

# Taxi to the dark side



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Brutality, degradation, inhumane treatment, cruelty, these are the words that are often ascribed to the act of torture, whatever form it maybe. The mere intention to conduct these actions reveals a complicated double standard (Fiala, 103). People would opt to be the punisher, the powerful, the dominant rather than being punished, being weak and being dominated by someone else. It might not generally surmise human nature but it reveals the fact that humans in a society would always aspire for the top position in the ladder.

To this end, it is not surprising why some people support torture, most specifically, when they are not the one who is being (or will be) tortured. On the other hand, people also tend to display compassion and sympathy to other human beings. This is the basis of the deontological morality expressed by Immanuel Kant. This essay would try to explore the nature of torture and present an evaluation of the ethical values involved. The subject of the essay would be based on the discussion of torture in the documentary by Alex Gibney entitled ' Taxi to the Dark Side'.

The main argument would be that ' torture is morally impermissible' nonetheless the essay would also try to determine the reason behind the act of torture especially with regards to the incident in Afghanistan and Iraq. Interrogation is the basic means to attain ' intelligence' or first-hand information that are vital in the prevention of danger such as war/s and terrorism. It can also be use to gain knowledge of the culprit behind certain crimes. One, need not to be involved in an actual warfare or crime to understand the concept involved in interrogation.

However, it is also a common knowledge that some information gathered through interrogation may not be valid. One cannot establish the factuality of a certain statement that people ‘spill out’ during interrogations. In some cases, ordinary interrogation techniques are futile since the person being interrogated may not be willing to cooperate. These instances coupled with an urgent need for the ‘information’ usually calls for a ‘forceful’ kind of interrogation.

In the context of this essay, the type of interrogation is known as ‘torture interrogation’ (Casebeer, 263). In the documentary ‘Taxi to the Dark Side’, torture interrogation is portrayed as a technique used to gather information from supposedly terrorists. It involves long hours of standing, sleep deprivation, use and application of physical force, humiliation and other maltreatments that would fall under CID or acts of ‘cruel, inhuman or degrading’ treatments (Luban).

Casebeer (264), explained that torture interrogations encompass the strategy that involves ‘severe physical and/or mental pain’ (I believe that emotional or psychological pain can also be present especially during humiliation and inducement of fear) that is inflicted on its ‘victim’, that is done by certain ‘perpetrators’ such as ‘interrogators and/or soldiers’ and are designed to reach a goal such as to ‘extract information and confessions’. The ethical considerations that torture interrogation presents are grounded on the fact that (in most cases) during ‘torture interrogations’ the person is not yet convicted ‘guilty’ (Fiala, 109).

Torture, in its own terms, has long been considered as an immoral act. Nevertheless, torture as a type of punishment can be justified since the ‘

victim' of torture is ' guilty' of a certain crime which could have been worst than the punishment (torture) in itself. The possibility of torturing an innocent individual creates a moral debate regarding the permissibility of torture. The utilitarian principle requires the maximization of happiness and minimization of unhappiness as standard for morality.

In the ' ticking time-bomb' scenario, as mentioned by Casebeer (271) and in the documentary by Gibney, a bomb is placed in a certain field or establishment and only one person (a terrorist or the bomber) knows how to locate and defuse the bomb. If the bomb explodes, several people will be affected or will die, thus, all necessary parameters are to be taken to extract the relevant information from that person (terrorist or bomber). Torturing one person to be able to save more number of people is of course considerable.

But it should not be taken for granted that this argument is ' hypothetical'. In reality, this situation may not even exist. Deontological ethics focus on a person's duty which implies the respect for another person's rights. People, according to this ethical framework, should not be treated as means rather as an end (Casebeer, 266). In torturing another person to extract information that would benefit more people denotes using that other person as means. Whether the person is guilty or innocent, torture interrogation would still involve disrespect to the other person's right and humanity.

In reflecting on the documentary, a taxi driver nicknamed Dilawar died of homicide due to ' blunt force of injuries to lower extremities that complicates coronary artery disease' as a result of ' torture interrogation'. The documentary elaborated that Dilawar is not-guilty. Furthermore, the

documentary also highlighted that 93% of the suspected terrorists are turned over to the United States forces to gain bounties or rewards. It also turned out that Dilawar is included in this 93%. With these in mind, the act of torture interrogation is blatantly immoral.

Despite the fact that legal documents and loopholes can be found to justify the act of ‘torture interrogation’ as can be deduced from documents, such as the memorandum for William J. Haynes II dated March 14, 2003, torture interrogation is morally impermissible. To better justify this position, Fiala argued about the possibility of the ‘slippery slope’ fallacy that might result if torture terrorism would be justified and practiced in ‘extreme cases’ or ‘supreme emergencies’ (quoted by Fiala from Walzer). According to Fiala, politicians or people who are granted the necessary authority to conduct torture terrorism might abuse their power.

As Fiala states, ‘when political agents makes exceptions to moral principles, these exceptions can become precedents that serve to normalize immoral behavior’. In ‘Taxi to the Dark Side’, there is an argument regarding the slippery slope phenomena that transpired during the change in the ‘interrogation methods’ for the prisoners in Guantanamo Bay. According to the documentary, the changes in the interrogation techniques are only applicable in Guantanamo. Nonetheless, the ambiguity and loopholes that surrounds the issue resulted to the application of the interrogation techniques to Iraq.

The danger of the slippery slope is when the technique is applied to innocent individuals. The documentary also mentioned that there are other prisoners that are sent to Guantanamo or in places outside the United States that

permits torture interrogation because this methodology is illegal in the United States. After the discussion of the moral impermissibility of torture interrogation, it might be obvious to some people that torture interrogation is wrong. However, the question ‘ why are there people who conduct such immoral acts’, might linger to a person’s mind.

‘ Taxi to the Other Side’ illustrates the confusion and the pressure that interrogators undergo during the ‘ War against Terrorism’. Most of the pressure comes from the government, the need to justify an attack or the arrest of a person. Another source of pressure, as explained in the documentary, comes from other soldiers. As one soldier testified ‘ I don’t want to go against my fellow soldiers’. Fiala (101) described the possibility of this situation as ‘ a political pressure to take decisive and dramatic actions without regard for moral niceties’.

This essay concludes that torture interrogation is morally impermissible based on the utilitarian and deontological ethical frameworks. Humans should be treated as humans. Punishments should be carried out effectively and justly. Torture interrogation does not treat humans humanely. Moreover, torture of the innocent is highly unacceptable under moral precepts. A clearer guidance on the interrogation process must be devised to be able to minimize the dangers of slipping down the use of torture interrogation specifically when there is a high pressure to produce information.

Legal justifications are not enough to excuse or validate the use of torture during interrogation. It merely served as evidence that the legal standards are flawed and needs immediate repair (reconstruction/revision). References Casebeer, W. D. (2005). “ Torture Interrogation of Terrorists”. Fiala, A.

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