



The Ethics of Medical Involvement in Capital Punishment: A Philosophical Discussion (International Library of Ethics, Law, and the New Medicine)

Joseph B.R. Gaie

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The morality of capital punishment has been debated for a long time. This however has not resulted in the settlement of the question either way. Philosophers are still divided. In this work I am not addressing the morality of capital punishment per se. My question is different but related. It is this. Whether or not capital punishment is morally right, is it moral or immoral for medical doctors to be involved in the practice? To deal with this question I start off in Chapter One delineating the sort of involvement the medical associations consider to be morally problematic for medical doctors in capital punishment. They make a distinction between what they call “medicalisation” of and “involvement” in capital punishment, and argue that there is a moral distinction between the two. Whilst it is morally acceptable for doctors to be “involved” in capital punishment, according to the medical associations, it is immoral to medicalise the practice. I clarify this position and show what moral issues arise. I then suggest that there should not be a distinction between the two. The medical associations argue that the medicalisation of capital punishment, especially the use by medical doctors of lethal injection to execute condemned prisoners is immoral and therefore should be prohibited, because it involves doctors in doing what is against the aims of medicine.

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