

The death penalty is **kill**ing someone as punishment for a crime — it's also called **capital punishment**.

The Death Penalty Isn't Used Much Nowadays

- 1) Capital punishment has been **abolished** in many countries, including most of Europe and South America. Elsewhere, it only tends to be used for **very serious** crimes, e.g. **murder**, **espionage** (spying) and **treason**.
- 2) **Religious** and **non-religious** people might make some of these **arguments** for and against the death penalty:

For the Death Penalty

- The risk of death might act as a **better deterrent** to violent criminals than a prison sentence.
- If you execute a murderer, it's **impossible** for them to **kill again**. Imprisoned murderers have been known to **order** killings from jail, or to **reoffend** when released on parole. In cases like these, the **suffering** of the criminal could potentially **protect** many people.
- **Utilitarianism** (or the **principle of utility**) is the idea that the **best** course of action creates the best **balance of good** and **bad** results, e.g. it could be used to argue that killing criminals, although bad for them, would be good for the **majority** of society.

Against the Death Penalty

- Killing as punishment is **just as bad** as murder — many **religious people** and **Humanists** are against **any** form of killing.
- It doesn't give the offender the chance to **reform**.
- There have been cases where someone has been proved **innocent after** having been executed.
- Life is **special** and should be **preserved** — many religious people believe in the **sanctity of life**.
- Many religious believers think **God alone** can decide when to **end** someone's life.

- 3) **Christians** and **Jews** might be against the death penalty because the **Ten Commandments** forbid killing.
- 4) Some people might use **situation ethics** to decide on a **case-by-case** basis if the death penalty should be applied. This could lead to people being **for** the death penalty in **some** cases, but **against** it in **others**, depending on, e.g. the **severity** of the crime and the **background** to the case.

Christians have Mixed Views on Capital Punishment

- 1) Many **Christians** are opposed to **capital punishment**, as it doesn't allow for **reform**, or show **mercy**. **Jesus** said to set aside "eye for eye" (**Matthew 5:38 NIV**) and told people to "love your enemies" (**Matthew 5:44 NIV**). Many are against the **violent nature** of the death penalty.
- 2) However, some Christians in the **United States** (where capital punishment is **legal**) believe that the death penalty is a **good** thing. They say it **protects** the innocent. They might refer to **biblical texts** such as "Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed" (**Genesis 9:6 NIV**) and "Anyone who strikes a person with a fatal blow is to be put to death" (**Exodus 21:12 NIV**).

Islamic Law Allows the Death Penalty

- 1) The Qur'an outlines crimes punishable by **death**, but **encourages** victims' families to take **compensation**.
- 2) Muhammad said that death could be a punishment in **three** cases: "the married adulterer, a life for life, and the deserter of his Din (Islam)" (**Sahih Muslim 16:4152**). This is reflected in **shari'ah law**.
- 3) However, some Muslims believe that **Allah**, not humans, should decide when **life ends** — they **don't** agree with capital punishment.

Many Jews are Against Capital Punishment

- 1) **Exodus 21:12-17** outlines crimes **punishable** by death, such as **kidnapping**. Someone who "schemes and kills someone deliberately" (**Exodus 21:14 NIV**) could face the **death penalty**. Many Jews **disagree** with this — people can **pay** for their **actions** and seek **forgiveness**. The death penalty is an option in **Israel**, but is **hardly** used.
- 2) **Mishnah Makkot 1:10** suggests that the death penalty should be **avoided**. A court "that would execute somebody once in seven years would be considered destructive". The **Talmud** put many **restrictions** on using the death penalty so it was nearly **unusable**.

Learn all the different arguments about the death penalty...

You must discuss both sides of the argument for the essay question — don't just stick to your own views.

EXAM TIP