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Intro statement:

According to act consequentialism, is torture morally permissible? In this essay I will explain why, according to act consequentialism, torture is morally forbidden. Then I will state my rebuttal to that argument and the fatal flaws with that view. I will then state the act consequentialist response to the view that torture is morally permissible. Thus the conclusion of this paper will be that act consequentialism views torture as a morally impermissible act or permissible based on normative and motivating reasons, decision making procedures, and the actions themselves. Thus, this paper will conclude using the scenario below, that act consequentialism says that torture is morally impermissible.

Example:

1. A terrorist named 'Alpha' has a bomb on the eastern side of the city and is a member of a group named 'Bravo' that ~~orchestrated this together~~ ^{has orchestrated the attack}.
2. This bomb is timed to go off at a certain time and can only be deactivated if the bomb is physically found.
3. The authorities or police called 'Charlie' are able to arrest Alpha and start to interrogate him.
4. In order to interrogate Alpha, Charlie decides that torturing Alpha is the best option.

Part 1: The theory of act consequentialism

The theory of act consequentialism states that an action is morally required if that action has better consequences in terms of goodness for everyone considered over any other acts available to the agent. Moreover, an action is morally forbidden if that action has worse consequences for everyone considered over any other acts available to the agent. The agent is the person who is deciding what action to perform. The consequences are ~~whatever the actual result~~ ^{so} ~~that action~~ and is. So, if Jeff decides he will go to the grocery store after work, he will in fact do that action and

the consequences of going to the store are the results that came from Jeff deciding to go to the grocery store. [According to act consequentialism, the consequences of an action are determined to be either positive or negative, depending on the maximum amount of goodness that can be warranted by the actual outcome of an action.] For example, suppose an act consequentialist is a ranger at a wildlife reserve and is watching an endangered rhino that is about to be hunted by a pack of lions who are on the brink of starvation. The ranger could either ^{do} nothing and let the rhino die or he could drive the lions away, saving the rhino's life. An act consequentialist would argue that the ranger should not stop the pack of lions from killing the endangered rhino because letting it live over preventing a group of lions from dying of starvation would result in a worse amount of goodness in this situation. By letting the lions eat the rhino, the act consequentialist ranger is maximizing the total amount of goodness by having a greater number of lions benefit from one rhino's death.

Act consequentialism is an abnormal theory due to the often conflicting normative and motivating reasons. In the case of the African wildlife ranger, his normative reasons would tell him to let the endangered rhino die so the group of lions will be able to have something to eat. However, his motivating reasons can be that as a ranger he wants to preserve the endangered animals on the reserve and ultimately protect the rhinos from going extinct. The conflicting normative and motivating reasons can affect what action the act consequentialist will perform, and often will not perform the actions that will maximize the goodness of a situation.

Part 2: Torture applied to the theory of act consequentialism

In this section of my essay I will explain why torture is forbidden according to the theory of act consequentialism. Act consequentialism says that an action is required when the action produces the best consequences over any other action. Torture is forbidden by act consequentialist reasoning because torturing a terrorist such as Alpha in a case where the information obtained is not true, and thus does not get the maximum amount of goodness available to the agent. With each iteration of torture to a prisoner, it can become easier for Charlie to torture another prisoner and with more extremity in the method of torture. Torture can also cause the integrity and authority the organization of Charlie to be put into question which

can produce negative results. Due to the combined efforts of not being able to be truly sure that information provided by Alpha is entirely truthful, and more intense torture being practiced with acceptance, this can lead to Charlie not knowing when ^{he} ^{will} stop and never be confident in the response from the tortured prisoner, and if the general public found out about widespread torture, the previously trustworthy Charlie's reputation is put into jeopardy.

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A variant of untruthful information that can come from torture is that Alpha will be tortured and instead of stating the true location of a bomb for instance, he will intentionally state that the bomb is in the west, and wrong location in order to bide time so the bomb can explode. This leads to authorities checking the western side of the city and the bomb will still explode in the eastern neighborhood. This false information can cause an issue with actions taken by Charlie and instead of being given a false location, would have searched it using other methods instead. Torturing Alpha and receiving false information will only cause for Charlie officers to use more brutal torture methods. This results in Alpha or subsequent captured members of Bravo to experience more harsh torture, and reveal more false information in order to stop their pain. The act consequentialist says that the torture of Alpha does not accurately lead to the best consequences objectively as instead of just having the bomb explode and having the people die, you have a worse state of affairs because now you have the bomb exploding and people dying and Alpha is now tortured, which is overall worse when compared.

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Something that can arise from practicing torture is the accepted use within the institution Charlie. This can lead to officers of Charlie torturing more people in more extreme ways, for less valuable information than Alpha had. The repeated use of torture can lead to innocent people not involved with Bravo's bomb plot to possibly be taken into questioning as suspected terrorists and thus tortured in order to have them reveal the "truth". This "truth" can result in innocent people claiming involvement in a crime that they were not involved in, so that the pain during torture will stop. By the initial torturing of Alpha and the torturing of innocent people as suspects, it leads to those officers being more desensitized to torture, and thus more likely to be less productive in society, and more likely to torture future criminals they arrest. The act consequentialist would say that torture is morally forbidden as if they had not tortured innocent people, those innocent people would not have gone to prison. The act consequentialist can also

Good Points!

argue that by torturing Alpha initially, you have led to a worse state of affairs as only the bomb would have exploded, and no one would have been tortured with a bomb going off as well.

Torture can also damage an institution like Charlie's reputation, integrity, credibility, and respect if information regarding the harsh, and frequent torture of prisoners like Alpha were to be released to the general public. Torture can also cause dissent within an organization like Charlie and lead to a less productive organization that is aimed at stopping and preventing criminal and terrorist activity in the city. This can lead to Charlie becoming a corrupt institution, with the leaders of Charlie being forced to redo the entire hierarchy, rules, and staff. This makes Charlie unreliable and possibly unable to rebound from its downfall. If the institution is corrupt, it only gives Bravo more of a platform to say how corrupt a country, or ethnic group is to their followers only giving current members more of a reason to support Bravo's cause, and potentially gain new followers. The act consequentialist would say that this corruption could have been preventable had Charlie not tortured prisoners or potential suspects. The potential downfall of Charlie and Bravo's expanded platform is just the overall worse state of affairs that resulted from the torture of people than if torture had not been committed, and thus only the bomb would have exploded and Charlie would have a cleaner reputation among the general public.

Great point!

Part 3: Objections to the view of torture and act consequentialism

However, torture can be morally permissible according to the act consequentialist under certain circumstances and allow for torture to be used when it benefits the larger whole, especially in desperate scenarios.

Back to the Alpha/Bravo/Charlie scenario, torturing Alpha can still result in an overall positive as the bomb is timed, and by some means Charlie officials were able to determine that there was a bomb located in the city, just in an unidentified location. Because of this, lots of innocent lives are at stake in the eastern part of the city where ^{the} bomb is located. Due to this it can be oftentimes necessary to take drastic measures in order to protect those innocent lives. By torturing Alpha, officials are able to obtain information in a dire scenario, where any information could prove helpful in a ticking time bomb situation.

Name the "dilemma/problem" this

20 Torture can lead to a iterative process in which an officer of Charlie will be more likely to torture a prisoner in the future at an increased intensity. However, when faced with a serious dilemma when multiple lives are at stake, the only option often times is the utilitarian option as it will always minimize the harm in a given scenario, or at least attempt to minimize the harm involved with the bomb going off. The ability to respect Alpha's individual autonomy can not be respected due to a more intense situation at hand. ^{compare 1 life to a few hundred} The end goal is to maximize happiness, and by having a chance of saving hundreds of innocent lives, unfortunately the option to torture Alpha is one of the only options left, and for the act consequentialist is the action that must be taken in a difficult circumstance. To an act consequentialist, ultimately the utilitarian view is the option that humanity tends to take, and in the eyes of the general public is the action that should be taken due to the serious risk involved. The act consequentialist will state that it is time to look at the positives and negatives and ultimately the scenario for torturing Alpha is the best case scenario to save everyone's life.

With regards to the institutional distrust that could come from torturing Alpha, this could be summarized that despite the knowledge of Alpha being tortured to the public, this does not mean that it is the end of the Charlie organization and that even if the reputation is tainted it does not mean it is the end, and to some members of the general public it is apparent why Alpha was tortured, as the circumstances were dire and desperate times call for desperate measures. Charlie's reputation may not be tainted for all time, a historical example is Winston Churchill receiving intelligence that the Nazis were going to bomb Coventry, but if he alerted the people of Coventry to evacuate, then the Nazis would know that the Allied forces cracked the enigma code. In order to maintain the status that the Germans did not know about the British cracking of the enigma code, Churchill decided to let Coventry be attacked. Churchill's reputation today is not tainted by this knowledge and while it is one of his more controversial decisions, he is still revered as one of the best Prime Minister's historically.

Great supporting example!

Part 4: Objections to why torture is required by act consequentialism

Unfortunately though, even if desperate times do require desperate measures, subjectively it is still difficult to torture Alpha due to the severe likelihood of aggregated torture that can accumulate over time. Torture as a practice can be counterproductive, and information obtained under extreme stress can be not entirely accurate, and verifying these facts waste time and resources over using them effectively. The act consequentialist objection to torture being permissible is that, when someone from Charlie for example is to torture a prisoner like Alpha, that information is not entirely accurate and when a prisoner is under duress, memory is impaired and will not be able to give entirely accurate information. When one is tortured, the brain functions will start focusing on ways to survive, and cognitive function is reduced in order to give more brain functioning power to the survival parts of the brain. The act consequentialist would say that despite the impulse to torture for valuable information, the information given by a prisoner such as Alpha would be too incorrect and wrong in order to warrant anything, as it is better to have no information ~~that is wrong~~ than information that is ~~right~~. *Good Point!*

(22) Torture also has a psychological impact on people who are ~~involved with it~~, and their mental capacities will ~~numb~~ to torturing prisoners of Bravo and will ultimately be able to commit more heinous acts of torture ~~every next~~ time they decide to torture the prisoners. In the scenario involving Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie, suppose that an officer named Delta for example was commanded by a superior to torture prisoners of Bravo. Delta initially feels a little "weird" by doing it but eventually decided that it ~~was~~ nothing out of the ordinary to get information. After the leak of these torture photos is released via major news and media outlets, Delta's statements get somewhat more intense. For instance, Delta would say that despite the torture and her subsequent imprisonment that "Bravo members ~~lives~~ are better, they got the better end of the deal, Bravo's are trying to kill us, and I'm not apologizing ~~the~~ enemy." This harsh statement is a drastic difference from Delta's original statement of feeling strange about committing torture, and only shows that torture can change the perpetrator's minds and that is not a good thing. The act consequentialist would then say that the long term effects of this are too significant to risk torturing Alpha in a situation. *Is this always the case? What if they did tell the truth?*
wrong
enacting it
what if you had a specialist who could spot a lie?
become
each
was
sorry
lives
more important

A response to torture being objectively permissible is that the institutional damage that can be done by a media release is that even if outrage will subside among the general public, media outlets will not forget it, and it can be used to amplify a current scandal or be used by political enemies to gain traction. In the case of Charlie's information being released and Delta being incarcerated, it can easily be used to say that this leak being called the Echo Scandal can lead to long term disrespect from outside the organization and inside the organization. In wake of Echo, uninvolved members from Charlie will say that, "It's appalling. We wear the same uniform, and serve the same purpose. They let their fellow officers down." From the public it can be an issue as well, an organization meant to serve and protect the people are treating Bravo's so inhumanely that the public does not know who will protect them anymore. These long standing consequences will lead for the act consequentialist to say that these consequences do not maximize the happiness and goodness of a situation. If we are to judge the action and look at the consequences over the long term, more people will end up suffering with an institutional downfall.

↑ No problems here!

Conclusion: why act consequentialism is not the best ethical theory

Act consequentialism is a utilitarian theory, and is not the best theory for judging whether or not to commit torture. I feel that this theory is too simplistic in approach to judge something as intense as torture and something that can have disastrous consequences if not done the right way. This utilitarianism is too pigeonholed into either the positive or the negative view of torture and will distort something so serious such as torture into something as an easy decision which is wrong. Act consequentialism is best used for circumstances where lives and humanity is at stake, maybe choosing what to do in a smaller, insignificant scenario can be served by the theory of act consequentialism.

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