

Capital punishment: the death penalty

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Capital punishment, or the death penalty, has been used for centuries.

Recently, though, there have been many debates about whether or not it is moral.

The decision is not one that can be clearly made, but two philosophers, Jeffrey Reiman and Louis Pojman, have debated thoroughly on the issue. Pojman believes that the death penalty is needed in some situations, while Reiman thinks it is an immoral act completely. Pojman's central point is simply that the death punishment deters more criminals than life imprisonment does. Though statistical evidence is not significant enough to show if this is true or not, he makes his case with two examples. The Best Bet Argument says, " Even though we don't know for certain whether the death penalty deters or prevents other murders, we should bet that it does." Pojman goes on to demonstrate a wager which shows that, whether capital punishment works or not, betting against capital punishment would most likely bring more deaths than betting on it.

Pojman continues his argument using Anecdotal Evidence, which he claims provides insight into human motivation. The anecdote says, ' What people fear more will have a greater impact; people fear death more than any other humane punishment. Therefore, this leads to the conclusion that people are deterred more by capital punishment than by imprisonment.' Though we can't be certain if that is true, Pojman has a clear and thorough argument. Reiman's perspective is opposite that of Pojman's.

Through his argument, Reiman concludes that it would be more civilized to send criminals to prison than to end their lives. He backs up his argument by

using the fact that there is no statistical evidence that the death penalty deters. Pojman also gives an ethical perspective to the situation, saying that decreasing the number of people undergoing the death penalty will decrease the number of people to commit crimes. The logic used here would be that the fewer occurrences there are of authorities harming people, the less society will harm people. Whether his argument or Pojman's is ethical is not a decision able to be made, but they have both made strong cases. Though there are adequate points given to support each argument, I firmly believe that, besides a few extreme cases which will be noted, capital punishment should be abolished.

There are numerous reasons, but I will use the five strongest reasons to make my case. The first is the way capital punishment violates morality and justice. Moral status, as defined by Sterba, should not be used as a means, only as an ends. The principle of justice, as mentioned by Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* declares that equal rights to all basic liberties should be given to every person. I feel that the death penalty would violate both of these principles.

Killing somebody denies them life, which is a right everyone deserves to have. Also, killing somebody would be using them as a means; though they might have used others as means, that does not make it justifiable to do the same to them. This ties into my next point, which is the how fairness in persecution is, as well as should be, dealt with. Killing somebody is a very cruel thing to do; the same could be said for rape, torture, and other crimes. People want justice when dealing with crimes, and it has been said, by Reiman, that offenders of crime deserve the least amount of pain to be

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equivalent of harm they set on the victims and society, while deterring other rational people from committing crime.

Each of these conditions could be satisfied very well with capital punishment, which may be the option many would want the offender to suffer, especially those close to the victim. These qualifications could also be satisfied with life or long-term imprisonment, though, which would bring less harm to them.

Another issue with the practice of the death penalty is the harshness of the practice. Execution will sometimes bring physical pain, and will always bring psychological pain. Waiting, unsure when you are going to die, but knowing it could be any minute, can tire the mind quickly. That sort of pain could be worse than any physical pain they may endure.

Another aspect with harshness is how different death by another human is from death by natural causes. Natural causes are unexpected, while a murder, even if justified, involves overwhelming thinking in the consciences of both the victim and offender. Tying very closely with this is my fourth point, which is also stated in Reiman's article; this point says there is evidence that society's harshness decreases over time. Hundreds of years ago, whips, hangings, and many types of torture were the norm for persecuting offenders. Over time, they were seen as unacceptable. Once deemed wrong, the acts stopped.

Following that pattern, eventually capital punishment may seem wrong, and therefore stop. It may be better to stop the act now and save lives than to wait for the act to dissolve in itself. My last point, mentioned in both Reiman and Pojman's articles, is about the fear of an act assisting in the deterrence

of that act. Pojman argues that the worse the fear is, the more they will deter, while Reiman argues the opposite. I agree with Reiman, as I understand his point of view in which it is not logical to automatically assume more fear will lead to more deterrence.

With no statistical facts, there is no proof in that part of Pojman's argument. Though I have argued against it, there are a few cases in which capital punishment may be completely necessary. If it is essential to prevent worse outcomes, it may be allowed. Serial killers may fall into this category at certain times, as will other offenders who cannot be in prison without causing further damages. Another example is a person who has been caught on a crime scene with a weapon in hand.

If they will not cooperate, or if they make any threats, precautions may need to ensue. This is a whole different situation though, and needs to be handled very quickly and carefully. After hearing both of these arguments and spotting all of the differences, I have an opinion separate from both of theirs. I feel that morality is the center of all life; society would not work without ethics. All crimes are a violation of the moral code, and they should be punished strictly.

Punishing through murder, though, is just affirming that murder is an okay action. People are likely to follow in the footsteps of what their authorities do; if we say it is okay to harm somebody because they've done something wrong, people might take that to heart and change their morals. I believe that time in prison, maybe in solitary if that is what is needed, will be more than enough to satisfy the qualifications needed to bring justice. Though the

ignorance of some may lead to people believing capital punishment is morally justified, it clearly is not. Overall, I believe Reiman is right in his argument, and I am for abolishing capital punishment.