Revenge   
Negative Case by Travis Herche



This case argues that revenge is good. The rest of the case is pretty obvious.

To sell this case, you need to overcome the initial instinctual warning that revenge is to be avoided. That may seem daunting at first, but you have some powerful persuasive tools in your corner – biases the judge walked in with that your opponent wasn’t prepared to deal with.

The first is the Evangelical Christian worldview held by many of your parent judges. In this view, the majority of humans will spend eternity in conscious agony. If revenge is bad, this is not a happy ending; it’s horrifying.

You don’t want to be the first person to explicitly invoke a specific religious perspective in a Stoa debate round, but you can use this bias in your favor. The key is to remember that it’s there.

Consider these excerpts from the Bible. Read these verses not as spiritual instruction – though they are useful for that, too – but instead as a debater getting to know your audience so you can persuade effectively. All verses are from the Contemporary English Version (CEV):

* **Genesis 9:5-6**I created humans to be like me, and I will punish any animal or person that takes a human life. If an animal kills someone, that animal must die. And if a person takes the life of another, that person must be put to death.
* **Exodus 21:12**Death is the punishment for murder.
* **Deuteronomy 19:11-13**But what if you really do commit murder? Suppose one of you hates a neighbor. So you wait in a deserted place, kill the neighbor, and run to a Safe Town. If that happens, the leaders of your town must send messengers to bring you back from the Safe Town. They will hand you over to one of the victim’s relatives, who will put you to death. Israel, for the good of the whole country, you must kill anyone who murders an innocent person. Never show mercy to a murderer!
* **Acts 25:11**If I had done something deserving death, I would not ask to escape the death penalty. But I am not guilty of any of these crimes, and no one has the right to hand me over to these people. I now ask to be tried by the Emperor himself.
* **Romans 13:1-4**Obey the rulers who have authority over you. Only God can give authority to anyone, and he puts these rulers in their places of power. People who oppose the authorities are opposing what God has done, and they will be punished. Rulers are a threat to evil people, not to good people. There is no need to be afraid of the authorities. Just do right, and they will praise you for it. After all, they are God’s servants, and it is their duty to help you. If you do something wrong, you ought to be afraid, because these rulers have the right to punish you. They are God’s servants who punish criminals to show how angry God is.
* **Revelation 13:10**If you are doomed to be captured, you will be captured. If you are doomed to be killed by a sword, you will be killed by a sword.

The second persuasive advantage you can tap into is the constant use of revenge in fictional happy endings. Gaston just plummeted to his death – huzzah! This is the advantage you tap into directly in the speech. Study the applications; you should at least be conversational about the plot and major characters.

Here’s a bonus Value RTP (Reason to Prefer) application that was cut for time.

## Application: The Merchant of Venice

In Shakespeare’s “The Merchant of Venice,” the moneylender Shylock goes too far in his personal vendetta – a reminder that revenge must be handled by a just government, not by individuals. But the story still resonates profoundly because, even if Shylock goes too far, he’s a sympathetic character. We understand that lending someone your hard-earned money in good faith and having that loan defaulted demands revenge.

Consider Shylock’s famous words from the start of Act Three:

“If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge.”

Revenge

Edmond Dantes is an up-and-coming sailor and just got engaged to the love of his life. Then, in one night of betrayal, his jealous best friend has him framed and arrested. He loses his career as a sea captain, his fiancé, and his freedom. He spends 14 years rotting in a terrible dungeon. His fiancé marries the man who betrayed him. His father dies with no idea what happened to him.

The story has a happy ending, but not because Edmond goes on a vision quest, or hugs a bunch of strangers, or starts a charity. It definitely doesn’t have the happy ending of the bad guy being restored to society. It ends happily because Edmond enforces a universal principle and brings the bad guy to justice. In so doing, he teaches us a lesson about the danger of the resolution.

# Value: Revenge

Revenge is operationally defined as: “The act of retaliation as a proportional response to significant unjust injury.”

Let me clarify and defend Revenge with two sub-points.

## Value Analysis: Offenses, not Slights

When you’re dealing with a minor annoyance, like being cut off in traffic, we can just follow Taylor Swift’s advice to “shake it off.” But some wrongs cannot be ignored. You cannot shake off being mugged in an alley, or the murder of a loved one.

Revenge is to be reserved for significant grievances. It is silly to tell someone, “sure, you were beaten so badly that you’ll never be able to walk again. But just shake it off and move on.” The only way for this person to move on is to see justice done. We seek revenge not to stay stuck in the past, but to finally move on from it.

## Reason to Prefer: Universal Moral Principle

The importance of revenge is deeply ingrained in every human society because it’s fundamental to our psychological and spiritual well-being. Even religions and moral codes that seem to discourage revenge only do so because there is a promise of revenge already in place: turn the other cheek, because the offender will be punished in the end. Forgive, because karma will catch up to the bad guy.

That’s good advice on a personal level, but not for the criminal justice system. We need to acknowledge the overwhelming consensus that a terrible grievance demands revenge – that a story cannot have a happy ending until the bad guy gets what’s coming to him.

Rather than explore the emotionally-charged waters of religion, I’d like to point to three popular stories that explore the theme of revenge. Consider their popularity – and the visceral satisfaction of their endings – to be proof of the universality of revenge.

If you’re not familiar with these stories, please accept my apology for the spoilers.

## Application 1: The Count of Monte Cristo

In Alexander Dumas’ epic tale, Edmond Dantes loses his family, his love, and his career and is locked in a tiny dark room for fourteen years. Edmond finally escapes. But the story can’t end there. We understand as the audience that Edmond needs to track down the man who wronged him. In the final moment of triumph, the protagonist wins back the woman he loves and punishes his enemy for his fourteen years of suffering. That is a happy ending.

## Application 2: The Lion King

Mufasa is betrayed and killed by his brother Scar, and the young Simba is banished into the wilderness. Does he find himself and learn to leave behind what happened at Pride Rock? Does he abandon his fellow animals to being ruled by Scar? Certainly not! That would be a grave injustice.

The Lion King is a story of good versus evil. Evil creates an imbalance, and in the end, good is restored. In the circle of life, good wins in the end – and often, the instrument of that good is revenge.

## Application 3: The Princess Bride

“My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die.”

There is no victory if Inigo just rides away, forgetting all about his father. He cares too deeply for that. Justice and compassion and the dignity of human life demand revenge. So when Inigo finally confronts the six-fingered man who killed his father, we’re all rooting for one thing: revenge.

Of course, these stories are examples are not examples of government-administered revenge. Revenge outside the criminal justice system is a dangerous business – more on that in a bit. For now, just remember that artists take creative license to make the stories more personal and intense. But we can still draw from them the universal theme that revenge is a positive and necessary response to evil.

Now let’s take a quick look at the two theories of punishment in the resolution.

# Contention 1: Rehabilitation denies Revenge

Try adding rehabilitation to any of those stories we just went through. “My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare for free meals, free housing, free clothing, free education, and free legal counseling, and we’re going to do everything we can to help you lead a happy and fulfilling life.” This is what we call a bad ending, where wickedness prevails.

The social effects of rehabilitation aren’t the issue here. The problem is that rehabilitation spits in the face of morality and denies the victims the revenge they deserve.

# Contention 2: Retribution exacts Revenge

There’s a scene at the end of the first season of “24” where the main character confronts the man who killed his wife. He has the man at gunpoint. Now, he has a choice to make. He can pull the trigger, distributing justice himself, or he can arrest the man and find revenge in the court system. This is high drama because it’s such an important decision. It’s a classic dilemma. As audience members – even those untrained in philosophy – we understand that revenge is very different when you’re pulling the trigger yourself, without any laws or restrictions or supervision. That’s a very dark path to go down.

Most of the concerns related to revenge are rooted in the danger of having individuals exact revenge on their own terms – vigilante style. Such “justice” is haphazard, unfair, and almost always excessive. That is not what I advocate. I advocate retribution in the criminal justice system.

Revenge is a dish best served cold, and that means it can only be done by government. Government uses due process and rule of law and sentencing guidelines to ensure that revenge is meted out fairly. That’s the whole point of having a criminal justice system, and it’s the reason you can vote against this resolution without reservation. Thank you.

# Affirmative Brief

There are plenty of Bible verses that seem to conflict with the idea of revenge; I assume that you’re more familiar with them because they tend to be more popular. You can use the worldview that everyone is loved by God and can be saved as a persuasive leverage to make rehabilitation appealing.

You can engage with Revenge a few different ways, but all of them involve rejecting it. If the judge uses revenge as the value, you can’t hope to win.

One option is to dismiss the applications as hypothetical and say they don’t speak to reality. This is an efficient but logically risky strategy; the applications aren’t supposed to prove that Inigo Montoya’s father was really killed, but rather, the popularity of the stories is used as proof that revenge is universally considered positive. You’ll have to go deeper.

You could try to counter-warrant by running your own applications with inspiring stories of forgiveness. But again, getting a logical advantage will be tough, especially with a four-minute 1AR.

A better option is to incorporate your affirmative case philosophy and re-tell each of the negative stories, showing how a better ending could have been achieved if the resolution was upheld.

No matter what you do, acknowledge that revenge is satisfying. But urge the judge not to play to a gut hunger for revenge; to rise above and be a more compassionate and enlightened person who does what’s best for everyone.

The negative’s only option is to argue that your contentions have no impact. Push that later in the round; remind the judge about the enormous uncontested benefits of rehabilitation.