

Starship Social Studies

The Starship Social Studies under command of Captain Klirk travels across the known and unknown universe. It's mandate is to "go where no people have ever gone before." One day it arrives in an uncharted galaxy where its crew discovers a primitive civilization on the third planet orbiting the star. As they explore the planet in secret, they uncover disturbing practices which lead the crew's Captain, First Officer, Galactic Historian and Cultural Anthropologist into a heated debate.

Captain Klirk: "Let me remind you that the prime directive is very clear about this issue. Under no circumstances are we to interfere with the cultural practices and historical development of the humanoid civilizations we encounter on this voyage."

First Officer: "I understand that, Captain, but I believe there are mitigating circumstances that allow us a certain leeway. One of our directives is to challenge injustice and end savage barbarism. I think we have an obligation to intervene in this case. There is a level of barbarism that we can not turn our backs on. I would like the ship's Cultural Anthropologist and Historian to explain what they have discovered."

Cultural Anthropologist: "Every planet must maintain a balance between its resources and population. If the population grows too rapidly or too large, it strips away essential resources and eventually the whole system collapses. There is starvation, misery and death. In an earlier epoch, balance was maintained on this planet in three ways. As a first step, people took elaborate physical and medicinal precautions to limit pregnancies. When these were insufficient and excess population strained local resources, it stimulated warfare over land and food between competing societies. While the warfare could be brutal, it did serve to keep down the male population. In addition, the female population was controlled by powerful female shamans. When the number of children began to exceed the food supply, they administered herbal abortion potions that ended pregnancies. When the number of women exceeded the number of available men, the female shamans, who delivered the infants, would allow excess female babies to die at birth. Elaborate rituals and complex religious explanations were offered to comfort parents and explain the deaths. At some point, this process began to change."

Historian: "Perhaps I can shed some light on that process. A group of overlords established control over these small societies with the goal of expanding and enslaving the populations. To reinforce their control, they challenged the authority of the male chieftains and female shamans. They stopped the wars and punished the warriors. They outlawed the traditional practices of the shamans. They declared them witches and tortured and killed anyone who practiced the traditional ways. They were especially concerned with stopping the abortions and infanticide because they wanted to use the extra population as their work force. They declared that the sole legitimate purpose of sex was for pregnancy and procreation. Elaborate rules defined legitimate and illegitimate sexual practices. Male and female masturbation were outlawed. Physical and medicinal barriers to pregnancy were outlawed. Sexual practices that did not lead to pregnancy were declared sinful and a violation of the dictates of the overlords' God."

First Officer: "The overlords have already broken the prime directive. The system they enforce is inhumanoid and should not be allowed to continue. We have a right to intervene."

Second Officer: "You are right, but that doesn't mean it would be a good idea to act directly. The people of this planet need to resist the overlords on their own. As outsiders, we might only succeed in creating popular support for the overlords and their brutal system. A major reason for the prime directive is that our actions can have unanticipated consequences."

Captain Klirk: "I am not sure there is sufficient justification for our intervention. I am going to need further opinions on this issue from other members of the crew. What do you others think?"

Questions

- Does a more powerful civilization have a right or an obligation to interfere in the affairs of other civilizations that are acting in ways they consider immoral?
- What are the problems with intervention? What are the problems with non-intervention?
- Are there parallels between this society and life on Earth that we can use for insights?
- What do you recommend to Captain Klirk?