

Trusting Governments with Death

In a free nation that is ruled by the people, do we want to give government the power to take lives as a criminal penalty? If we are executing murders, then an argument can be made in favor. But should a government be trusted with that kind of power? Has any government been able to use the power of execution responsibly? History tells us that the answer is, no!

A nation that has the power to execute, even a little bit, faces the temptation to abuse that power. Nations can evolve in the wrong direction or be suddenly taken over through either coup or through fraudulent elections. Nations that have the power to execute can slowly expand that power using it to "protect" society from threats such as people who have "dangerous ideas". In the past it was common for people to be tortured to death for heresy. People with dangerous political ideas can be considered to be disruptive to society and need to be eliminated for the greater social good. Once the death penalty is accepted for some things, then it can be expanded and justified for other things. It is easy to rationalize that executing all drunk drivers would save the future lives of people who they would kill in the future. Realists could be executed for leading Christians away from Jesus to a path of eternal damnation.

Once you accept that some execution is justified, then the issue is what are the rules. Can governments be trusted never to abuse those rules and start executing people who don't deserve it? So far, history tells us the answer is no, we can't. Based on our history, it is clear that nations can't be trusted with that level of responsibility. Humanity hasn't yet evolved to the point where it can be trusted to be wise enough to have the power of execution. And if we evolve to where we are wise enough to have the power of execution, will we then need it? Perhaps not.