

Judgment at Nuremberg

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Judgment at Nuremberg is a powerful persuasive film by producer-director, Stanley Kramer, with Spencer Tracy playing the main protagonist of chief American judge, Dan Haywood. When four Nazi German Judges are put on trial for abetting holocaust during the Second World War, Haywood was at the helm to deliver the verdict. Although, the actions of the German judges were a clear case of violation of human rights, Haywood played by Spencer Tracy faces slight ethical and moral dilemmas due to the background of one of the judges and also due to the changed political climate. Among the judges, Ernst Janning (portrayed by Burt Lancaster), was slightly different from others because he was an accomplished legal scholar, who drafted the strong Weimar constitution, and even expressed his opposition to Hitler. Due to this positive background, Tracy's character has some dilemmas regarding Janning's role in Holocaust. However, removing those mental dilemmas, and with only a minor conflict between what he feels " is lawful" and " is ethical", he convicts all the judges including Janning. Against Janning, he had strong evidences overriding any dilemmas. That is, despite his favorable credentials, in the Feldenstein case, Janning convicted Feldenstein although he is perceived as an innocent and importantly ordered imprisonment of many innocent Jews concentration camps and thereby facilitated their deaths in. 2. It is clear that although Janning had a creditable background, he has committed or facilitated crimes against the humanity, and thus has to be punished. This is line with the ethical principle of distributive justice as this principle mainly focuses on what is good and ethical to the whole society, instead of catering to individual interests. The argument put in favor of Janning was that, should he be accountable for the deaths in the

concentration camp, although he just signed an order for imprisonment. However, in line with principle of distributive justice, that action of Janning proved to be detrimental to sizable number of people or society, and that negative effect on society has to be taken into account. 3. In the context of then prevailing political and social climate, as well as historical events, the resolution in the movie seems to be apt and ethically correct. That is, at the time of the trial, political repercussions of Second World War got subsided and Cold War has started. So, there was a view, that the German judges should not be punished strongly to avoid alienation of the German people, and to make the German government side with the United States. Quite contrary to that perception, the Germans themselves wanted to punish the Nazi criminals to wash off the taint of Holocaust and thereby salvage some pride. So, instead of taking a softer path, the resolution of sentencing the judges to life imprisonment was ethically apt. 4. Although, the Nuremberg Judgment had clear political and social impacts, it made impacts on the Healthcare arena as well. The Nuremberg Trials took place from 1945 to 1947, and it was in 1947, the World Medical Association (WMA) was established. When the WMA was set up, its founders decided to incorporate ethics for physicians taking into consideration the inhumane and unethical practices carried out by the German physicians at that time. “ Conscious of the violations of medical ethics before and during World War Two, the founders of the WMA immediately took steps to ensure that physicians would at least be aware of their ethical obligations.” (Elnimeiri, 2008). Many obligations were included like, voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential during treatment and medical experiments, those

experiments should yield fruitful results for the good of society, importantly the experiment should be so conducted as to avoid all unnecessary physical and mental suffering and injury, experiments should be conducted only by scientifically qualified persons taking into ethical considerations, etc.

(Elnimeiri, 2008). 5. The personal conclusions that can be made from the movie is that whatever be the external political, social and historical situations and pressures, ethical aspects has to be given prominence. In the film, there were pressures to go soft on the German judges and also consider Janning's credentials, but Haywood played by Tracy placed strong emphasis on ethics and laws, thereby taking apt decision. He even declares that a judge responsibility is to stand for and uphold justice, overriding any personal and external pressures. In addition, the decision of Haywood not to focus on Janning's ' other side', and decide mainly based on the repercussions of his decisions, were commendable and an ethically correct behavior. Reference: Elnimeiri, M. K. M. (2008). Nuremberg Code: A landmark document on medical research ethics. Sudanese Journal of Public Health, 3 (2): 94-96. Retrieved from: <http://www.sjph.net.sd/files/vol3i2p94-96.pdf>.