shudder at the prospect. "Isn't it dangerous?", they ask, "to bring morality and religion into politics? Isn't it safer for a government to try to be neutral and avoid taking sides on the moral and religious convictions its citizens espouse?" I say no, not necessarily, for two reasons. First, it's often not possible for government to be neutral on substantive moral questions; and, second, the attempt to do so can make for an impoverished public discourse.

Let me begin where I left off last time with a case about buying and selling. Some couples are unable to bear children of their own, but they don't want to adopt. They want a genetically related child, so they provide the egg and sperm and hire a woman to carry the pregnancy for them: a surrogate mother. When the surrogate gives birth, she turns the child over to the commissioning couple. Commercial surrogacy is illegal in the UK and in most European countries. In the United States, some states permit the practice and others prohibit it. Even where it's legal, it's quite expensive.

Confronted with high costs and legal restrictions, people have turned to a familiar solution: paid pregnancy is now outsourced to low cost providers. In 2002, India legalised commercial surrogacy in hopes of attracting foreign customers. And in Mumbai, an obstetrician recently told the London Evening Standard that she delivers on average one baby from a surrogate for a British couple every 48 hours. From the standpoint of market efficiency, outsourcing pregnancy to women in the developing world makes perfect sense. The money the women earn (around 7500 dollars) is often more than they would make in 15 years. For the prospective parents, hiring an Indian woman to bear their child is a great bargain. The total cost is about a third of what it would be in Britain or in the United States. Everyone gains. And yet there is something unsettling about this new global industry. One source of unease may be a doubt about consent. Have the women freely chosen to bear other people's babies for

pay? Or are they driven to it in effect by force of poverty and economic necessity? But even if we're satisfied that the arrangement is not coercive, there remains a further moral question - not about consent but about degradation. Does treating babies and pregnancies as commodities degrade them? Does it fail to value them in the right way?

Elizabeth Anderson, a moral philosopher, has applied a version of this idea to the surrogacy debate. She argues that surrogacy contracts degrade women and children by treating them as if they were commodities. And by degradation, she means creating something in accordance with a lower mode of valuation than is proper to it. Commercial surrogacy degrades children, she argues, because it uses them as instruments of profit rather than cherishes them as persons worthy of love and care. It also degrades women, Anderson argues, by treating their bodies as factories and by paying them not to bond with the children they bear. *The surrogate labour is alienated*, Anderson writes, *because she must divert it from the end which the social practices of pregnancy properly promote; namely an emotional bond with the child.*

So this idea that there are certain proper ends or purposes to social practices, this idea suggests that to determine the right way of valuing things, we have to figure out the purpose, the end of the social practice in question. And this idea is an idea that goes all the way back to Aristotle. Let me give you a very brief summary of Aristotle's theory of justice. Justice means giving people what they deserve. That's it; that's my summary of Aristotle's theory of justice. (LAUGHTER) Now of course who deserves what depends on the kind of thing being distributed, so Aristotle says suppose we're distributing flutes. Who should get the best ones? His answer: the best flute players. Why? Well the most obvious reason - you might be thinking - is that this will result in the best music, making everybody better off. But this isn't Aristotle's reason. He thinks the best flute should go to the best flute players because that's what flutes are for: to be played well. The purpose of flutes, and of musical performance generally, is to produce excellent music. It's also to honour and recognise those who are great musicians. That's why the best musicians should get the best flutes. But this case seems too easy. Most people would agree that flutes are for the sake of producing music. What happens if people *disagree* about the purpose of the activity in question?

Is it possible to reason about the purpose of social practices in the face of disagreement? Aristotle believes that it is, and I think he's right.

Now let's shift from flutes to golf. Here is an Aristotelian story about a controversy over golf. Casey Martin was a professional golfer with a bad leg. He had a circulatory disorder and so walking the golf course for 18 holes caused him considerable pain and posed a serious risk of fracture. Despite his disability, Casey Martin was an excellent golfer. He asked the PGA, the Professional Golfers Association, for permission to use a golf cart during tournaments. They said no. Martin took his case to court. He argued that the law about disability accommodation, the Americans With Disabilities Act, required reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities, provided (as the law said) that the change did not fundamentally alter the nature of the activity. That was the law. Some of the biggest names in golf testified in the case. Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Ken Venturi all defended the ban on carts. They argued that fatigue is an important factor in tournament golf and that riding rather than walking would be an unfair advantage. Believe it or not, the case went all the way to the United States Supreme Court. What's interesting about the case is that as the justices wrestled with it, they found themselves facing an Aristotelian question. The court had to determine the essential nature of the activity in question: is walking the course essential to golf or merely incidental? To resolve the question about Casey Martin's rights, the court had to determine the purpose or the essential nature of the game. What do you suppose they decided? Well the court ruled 7 to 2 that Casey Martin had a right to use a golf cart. The court concluded that accommodating his disability by letting him ride in a cart would not fundamentally alter the game, which was - the justices concluded - mainly about making shots, trying to get the ball into a very small hole.

(LAUGHTER)

What, after all, was the conflict over the golf cart really about? On the surface, it was about fairness. But if fairness were the only thing at stake, there would have been an easy and obvious solution: let *all* golfers use carts in the tournaments. But this solution was anathema to professional golf, even more unthinkable than making an exception for Casey Martin. Why? Because the dispute was less about fairness than about honour and recognition - specifically the desires of the PGA and top golfers that

their sport be recognised and respected as an *athletic* event. Let me put the point as delicately as possible. Golfers are somewhat sensitive about the status of their game. (LAUGHTER) It involves no running or jumping and the ball stands still.

(LAUGHTER) No-one doubts that golf is a demanding game of skill, but the honour and recognition accorded great golfers depends on their sport being seen as a physically demanding, athletic competition. If the game at which they excel can be played while riding in a cart, they're recog... (LAUGHTER) their recognition as athletes could be questioned or diminished. So whoever's right about the essential nature of golf, the federal case over Casey Martin's cart offers a powerful illustration of Aristotle's point: debates about rights are often unavoidably debates about the purpose of social institutions, the goods they allocate, and the virtues they honour and reward.

Let's turn now to a hotly contested contemporary issue: the question of same sex marriage. It's a prominent issue in the United States. Several American states now permit gay marriage; many others allow for civil unions or civil partnerships. These are arrangements that stop short of marriage but grant legal protections, inheritance rights, hospital visitation rights, child custody arrangements and so on to unmarried partners of the same sex who live together. So here's the question: should the state recognise gay marriage on the same basis as marriage between a man and a woman? Some people say yes and argue for same sex marriage on what they claim are neutral, non-judgemental grounds. Whether one personally approves or disapproves of gay and lesbian relationships, individuals should be free to choose their marital partners. Now if this argument is a sufficient basis for according state recognition to same sex marriage, then it's true - the issue can be resolved without entering into controversies about the purpose of marriage and the moral status of homosexual relationships. But the case for same sex marriage *can't* be made on neutral or non-judgemental grounds. Here's why. The debate over same sex marriage is fundamentally a debate about whether gay and lesbian unions are worthy of the honour and recognition that in our society state sanctioned marriage confers, so the underlying moral question is unavoidable. To see why this is so, it's important to bear in mind that the state can take three possible positions toward marriage, not just two. First, it can recognise marriage only between a man and a woman, though perhaps offering gay men and

lesbians civil partnerships, as the UK currently does. That's policy one. Or policy two: it can recognise same sex marriage on an equal basis with heterosexual marriage, as my home state of Massachusetts has done. Or three: it could decline to recognise marriage of any kind and leave this role to private associations and religious communities. Now the third policy is purely hypothetical. As far as I know, no state or country has renounced marriage as a government function. But policy three is the ideal libertarian solution to the marriage debate. It doesn't abolish marriage, but it does abolish marriage as a state sanctioned institution.

Michael Kinsley, an opinion journalist with libertarian sympathies, defends this policy, this third option, as a way out of what he sees as a hopeless argument over marriage. *The solution*, Kinsley writes, *is to end the institution of government sanctioned marriage or to privatise marriage*. Here's how he puts it. Quote: *Let churches and other religious institutions continue to offer marriage ceremonies. Let department stores and casinos get into the act if they want. And, yes, if three people want to get married or one person wants to marry herself and someone else wants to conduct a ceremony and declare them married, let 'em*. That's Kinsley. So he proposes in effect to replace all state sanctioned marriages, gay and straight, with civil partnerships.

Now relatively few people on either side of the same sex marriage debate have embraced the disestablishment proposal, but this third option helps us see why proponents and opponents of same sex marriage must contend with the substantive moral and religious controversy about the purpose of marriage and the virtues it honours. Many who defend a right to same sex marriage try to rest their claim on neutral grounds to avoid passing judgement on the moral meaning of marriage, and this attempt draws heavily on the ideas of non-discrimination and freedom of choice. But these ideas can't by themselves justify the right. If freedom of choice were all that mattered, the state would have no grounds for limiting marriage to two persons. Consensual, polygamous partnerships would also qualify. And if the state really wanted to be neutral and respect whatever choices individuals wish to make, it would have to adopt Kinsley's proposal and get out of the business of conferring recognition on *any* marriages. This would be the equivalent, in the case of marriage, of letting

everyone ride in a golf cart if they chose. The real issue in the gay marriage debate is not freedom of choice, but whether same sex unions are worthy of honour and recognition by the community, whether they fulfil the purpose of the social institution of marriage properly understood.

The Massachusetts Court that became the first court in the United States to require recognition of same sex marriage understood this point. Though the court gave a nod to neutrality and freedom of choice, it made clear that it did not intend to open the way to polygamous marriage, nor to call for the abolition or disestablishment of marriage. Chief Justice Margaret Marshall wrote the opinion for the court, and in making the case she stepped outside the bounds of liberal neutrality to affirm the moral worth of same sex unions and to offer a view about the purpose of marriage properly understood. More than a private arrangement between two consenting adults, she wrote: *marriage is a form of public recognition and approval. In a real sense there are three partners to every civil marriage: two willing spouses and an approving state.*

If marriage is an honorific institution, what virtues does it honour? To ask this question is to ask about the purpose of marriage, and this is really the heart of the dispute. Opponents of same sex marriage claim that the primary purpose of marriage is procreation. Since same sex couples are unable to procreate on their own, the opponents argue they don't have a right to marry. They lack, so to speak, the relevant virtue. This line of reasoning is at the heart of the case against same sex marriage and Justice Marshall took it on directly. She disputes the claim that procreation is the primary purpose of marriage, and she does so by showing that marriage as currently practised and regulated by the state does not require the ability to procreate. *Heterosexual couples who apply for marriage licences are not asked about their ability or intention to conceive children. Fertility is not a condition of marriage. People who have never consummated their marriage and never plan to may be married; people who can't stir from their death bed may marry.* So wrote Justice Marshall for the court. *And so, she concludes, it's the exclusive and permanent commitment of the married partners to one another, not the begetting of children, that is the sine qua non of civil marriage.*

So how does the argument work? Part of the argument consists of an interpretation of the purpose or essence of marriage as it currently exists. Another part of the argument is to ask which interpretation of marriage celebrates virtues worth honouring. What counts as the purpose of marriage partly depends on what qualities we think marriage should celebrate and affirm. This makes the underlying moral and religious controversy unavoidable. What is the moral status of gay and lesbian relationships? Marshall is not neutral on this question. She argues in a court opinion that same sex relationships are as worthy of respect as heterosexual ones. So the case for same sex marriage is not neutral, after all. In order to decide who should qualify for marriage, we have to think through the purpose of marriage and the virtues it honours, and this carries us onto contested moral terrain where we can't remain neutral toward competing conceptions of the good life.

What does all of this tell us? The attempt to detach arguments about justice and rights from arguments about the good life is mistaken for two reasons: first, it's not always possible to decide questions of justice and rights without resolving substantive moral questions, and this is true whether we're arguing about surrogacy or about how to distribute flutes or political authority or the right to use a golf cart or same sex marriage. Arguments about justice and rights are unavoidably arguments about the moral meaning of the goods at stake. The second reason is that even where it may be possible, it may not be desirable.

And that brings me back to the question of revitalising our public discourse in democratic life. But if, as I've argued, it's not possible for government to be neutral on these disagreements, is it nonetheless possible to conduct our politics on the basis of mutual respect? The answer, I think, is yes. In recent decades, we've come to assume that respecting our fellow citizens' moral and religious convictions means ignoring them, leaving them undisturbed, conducting our public life in so far as possible without reference to them. But this stance of avoidance makes for a spurious respect. Often it means suppressing moral disagreement rather than actually avoiding it. This in turn provokes backlash and resentment, as we see in the rise of religious fundamentalism. A more robust public engagement with our moral disagreements could provide a stronger, not a weaker basis for mutual respect. What would that look

like? Well rather than avoid the moral and religious convictions of our fellow citizens, we should attend to them more directly - sometimes by challenging and contesting them, sometimes by listening and learning from them. It is always possible that learning more about a moral or religious doctrine will lead us to like it less, but we cannot know until we try. A politics of moral engagement is not only a more inspiring ideal than a politics of avoidance. If it's true, as I've tried to argue, that our debates about justice are often inescapably arguments about the good life, then a politics of moral engagement is also a more promising basis for a just society. Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

SUE LAWLEY: Many thanks indeed, Michael Sandel. And now I'd like to open it up for questions from the floor here in Rhodes House in Oxford where we have an audience certainly of academics, but I think we have politicians, students, and many of the good people of the city too. I think you've been writing down some questions, as we went. Please continue to do so and they'll be collected. I'll try and feed them in as we go. But in fact I'm going to call the first question because we felt it only fitting that we should begin with a Rhodes scholar, and we have one here with us. Her name is Kate Brennan and she's from Australia. Kate Brennan, your question please?

BRENNAN: You've spoken of the problem with public debate. Many of the traditional forums for debate such as political meetings have been in steep decline for decades. How then in a globalised world do you envisage this new public debate taking place?

MICHAEL SANDEL: What I think we need to try to do is to try to build institutions of civil society that cut across national boundaries and provide ways of debating questions that spill across borders. And also to build up those forms of civil society that may be closer to citizens than national assemblies are, or national newspapers, so that more local particular sites within civil society can contribute to a rejuvenation of democratic discourse.

SUE LAWLEY: What do you feel about that, Kate? I mean it sounds to me as if you're not acknowledging the existence of the Internet there.

BRENNAN: I think when you talk about bringing these kind of debates closer to people, then the Internet probably plays a role in that. So I'd be interested to hear what role you think the Internet with its new media could play in that type of process and how will it affect democracy?

MICHAEL SANDEL: My hunch is - and I don't know the answer to this - my hunch is that the prospect is mixed. The good news of the Internet is that it provides a cheap way to communicate. The not so good news is that the Internet can't possibly hope to replace direct personal engagement. So even as we take advantage of more universal forms of political communication such as the Internet, I think there's going to be a growing demand and hunger for more particular forms of political identity and communication and association.

SUE LAWLEY: I'm going to call Evan Harris I think, at the back there, who's a local MP here in Oxford, for Oxford West and Abingdon. Evan Harris, your question please?

HARRIS: Thank you. I do a lot of public policy on abortion and gay rights and assisted dying and embryos, and it seems to me that it's not the morality that's missing on either side. I come from the non-religious side and I would say that I bring morality - the principle of non-discrimination, the principle of not harming someone unless there's evidence that your policy creates harm. Obviously the religious side bring their morality. But one side, I think, tends to bring evidence and an acceptance that their position might change with evidence; whereas another side, the religious side, is much less likely to accept and consider evidence and bring that to the table because their moral position is relatively absolute. And so shouldn't we be arguing that we should bring evidence into the moral arguments, where appropriate, not bring morality in when it's already there on both sides?

MICHAEL SANDEL: I agree with what may be the impulse behind your worry,

which is that if people simply assert dogmas rather than offer reasons and listen to the reasons given by their interlocutors in public debate, that's not a very valuable contribution. Where I think you and I may disagree is on this. I don't think that those who enter into public discourse and advance moral arguments that may be informed by faith traditions, I don't think they have a monopoly on dogmatic assertions. I think there are dogmatic secularists, just as there are dogmatic religious fundamentalists.

SUE LAWLEY: A question here.

NGAIRE WOODS: Hello, I'm Ngaire Woods based here at Oxford University. Some would say you know politicians have outsourced morality. When they get a difficult moral decision to make, they appoint a commission to advise them. And of course when politicians do claim a moral case for their action, I think the public rather worries that the politicians might be saying it's right because it's right for them, but not necessarily because it's morally right for the nation or for the whole of the good of society. I'd love to hear from you where is it that politicians fit in? Would you keep them out of your moral discourse? Or if you're going to put them in, how are you going to put them in?

MICHAEL SANDEL: I would make greater demands on them and try to lift them up, so that they can make a better contribution than typically they do. But as for outsourcing to commissions moral judgements, sometimes the creation of commissions to grapple with hard moral questions can actually be not a way of sweeping under the rug a serious moral question that arises for policy or law, but a way of enlarging public debate and argument about it. As for politicians being very bad at making arguments, that's always going to be true in politics. The question is what is the alternative? I think one of the things that so struck and stirred the American public about Barack Obama's campaign is that he, for the first time in quite a long time in presidential politics, was actually speaking in a way that resonated to people's hunger for moral and even spiritual discourse and bringing it to bear on politics in public life.

SUE LAWLEY: What about Daniel Hermel, a student?

HERMEL: If one of the purposes of politics is to confer recognition upon civic and moral virtue, does that mean that we should choose our politicians based on their personal moral virtues such as their fidelity to their spouses and their qualities as good parents, as well as choosing politicians based on their substantive policy proposals?

MICHAEL SANDEL: I would say that the character of politicians is relevant if we think part of the purpose of politics is educative. Now whether the aspect of character most relevant to political education and judgement has to do with marital behaviour, I'm not so sure because character is a complicated thing. We have learned looking at a wide range of politically capable miscreants (LAUGHTER) and policy positions alone, I agree, are not a sufficient condition for choosing a good leader or an effective leader.

SUE LAWLEY: Julian Savulescu, who's Professor of Practical Ethics.

SAVULESCU: Thanks, Michael. I want to put pressure on your claim that we should give a place to religious moralities and values. Now many values are shared by both religious and non-religious people. So the value of love, family, well-being, happiness, longevity - these are all values that can be defended in secular and religious terms - but when those values have a distinctively religious basis, I don't believe they have *any* role in public life. So to take your example of same sex marriage, you picked out the two values of a loving commitment or the value of procreation. Both of those are widely defensible across society, but notice in no place in the judgement was there appeal to particular religious authorities or religious moralities. So nobody said that homosexuality was a perversion or unnatural or against the dictates of some religion. So can you clarify the role of religious values in public discourse?

MICHAEL SANDEL: Well, first, the idea that we should only admit those arguments that everyone can agree with or everyone can find to be reasonable, I think that's not something we can know or specify in advance. The moral of the story is we can't know in advance what the moral source of a good argument can be, and we may learn from arguments that come from surprising sources. And so I'm arguing for a

politics that remains open and hospitable to a range of moral sources, be they based in faith or in secular ideologies or reason.

SUE LAWLEY: Right, we're going to leave that issue there. I'm going to go ... Well I think this is a change of issue. Just in front here.

HELM: My name's Dieter Helm and I'm an economist at Oxford. I was struck by two parts of your argument. The first part about morality and politics coming together, which I find not at all difficult. But take a subject which is burningly political and moral: climate change. If I ask myself what's the moral question to which climate change policy is an answer, I can talk about intergenerational equity, about neutrality, and that's enough. I don't need Aristotle or the good life to engage in a moral debate about politics. So can I have the first bit, the morality and the politics, and the conventional discussion of neutrality and intergenerational equity and so on without having to buy your Aristotelian ethics on top?

SUE LAWLEY: Briefly if you would, Michael.

MICHAEL SANDEL: I'm afraid you can't, for the following reason. That ... Take climate change. Yes, there are conventional arguments about intergenerational justice. Let me grant you that. Really to deal with the problem of the politics that will deal ultimately with climate change will be a politics, I suspect, that changes the wanton and profligate attitudes we have toward the natural world and toward the environment as well as toward future generations' enjoyment of it. I have a hunch - and this is only a hunch - about the way politics in democratic societies play themselves out, and I suppose it's also a hunch about how important, eventful movements of social and political reform take place. They take place when people are persuaded by their circumstance and by the arguments and debates they hear around them, about the need to question and change their attitudes and their ways of life. And I think that the politics of the environment, maybe more clearly than any other politics we confront today, requires a more ambitious engagement with what the good life is and how we should regard our relation to the planet we share.

SUE LAWLEY: Michael, thank you very much indeed. My thanks also to all of you. Next week we'll be broadcasting from the Centre for Life in Newcastle where Michael will be talking about genetics and morals - the issues surrounding designer babies, designer athletes and so-called smart pills, which could bring about even designer students. Can we, should we check our impulses to achieve such "perfection"? That's the same time next week. For now, from Oxford, Michael Sandel, Reith Lecturer 2009, thank you very much indeed. Thank you.

MICHAEL SANDEL: Thank you, Sue.

(APPLAUSE)