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English Composition Mr. Duran

**Inquiry Based Essay**

The death penalty or capital punishment is a practice used and by multiple governments across the globe where a person is killed by the state as a punishment for their crimes and it's often used as a deterrent to stop extreme criminals. Before their execution, these criminals are sentenced to death after the court process of serious capital felonies such as mass murder, multiple cases of rape, child rape, terrorism, attempts to overthrow the government, genocide and many more depending on the country. This punishment is very controversial and sparks up heavy debate by opponents considering it very inhumane meanwhile advocates say it’s a deterrent to crime and makes sure criminals do not commit offenses again. This sparked debate has led to multiple different opinions, stances, and viewpoints being spread and the way these authors they want their message to be heard to the audience they are presenting to. This brings the big question, “whether the death penalty is moral for the greater good of justice?” and this question will be narrowed down to just the practice of capital punishment in the United States only. The question is limited down to just the United States because many different countries around the globe all have their own set of morals, laws, and culture which clash and are very different from one another. There are many sources that carry on the disputed debate ranging from scholarly and informative academic articles, popular media websites, and even some words from non-profit organizations on capital punishment. These articles bring out information and statistics both ends of the spectrum remaining unbiased such as the scholarly article, “Individual differences underlying attitudes to the death penalty” by Sunpreet Singh Kandola and Vincent Egan, will be the main basis in this inquiry-based research essay.

In this academic source, it is a study that examines the correlation between stong attitudes and arguments towards the death penalty and underlying individual differences in expressed morality, prior victimhood, abortion stances, and even gender. They used an online questionnaire that measured these factors like socio-morality and set them up in data tables from 222 participants aged 19 to 71 to create an unbiased study. The authors’ purpose of this scholarly source was to inform and make correlations between the demographic factors and how it negatively or positively correlates with support for the death penalty. This is shown throughout the article such as when the authors are neutral by never taking a stance in the subject and only repeated the scientific data and facts that are made from this data without showing any bias leaning towards any side. For example, this was shown when the data analysis was stated to be, “tested to check assumptions of normality, linearity, reliability, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity before being treated as interval data.” The audience they are trying to present to are other researchers and scholars because the two authors provide a lot of statistics and that data that would be useful research on the individual influences that affect attitudes towards the death penalty; an additional audience would be people who are interested by the controversial debate of capital punishment. The tone is a very serious and informative with the authors focusing on their research saying phrases such as, “these findings from previous studies lead the following predictions to be made, all of which suggest an individual differences approach can help understand the basis of attitudes to the death penalty.” This source is from the scholarly website, Elsevier, which according to its website is a global information analytics business that, “helps institutions and professionals advance healthcare, open science and improve performance for the benefit of humanity.” This website is also the medium or the way the article is conveyed, and this shows how this article is informative with trusted sources and analytics providing facts with proven data. The rhetorical stance the authors take is neutral showing no bias or leaning to any side because the article is informative, and the language used in the article is very formal by quote such as, “the study was approved by the University ethics committee,” showing how factual and unbiased they are. Although, after the results were then analyzed and assessed to show a normal distribution, there were some interesting observations and correlations that were made relating back to the morals of people with the death penalty. For example, men supported the death penalty more than women, along with more extraverted and conscientiousness people supported it as well in comparison to people with higher emotional instability and higher openness who were against the practice.

In another academic source, “Event Dependence in Death Penalty Executions” by Janet Box-Steffensmeier and Benjamin Campbell of Ohio State University and Frank Baumgartner of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is a research strategy to test a theory on death penalty executions which was if a county goes through an execution of an individual, will it be likely that they will continue to execute more people. They are also determining evidence of a person being executed is in the county’s own previous experience with execution, and its raise of policy, legal, and moral questions. In this research they account many variables that could greatly affect a county’s amount of death penalty executions such as homicides, racial threats, poverty, population, and judicial elections. This source relates to the main inquiry-based question on the morality of the death penalty for justice with one of the variables in the research analysis being greater use of social control. Using the Racial Threat Theory, they expect that as the population of a minority group increase it will cause the majority race to impose higher levels of social control which would include more severe measure for law breaking. For example, as the rate between the proportion of white to racial minorities increase this would make it more likely for the utilization of the death penalty as a form of social control. Additionally, another major factor that paints the use of the use of death penalty in a negative light is the amount of poverty in an area; this may drive the amount of death penalty executions and the prevalence of murder. This draws the ethics of the death penalty argument being unmoral with its practice being used for discrimination on race and wealth. Like the scholarly article on Elsevier, this academic source mainly focuses on research and correlates the variables and factors that affect an increase in death penalty executions and in the article, which was on people’s thoughts on the punishment itself.

In this source, “Facts about the Death Penalty” by the non-profit organization the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC), it is a statistic sheet with a lot of information centered around the death penalty ranging from the number of executions since 1976 to current time 2019, the public opinion, and facts on it being a deterrence. After more observation on the organization, DPIC’s main goal and purpose is to serve the media and public with analysis and information on issues concerning capital punishment to create well informed and fact-based discussions as stated by its Executive Director Richard Dieter. They create in-depth reports, issues press releases, do briefings for journalists, and serve as a resource for those working on this issue. They don’t have a specific stance on capital punishment or address it as a moral issue, but instead focus on educating the public on the aspects of it in the United States by providing a wide range of tools and research. In the fact sheet, it gives a lot of material that relates back to the inquiry question of the morality of the death penalty by having a section of the death penalty being used as a deterrence. It included a report by the National Research Council, called “Deterrence and the Death Penalty,” stated that it is “fundamentally flawed” in capital punishment lowering murder rates. In addition, the 2018 FBI Uniform Crime Report showed that the southern states had the highest murder rate even though they are responsible for over 80% of all executions. Another example is that in a survey with the presidents of the country’s top academic criminological societies had 88% of them reject the notion that it worked as a deterrent to murder. This shows how much reliable research and information is out there against the death penalty working against crime and not helping in the justice system by not changing much in the crime rates; especially in the South where capital punishment is still not abolished. Alongside this research, like the first scholarly source they had a 2010 survey by Lake Research Partners, and they found that a majority of voter would choose any other punishment other than the death penalty for murder with only 33% in favor and 61% against. In fact, in another 2009 poll commissioned by DPIC found that police chiefs saw the death penalty as the least efficient way to reduce crime and use of taxpayers’ money. This further proves how the public opinion is majorly against the use of the death penalty which correlates to the question of executing of individual not moral or efficient even in the eyes of the justice through the law enforcement with police chiefs.

On the other side of the spectrum, there are academic articles in support the death penalty such as on The Catholic World Report website, “Why the Death Penalty Is Still Necessary.” The article is written by authors Edward Feser, PhD Associate Professor of Philosophy at Pasadena City College, Joseph M. Bessette, PhD, and Alice Tweed Tuohy Professor of Government and Ethics at Claremont McKenna College. They state that capital punishment must be preserved for extremely heinous crimes and that in the United States today the only crime that the death penalty is imposed on is murder according to the U.S. Supreme Court with multiple states being more selective on the most heinous murders. Also, they state that by sentencing killers to anything less than the death penalty such as having a long sentence in prison would be grossly disproportionate to the heinousness of the crime. The prosecutors, jurors, and loved ones of murder victims would understand along with the criminals themselves acknowledging this with one individual who killed two men after a minor traffic accident said, “I’ve always accepted responsibility for the taking of their lives … I believe in justice and I believe that the victims, their hatred, their anger, they need to have justice.” This mainly shows how the article sees the death penalty as morally good making the world a safer place and upholding a common good; stating that it promotes a belief and respect for moral order and the system of human law.

Besides arguments being focused on research and analysis, there also seems to be strong opinions coming from multiple pop culture and popular media sources such as in this website opinion piece, titled “Death Note and the Death Penalty” by deathnotenews.com. In this response, a fan of the animated series called “Death Note” written by Tsugumi Ohba, replies to an editorial by Clive Stafford Smith of the Guardian where they took a worldwide view of capital punishment in its current state. The animated series follows a mysterious supernatural notebook called the Death note which grants the ability to kill anyone whose name is written inside. It explores the psychological impact of power in people and gives off a lot of moral ambiguity to the viewers like the debate to the use of the real-world death penalty and the morality of sacrificing one person’s life for the greater cause. Using the series as a backbone for the fan’s argument, he states how the show’s protagonist Light Yagami rationalizes his murders by insisting the criminals of the planet must perish in the name of the deterrence in his “new world” and he gains a God complex being the tyrannical judge, jury, and executioner. Making a connection to how The purpose of the fan’s response to the author is to criticize and make connections to how Lights saw himself as righteous with his mass murder for justice who became corrupted similarly to the supporters of the death penalty who believe they are doing justice and won’t fall into corruption. For example, he writes about how Light says, “What, me? I’m just a straight-A student. A law-abiding citizen.” The author then gives his own opinion stating, “Its remarkable how death-penalty advocates are convinced they won’t fall into corruption or self-righteousness ... or even mistake.” He relates the protagonist’s morality to the mentality of the supporters of the death penalty as they believe they’re doing nothing wrong and don’t see the death penalty as immoral.

Another popular media view on the inquiry question is used through the comic book superhero, Batman, who has a very strict no killing rule due to his origin story having childhood trauma of seeing his parents gunned down in front of him by an armed robber. The character himself has stated in author Judd Winick’s run of the comic series, “If I do that, if I allow myself to go down into that place … I’ll never come back,” when discussing the act of killing and it shows his morality by not lowering himself to the level of the criminals he has fought. In the article by the Polygon website, “Why Batman stopped killing people in 1940” by Alan Kistler, comic writer Bill Finger stated that the character’s past, “taught him to cherish and respect life as much as it taught him to hate criminals.” This relates back to the inquiry question on the morality of the death penalty for the justice with the fictional character Batman following this moral code to the highest degree by bringing criminals behind bars instead of killing them. However, there are readers who disagree with the character’s moral code believing it to be unrealistic, pragmatic, and could lead to trouble. In another media article by the Daily Wire, “Batman’s Morality Is Destroying Actual Morality” by Ben Shapiro, who believe this moral code that is moral inversion which is the idea that people who commit evil acts must never be killed and the that people believe the act of defending yourself is immoral nowadays. Shapiro states that there are only reasons to take one’s life is in defense of self and defense of others and considers this to be Batman’s greatest weakness; especially with his classic archenemy the Joker who he believes he could’ve saved countless lives by putting him down. He further emphasizes that Batman is just a comic book character and real people aren’t and claims, “Our entertainment industry does us a great disservice morally when it teaches children that killing in self-defense or defense of others is morally unjustifiable.” This relates to the inquiry question by justifying killing criminals and the practice of capital punishment to be morally justified for the greater good of justice in the defense of people.

The debate on the morality of capital punishment has been a controversial debate with many academic and popular media sources having strong stances on the topic with analysis and research strengthening their points. Many academic articles have different stances on the inquiry question such as the Elsevier scholarly article, the fact sheet made by the DPIC, and the research strategy developed by the being neutral and taking no stance but only giving research and statistics for others. Some articles are more leaning towards the death penalty being morally justified for the greater good of justice like the Daily Wire and the Catholic World Report being in support by stating that its moral to kill in defense of yourself and others and that it is required for the most heinous crimes; in belief that anything less wouldn’t do justice to the victims’ loved ones. Other articles see the practice of the death penalty as immoral like in the fan response to the supporters of the practice who he states, “Its remarkable how death-penalty advocates are convinced they won’t fall into corruption or self-righteousness ... or even mistake.” In conclusion, many articles use their own evidence such as research, statistics, and philosophies to strengthen their argument on the morality of the death penalty for the greater good of justice in the United States.

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