[Maegan Johnson won an Outstanding Abstract Award at the 2010 HTCC Student Research Conference with the following abstract.]

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Faculty Mentor: Thomas Edson
Title: Engendering Paradoxes in the War on Terror, 360 words

One of the most controversial issues of public debate arising from the prosecution of the War on Terror concerns the use of interrogation techniques which some consider to be tantamount to torture. Despite the fact that Western society's deepest-held beliefs about the rights of man condemn any kind of inhumane treatment, the pressing intelligence needs of governments charged to protect their people from the threat of terrorism has forced many to reconsider the wisdom of a categorical refusal to countenance such measures.

The policies established by the Bush Administration regarding the detention and interrogation of enemy combatants have been the subject of intense scrutiny and vigorous debate by legal scholars and philosophers alike. Most of these discussions focus upon one of several basic positions: the ramifications of positive-law prohibitions against torture or other degrading treatment, on utilitarian or consequentialist ethics, or on humanitarian philosophies of natural law and human rights.

The concept of torture is so abhorrent that there is considerable concern about the morality of anything even resembling it. However, this revulsion is predicated upon a deeply ingrained consciousness of the value and inviolability of law and human rights. Ironically, these very concepts are the ones that terrorism endangers most.

This paper argues from a natural law position and on the basis of historical analogy that torture can be an ethical option in combating terrorism. It concludes that an act of terrorism is so flagrant a violation of the social contract that it constitutes a forfeiture of the terrorist's human rights, and that therefore the otherwise unconscionable use of cruelty for coercive purposes is, in this case, ethically justifiable. Historical models exist which illustrate feasible, carefully circumscribed implementations of similar policies; a close comparison can, in fact, be drawn between terrorism and piracy.

Remaining objections to the use of harsh interrogation techniques are also given consideration. Among these is the belief that we might demean and dehumanize ourselves by the use of cruelty. Although this is a very real concern, it is also important that we carefully balance considerations such as this against the responsibility that we have to protect innocent populations from the violence and oppression of terrorism.

Works Consulted

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Introductory sentences present context and central problematic of current controversial issue

Logical organizing pattern identifies key premises of counter-position before advancing author's thesis

Paragraph presents **thesis** and explains **methodology**

Acknowledgment and refutation of counterargument