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ENGH 0890-011

19 September 2010

Death and Justice

Years ago, a woman named Kitty Genovese was brutally raped and murdered in New York. The murder occurred on a street where dozens of neighbors heard the dreadful cries of a woman in need. However, nobody tried to help her. In fact, not even one person had the dignity to call the police and report the crime. Unfortunately, the world we live in is cruel. Criminals are allowed to walk the streets and do as they please while the rest of the society looks the other way. In response to this horrific crime, Edward I. Koch, former mayor of New York City, wrote, "When we protect guilty lives, we give up innocent lives in exchange...It is hard to imagine anything worse than being murdered while neighbors do nothing. But, something worse exists. When those same neighbors shrink back from justly punishing the murderer, the victim dies twice" (Koch 324). I agree with Koch that the murderer's life was valued above the victim's life in this case because not one person came to her aid.

I support the points Koch makes about the death penalty, because it only does to a murderer what the murderer did to the victim. Yes, it is unfair to kill an innocent person. However, it is unfair and wasteful for tax payers to have to feed, cloth, and shelter these malicious individuals. A victim is not allowed to be a participant in a trial nor are they allowed to see their family and friends ever again. Their life is taken away without a second thought of what could have been, and no matter how much their family or friends would like it, the victim will never be brought back to them. These things are apparently unimportant to the murderers.

Another point Koch suggests: Rehabilitation does not begin while in prison. Another story used by Koch was of Lemuel Smith. While serving a life sentence in New York's Green Haven Prison for

kidnapping, robbery, and murder, Smith pulled a female corrections officer into the chaplain's office, strangled her, and then mutilated her body. Koch stated, "An additional life sentence for Smith is meaningless. Because New York has no death penalty statute, Smith has effectively been given a license to kill" (Koch 322). How can a person serving a life sentence effectively be punished when their penalty cannot get any worse?

People who think that a life sentence, instead of the death penalty, is sufficient punishment for murders are misled and confused over the issues. Having a life sentence for murder does not bring justice. I feel that we have to impose the death penalty for cases of violent murder, and serial killers. Life in prison is not a satisfactory punishment for the taking of another human life. I believe that a person who is sentenced for life would adapt to the environment in the prison and may actually enjoy that lifestyle. If we did not have any kind of death penalty then the murderers who are serving life in prison may kill again by killing someone in prison.

In Utah, earlier this year (2010), Ronnie Lee Gardner was executed by firing squad. It was the first firing squad execution in the United States in fourteen years. Gardner attempted to escape at the old Metropolitan Hall of Justice in downtown Salt Lake City. Just before the shooting, a female friend of Gardner slipped him a loaded handgun. Although he was handcuffed and surrounded by prison guards, Gardner shot and killed Michael J. Burdell, an attorney, and wounded a court bailiff. Police shot Gardner in the right shoulder before he was captured on the courthouse lawn as he tried to flee. Some citizens of Utah believed that it should not have taken twenty-five years to put Gardner to death. These Utahns felt that he should have been put to death while everyone was still angry, and while it was fresh on everyone's minds.

Some felt that Gardner's execution day was not a time to celebrate, but rather a time to be considerate of Gardner's family and what they would be going through. Some people felt that capital punishment is wrong because the Ten Commandments say, "Thou Shalt not Kill." According to Koch,

“The Bible is our greatest source of moral inspiration. Opponents of the death penalty frequently cite the sixth of the Ten Commandments in an attempt to prove that capital punishment is divinely proscribed...The United States Constitution, widely admired as one of the seminal achievements in the history of humanity, condemn cruel and inhuman punishment, but do not condemn capital punishment” (Koch 323). Koch continues, “we may not like the death penalty, but it must be available to punish crimes of cold-blooded murder, cases in which any other form of punishment would be inadequate and, therefore, unjust. If we create a society in which injustice is not tolerated, incidents of murder – the most flagrant form of injustice – will diminish” (Koch 321).

I absolutely believe that those who commit cold-blooded murder should be sentenced to death. There should be no remorse for cold-blooded murderers. I think that they should be able to speak their case and have a fair trial, but allowing these murderers to keep appealing their case for years is wrong, because it unjustly prolongs their life. Some people feel murderers might be falsely accused for their crime and be innocently put to death. An opponent of the death penalty, Adam Bedau, states, “It is false sentimentality to argue that the death penalty should be abolished because of the abstract possibility that an innocent person might be executed” (Qtd. in Koch 321). Bedau reveals that a study of 7,000 executions in this country dating from 1893 to 1971 shows that false executions do not occur. I believe that murderers should be given long enough time to ensure that there is no mistake about giving them the death penalty. Murderers need to come to reality that they are responsible for taking a person’s life and need to be punished for what they have done.

In conclusion, if a murderer is willing to take somebody’s life, what gives the murderer any right to have a better life than that person? Murderers should pay the consequences for their actions by suffering a similar fate. The murderer should not be given any special consideration, since the victim did not have any as well. What better punishment for these cold-blooded killers than the death penalty.... Murderers are the most deserving of such a punishment. The only way to stop killers in the world is to

place a great importance on the value of human life. Capital punishment would discourage potential murderers from killing, because they would fear losing their own life. The death penalty seems like the only rational solution to such horrific crimes such as murder. As Koch suggests, "Life is indeed precious, and I believe the death penalty helps to affirm this fact. Had the death penalty been a real possibility in the minds of these murderers, they might well have stayed their hand. They might have shown moral awareness before their victims died, and not after" (Koch 320).

Works Cited

Koch, Edward I. "Death and Justice." *40 Model Essays: A Portable Anthology*. Ed. Jane E. Aaron. Boston: Bedford/St.Martin's, 2005. 319-24. Print.