

## FYS 16: Debates (Oct. 26)

### 1) Balram deserves to get away with his crime.

#### Pro

One must contextualize moral judgment, since the book emphasizes how constructed values are. As Balram (B.) explains on p. 273, he only acts in concert with the new realities and the whole world. Premier Jiabao himself must have killed to attain his current position. In a hierarchical and competitive society, those on the bottom can advance only by displacing those above them to take their place. Society is compared to a jungle, entailing dog-eat-god combat.

In murdering Mr. Ashok B. is left with no alternative: He is on the verge of losing his driver's position and therefore reverting to the Darkness. His family will not help him but will prey on him, bringing a death like his father's (as they are preparing to do on p. 224). The family is held together only necessity and mutual predation, not by ties of affection or shared identity. He has no allies or people to help him.

One cannot argue that justice should be done, for there is no justice in this society. As the incidents with the hit-and-run drivers show, there are only pay-offs.

As anyone in this depicted world would, B. takes the one chance he had.

#### Con

Moral judgments are not entirely contextual and relativistic. Murder is murder. B.'s offense is a transgression on multiple levels, and stems from the purely selfish motives of his desire to get ahead. The levels are:

- Civil order: Society relies on the sanctity of human life and the integrity of property. B. steals a life and commits other theft.
- Family: B. endangers or dooms his birth family. "Family" entails responsibilities and sacrifice in all cultures, so one cannot discard the term as meaningless for B.
- Religion: Hinduism, like other religions, forbids murder. By the tenets of Hinduism, the status of the upper castes is deserved from merit in previous lives; B. violates this order.

Far from lacking alternatives, B. has attained real advancement in becoming a driver. His transgressions cannot be justified by the corruption of the surrounding society and, indeed, aggravate that corruption by setting an example to the rising generation 'with no morals.'

He acts in full knowledge of the wrong he is committing, and with premeditation. Indeed, his justification for killing, rather than just tying up Mr. Ashok, is to take revenge in advance for the revenge that Ashok's family would exact on B.'s family.

### Pro rebuttal

- Family: “Con” is using a typical rather than contextualized view of family. B.’s family tries to frame him.
- Religion: The image of the chicken coop shows the broader reality. Not everyone in the society is religious.
- Selfishness: Everyone in the society is selfish.

### Con rebuttal

“Pro” relies on generalizations. Moral behavior is possible in this society; having come up a step in society, B. has other options. The pressures of families are felt in all societies,. B. treats Dharam abusively. B. inflicts violence on Mr. Ashok, who has inflicted no violence on him and has often been concerned and considerate.

“Con” prevails (4 to 3)

## 2) As a depiction of social inequality in India, “The White Tiger”(WT) is less depressing than “Slumdog Millionaire (SM).”

### Pro

Protagonist: SM is more depressing because Jamal (J.) is just an overwhelmed child, while B. grows up to be an adult with skills and resourcefulness. J. never has opportunities. When J. gets away with money and the girl, we have to wonder what will happen next, given his lack of resourcefulness.

Violence: For all the dog-eat-dog conflict of WT, it does not center on deliberate violence against children and sexual abuse (the hit-and-run of the girl was accidental).

Style: The first-person narrative of WT indicates that B. has overcome obstacles and has his own defense mechanisms (irony, sarcasm); SM sees the violence and suffering without that filter.

### Con

Love: WT has no love story, while SM provides the cheering them of J.’s and Latika’s love. In WT, B. loves only money, other than his affection for his father.

Style: It’s actually more depressing that B. jokes around the horrible inequalities and his own transgressions.

Success: B. sets his sights low (just to be able to wear a uniform) and ends up still on the treadmill, alone and driven. B. never gets out of the rooster coop, but knowing that his own way to hold his position is to keep battling his way forward. J. dreams bigger dreams. B.’s only way

of advancing has been to kill, knowing that's wrong. By the end, B. is still a wanted man and subject to blackmail by Dharam. He must dominate his employees as he has been dominated, unable to trust anyone. Where B. has nothing and no one to hold on to, J. has Latika and a fortune; B. essentially remains in the Darkness, and any step he has taken is a small one.

#### Pro rebuttal

Has "Con" read the book? B. ends up in a familial position with Dharam, rearing the next generation. B. does not have unmet needs, since he does not want a wife.

SM presents an unreal fantasy – winning a game show – as the only way out of the grinding poverty. Take away that fantasy and the formulaic love story, and the view of suffering is stark and unredeemed.

#### Con rebuttal

What kind of "father" is B.? He beats Dharam, who may be growing up as a successor or replacement rather than some kind of son figure. Where B. never escapes his struggle, J. has a fortune and the love of the whole city, who root for him. WT has the wrenching story of lost opportunities – the prospects of B. as the "white tiger" – which were stolen from him and, even at the end, can never be sure that he will get away with his crime.

Tie vote (4 to 4).