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DENNIS PRAGER

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## More innocents die when we don't have capital punishment

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By Dennis Prager

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A couple of weeks ago, three New Hampshire prisoners, one a convicted murderer, escaped from prison. What if the murderer had murdered again? On whose hands would the victim's blood have been?

One of the most common, and surely the most persuasive, arguments against capital punishment is that the state may execute an innocent person. One reason for its effectiveness is that proponents of capital punishment often do not know how to respond to it.

That's a shame. For while the argument is emotionally compelling, it is morally and intellectually shallow.

First of all, there is almost no major social good that does not lead to the death of innocent individuals. Over a million innocent people have been killed and maimed in car accidents. Would this argue for the banning of automobiles? To those whose criterion for acceptable social policy is that not one innocent die, it should.

If it were proven that a strictly enforced 40-miles-per-hour speed limit on our nation's highways would save innocent lives, should we reduce highway limits to 40 miles per hour? Should all roller coasters be shut down because some innocents get killed riding on them?

Anyone whose criterion for abolishing capital punishment is saving innocent lives should be for a 40-mile-per-hour speed limit and for abolishing roller coasters.

But death-penalty abolitionists aren't. And that is why they cannot logically build their case against capital punishment on the argument that an innocent may die. They accept a large number of social policies that kill innocents. Therefore, if abolitionists were intellectually honest, they would have to argue that capital punishment achieves no social good or that it is immoral to kill any murderers, not that it must be abandoned because an innocent may die.

But they do not make those arguments because they know that most Americans do not share their view that killing a murderer is immoral and that all murderers deserve to live. So they make the emotional but intellectually dishonest argument that, sure, some murderers ought be put to death, but we just can't do that because an innocent person may one day die.

The abolitionist argument that an innocent might be killed is false for a second reason. Far more innocent people have already died because we did not execute their murderers. The abolitionist has convinced himself, and a sincere but gullible public, that only a policy of capital punishment threatens innocent lives, while abolition of capital punishment threatens no innocent lives. That is entirely untrue.

Murderers who are not executed have murdered innocent people – usually fellow prisoners. And the very real possibility of escape from prison means that murderers threaten far more innocent lives than capital punishment does.

So here is the bottom line: If the escaped New Hampshire murderer had murdered someone, would opponents of capital punishment have acknowledged that the blood of that victim was on their hands? I doubt it. They believe that only advocates of capital punishment can have blood on their hands, when and if the state executes an innocent person. But they, the abolitionists, somehow have no blood on their hands when a convicted murderer murders an innocent.

As a proponent of capital punishment, I fully acknowledge my moral responsibility for any innocent person executed by the state. It is time that the abolitionists confronted their responsibility for every innocent already murdered and yet to be murdered by murderers who should have been executed. Or at least let them drop this false argument and state the truth: They believe murderers should never be killed.

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*Dennis Prager, one of America's most respected and popular nationally syndicated radio talk-show hosts, is the author of several books and a frequent guest on television shows such as Larry King Live, Politically Incorrect, The Late Late Show on CBS, Rivera Live, The Early Show on CBS, Fox Family Network, The O'Reilly Factor and Hannity & Colmes.*