**CC0003 / Ethics and Civics in a Multicultural World**

**Sem 1 AY21-22**

**Debate Topic for Week 05: Jim’s Utilitarian Mission**

Only students in the small groups **B1** will debate this topic.

*Instructions*

Due dates and assessment rubrics for the debate team assignment can be found in Appendix 3 and 4 of the CC0003 course outline posted on NTULearn.

The general structure of the debate is as follows.

* Two teams of students (Red and Blue) will debate each other on a topic set in advance by the instructor.
* Each team will have 3-4 members.
* The debate will be held during class, with a total duration of about 30 minutes.
* The debate will proceed in six stages: (1) Opening Argument by Red Team, (2) Rebuttal by Blue Team, (3) Counter by Red Team, then (4) Opening Argument by Blue Team, (5) Rebuttal by Red Team, (6) Counter by Blue Team.
* Both teams will be given 1 minute of preparation time in between stages (1) and (2), (2) and (3), (4) and (5), and (5) and (6). Please do give the opposing team your undivided attention while they are presenting, and please do not make noise while the opposing team is speaking.
* Each stage of the debate will have a duration of about 5 minutes.
* Every student participating in the debate is expected to speak for a roughly equal amount of time.
* Following the debate, there will be 30 minutes of open-floor discussion involving the entire class. The open-floor discussion will be moderated by the instructor.

The **Opening Argument** should provide an argument to support the assigned position. The objective of the Opening Argument is to argue for the position, not to respond to objections.

The **Rebuttal** should present objections to the opposing team’s Opening Argument. It should argue that the opposing team’s position is wrong, or that the opposing team’s Opening Argument failed to substantiate its position.

The **Counter** should argue that the opposing team’s Rebuttal fails to refute your team’s Opening Argument. In the Counter, your team answers the objections raised in the opposing team’s Rebuttal.

**Please prepare a visual aid to go with your Opening Argument.** It could be either slides or a printed handout, or both. If you do slides, have no more than 5 slides. If you have a handout, make it only one side of one page long.

In all stages of the team debate assignment, you are expected to give **arguments**. To review what an argument is, you can re-read pages 11-17 of Russ Shafer-Landau’s chapter “Moral Reasoning” from his book *Living Ethics* (Oxford, 2019). This chapter was part of Reading Assignment 1.

*Background: Jim’s Utilitarian Mission*

**Motion: Should one marry multiple times**

Consider the following extract from “Jim’s Utilitarian Mission” by C. L. Ten:

Jim and his wife, while on a botanical expedition, find themselves in the central square of a South American town where twenty Indians [i.e. indigenous people of South America] are about to be killed by Pedro and his police, for minor offences like stealing bananas. Jim is treated as a guest of honour, and Pedro offers to free all twenty Indians if and only if Jim kills his wife. At first Jim is appalled by Pedro's offer. But Jim is an act-utilitarian. He does not normally appeal directly to this doctrine, for he had long ago convinced himself that following common sense rules will generally be the best way of promoting the utilitarian aim. But now, it occurs to him that he is in a most unusual situation, where his normal, utilitarianly grounded aversion to killing innocent people and to harming his wife, may not be appropriate. After all, there are twenty Indian lives to be saved if he is prepared to sacrifice his wife’s. He considers the less obvious, remoter effects of his killing his wife, but cannot find any that will outweigh the good consequences of saving twenty lives. With a heavy heart, Jim accepts Pedro’s offer, gives his wife one last, fond embrace, and kills her.

Jim is a shattered man. He struggles hard to convince himself that he in fact did the right act. He knows that it is natural to grieve at the loss of a dear one. But he also has irrational guilt feelings about killing his wife. He attributes such guilt feelings to his early conditioning to deontological ethics when he attended a Catholic school. But still the feelings persist. The families of the rescued Indians look after him very well, and slowly Jim begins to mend. He learns about the life of the Indians, and discovers that the execution of people for minor offences is carried out only once a year, always on the same date. Those who are convicted earlier remain in jail until execution day.

Jim now realizes that not only has he done the right thing in killing his wife, but that the best way to promote the utilitarian aim is to return to the town each year with a new wife, and kill her to save the lives of the Indians. He canvasses other ways of preventing the Indians from being killed, but has to reject them as unrealistic.

So Jim marries again. On his second trip to the town, Pedro, true to form, makes the same offer as before, and Jim again kills his wife, this time saving thirty Indians. For the next few years, Jim makes an appearance every year at the proper date, and continues to save more Indians.

Several wives later, Jim finds it impossible to marry again. Although people believe his white lies about his previous wives being killed by venomous snakes while accompanying him on botanical expeditions, somehow no woman is prepared to marry him. So Jim returns to the town on his own, for the last time. To his surprise, he finds that there are to be no more executions. Apparently, so many Indians had stolen bananas this year that there will be a severe manpower shortage if they are all executed. The Indians had expected Jim to come to their rescue, and this considerably reduced the deterrent effect of the death penalty. The law is changed, and now offenders are punished leniently. Jim feels that his previous actions have been fully vindicated. (Ten 1979, 221–222)

*Question: Was Jim morally obligated to have married women to trade them for the lives of indigenous people in a South American town who would otherwise be executed for minor offences?*

*Debate Positions:*

**Assume only the details of the scenario provided above. Also, assume Jim *correctly* calculates that his actions maximize overall well-being.**

* **Red Team** will argue that Jim’s feelings are **correct**, and he was **morally obliged** to marry women to trade them for the lives of indigenous people in a South American town who would otherwise be executed for minor offences.
* **Blue Team** will argue that Jim’s feelings are **incorrect**, and that he was **not** **morally obliged** to marry women to trade them for the lives of indigenous people in a South American town who would otherwise be executed for minor offences.

Both teams should support their arguments with examples. Hypothetical examples are acceptable, but real-life cases would be valuable as well.

**References**

Ten, C. L.. 1979. “Jim’s Utilitarian Mission.” *Philosophy* 54(208): 221–222.