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

**Sem 1 AY21-22**

**Case Studies for Week 03: The City of Happiness & The Burning of Coventry**

**Case Study 1: The City of Happiness**

**Reference:**

Le Guin, Ursula K. “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas.” ­The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction­. Eds. Richard Bausch and R.V. Cassill. New York: Norton, 2006. 454- 458.

**Summary of Case Details:**

The award-winning sci-fi/fantasy writer Ursula Le Guin writes in "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas", of a city called Omelas. It is a city of happiness and celebration. It is an idyllic, almost magical place, where people are joyful, there is no need for a king or rules, no weapons, no stock exchange or secret police.

But, she tells us that “In a basement under one of the beautiful public buildings of Omelas, or perhaps in the cellar of one of its spacious private homes, there is a room. It has one locked door, and no window.”

In this utter depravity, is kept a child. It is malnourished and sits in its own excrement - covered in painful sores. No one is allowed to speak kindly to it. All it remembers of the world outside is "sunlight and its mother's voice".

“They all know it is there, all the people of Omelas,” Le Guin writes. “Some of them have come to see it; others are content merely to know it is there. They all know it has to be there...the beauty of their city, the tenderness of their friendships, the health of their children ... depend wholly on this child’s abominable misery.”

That is the social arrangement in Omelas. One child suffers wretchedly so that the rest can be happy. If the child were freed or consoled, Omelas would be destroyed.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. Are the terms of this arrangement morally justifiable? Why or why not?
2. What, if any, implications does this story have for utilitarianism?
3. Should we be willing to live according to this sort of social arrangement?

**Case Study 2: The Burning of Coventry**

**Reference:**

Cushman, Kathy., Sizer, Nancy. “The Broken Code: Churchill’s Dilemma at Coventry.” [Internet]. Horace. 1991 Feb 12 [cited 2021 Aug 1]; 7(1) Available from:

<http://essentialschools.org/horace-issues/the-broken-code-churchills-dilemma-at-coventry/>

**Summary of Case Details:**

One account of this historical event suggests that during WW2, through complicated and arduous efforts, British codebreakers learned to read secret German codes. The information gathered in this very careful and secretive way was called "Ultra", and the British took great efforts to keep this from the Germans - if the Germans found out, they would adopt new codes that may not be decipherable.

In November 1940, British cryptographers learned that Hitler was going to bomb the British city of Coventry. Churchill, the British Prime Minister of the time was faced with a terrible moral dilemma. If he acted on his knowledge, he would evacuate people and remove property, thus saving them; but he might also alert the Germans to the fact that he had “Ultra.”  Churchill chose to keep "Ultra" a secret and let Coventry burn.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. Was this decision morally justifiable? Why or why not?
2. What, if any, implications does this case have for utilitarianism?
3. What other decision might Churchill conceivably have taken? Would these have been morally justifiable?