

What are non-religious attitudes towards the use of capital punishment?

Religious and non-religious views about the use of capital punishment are similar, in that they are mixed: some support it, while others are opposed to it. Atheists do not believe in God, nor in an afterlife where sins will be punished. Many non-religious people, including atheists and Humanists, do not support capital punishment.

- Capital punishment does not seem to deter murder. The US, which is one of the few democracies to retain capital punishment, has one of the highest murder rates amongst western democracies. The number of murders does not rise when capital punishment is abolished. **9**

(British Humanist Association)

Situation ethics does not have an absolute rule on whether capital punishment is morally acceptable. It advocates that a situation should be judged on a case-by-case basis. In so doing, situation ethicists would consider what is the most loving and practical thing to do in each situation, and whether sentencing someone to death would serve the interests of society as a whole.

Muslim responses

- Allah is just, therefore justice must be carried out even if it means putting someone to death.
- Muslims agree with many non-religious people that life is special and should be protected, but that those who kill fellow humans must face severe consequences. Muslims, like some non-religious people, believe in the death penalty.
- Many Muslims emphasize that while the Qur'an permits capital punishment for certain crimes, it prefers believers to forgive.

BUILD YOUR SKILLS

- Produce a spider diagram to show divergent Muslim attitudes towards the use of capital punishment. Include references to Muslim teachings to support the different attitudes, and the different situations in which it might be used.
- Why might some Muslims support capital punishment for certain offences, and others reject it?
- Should treason be a capital offence? Justify your answer.



SUMMARY

- Capital punishment is designed to act as a deterrent to committing certain crimes, such as murder.
- There are divergent views among Muslims about whether Islam allows the death penalty in relation to particular offences, such as adultery, apostasy and blasphemy.
- Many non-religious people oppose capital punishment.

Write down one non-religious argument against the use of capital punishment.

When might the death penalty be seen as the most loving action to take? For whom would it be loving, and why?

AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

GOOD WITHOUT A GOD

B The American Humanist Association officially proposed the use of the death penalty in 2001.

3 NON-STATE QUESTIONS

- Explain two non-religious attitudes towards capital punishment. (4)
- Explain two Muslim teachings about capital punishment. In your answer you must refer to a source of wisdom and authority. (5)

Revision

BUILD YOUR SKILLS

Look at the list of 1 can't statements below and think carefully about how confident you are. Use the following code to rate each of the statements. Be honest!

Green – very confident. What is your evidence for this?

Orange – quite confident. What is your target? Be specific.

Red – not confident. What is your target? Be specific.

I can...

- Explain what justice is
- Explain Muslim teachings about justice
- Explain why justice is important to Muslims, including Surah 4:135
- Explain Muslim responses to why justice is important for victims
- Explain non-religious (including atheist and Humanist) attitudes about the importance of justice
- Explain Muslim responses to non-religious attitudes about the importance of justice
- Explain what crime is
- Explain Muslim teachings about, and responses to, the causes and problem of crime, including Surah 16:90–92
- Explain Muslim teachings about crime as a distraction from Allah
- Describe what Muslim individuals and groups, including the Muslim Chaplains Association and Mosaic, do to end crime
- Explain Muslim teachings about what good actions are and how they are rewarded
- Explain Muslim teachings about what evil actions are
- Explain divergent Muslim teachings about why people suffer, including Surah 76
- Explain non-religious (including atheist and Humanist) attitudes about why people suffer, including believing in religion
- Explain Muslim responses to non-religious attitudes about why people suffer
- Explain divergent Muslim teachings and attitudes towards punishment and how it is used, including Surah 2:178 and 5:44–46, and link these to situation ethics
- Explain Muslim teachings on why punishment can be regarded as justice and why it is needed in society
- Explain divergent Muslim attitudes towards each of the aims of punishment: protection, retribution, deterrence, and reformation
- Explain Qur'anic teachings about punishment, including Surah 4:26–32
- Explain Muslim teachings and responses about forgiveness and its importance, including Surah 64:14
- Describe how offenders are forgiven by the community and explain why this is needed
- Explain restorative justice, how it is used, its importance for criminals, and Muslim responses to these
- Explain Muslim teachings about how criminals are treated, including interpretations of Surah 76:1–12
- Explain divergent Muslim attitudes towards the issues of torture, human rights, fair trial, and trial by jury
- Explain the application of ethical theories, such as situation ethics, to the treatment of criminals, and why these theories may accept the use of torture if it is for the greater good
- Explain what capital punishment is and its purpose
- Explain divergent Muslim teachings about capital punishment, including Sahih Muslim Hadith 16:4152
- Explain non-religious (including atheist and Humanist) attitudes towards capital punishment
- Explain the application of ethical theories, such as situation ethics, to capital punishment
- Explain Muslim responses to non-religious attitudes, and the application of ethical theories such as situation ethics, to capital punishment

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A self-assessment revision checklist is available on Kerboodle