

Answering the question should not be difficult, as the opposition is severely limited in time (ca. 1½cs.) & place (Euramerica). In the England of 1800 you could be executed for over 200 crimes. The death penalty was briefly illegal in the U.S.A., but the U.S. Supreme Court has restored it.... This 20Feb94 CAPE COD TIMES letter has, as its primary burden, the opposition's **abuse of the Bible**, as you will note in its full text below. But you get no whiff of that in what actually got printed, which I've italicized:

*Governor Weld is right that capital punishment would make our society more civilized. But your Feb. 13 editorial calls it "institutionalized blood lust for revenge" and asks "Why should our civilized society condone that?" No wonder you're against capital punishment! You think our society is civilized and that no crime is serious enough to deserve death.*

In the Plymouth Colony of 1627, fifty-seven crimes were considered serious enough to deserve death. Gradually, successive governments have so surrendered that sanction that today no crime [in Mass.] is considered that serious.

The consequences?

When drug-pushing is not considered serious enough to deserve death, in Chicago nineteen small children are found living in squalor, their parents using welfare money to buy drugs rather than to care for their children. Governments considering drug-pushing more serious serve nations that [consequently] don't have a drug problem. So much for the fantasy that capital punishment does not deter crime.

*The truth is that capital punishment is a 100%-sure deterrent of crime. No executed criminal ever commits another crime. Where capital punishment is efficient, without long delays, it moves fear from where it doesn't belong, in the citizenry, to where it does, in would-be criminals. "If you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain" (Romans 13:4, New Revised Standard Version).*

*Further, your editorial assumes that vengeance is an unworthy jurisprudential motive. All human societies condemn it as a personal motive: Public order cannot allow personal vendetta. So the Bible says (in vs. 19 of the previous chapter) "Never avenge yourself," for it's God's job: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord" (Deuteronomy 32:35).*

Misreading the Bible is a cause of opposition to capital punishment. "Thou shalt not kill" is not against capital punishment but against personal killing: "You shall not murder" (NRSV of Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17). And "Vengeance is mine" is not against capital punishment, which appears approvingly only six verses later (as indicated above). As for Jesus' saying we should forgive seventy times seven (Matthew 18:22), that again has to do with interpersonal attitude, not social policy or government action.

*For civilization's sake, let's restore capital punishment.*

1 In a NYC suburb Saturday, a woman remarked to me her community's decline in civility, a malaise worsening over the past two decades. When I asked "Why?", she listed factors familiar all across our country. A major one is fear, which I address above & which the newspaper's titler highlighted. Said she of her upper-middle-class town, "Life has become meaner, more abrasive; with good reason, people have become less trustful, more fearful." I: "Less civilized?" She:

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

309 L. Eliz. Dr., Craigville, MA 02636

Phone 508.775.8008

Noncommercial reproduction permitted

## Putting fear into would-be criminals

Governor Weld is right that capital punishment would make our society more civilized. But your Feb. 13 editorial calls it "institutionalized blood lust for revenge" and asks "Why should our civilized society condone that?"

The truth is that capital punishment is a 100 percent-sure deterrent of crime. No executed criminal ever commits another crime. Where capital punishment is efficient, without long delays, it moves fear from where it doesn't belong, in the citizenry, to where it does, in would-be criminals.

Further, your editorial assumes that vengeance is an unworthy jurisprudential motive. All human societies condemn it as a personal motive: Public order cannot allow personal vendetta.

For civilization's sake, let's restore capital punishment.

WILLIS ELLIOTT  
Craigville

"Yes!"....How much less livable, less insulated against drugs & violent crime, are our inner cities!

2 Four parallel increases: (1) Of drugs & violent crime; (2) Of tolerance of criminality; (3) Of public outcries against "coddling criminals"; & (4) Of official tough talk against crime. As to the last, the latest nonsense is the baseball metaphor (in Clinton's State of the Union) "three strikes & out" (immediately countered by Sen. Dole's official Republican rejoinder, "three strikes & in [prison for life]"). Dole's revision properly bends the metaphor to the proposal: Clinton's straight use of "three strikes & out" states, with unwitting humor, the opposite of what he says he wants, viz no-parole incarceration for life. "Out" is what the country now has; eg avg. time for murder, "in" five years. In most societies of past & present, "out" would indicate the death penalty. Instead, what's being proposed would mean billions more spent on prison-building, with \$2 million as the avg. life-incarceration cost. Washington wants to *sound* tough on crime without proposing a feasible solution. Does the electorate believe that the death penalty would be a feasible solution? Yes, some 87% of voters. Why, then, Washington's reluctance? Because Congress does not believe that the stipulated three major crimes together are serious enough for the death penalty.

3 In my letter & in the above §, **serious** is the nodal word. An old hospital joke: "The patient's condition is terminal but not serious." American liberals of whatever persuasion vis-a-vis religion consider America's crime situation not serious enough to justify capital punishment but are pro-choice: killing fetuses is acceptable even at public expense, killing criminals is unacceptable under any circumstances. In the broad human & ecological picture, both killings make sense to me. To a very few (who say they are "consistently pro-life"), neither makes sense. On the right, only the first makes sense: on the left, only the second makes sense. Everybody is serious about making sense. Somebody ought to write a satire. A serious one, of course. And nobody should condemn anybody (we're all vulnerable), but it's OK to laugh & shout if you put some effort into listening & reasoning.

4 Last week a U.S. Supreme Court justice declared that he would do no more reasoning on any death-penalty case: he's automatically-dogmatically agin' it. He gets paid to reason, but on this subject he's quit. How crippled the court would be if each justice had an anti-reasoning list!

How could that justice have worked himself into that mindless frame of mind? Let's stick with seriousness-analysis: he concluded that he believes so overwhelmingly in the seriousness of a human life that he could no longer be serious about any death-penalty case. So what is there about human life so serious, so valuable, that he cannot consider the legal taking thereof? In terms of this Think-sheet's title, his absolute opposition to capital punishment rests on his attributing of **absolute value** to human life. This is what the title promises to look at.

5 The biblical religions attribute absolute value only to God, so locating it anywhere else is blasphemy & idolatry. On his visit to Rome, Luther (whose Reformation was theocentric) was horrified at Rome's capitulation to the Renaissance's anthropocentricity: in spite of their religion subjects, Leonardo & Michelangelo present "man" as the glory of the world & the cynosure of art. And Pico put this neopagan message in the expression "the **dignity** of man," which (Bloom, *THE CLOSING THE AMERICAN MIND*, 180) "had a blasphemous ring to it." Only God had dignity. Man had a derivative, secondary, creaturely value (as in the Bible), or a nature-relational value through the verisimilitude of his reason with the nature of nature (Aristotle's "rational animal"). Bloom: "But now the dignity of man has neither of these supports; and the phrase means that man is the highest of the beings, an assertion emphatically denied by both Aristotle and the Bible." Liberation from God & nature seduces man into the Luciferian claim to have what only God has, viz "creativity," which "had the odor of blasphemy and paradox." The resulting irrationalism elevated human "personality" to divine status....Need I follow this analysis further to make my point? Executing this being would be decide, killing a god! My church, the UCC, goes with Pico & the flow I've been describing. I am a Christian: I don't value human beings so highly.