

Against the Death Penalty

The Death Penalty is, undeniably, one of the most controversial issues of our day. Emotional tensions are high between those who hold human life above justice and those who hold justice above all human life. The Death Penalty, along with all other forms of criminal punishment, is barbaric. This form of punishment, indeed all forms of criminal justice, truly shows the level to which society has sunk. When people stand outside prisons and cheer as prisoners are murdered, there is a problem. When personal bloodlust is held above moral ideologies, there is a problem. When human life is assigned a value and weighed against other alternatives, there is a problem. The state speaks of Justice, but this word is only a reflection of the confusion, anger, and hatred that has fermented within this country, indeed within the very foundations of human society itself.

Truly there is no purpose to the Death Penalty other than vengeance, yet it seems that our society has sunk to such a level that even vengeance is acceptable to most. The state, though, mimics every abhorrent quality of a punishable act of murder; a murder committed in anger is punished with an execution committed in anger; a cold, calculated, murder committed with pleasure is met with the same form of execution. The end result is the same and the feeling with which it is carried out is the same. There are, even, many qualities of the death penalty that surpass the moral obscenity of a criminal act of murder. Where then is the difference between a murder and an execution? How can one form of murder be right and another be wrong? How can the same deed, carried out by two different people, be one time evil and another time divine? How, furthermore, can a morally adverse action promote the morality, let alone the continued existence, of human society? If we feel bad about explaining the Death Penalty to our children then we should not have to explain it at all.

There is a large majority of Christians in this country, yet such a small number of them actually come up in opposition to the Death Penalty; oftentimes, in fact, they are its most avid supporters. How can this be? All the teachings of Christ, save for those which have been horribly twisted by his followers, are opposed to any form of criminal justice. It seems that the modern Christian has begun to accept only those teachings which feel convenient. It is, indeed, sickening to see mock-Christians and self-styled "christian conservatives" speak in support of something that their religion expressly opposes. They speak of Justice, but what of morality? They speak of punishment, but what of forgiveness? They speak hatred, but what of love? How can they appoint themselves judges of another human being when they, themselves, are the ones who should be, supposedly, judged; how are they qualified to determine the fate of another man's life when their fate is still in question and their status undetermined? There is one stunning question that must be asked of these people: If you were standing before Jesus Christ himself, could you possibly tell him how and why you support the death penalty; do you think you could make Christ believe and support such ideals?

Unfortunately religion is too often devoid of reason; that, though, is more often the fault of those who follow the religion than with the religion itself. The answer to the death penalty does not lie in finding out what "God" wants but, rather, in determining what is right. Where is the reason behind the Death Penalty then? It cannot "rehabilitate" (I, of course, use the word only to display the endemic hypocrisy in the justice system, indeed in much of present ideology both religious and political. The word itself is nothing more than a cosmetic euphemism.). It cannot, and, as we have clearly seen, does not prevent crime outside of insultingly simple models of human behavioral response. Where is the purpose? The purpose of the Death Penalty lies in anger and hatred. Often has it been said that anyone who would not want a murderer of a relative to die is "sick." Is not such a statement, and its advocate, sick though; sick with anger, hatred, and confusion; sick from the pain of loss? This practice finds its roots in rage, the consuming rage experienced when a loved one is murdered and the fabricated rage every citizen is conditioned to hold against enemies of the state. Where, though, is the rage when another dies? What happens to the professed sentiment for human life we all claim to hold so dearly when anger clouds the mind? How can one find reason and logic in a purely emotional deed; one whose very nature defies the moral status of reason? How can one justify something through anger and hatred? One might argue a disbelief in this ideology, but its advocate must reply that he lacks a belief in the ideology of this form of justice; an ideology of hatred; an ideology which, its moral standing presently under heated debate, is still being used to affect, direct, and, ultimately, exterminate human lives. When one or more of our numbers, from the depths of pain and loss, drowning in a sea of hatred, falling into the abyss of their own despair, raises up their voice from the midst of their delusions and screams, cries out, begs for vengeance in a way only the tortured soul can, will we listen? A tear slides down the human face and falls into the dirt. We cannot follow it. A human tear, when mixed with the dirt, becomes something vile; a human mind, when mixed with the dirt,

becomes something evil.

Save for religion there are few other ideals people adhere to so fanatically as criminal justice. Among all other social concepts justice is unparalleled with respect to the level of effort which is expended in the pursuit of its fulfillment. It seems that the supporters of this barbarity are willing to hold it above all else. America has been rampantly executing immigrants from other nations without ever contacting their embassies, in complete defiance of international law. We have watched people burned alive in the electric chair in Florida. There can be no concept of barbarity at all for one who believes that burning people alive is not so. Our nation continues to radically lower the standards for competency so that we might execute the mentally insane as well as the mentally handicapped, so that now we have people suffering from psychotic delusions while waiting for their deaths and others so mentally underdeveloped that they request snow cones for their final meals. We continue to lower the age at which a child can be, criminally, treated as an adult and executed. Our present course ensures a time when the state will have to provide prison issue diapers. Leaders of other nations, political and religious organizations across the globe, and even the Pope himself have asked for stays of execution for certain prisoners and nearly all in recent memory have been ignored with nary a comment on the subject other than the statement that justice must be served. It seems that this practice is so fragile, far more than we are led to believe, that giving one person, publicly, a stay of execution would be far too dangerous for the entire practice itself. Capital Punishment is a practice that exists in the most fragile circumstance of social policy; between anarchy and tyranny; lacking the support or reason but backed by the force of the gun; invulnerable against forceful rebellion but always fearing a single whisper that speaks the truth.

The Death Penalty is a simple-minded solution to a complex problem. It seems people like to complain about problems, but do not want to go to the trouble of finding reasonable solutions. They opt for the quick-fix; something that seems easy and simple to carry out but, in actuality, does nothing to address the problem. As many great thinkers have said, our laws are too often directed at the results of social problems rather than the problems themselves. People don't care anymore. They don't care about their religion, their government, their laws, or each other. It's just too much trouble. Sadly, though, the one true religion, is the only one which lacks a multitude of fanatical zealots. It is, indeed, far easier to simply throw a human being away like so much garbage than to delve into the depths of their mind and determine the causes of their actions. We now live in the age of the disposable human being. One might be tempted to jokingly ask "What will they think of next?" The problem, though, is that no one has been thinking at all.

Where is the necessity in the Death Penalty? Even though the entire system is hopelessly misguided, one can see that, even within it, there are still other alternatives. There are many reasonable, less controversial, and far more efficient methods of dealing with serious crime within our corrupt system without going to such extremes as the routine slaughtering of human beings. So what is the purpose of the Death Penalty? Why do we carry it out? Perhaps society finds it as an outlet for its collective anger, hatred, and confusion; a focal point for all our dark qualities which have originated from the torturous condition of our lives. The victims of this barbarity are used as scapegoats for our social problems; they, rather than our social policies and practices, are blamed for all social ills. They are used to suppress and redirect the collective, blind, and violent outrage we all feel towards the character of our society. Orwell needed only one Goldstein to maintain his tyrannicism; the American government needs millions. Perhaps, in the Death Penalty as well as all other forms of criminal justice, our society finds an outlet of savagery and barbarity, a method by which we can legally lower ourselves to a point that has long been socially forbidden. The problem with falling so low so often though, is that, eventually, we will reach a level too low to return; a level so low as to merit the loss of the term human.

Reciprocal Punishment is not the solution. This antiquated and barbaric eye-for-an-eye form of Justice is a primitive, savage, and ultimately mindless way of addressing the problem of crime. If law is supposed to be objective and independent from religion why is it based on these ancient and barbaric doctrines of a God that is more evil than divine? How can we defeat violence with violence? How can we defeat murder with murder? How can we defeat anger with anger? In doing so we merely assist the propagation of circumstances, the existence of which we claim we are trying to end, in our own actions and in our own minds. Have these foolish practices solved any of our problems? What of peace? Why, still, must people die? Perhaps if we go to the trouble of finding out we can end the problem, instead of having to delude ourselves into believing that murder will save the world. The road to peace is not paved with blood. Mankind must realize that peace bought with murder is not peace at all; it is merely the silence of death.