

Capital Punishment Cannot Prevent Murder

Executions have always been a part of our lives as this practice has been in use since the ancient times. However, more and more countries abolished this kind of penalty because they started to doubt its fairness and reliability. Amnesty International states on its website that "an average of three countries per year have abolished the death penalty since 1976 (...)." The only country that retains capital punishment is the United States. On the other hand, statistics prove that American citizens are not as convinced of the rationalization for a death penalty as they were in the past. Revenge, save of costs, trust in the U.S. justice system, and a deterrent effect on crimes and murders are arguments from those who support capital punishment. I have to say though that cruelty, irrevocability and discrimination are the reasons why a death penalty cannot be justified. Many supporters of the death penalty argue that it is only fair to kill a murderer. They believe in the principle "Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth". Death penalty as revenge and retribution cannot be morally justified. How can it be right that people create violence in order to fight against violence?

British Conservative John Townend asserts, "[death penalty] would also save an awful lot of money. It costs a lot of money to keep people in jail" (Europe). This statement is not entirely correct. For example, the United States requires twice the amount of four different expert reports from psychiatrists, clergies, and psychologists before the execution. The examination and advisory opinion of specialists is very expensive. Moreover, adjournments occur quite often in processes. For instance, new pieces of circumstantial evidence might be found. The combined cost of these matters can be even more expensive for the state than lifelong custody in jail.

Many people argue that capital punishment is the right penalty for murderers because they trust in the justice system of the United States. They assert that any person who is put on trial can have a lawyer, can go back to court at any time if there is new evidence found. Thus, these citizens trust in the system, believing that only guilty people become condemned. Unfortunately, this assumption is not correct. The past has shown that it is not an exception that innocents conceive the death sentence. In 1950, Timothy Evans was hung for the murder of his daughter. Today, detectives are almost certain that John Christie - also executed for the murder of seven persons - was the real assassin in this case (Pro und Contra, 1). This is only one of many known cases in which the convict was innocent. Moreover, journalist Jennifer L. Peters points out, "More than 90 people have been released from death row since 1973. (...) One class from Northwestern University found evidence to clear Dennis Williams of murder charges" (Know Your World Extra). The justice system failed once again. Furthermore, it is also possible that people become executed, although they cannot be held responsible for their actions. In some states in the U.S. murderer can be condemned even though they might have a mental illness.

A last argument that is always mentioned in the explanation statement for capital punishment is that it is supposed to be a deterrent for assassinations. However, scientific

studies show that capital punishment does not deter murders, nor does the abolition of the death penalty cause an increase in crimes and murders. As stated from Amnesty International, "Research has failed to provide scientific proof that executions have a greater deterrent effect than life imprisonment and such proof is unlikely to be forthcoming. The evidence as a whole still gives no positive support to the deterrent hypothesis..." In 1983, a study examined 14 countries that had just abolished the death penalty. This analysis showed that murder rates had decreased more than 50 percent (Pro und Contra, 3). This statement emphasizes that a whole life in jail is rather a prevention of crimes than capital punishment. Certainly, no one can punish the skyjackers of September 11 with the death penalty anymore, but I am very sure that every single terrorist who also had something to do with the attacks would rather chose capital punishment for himself/herself than a life time in prison. Should they get what they want? Do they deserve our attention?

Those who want to abolish capital punishment argue that the cruelty of executions is inhuman. The death penalty is the denial of the right to live, which is constituted in Art. 3 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. None of several ways to administer such a death penalty - the electrical chair, hanging, or a deadly injection - is painless. It can take a couple of minutes until the delinquent is dead. John Lewis Evans, for example, was put to death in April 1983. It took 14 cruel minutes. Besides, the penal code in the Iran says that the stones for a stoning may not be too big, so that the convict cannot be killed with the first or second stone (Pro und Contra). It very sad to see how heartless and sick some nations are; it is hard to find the right designation for people who decide for such a panel code. This might be the real reason why murders always happen. "Capital punishment feeds the cycle of violence instead of stopping it"(Bernardin).

The death penalty is irreversible. As already mentioned, people were falsely convicted of murder and were killed consequently. A justice system cannot guarantee the reliability of conviction. Thus, the state might kill even more innocent people. Besides, a convict who murders today is not the same in 10 years. That does not mean that we should forget about what he/she has done, but some of them deserve at least a second chance.

Suspects sometimes become convicted due to discriminating reasons. Data from Amnesty International show that the death penalty is used disproportionately often to punish the poor and minorities. In 1994, 42 percent of the accused workers in California were sentenced to death, whereas only 5 percent of the accused employers conceived capital punishment (Amnesty). One major problem is simply that rich people can afford better lawyers than the poor. Unfortunately, that emphasizes the deficiencies in the justice system, and it imposes the question, if we can even talk about justice here.

Capital punishment is a very controversial topic. The supporters argue that it can only be regarded as fair to put a killer to death, whereas non-believers find it to be cruel and unjustifiable. The unequal treatment of those accused, and the uncertainty of whether a convict might be innocent or not should prohibit executions. It may sound frigid to argue against capital punishment right after the terrorist attacks. Maybe everyone believes that those who were involved deserve the death penalty. Maybe they do. Maybe they do not. This is a question that I do not feel able to answer. Everything I know is that the justice system cannot guarantee flawlessness and thus, there is no justification for capital punishment.

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