

Torturing Terrorists From A Utilitarian Moral Perspective

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Torture Terrorism and the Moral Problem

Torture is viewed to be immoral. But it has often been justified from a [utilitarian perspective](#) in the case of terrorists, for which people have argued for its utility despite being forbidden by the Geneva Conventions. There have been multiple ethical arguments raised against torture's value to society. Some countries, however, continue to use it despite condemnation worldwide along with treating that forbid it.

The Utilitarian Dilemma

The question today is whether torturing a terrorist is considered a moral or an immoral practice from a utilitarian perspective or whether it is neither one. It presents itself as a moral dilemma because it requires an agent to make a moral choice out of two reasons, for which choosing both is not possible. To solve the dilemma, the claims of [proponents and opponents](#) of the actions will be analyzed using utilitarian standards to assess which of them bring about greater good or results to help the utilitarian agent make a moral choice.

Consequentialist Evaluation of Torture

In philosophy, utilitarianism refers to the moral theory that evaluates wrong and right based on the consequences or outcomes of choosing one action over the other. In my view, torturing a terrorist does not necessarily lead to a greater good, rather it harms the individual without bringing many benefits. The utilitarian position depends upon the perceived outcome, but since torture does not seem to bring about the desired outcome, therefore from a utilitarian perspective, it would also be morally wrong.

Greatest Happiness and Harm Principles

Those who subscribe to utilitarianism base their views upon the 'Greatest Happiness Principle' in which those actions that consequently produce the least amount of unhappiness or the highest amount of happiness are deemed right actions for all creatures. The absence or presence of pain and pleasure are what are meant by happiness in this context. The 'Harm Principle' states that the only

time when power can be exercised rightfully over an Individual against his will is to prevent him/her from harming others. Therefore, it is not sufficient to consider his personal moral or physical good in this case. For utilitarians, actions can be classified as neither wrong nor right if their greater good, benefit or greater harm to society is not established (Nathanson, n.d.).

Torture as an Ineffective Counterterrorism Strategy

The prime argument from a utilitarian perspective is that torturing a terrorist brings about greater harm than good to a substantial amount of people in society and that degradation and torture do not bring about the desired outcome the way it is believed. As a counter-terrorism tactic, it fails as an interrogation method and often leads towards vengeance. Establishing a formal torture program leads towards other institutional dysfunction,s such as in biomedical research, judiciary, healthcare, and military,y because they begin to operate independently of the moral rationale for torture (Arrigo, 2004). The fact that the terrorist can lie or that torture can impair his neurological ability to tell the truth, must also be considered. The potential harm to victims of terrorist attacks, when weighed against an officially sanctioned state torture of innocent and a breakdown of social institutions, leads towards damaging social consequences.

Individual Rights and the Ends-Justify-Means Problem

The other way this approach can cause greater harm than good is because an individual's rights are inviolable limits for the government. Using a narrow utilitarian calculus to justify torture leads us to the "ends justify the means" rationale. Thus, it makes the torturer no different from the terrorist who uses a similar line of reasoning to justify his acts of terrorism that would lead to the greater good as an outcome from his/her perspective. Therefore, the social consequences of not only dehumanizing people through manipulating their pain but also having a society approve of the same views as that of a terrorist, merely being on the opposing side of the spectrum, may lead to greater harm. Moreover, torture is mostly used as a means of subjugating and terrorizing a population instead of a method of extracting information, which allows state forces to establish guilt or innocence with forceful means (Evans, 2005).

Long-Term Damage to Social Values

A breakdown in social values leads to other groups of people being more likely and accustomed to making use of torture themselves for their utility in the long term and affects the mental state of people used for torturing as well.

Conclusion on the Morality of Torture

In conclusion, the practice of [torturing terrorists](#) from a utilitarian moral perspective is also morally wrong. I do not agree with the utilitarian moral approach in the overall sense but would disagree with those who justify the torture of suspected terrorists or their families using a utilitarian approach and have attempted to present a counter-argument from a utilitarian approach as well, which proves that position to be wrong. Hence, those utilitarians who adopt a position against the torture of terrorist suspects have a more compelling argument that is also supported by the findings of some empirical reports on the subject.

References

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