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Death Penalty

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Death penalty (also known as the capital punishment) is when a person is put to death by the state for committing a serious crime. It was practiced in many countries during the Middle Ages and later, but today it is abolished in most countries. The United States remains one of the few countries that still use death as penalty for certain crimes. Many see the penalty as barbaric and against American values. Others see it as a very important tool in fighting violent pre-meditated murder. Two concerns have once again brought this issue into national debate. One is the release of some highly publicized studies that show a number of innocents who were put to death. The second is the issue on terrorism and the need to punish its perpetrators (Messerli, 2014).

American writer Sean McElwee (2013) compares two countries with various laws involving the death penalty, Germany, and the USA. He states:

Germany is one of the many countries that has abolished the death penalty. Their reason: After the crimes of Nazism, the very idea of the state putting individuals to death is too much to countenance. Consider the justifiable outcry that would ensue if Germany reinstated the death penalty and Jewish inmates were far more likely to receive the death penalty for the same crime as a German inmate. Consider if, although Jews made up less than 15% of the German population, they made up a large percentage of those executed. And consider if the chance of a Jewish prisoner getting the death penalty was far higher if there were no Jews on the jury. There would be widespread accusation of racial preference. And yet, without fail, this is the case with America's criminal justice system. As Richard Pryor notes, "I went to see justice, and that's what I saw – just us."

Among the arguments to abolish death penalty are the following:

- It is not a reasonable practice in the modern time and is considered to be barbaric.
- Sentencing people to death for killing other people creates an "eye for an eye"

revenge mentality.

- Assigning the death penalty costs several times more than life imprisonment due to the numerous appeals and additional required procedures incurred by the death penalty.
- Innocent people may be sentenced to death by mistake.

The justice system, if it is anything, must be greater than institutionalized revenge. The death penalty turns the justice system from a mechanism of controlled force aimed at eliminating violence to a system of violence itself. Rather than moving our society towards mutual cooperation and understanding, we have institutionalized the very "eye for an eye" justice we have sought to end. We would do well to note with which other countries our commitment to death aligns us: China, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Yemen.

In conclusion, the death penalty undermines the very purpose of our criminal justice system. Since the death penalty does not serve any purpose that cannot be provided through the justice system by other means, any potential benefits would serve lesser means, and so it should be abolished.

References

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Messerli, J. (2014). Should the death penalty be banned as a form of punishment?

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