Big Conversation: Political morality

KAREN: Well, that was an interesting chat in our philosophy cafe. I'm joined by Sophie-Grace, and Sean. How did that all go for you? We were asking our students about might political leaders faced with national security crisis have to get their hands dirty?

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: It was all very quick for us. So many questions coming up, there wasn't time to bat them away or answer them or anything. But yeah, we had a good time in there, I think.

SEAN CORDELL: Yeah, I think Ben Tamplin kind of nailed it, because he said, does national security give political leaders justification to act in ways which would otherwise seem immoral? And that's probably a better way of putting the question that I came up with that we've been looking at. But that is basically the question of dirty hands. Is it that case that people in public high office, faced with the sort of scenarios that we mortals are not, forced to do wrong to do right, as it were? They're forced to do the wrong thing sometimes. They're constrained by their - by the situation and their role.

KAREN: Excellent. Well, that is the topic of our very next big conversation. So I hope that's got you warmed up and ready to start chatting. Don't forget, if that chat does move too fast, there is a little pin button that you can use to stop it and scroll it down and see what people have been saying. But do jump in. Oh yeah. Sorry. It was all very quick, wasn't it?

SEAN CORDELL: Can we do that with real people?

KAREN: We're having another philosophy cafe later, so we'll get the opportunity to do that then. But if you have missed any of that, do scroll back and see what points have been raised, if you would like to. And if you are watching only, you can choose the live and interactive version where you can see a lot of the chat coming up on your screen. So just pop back to the website and come in through that button. You need an Open University computer username to do that, but that's quick, free, and easy to get hold of. And then you'll see all the fabulous chat and interactive widgets that are going on.

OK, so our big conversation. Again, where we get lots of different people from areas across the university. I'm joined by Richard Heffernan from the Social Sciences, Jonquil Lowe, also from social sciences - but Richard is from Economics and John - sorry, Richard is from Politics and - oh, dear. Jonquil's from Economics. And Sean and Sophie-Grace from our Arts faculty, who are in Philosophy. Wonderful.

OK. So you guys came up with this idea of a question, and we thought, well, let's get some people from the social sciences in. And the first time that we started looking at this, because we know we like our definitions and our parameters, we started thinking about ethics of political morality. And then you insisted I took ethics out of that title. Now why was that?

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: Well, just to avoid using two words that mean the same thing. That was all it is.

KAREN: Right. OK. So going back, then. Definitions. We've been talking a lot about this. Morality.

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: Doing what you should do and not doing what you shouldn't do. And having an account of why one thing is wrong and another thing is right and why some things are good and other things are bad.

KAREN: So what we're really talking about now is, should - are politicians doing the right thing?

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: What we're talking about is what happens when someone gets into the office and suddenly, whereas before, they only had to decide whether to divorce their wife or whether to get this kind of fair trade coffee or that kind of not fair trade coffee - they were facing the sort of moral problems that ordinary people face. Suddenly they're facing the kind of moral problems that you've got if you sit in number 10 Downing Street or if you sit in the Oval Office or if you sit in the leadership in Beijing. Suddenly you're facing decisions that obviously and directly affect millions, perhaps billions, of people, and you're the one who's got to take them.

And the question is, when you're in that situation, how do you decide - do you decide in the same way as ordinary people? And do you operate under the same rules as ordinary people? Or would it be right to say that if you're in that situation then you're in a different place and different rules apply?

And that's the problem with dirty hands, because a lot of people think in this kind of situation you have to do things that would be dreadful things to do in ordinary life. But given that you're in power, you can't avoid doing them. You get your hands dirty, which is why it's called the problem of dirty hands. You can't help getting your hands dirty. Some people say it's bound to be like that in politics. And that's our question. Is it?

KAREN: Well, it's all very theoretical, you see, and this is why we have people from the Social Sciences coming along to give us some concrete examples. So whilst you two are both researching actively in these sorts of parameters, also as lay people - and this should be the idea of these big conversations, is that it's something that we can relate to - I wonder about your experiences.

Jonquil, we were talking a little bit about inequality the other day, weren't we, and about this idea of how sometimes political leaders may need to make decisions that can be difficult. And of course, that's a very topical issue right now.

JONQUIL LOWE: Well, it is very topical, because since the global financial crisis, a lot of governments have gone into austerity measures. And here in the UK, there's a big debate about who should bear the brunt of those measures and a lot of concern that, with welfare cuts, public service cuts, the cost is falling disproportionately on people who are least able to pay. Now, that's not a life and death situation. Actually, there's a whole other debate going on as to whether low-income families put under stress when their benefits are cut in fact sometimes are driven to suicide.

So maybe it's not as clear blue water from that kind of dilemma. But obviously, governments there, they're saying, well, for the greater good, to save the economy, to make it well in the future, we're going to have to sacrifice some people's well-being, at least for the time being. Is that moral? I struggle. I can see the problem.

SEAN CORDELL: I think this is an important - there's this point at which the theoretical and the concrete really does intersect, because - and the way it intersects here is, the question there is, do politicians use the phenomenon or the problem of dirty hands too readily? So might politicians avert to that all too easily and say, I've got to do what I've got to do.

So it could be that there is a problem of dirty hands. It could be that politicians sometimes have to do some pretty awful things. Not saying it is, but it could be the case and still be true that in actual fact, people, in the way that you suggested, might - in other words, they misuse it, as it were, and use it as an excuse. That could be actually true.

JONQUIL LOWE: Well, actually, that sort of moves into a slightly different area, which is certainly when we have a government that's right-wing and believes in small state, it could indeed be not just that they're sacrificing some people for the greater good, but they are actually taking the opportunity to pursue a small-state agenda. That actually moves it on, doesn't it? The motivation then is not the greater good but an ideology.

KAREN: Richard, what do you think?

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: Well, the ideology could be from the left. It could be a left-wing government taxing people punitively and punishing those who work hard and play by the rules and advantaging those who don't. There's all sorts of ways in which you can take it.

But I think political science, insofar as it has a contribution to make to debates such as this, it depends whether you're an analytical social-political scientist or a normative political scientist. The role of analytical political science is to describe and analyse and explain something without making a judgement on it. Normative political scientists tend to say whether something is right or something is wrong. And if you do take the question of political leaders, I suppose the first thing a political scientist would do, I think, would be to argue, well, what type of leader?

Broadly speaking, I think, we would agree that there are three types of regime found in the world. Authoritarian, totalitarian, and democratic. And a leader in one of those will operate very, very differently, because they define what is meant by dirty hands, and they also might not fess up to having dirty hands.

If you're Bashar Assad in Syria, you operate by a different set of normative rules than President Obama in the United States or even Putin in Russia. Very different. So it really depends where you're coming from before you answer the question, and it also depends, as a political scientist, whether you're speaking normatively or analytically, whether you're talking as a professional or as a citizen. Citizens have very different opinions, and sometimes professionals have to take stock of their professionalism and not express their political opinions when wearing their professional hat.

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: It might be normal, Richard, in a regime like Assad's, for hundreds of people to be tortured, as we saw in the paper today. That might be normal, but that doesn't make it right. Those are the rules they live by. But I guess part of Sean's point is that it's too easy for people in power, whatever kind of regime they're running, to say, well, this is a terrible situation, I'm going to have to do some terrible things, and just use that as an excuse for doing much more terrible things than they actually have to, even if it's true that they have to do some really hard things.

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: I agree. I think the key, post-enlightened regimes in the West and elsewhere now bound themselves by the rule of law. The rule of law was from Hobbes and from Locke and was linking the state to citizens, and citizens, therefore, were bound to the state. They had to obey rules and laws in order to benefit. And the state, too, is bound by rules and laws. It's accountable to the people and to itself.

So information is the sunlight that disinfects political actions. And if you're held accountable for what you do, you're much more likely to think twice before you do it. And that's why there would be a difference, shall we say, in the way the state in Syria treats its citizens and the state in the United States.

That's not to say that they're both perfect. One is certainly much more imperfect than the other in a normative analysis. Analytical, you could just simply describe what they do and allow other people to draw their conclusion.

JONQUIL LOWE: But the law sometimes is either not clear or is at least contestable. I was thinking of that case early September when the UK government killed a British citizen in Syria in order to stop a terrorist attack. But there's a big debate going on, as I understand it, about whether that was legally allowed. It's a different interpretation of United Nations law, I believe.

SEAN CORDELL: I was very interested in Richard's point about the analytical political science and normative political theory or political philosophy. And I was thinking of probably the go-to historical figure for this problem is Niccolo Machiavelli, after whom we have an adjective, Machiavellian. Not always usefully employed, but anyway. Machiavelli, on that subject, was talking about what the prince - he was a principality in his day - what the prince would just have to do in order to get the job done, and about, on some interpretations, a separate sphere of virtue, of virtu, for the prince. It's entirely separate from the Christian virtue that would nominate everyday life.

But what I'm interested in is he was kind of writing, almost straddling the two political science and political philosophy disciplines, because he was kind of trying to say, well, this is just how it is, rather than - but also saying, well, this is how it should be. He was trying to derive a philosophical theory from a kind of that's how it is stance. And some people have said, well actually the whole book was actually Machiavellian, as it were, a plea to the Medici to ingratiate himself with them. So it's interesting how those two things interact, I think.

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: I suppose Machiavelli was the first political advisor who told the world his private advice. And we still read it now and profit from it. On the point about democratic government taking actions, well, they're debated. They're discussed. They're commented on. They're held to account. There's a strong case that what the government did was perfectly legal and permissible in Syria. A targeted action. But the courts will be asked to adjudicate. A private court case has been called by people critical of the government. And now the court will adjudicate and fine.

JONQUIL LOWE: Well, that is the key point, isn't it? You say that these things are debated. But that was the problem, was the government was in a position where it felt it couldn't be public about what it was doing. But the critics - well, yeah, I think I agree with you. But the

critics say, well, OK, but that's carte blanche, then, for a prime minister to do whatever he can justify by his interpretation of the law without actually being held to account.

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: It isn't carte blanche if you can sit here and criticise it. If other people can hold him to account in Parliament, by asking questions, by making speeches, by the media interrogating, by the public sphere invading his private sphere, because he doesn't have a private sphere. He was the one who told us what happened. Parliament will consider. There is an investigation by the intelligence committee in Parliament. All information will be presented, and there will be a court case. So it isn't carte blanche. He's held to account in a way that in other, non-democratic regimes, the leaders aren't, because they will kill you if they're authoritarian or totalitarian for questioning what it is they do.

JONQUIL LOWE: Well, it's not retrospectively carte blanche, but I guess in an ideal world you'd want to have those kind of debates before an action took place, wouldn't you?

KAREN: Look at what you two have started.

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: I think one thing that's really interesting that Richard's contribution's bringing out is how important information is in the whole of this debate, and how central a role the media play, and how crucial it is - this was something that's coming through on the live feed, too, earlier - how crucial it is for us actually to have the facts. We can't criticise political leaders unless we actually know what's going on.

So here's a thought. It looks like we now have more information, more good information than people have ever had in the history of humanity. Why is it that we don't now have better respect for human rights and better political leadership than we've ever had in the history of humanity? Or maybe we do? What do you think?

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: We do, sure. We are almost the most perfect we've been in the West in terms of our respect for human rights.

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: I wasn't thinking just the West. I was thinking worldwide.

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: OK. Well, but I think even there, everything - a rising tide lifts all boats, large or small. And I think that there is a progression, largely because of information flows, and also because of a definition. That's not to say everything is perfect, but I think a sensible case could be made to say that it is more perfect now in terms of brutality, cruelty, committed by states, because we know about it. Sunlight is, as I said earlier - it's a cliche not of my making - a great disinfectant.

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: But some of these regimes or quasi-regimes are using YouTube to publicise their own brutal killings.

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: Yes, it's -

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: You know, this kind of - I see what you're saying, Richard, but there's one reaction which says, this is as good as it's ever been. Wow. That's scary.

JONQUIL LOWE: I will say, is it moral if people just change their behaviour because they're going to be found out? You know, just because the information's out there? Isn't morality about what you should do?

SEAN CORDELL: What about, I mean, this is good up to the right, it seems to me. But what about some sort of a leader of a liberal democracy? Can they be constrained by the evil projects of this, perhaps, to have to do awful things? And an example springs to mind, and if I've got the historical details wrong, I apologise. But Churchill, at the end of the war, Winston Churchill, is said to have not given away the fact that we had cracked the Enigma code by intercepting the bombing of Coventry.

So in other words, if the RAF had intercepted the Luftwaffe, it would've showed the Nazis, oh dear, we know what the Enigma code is. So what he did was make sure that we didn't. And the result was that Coventry got bombed. Flattened, OK?

Now, you might say, that's a terrible thing to do. We had the power to prevent a lot of this and didn't, and left his own, some of his own people to their peril. But that might be an example of just, he had to do what he had to do. He had to do wrong in order to do right. But that wasn't a situation - he wasn't the leader of a totalitarian regime. And he was at war with a tot - we were, the Allies were at war with a totalitarian regime.

And the idea is that this terrible decision he had to make was foisted upon them by the evils of others, not himself. So is it, can you be a clean-hands democratic leader, but before, sometimes, to have to do these awful things, which is kind of the question that we started with.

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: I don't know this Coventry case. That is new to me. I don't second-guess you, but I'm not aware of that in any way.

KAREN: It's like 'The Imitation Game'. I think we were talking about that. And a lot of people at home may have seen that film, which was out. And again, they really portrayed that whole idea that they cracked the code and they were having to watch all of these things happen - people dying, friends and family of the people involved dying in this dramatisation - and do that for the greater good. So people may have some thoughts on that at home as well. I'm sorry, what were you saying? Yeah.

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: My own instinct about 'The Imitation Game' case, the Enigma case, would be, if there's something particular, something specific for the sake of which you're allowing this happen, if you know what your greater good is, then it makes sense. I can't actually remember when Coventry was bombed. I think it was - sorry?

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: '41.

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: '41. So Hitler is bombing Coventry in '41. Churchill has in mind the fact that we want to keep hold of Enigma information as long as possible. '41 is pretty much the turning point of the war. Churchill knows that we're going to want to invade Europe sometime in the future. Now, for the sake of invading Europe in 1944, it might be worth holding back the fact that you know Enigma. Let it come out that you know Enigma when you want a D-day, because that is the greater good that you're playing for, to secure a foothold in Europe, to get back into Europe.

But where you don't know what the greater good is and where you keep postponing the greater good, you keep committing these relatively small bad acts for the sake of some big good act that you're going to do in the future, but that good act in the future is receding and receding. That seems to me - really is the road to hell being paved with good intentions.

I think the bombing of Coventry is not the best example, if I may say so, because nobody knew it would be as bad as it was. The incendiaries burned a largely wooden, mediaeval town. The weather conditions were ripe for fire. And so on.

The classic example I was always introduced to as a student was the one about the dropping of the atomic bomb in Nagasaki and Hiroshima - the other way around, Hiroshima first, then Nagasaki - in order to secure victory in the Pacific, done for many reasons, two of which were to prevent the Americans having to mount a full-scale invasion, which would have cost American lives but would also have cost many Japanese lives because of their commitment to defending the motherland. And so the argument was that the bomb was a necessary evil in order to secure the unconditional surrender of a militarist regime. And of course that cost the deaths of many people in the two cities, most all civilians, many of them children.

So is that - when do you take a different judgement on that? And then history of course comes in. I mean, the other time you come - history will come to your aid and help you. But then you can't punish the commanders in chief who take their decisions. But you can understand them, and that informs future activity, I suppose, in terms of judgments.

So again, it comes back down to this question of information, journalists, citizens, and historians all coming together to analyse. And if you try to explain something, then you're in a better judgement to have a conversation about it, and you form new moral rules that then enforce successive actions. So in that regard, the definition of dirty and hands is always changing according to a kind of rule of thumb that you imply. That has some effect.

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: It does depend so much on the details and the context. And when people debate an issue like the rightness or wrongness of bombing Japan in 1945, they tend to focus upon details like there was an offer from the Japanese crown prince for Japan to surrender before these bombs were dropped. That is sometimes said. I don't know for sure whether that's true or false. There's a question about whether that offer was received by the US.

So one interpretation of the events is that the US went ahead and bombed Japan anyway. Now, I'm not saying that's right or wrong. What I'm saying, as an interpretation of the historical facts, I'm saying that what matters in these cases is always to get to the detail and try and understand how the particular decisions were made. And another famous case which was discussed very much in Parliament in the 1980s, particularly by Tam Dalyell he got a bit of a reputation for raising the question.

This was the question of the sinking of the Belgrano which was the action by the British government which guaranteed there would be a Falklands war. And those who were critical of this decision thought it was immensely important which way the Belgrano was sailing at the time, what the progress of Peruvian peace negotiations at that stage was, and so on and so forth. And it's very easy for people's heads to be got into a spin by these kind of details. But my point is that they absolutely matter. Knowing exactly how the political leaders' deliberations went makes all the difference to understanding them morally.

JONQUIL LOWE: Well, it does, but you also have the problem, surely, with hindsight, in that sometimes you have to strip away some of that information that's only become known after the event. You have to try and put yourself in the shoes of the people at the time with the information they had at the time.

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: Yes. That's always philosophically interesting, trying to put yourself in someone else's shoes. What does that even mean?

KAREN: No, exactly. Well, there's certainly lots of chat going on here, but I know there's lots and lots of chat going on on the social media desk. And I'd like to just take a little pause to see what some of the things are that you guys are discussing and whether you're using that pin button to keep up with it all.

HJ: Yeah, I think we have to. The conversation - there's so many different elements to this that we're discussing. Natasha comes up with a good point about the consequence of inaction when we think about these things. But then that leads onto, for us as citizens. We've been talking about politicians a lot, what our moral responsibility is in terms of holding them to account, what we allow our leaders to do and how we can actually do that. Because Georgina brought up a good point about even in a liberal democracy, sometimes it can seem difficult to hold our leaders account. The mechanisms don't seem to be there in some cases as well.

KAREN: Interesting. Who'd like to pick up on that?

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: Well, I think it's a great shame that's it's easier to hold President Clinton to account for hanky-panky in the Oval Office than it is to hold President George W. Bush to account for the invasion of Iraq. And I could get on my hobby horse about this, but I'd probably better not. It just seems to me that sometimes, when it comes to discussing the morality of political leaders, we have our focus in rather inappropriate places. I'm not defending the harassing of White House interns in any shape or form. Of course not.

But you have to have, I personally think, a bit of a sense of scale. Hanging out with Monica Lewinsky just isn't as bad as launching an illegal invasion of another sovereign state. That would be my view of the matter. But as I say, that's not an OU official view, that's just me speaking personally.

KAREN: We all need lots of caveats, don't we?

SEAN CORDELL: Neither is my account of Coventry, I might have got the history wrong before I -

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: On the question of Iraq, it is debatable whether it's illegal in international law. Certainly wasn't sanctioned by a second UN resolution. The president had the right, according to American law, the rules that apply there, as commander in chief, to send the troops in. He did so with the express support of the Congress, a vote in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Public opinion, at the time, supported by majority. According to the way, imperfectly, we measure it, by opinion polls, a majority of the American citizens were in favour of the intervention. The invention went ahead.

And of course, the president is held to account, historically and contemporararily, by the actions he took. And we were all free to comment and observe and to criticise, and other

presidents will think twice about intervening. I suspect if we hadn't intervened in the way we had in Iraq, not just the intervention but the failure to secure the peace at great cost to the Iraqi people and the West's reputation, then there would have been, perhaps, an intervention in Libya or in Syria.

And of course, the notion of intervention was done under the idea of a humanitarian guise, the responsibility to protect, because before, we always operate on the basis that war was never possible if a country was simply, a leadership in the country, was just oppressing its own people. The Westphalian Peace, since the 17th century, meant that you're free to do whatever you want in your own borders. You can do whatever you want. It's only when you step outside.

So the motivations depends on your judgement. For the attempt to reorder the Middle East, in the form of Afghanistan and Iraq, and to manage Iran, was done for base, self-interested Western reasons according to some, and then done for good moral reasons according to others. So the argument is very present in terms of trying to understand what it is people did and why they did it. But they do it, and Bush did it, and Blair supported the policy in the full light of daylight. We all watched them, what they did, and we can make a judgement as to how they did it.

SOPHIE GRACE CHAPPELL: And they protested against the decision, and they ignored the protests.

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: Well, but 1.5 million people marched, which is a large number of people, in a country of 60 million. So my maths not very good, but that 58, 58.5 per cent didn't march. So might is not necessarily right.

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: An enormous number of people were mobilised onto the street who'd never been on a demonstration in their lives before. Me, for instance.

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: But at the point of the intervention, 54 per cent supported the intervention.

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: Is that in the US or the UK?

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: In the UK.

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: I think -

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: Very small. It soon dropped when the war didn't go well. But all I'm saying is there are snapshots of opinion as measured in many different ways.

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: In the UK, I think a lot of that was to do with the completely specious claim -

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: Sure.

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: - that the Iraqi government could attack Britain or British interests or something, it wasn't really made clear, within 45 minutes. I think that specious claim did a great deal of damage to people's understanding. We come back to your point

again about information. I think in the US, although I am troubled about the legality of that war - I'm afraid I'm just nakedly sounding off here - I am troubled about the legality of it, but what troubles me most deeply about the whole way in which the Iraq war was chosen and entered into, was that, as far as I can see, it was intended as a revenge attack for 9/11.

And that was absol - that was the fundamental motivation. If you speak to ordinary Americans now, you'll find that a lot of them think it was justified on precisely that ground. And every now and then it surfaces in the rhetoric. Even in this electoral round, amongst Republican candidates, they're still talking about it having been necessary to hit Iraq because of what Bin Laden did. And that's just a colossal misapprehension. It's like thinking that you should hit the Pope for what Martin Luther did in the 16th century.

SEAN CORDELL: And also, if might does not equate to right, then why would 54 per cent support equate to right, either? The might of a 54 per cent percent majority. And that could be terribly wrong, even if 90 per cent of people, theoretically, were behind it.

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: But I do think the one thing which we do, I think we might agree, is that it's incumbent upon political actors, leaders taking decisions, to be as transparent as they can and not to mislead. The sexed up document, dossier, was an absolute disaster and very, very wrong. And part of the reason that Blair has such difficulties is because many people think that his government took Britain into its position under a false prospectus.

And whether you think the intervention was right or wrong or whatever decision, I think you have to be truthful. You have to tell people the truth. You have to be as up-front - sometimes you have to keep secrets. You can't say, by the way, we're using drones to take out two terrorists, because the terrorists will run away. But having done it, you then need to explain it, justify it, and have people, try to take people with you.

KAREN: Well, I'd like to also go back to the chat area, because we're coming to the end of the discussion, and it's a very, very serious discussion, although there is a threat about the world being controlled by mice. So HJ and Helen, what are you talking about?

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: Well, anyone who's read Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy knows that.

HELEN: Well, there's so much going on in the chat. It's fantastic. Students are really getting engaged in the discussion. And Georgina says that, yay, Sophie-Grace, speaking sense. And also Davin -

SEAN CORDELL: Since when?

KAREN: Watch the catch-up.

HELEN: And another comment was that we have the ability on the board to it to pin the conversation, to stop it keep scrolling, and as someone said, it would be nice to actually pin people, to sort of stop them speaking for a moment, just absorb what they say and then unpin them so that the conversation carries on. Because there's a lot of ideas coming out of this. But Davin says, what may seem morally correct today may well be immoral tomorrow. So I don't know if that's something -

KAREN: Jonquil, you're nodding there.

JONQUIL LOWE: Well, yeah. I mean, it's not as serious as wars, but in the financial services industry, we have a lot of misselling cases. And certainly the industry - I wouldn't say whether they were right or wrong - sometimes they put up the cry that actually today's ideas of what's correct, what's good business practise, what's fair to consumers, are being applied retrospectively to what went on before. And they feel that that's, obviously they feel that's extremely unfair.

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: That's an appeal for regulation. And I suppose every kind of human activity could be done with some regulating. In democracies, it's ultimately the citizens, but they sometimes have imperfect information. Financial services industry, it's obviously got to be a beefed-up regulator has the power to stop criminality.

JONQUIL LOWE: Well, it's hugely regulated already, but I think the concern more is that the rules the regulator is using, they obviously shift. And to some extent they do shift, with public opinion, with markets. I mean, there are huge debates about what's moral within not just financial markets but all markets. Because from a business's point of view, if they're being driven by the profit motive, where does that stop? We've just seen it with VW rigging the diesel emissions test results. That clearly is wrong, but somebody in that company at some stage thought it was right, because their duty to shareholders and other stakeholders was higher than their duty to the environment as a whole.

SEAN CORDELL: I think dishonesty is a really interesting one. Richard mentioned before about lying and then sort of qualified it as well, of course political leaders sometimes will have to withhold things, will be dishonest. And one view might be that political leaders, people in high office, how could they possibly not sometimes lie? I mean, how could you be entirely honest about everything, I mean really?

You hear people that say, I just want a politician who tells the truth, and I just want an honest politician. Does it really - I mean, really, would you want a politician to disclose or be entirely honest about everything, including matters of national security? Surely they have to do these things. The question again is, or one question again is, when do they use that kind of cloak, as it were, the invulnerability of the role, to say, to out and get away with telling all sorts of porkies, because it's me job, you know. That's an interesting point. And is it all too often used, is it all too often rallied, as a, oh, I have to do this. I have to do this even though it's immoral.

RICHARD HEFFERNAN: I think politics is, there's an unintended law of anticipated reactions, I think, which isn't written down. It probably doesn't exist. But it's that, you do something, know that a reaction will happen, either supporting you or opposing you. So what politicians need to do is to anticipate the reaction and act accordingly. And they do that according to set of moral judgments that I think are improving over time in terms of getting - making better choices and with better public outcomes over time. But that doesn't mean that errors aren't made. They are.

SOPHIE-GRACE CHAPPELL: Immanuel Kant says that one of the big problems with telling lies is that you get a the boy who cried wolf effect. No one believes you anymore, because you told some lies in the past. They're just thinking, well, this political leader is saying what you'd expect her to say in this situation. We don't know whether it's true or false. And then

the truth becomes subject to partisanship, and the Right believes there is no global warming, and the Left believes there is global warming. And I think that gets incredibly dangerous. And it's hard to see how there could be no lies in political life, but the fewer, the better.

JONQUIL LOWE: An interesting example, though, was Corbin, wasn't it, this week, saying that if he were prime minister, he would never use the nuclear deterrent. I mean that's surely, it -

SEAN CORDELL: I'm not sure he quite said that.

JONQUIL LOWE: Well, no, he didn't quite say - But it struck me as interesting, because that's one area that, even if you wouldn't, it might be better not to actually disclose that that's what you - because you lose, then, the deterrent effect that you might.

KAREN: It's a conversation that could just go on and on. And I, we have a policy here, where we like our guests to be seen in a certain time. So I'm afraid we're going to have to draw this to a close. But thank you so much, Richard, Jonquil, Sean, and Sophie-Grace, for coming along and talking about this. I'd like to see, have you come to a conclusion in the chat about this very subject?

HJ: Well, there has been a lot of great chat with this, a lot of interest. And there are so many differing views. And it's a lovely debate going on about what you're discussing. I think Georgina had a great point, just to sort of wrap it up a little, saying, honesty and disclosing everything is not the same thing, and saying, I'm sorry, I cannot give you the information is still being honest, which a lot of politicians sometimes don't say that they are in fact not disclosing. But -

[BELL RINGS]

I think that - oh. We had to end this session on my favourite sound. I'm enjoying this. OK. Right. Oh, yes. Let's have a look. Just remove the spam filter - oh, dear. May need to get that update. Let's have a look what we've got in here. I think - oh, we've got a few different pieces in here. Helen's got a few pieces for her.

HELEN: Yes. Well, first of all, to bring it back to the volcano session that we had earlier, this is Sarah and her husband in Madeira with a volcano behind them, which is fantastic.

HJ: A little too close, it looks like. Too close for me.

HELEN: And staying on the volcano theme, this is Brett wolf study buddies. Aren't they adorable? But the smallest one apparently stole his rock samples, so not so adorable.

HJ: And we've had something else, as well. An invitation. We haven't had an invitation in our inbox before. That's quite exciting. I wonder what we're being - oh. It's for you. It's not for me.

HELEN: Oh, what's it -

HJ: OK. Let's have a look. Dear Karen, it's been great to hear all the stories about the tea and cake everyone is enjoying at home. There has been a lot of talk about - and people are

reminiscing about spam fritters. So, better - what do they say. We feel that you're missing out in the studio.

KAREN: I am indeed, and I'm really pleased everyone's recognised this.

HJ: So they say, oh, so the Open Programme would like to invite you to join us for afternoon tea at quarter past four today. They're looking forward to seeing you then, and it's signed from the Open Programme. That sounds lovely.

KAREN: Oh, I like the Open Programme. Well, that's a lovely idea, isn't it? Who thinks I should get for high tea at the Open Programme, with the Open Programme? I will be on here as well, where we'll talk about stuff. But I think that sounds like a fabulous - I'll accept the invitation. Thank you very - you need to get that spam filter updated.

Right. Thank you very much for our discussion. We're going to have a short break and watch a little video about careers, and then we're back with the careers advice service. We've been having a lot of conversation about how they can help you, and we're going to find out how to after this break and video.