
Justice, Context, and Violence: Law Enforcement Officers on Why They Torture

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How do police explain their support for torture? Findings from 12 months of fieldwork with police in India complicate previous researchers' claims that violence workers tend to morally disengage and blame circumstances for their actions. The officers in this study engage in moral reflection on torture, drawing on their beliefs about human nature and justice to explain their support for it. They admit that they use torture more widely than their own conceptions of justice allow, but see this as an imperfect implementation of their principles rather than as a violation of them. Previous research on the spread of human rights norms has focused on how these norms can be adapted to the local beliefs that support them, rather than on understanding the beliefs that conflict with human rights. I argue that illuminating the self-understanding of state actors who support or engage in torture is crucial to building theory on why such violence occurs, as well as to designing interventions to prevent it.

Hannah Arendt famously wrote of the “banality of evil.” She meant that atrocities are committed not by people who are exceptional in their monstrosity, but those who are disconcertingly normal. Their acts result not from evil intentions, but by a failure of any moral engagement; a failure, Arendt says, “to think” (1963). Research on the use of torture by the police and military has followed suit. Torturers are not radically different from the rest of society, and nor are they motivated by long-standing personal enmity toward the people they victimize, many researchers argue. Rather, they are transformed through socialization processes

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that encourage moral disengagement. These two factors—moral disengagement and circumstances that socialize violence—are keys in producing torturers, according to researchers (e.g., Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo 2002).

It is unclear, however, how those who commit or contribute to torture through their support of it understand what they do. To examine this question, this study draws from in-depth interviews with law enforcement officers who were participating in human rights education in India. I examine these officers' moral beliefs, their perceptions of the circumstances in which they work, and how these beliefs and perceptions inform their judgments on the use of torture and related violence.

The findings from this study complicate previous conclusions regarding the way police understand and explain the use of torture, and more broadly, how people who support violence justify this support to themselves and others. First, my research suggests that officers' justifications for torture are more than morally disengaged rationalizations and are in fact consistent with their moral worldviews. Second, my research shows how officers' interpretations of the circumstances in which they work contribute to their view that torture is justified even beyond the violence that could be supported by their own moral beliefs.

The study is motivated by the premise that insight into the self-understanding of those who commit and support torture is crucial not only to theory on violence but also to the design of interventions to prevent it. A key means by which human rights activists and other reformers combat torture is through education for police and security officers. The current phase of the United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education, for example, prioritizes education for these groups. But in order to persuade people to behave differently, it is crucial to understand how they defend their current behavior. In the case of police violence, it is especially important to understand both officers' beliefs about what is right as well as whether and how they believe they can act on their beliefs.

Most of the human rights educators interviewed for this study assume that officers violate rights for what even the police would agree are immoral reasons, such as to receive a bribe, or amoral reasons, such as a lack of training. Although the police do use torture for these reasons, they admit that it is wrong to do so. Missing from this understanding are the reasons for which police believe it is right to use torture.

Human rights activists' relative neglect of perpetrators' moral beliefs is understandable. The human rights movement is premised on the universality of its principles. A focus on the moral beliefs that conflict with these principles may seem to compromise the

movement's moral authority. I argue that far from undermining the legitimacy of rights claims, recognizing and understanding such beliefs can strengthen the fight against torture.

Torture and Criminal Justice in India

Torture by the police and military is a “routine and accepted means of investigation in India,” according to human rights organizations (Asian Human Rights Commission n.d.). Domestic civil society groups, international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the U.S. government have documented the pervasiveness of the problem (e.g., Asian Center for Human Rights 2011; Human Rights Watch 2009; U.S. State Department 2013). The Indian police frequently refuse to register cases against other police officers, so the majority of incidents of torture are not reported (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative 2011; personal interviews with the staff of the Human Rights Law Network, New Delhi 2012). The police are however required to report deaths in police custody to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Between 2001 and 2010, the NHRC recorded 14,231 such deaths (Asian Centre for Human Rights 2011). These numbers include deaths from other causes as well as torture, but are nonetheless suggestive of significant problems within prisons and jails.

Legal Provisions

India has signed but not ratified the United Nations Convention Against Torture (CAT). This partial endorsement reflects the ambivalence within Indian law regarding torture. In the Indian Penal Code, “voluntarily causing hurt to extort confession, or to compel restoration of property” is punishable by a sentence of up to seven years, and “wrongful confinement to extort confession, or compel restoration of property” is punishable by a sentence of up to three years (Indian Penal Code, Sections 330 & 348). In order to ratify CAT, however, a government must enact a law that criminalizes torture as a specific offense and these current provisions fall short. The government has taken steps in this direction: In 2010, the lower house of the legislature passed a Prevention of Torture bill. But the upper house of the legislature has not yet approved the bill.

Moreover, punishment for officers who use torture is rare. Although the NHRC investigates cases of torture and has found officers guilty of it, in most cases, they only award monetary compensation to the victim or the victim's next of kin rather than prosecute or recommend punishment for the accused officer (personal interviews with NHRC officials, New Delhi 2011–2012).

Defining Torture

The issue of what constitutes torture may never be resolved. Those most concerned with preventing it are sometimes most loathe to define it, since the more specific a definition, the more it narrows what is prohibited—and hence, the more it implicitly permits. The still pending Indian Convention of Torture Bill (2010) limits the definition of torture to “grievous hurt” and “danger to life, limb, or health (mental or physical)” committed while “seeking to elicit information or a confession.” In contrast, the United Nations Convention on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment broadens both the acts that might be considered torture as well as the motivations for torture.

The police officers in this study often used the words “torture” and “third degree.” They were occasionally more specific, such as one officer who described putting suspects in stress positions, giving the example of “asking [suspects] to put their leg in one particular position until they tell us the truth.” Usually, they were more vague. For instance, when I asked one police officer about torture, he replied, “Every day at *thanas*¹ there is some sort of illegality but the acceptance is that you cannot cross [a certain] level . . . If you torture someone and you get information and crack the case then it is win-win for everybody.”

I did not ask officers to specify the details of these acts. They were already wary of my interest in their behavior, and it was important that they do not feel that I was investigating their actions for the NHRC or an NGO. Moreover, I aimed to understand the beliefs and perceptions that inform officers’ views on violence, rather than the details of the acts they commit.

Speculations about the nature of this violence can however be made based on the reports of human rights organizations. Reports list beatings, electric shock, sexual assault, stress positions, and exposure to cold as common practices among Indian police and security forces.

In addition, ethnographic research in India reveals the types of torture that are common among police. The anthropologist, Beatrice Jauregui (2013b: 4–5), writes of police in Uttar Pradesh:

On any given day one would see police of all ranks but especially the subordinate ranks of Sub-Inspectors and Constables . . . shove bodies into walls or other objects; slap people across the face; leave them bloody, black and blue from beatings; pull hair and ears and other appendages; stretch and step on limbs; bang heads . . .

¹ Police stations.

Some of the police in my study admitted that they have used torture, while others expressed their support for torture without stating that they have engaged in it. It is essential to understand the beliefs that inform officers' support of torture even if they do not personally engage in it, however, because such views contribute to violence. For example, a high-ranking officer may not use torture himself, but expect his subordinates to use it. Moreover, since I did not ask officers to admit to personal culpability, the interviews are not a reliable source of data on which officers have engaged in torture directly. As such, I include the beliefs officers express in support of torture, rather than focus on which officers confessed to carrying it out.

Criminal Justice beyond the Police

The criminal justice system in India is plagued by problems. Government bodies and NGOs alike have for years worked to address the "inordinate delays" in the judicial system, which often "undermine the very purpose of the administration of justice" (Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India 2011). Court cases often take decades and result in a high number of acquittals, as the availability of witnesses and evidence erodes over time (Law Commission of India, Government of India 2012). In addition, politicians routinely interfere with police work, using the police to punish enemies and help friends; a practice that is supported by the significant control they exert over individual officers' career trajectories. Furthermore, inadequate resources, poor training, and insufficient staffing stymie the effectiveness of the police and other actors within the system (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative 2010; Human Rights Watch 2009).

These flaws in the criminal justice system and in police functioning have been documented by domestic and international NGOs (e.g., Amnesty International 2011; Asian Centre for Human Rights 2011; Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative 2011; Human Rights Watch 2012), analyzed by government committees (e.g., National Police Commission 1979, 1983; Ribeiro Committee on Police Reforms 1998, 1999; Padmanabhaiah Committee on Police Reforms 2000), and addressed by the Supreme Court of India (2006). But how officers understand their own behavior in relation to these problems receives far less attention. Observers know little about how police officers' perceptions of the flaws in the criminal justice system inform their judgments on how they should behave and how these perceptions may generate additional barriers to good governance and rights protection. This understanding becomes all the more important given that decades of legal reform

efforts have failed to produce meaningful change in the police (personal interviews 2011–2012;² Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative 2010).

Relevance of the Findings beyond India

Research suggests that the beliefs about justice expressed by the police in this study reflect a “culture of policing” that transcends national contexts. Often referred to as “noble cause corruption,” researchers have documented the prevalence of these beliefs in many countries, including the United States (Caldero and Crank 2010; Kleinig 2002).

However, my findings best describe police in countries with weaknesses in the legal system similar to those of India, for two reasons. First, police in countries characterized by pervasive corruption and judicial inefficiency can act on their beliefs to a greater extent than in countries with stronger mechanisms to discipline law enforcers. Second, obstacles to justice, such as corruption and inefficiency, undermine the legitimacy of the rule of law in the eyes of the police as well as the general public, and provide police with yet another rationale to disregard it. Indeed, countries with similar weaknesses in the justice system such as Brazil are home to similar types of police violence. This similarity may, at least partly, be due to the impunity these weaknesses provide to the police and the corresponding lack of legitimacy of the rule of law.

Torture and Torturers

Studies have revealed disturbing findings about the relationship between torture and democracy. Rather than abolishing it, democracies pioneered the use of torture that does not leave any scars and continue to be more likely to use this type of torture (Rejali 2007). Moreover, democracies with strong judiciaries are more likely to use nonscarring torture than those with weak judiciaries (Conrad, Hill, and Moore 2014). Further, in spite of public pronouncements to the contrary, democratic countries such as the United States and India have maintained ambivalence in the law regarding such violence (Lokaneeta 2011).

How, though, do individual police and military officers understand this violence? A limited number of studies involve in-depth

² I conducted interviews between 2011 and 2012 with the staff of human rights organizations in New Delhi, including the Human Rights Law Network, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, the Asian Centre for Human Rights, and the South Asian Human Rights Documentation Centre.

interviews with these actors, but those that exist offer rich insights. The majority of these researchers follow Hannah Arendt in her reflections on Adolph Eichmann, in arguing that those who commit atrocities are surprising not because they are different from non-violent people, but because they are so normal (1963).

Arendt gave significant attention to Eichmann's personal failings, though, while more recent researchers have focused on how people are socialized into committing violence by forces outside themselves (e.g., Conroy 2000; Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo 2002). In this view, "the effect of wearing a uniform, the roles we are expected or ordered to perform, the coercive rules that govern behavior, the camaraderie and social support from peers who urge us on, the need to be liked, accepted, and respected by our cohorts and by our superiors who parcel out the system's rewards" contribute to torture more powerfully than the internal traits of an individual (Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo 2002: 234).

The processes that draw police and military officers "across that elusive line between good and evil" range from highly systematized to more informal but no less coercive influences (Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo 2002: 242). A systematic socialization process was in place in Greece, where special police units were first brutalized themselves to desensitize them to violence, and then gradually given increasing honors and respect as they took on responsibilities for torturing others (Haritos-Fatouros 1988). In his book on a German police unit during the Second World War pointedly titled *Ordinary Men*, Christopher Browning (1998) argues that the German police were gradually desensitized to brutality by the examples of their peers and the mockery they feared enduring should they fail to participate. The author of the similarly titled book, *Unspeakable Acts, Ordinary People*, also suggests that socialization processes, rather than dysfunctional individuals, are responsible for torture (Conroy 2000).

These and other scholars argue that people are able to support and commit atrocities in part because they have disengaged from their moral beliefs. In a study that informed much later work, Gresham Sykes and David Matza (1957) refer to this as a "neutralization" of shame. In this view, people who commit crimes hold the same moral beliefs as people who do not commit crimes, but distance themselves from the shame of violating these beliefs. Although this assertion has generated much scholarly debate (e.g., Topalli 2006), it has informed the work of later scholars who argue that police and military officers' moral disengagement facilitates violence (e.g., Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo 2002: 202).

However, it is not clear whether officers' explanations for violence suggest a moral disengagement, or as I will argue below, reveal a differing conception of moral action that interacts in complex ways with their interpretations of the circumstances in which they work.

Noble Cause Corruption

Another body of literature examines "noble cause corruption," which refers to police violations of legal procedures for the sake of obtaining an outcome they see as just. This literature characterizes police explanations for such illegal behavior as reflecting a genuine ethical dilemma, rather than as a rationalization or form of moral disengagement (e.g., Kleinig 2002). One textbook intended for police officers in training describes noble cause corruption as what happens when police seek to "get bad guys off the street and protect the innocent." According to the authors, such corruption can result when police "care too much about their work" and are motivated by the belief that "the outcome will be good" (Caldero and Crank 2010: 3).

Much of the scholarship on noble cause corruption draws on archetypical cases such as the film "Dirty Harry," rather than on empirical research with police (Crank, Flaherty, and Giacomazzi 2007; e.g., see Klockars 1983). Extant empirical studies are primarily quantitative. For example, Crank, Flaherty, and Giacomazzi (2007) investigated the prevalence of police support for illegal activities to achieve good ends. To contribute to the debate over whether police enter the profession with noble cause beliefs (see Caldero 1997) or whether these beliefs develop in response to their environment (see Sunahara 2004), the authors also tested whether officers' support for illegalities is associated with their perception of local crime rates. The authors found that for the most part police did not express support for illegal behavior to achieve good ends. The authors also did not find a consistent relationship between such support and officers' perceptions of crime in their environment.

The setting and method of the study may help explain why police did not admit to supporting illegal activities, and why a consistent relationship between police support for illegal activities and their perceptions of crime rates did not emerge. The researchers administered a structured survey during a police training session. Police may be less willing to admit support for illegalities in writing and at their workplace during a training on police procedures, even if told that the answers will remain confidential. Moreover, the nature of police beliefs and the relationship

of these beliefs to their environment may be too complex for a structured survey to illuminate.

Contributions of the Current Study

Previous in-depth qualitative research focuses on the process by which police and military officers are socialized to engage in torture. The current study probes how officers understand and explain torture once they have been socialized to view it as acceptable. It is crucial to understand not only the processes that produce violent actors but also the perceptions and beliefs that perpetuate these acts by helping people to see violence as in keeping with their moral beliefs.

Furthermore, while previous researchers interviewed officers after violence has ceased, I interviewed officers about current violence. This offers a window into how officers justify violence while they still engage in or support it. Moreover, most in-depth qualitative studies focus on exceptional moments of history, such as times of political upheaval. Torture takes place routinely in stable democracies as well, however (Rejali 2007), and it is important to understand the beliefs and perceptions that support these practices during unexceptional moments in democratic countries.

An important exception to the above-described focus of past research is the work of the ethnographer Beatrice Jauregui. Focusing on police in India, her research revealed how officers' perceptions of their circumstances exacerbate violence. She showed that police confront many challenges to their authority, and that the insecurity this induces may increase their tendency to use violence (Jauregui 2013a). Moreover, a nuanced study by James Dawes suggests that genuine moral beliefs that support violence and moral disengagement may not be mutually exclusive. In his interviews with Japanese war criminals, Dawes revealed how deeply held beliefs inculcated in childhood may have prepared these men for violence. At the same time, these men disengaged from their brutality, such as by using language that distanced them from it (2013). One might surmise that officers' moral beliefs facilitated their disengagement, by making insensitivity seem honorable.

These studies point to the importance of individual beliefs and the local context for whether governments and communities adopt human rights norms; a point emphasized by human rights researchers (e.g., Klotz 1995; Merry & Levitt 2009). From the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the conclusion of the Second World War, scholars have heatedly debated whether human rights principles are universal or culturally specific. Beginning in the late 1990s, though, the focus expanded

beyond this dualistic framing of the issue. Researchers have since contributed rich ethnographic accounts of how global human rights norms emerge in particular places (Goodale 2006). Anthropologists (e.g., Merry 2006) as well as political scientists (e.g., Keck and Sikkink 1999) have focused in particular on how human rights principles can be made relevant in diverse contexts by linking them to the local beliefs that support them. Far less attention has been paid, however, to beliefs that conflict with human rights, how these beliefs are informed by local contexts, and the meaning of these conflicting beliefs for how perpetrators understand rights violations.

Methods

This paper is based on my 12 months of fieldwork in India with 33 law enforcement officers who were participating in a two-year distance-learning course that awards them a Master's Degree in Human Rights. I use the United Nations' (1979) definition of law enforcement officials, which includes civil police as well as military and paramilitary officers serving in domestic locations who have been given policing powers.

The study relies on in-depth qualitative interviews rather than large-N survey data due to the nature of the research questions. While quantitative research shows causal relationships between variables, qualitative research illuminates the processes that explain such relationships and the perceptions of the actors involved (Lin 1998). This study focuses on how officers explain their use of violence, and probes the beliefs that inform their explanations. These interviews also differ from surveys in that they evolve as organic conversations from a base list of questions; they are "semistructured" rather than structured surveys. This allows the researcher to probe the perceptions officers express, rather than only inquire about a list of beliefs that the interviewer has anticipated prior to the interview. What may be lost in consistency across interviews is gained in the depth and nuance of each individual interview. Moreover, the loss is only superficial. While the phrasing of the question varies depending on to what the interviewer is responding, a common set of basic questions guides each interview, allowing for a consistency in focus and content. Finally, this study focuses on what is common across the interviews in spite of the differences in how questions are phrased.

Representativeness of Sample

I anticipated that these officers would be more likely to oppose torture than the average officer because they chose to enroll in a

human rights course. However, pilot interviews revealed that officers enrolled primarily for the potential professional benefits, and as will be clear in the following, do not oppose torture. Moreover, discussions with human rights educators who conduct police trainings in India suggest that these officers' beliefs about violence and rights are similar to those of officers who did not enroll in the course.

It is possible, however, that officers who choose to enroll in any course are more ambitious and academically inclined than an average officer. This may make them more articulate than they would be otherwise without changing what it is that they articulate. The lower ranking officers in the sample may also be more economically secure than their peers, since they pay a fee to attend the course. It is unclear what difference it makes if the sample is more ambitious and economically comfortable than average. If anything, such officers may be a "best case scenario" for responsiveness to efforts to prevent torture and promote human rights. If so, this "best case" is still highly problematic, as the following will reveal.

The officers in the sample range from the lowest rank of constable to higher posts such as Additional Director General of Police. Of the 16 civil police in the study, five are members of the Indian Police Service (IPS), the elite national service whose officers fill leadership positions and must pass a competitive national examination to be admitted. Eleven are members of the State Police Service, who fill the lower and middle ranks of the police. The greater number of lower and middle ranking officers in this study is in keeping with a similar, and in fact greater, disproportionately large number in the Indian police. State Police make up 99.12 percent of the police force in India (CHRI 2008). In spite of the common assumption that lower ranking officers are more likely to support the use of extrajudicial violence, the IPS officers in this study expressed the same views as the lower ranking officers, and did so consistently through several rounds of in-depth interviews. The study also includes 4 members of the paramilitary police and 16 members of the military. Most of the military in this study serve in domestic locations in which they have been given policing powers under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. The below section on officers' moral beliefs includes all the officers, while the section on officers' responses to their working environment focuses more on the civil police. All but two of the officers in the sample are men; again reflecting an even greater disparity in the Indian police, of which women make up only 1.79 percent (CHRI 2008).

Officers across the country enroll in this course, and my sample consists primarily of officers in North India. It is unknown whether officers in other regions would respond differently, although there is no evidence to suggest that they would. This is especially the case

given that the supervisory rank of IPS officers do not serve in their states of origin but are posted in diverse parts of the country and are transferred with some frequency, making it less likely that regional differences in police beliefs have taken hold. The officers in the sample ranged from those in the capital city of New Delhi to those who serve in more rural parts of states such as Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. In this paper, I focus on beliefs and perceptions that were articulated by most officers across the different ranks and geographic locations.

Interviews

I conducted 60 in-depth, semistructured interviews with 33 officers who were enrolled in the human rights course. I interviewed 20 officers at least twice and in some cases three times. Most interviews lasted two to three hours. In the first interview, I asked questions such as why the interviewee joined the police or military, and about the challenges they face in their work, what made the experience challenging, what they did in the situation, what they think they should have done, and why. I asked why they think the police are criticized for using torture and other forms of violence, who criticizes them, and in what instances they think such violence is right. I also asked for their opinions on instances of police violence that were covered in the news around the time of each interview. In each of these questions, I probed how officers judge the “right thing to do” and the understanding of justice on which these judgments are based. In the second interview, I gave officers a report by an NGO alleging that police tortured a man suspected in his wife’s disappearance. I asked officers what they believe happened, why they believe it happened, and what they believe the police should have done. I also read them quotes from their human rights textbooks and asked for their views on the meaning and legitimacy of the material. I used a Hindi interpreter with six of the officers, and interviewed the rest in English. The interpreter was a PhD student in New Delhi whom I trained in qualitative interviewing methods. After each interview we discussed differences between Hindi and English regarding key words. Although such differences cannot be erased, I was attentive to their implications as I analyzed my data.

Sampling

I attended both the week-long examinations for the human rights course that take place twice each year, explained the project to officers who were sitting for the examination, and requested their contact information. I then contacted the officers over the

phone and requested an interview. Most officers volunteered their contact information, and most whom I reached over the phone agreed to the interview. This represents a small percentage of officers enrolled in the course overall, though, since students across the subcontinent are enrolled and my sample focused on one examination center in North India. I conducted most interviews in person in Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab at the officers' homes or in restaurants. I interviewed some officers from other states over the phone. Many of the officers in the military and paramilitary forces were serving in Jammu and Kashmir.

Following previous researchers on extrajudicial violence, I include officers' beliefs about both torture and extrajudicial executions in the study, as these two types of violence share common rationales among the police as well as, sometimes, common victims (Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo 2002).

Additional Interviews

I also interviewed 35 Delhi-based police experts and human rights advocates, as well as 15 civil servants who also participated in the human rights course. This sample included high-ranking police officers in leadership roles such as in the NHRC and Bureau of Police Research and Development, and former high-ranking police officers who now work on police reform within civil society groups. The human rights advocates I interviewed included human rights educators, lawyers, and activists who conduct human rights trainings for police or work on police reform, such as the staff of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, the Asian Centre for Human Rights, and the Human Rights Law Network.

Findings

Moral Disengagement—or a Different Morality?

Officers condemn torture that is motivated by corruption, political interference, pressure from supervisors, lack of resources, and poor training almost as readily as human rights advocates do. They condemn this kind of torture, however, because it interferes with their conception of justice, not because it interferes with human rights protection. This does not suggest that officers only engage in torture for what they consider to be good reasons. But what is less recognized is that if officers *did* act purely on their professed ideals, they would still use torture.

Indeed, interviews with these law enforcement officers do not indicate that they are disengaged from moral reflection. In the

hours officers spoke to me, most demonstrated their desire to wrestle with questions about the right thing to do. Moreover, they articulate judgments in support of torture that are consistent with their beliefs about human nature and justice. This moral consistency complicates the picture of atrocity perpetrators as disconnected from moral beliefs and primarily attempting to neutralize inconsistencies between such beliefs and their actions. More troublingly, it suggests the presence of alternative moralities in which they consider violence to be a good act in some circumstances.

Beliefs about Human Nature: Types of Human and Categories of Exception

The officers in this study view human beings as divided into different types of people with different moral worth, and hence, with different standards of behavior due to them. As such, differentiating by the identity of the victim of a rights violation, rather than by whether a violation has technically occurred, is a key element in their conception of justice. When I asked one high-ranking military officer who had previously been stationed in Kashmir how one should decide whether an act is a “human rights violation,” he replied, “It depends on whom the violation has taken place against.” For officers, different types of people deserve very different treatment, and justice depends on their receiving it. This is in sharp contrast with the human rights movement’s affirmation of universal and equal human dignity, and the corresponding conception of justice based on equal treatment and protection.

Officers are most willing to defend torture when it is done to the category of criminal they describe as “hardened.” For officers serving in areas combating insurgencies, the label of “militant” or “terrorist” operates in the same way. Once an officer believes that someone should be labeled in this way, he or she enters a category of exception. The rules that protect “normal” human beings no longer apply for moral as well as for instrumental reasons.

As was typical, an IPS officer from Punjab explained, “If a police officer wants to extract information without using the third degree, he can, depending on the criminal. If he is a hard-core criminal, then you will have to.” Another high-ranking IPS officer asserted, “I have been a senior officer for twenty-eight years. There was no situation where I had to be firing on someone. Except in encounters with terrorists.” The officer has not fired on anyone, he states proudly. However, he has fired on “terrorists.” In this narration, “terrorists” do not count as a “someone.”

Officers believe that people in these exceptional categories should be tortured for several reasons. First, they view such people

as not human in the same way as others and hence do not deserve “human” rights such as protection from torture. This understanding of human nature as divided rather than universal helps explain how people come to “dehumanize” others, which scholars argue has contributed to atrocities throughout history (e.g., Rorty 1989).

In addition to this ontology of “human” and “less human,” instrumental reasoning is also important in their justification. Police argue that their hardened nature means that certain types of criminal will not respond to anything short of violence. These different types of explanations are often combined, such as in the statement of a high-ranking IPS officer who warned, “A criminal is a person without a soul and the standard techniques for people with souls cannot be applicable.” In officers’ view, certain people should be tortured both because they do not have that which constitutes humanity—a soul—and also because this lacking means that nothing short of torture will have any effect.

Beliefs about Justice

Drawing from this view of human nature, law enforcement officers articulate a conception of justice that is grounded in principles of merit rather than equality. When they describe the ideal law enforcement officer, it is not an officer who neutrally upholds the rule of law for all people equally. Rather, they envision an officer who identifies those who are evil and fights them, upholding justice by punishing wrongdoing. For example, when explaining why he joined the police, a low-ranking officer from Uttar Pradesh asserts, “We do away with evil powers. We fight those with *ravana-pravathi* [demon nature].”

The desire to view themselves as heroes who fight wrong rather than neutral protectors of the law informs their explanations for violence, even including violence toward people who are not “hardened criminals” and “terrorists.” This is demonstrated frequently in the second interview with the officers, when I gave them an NGO report alleging that police in West Bengal tortured a man named “Ajay” while he was in custody. According to the NGO, Ajay came to the police station to report the disappearance of his wife. The police responded by illegally detaining and torturing him. I asked the police officers in my study what they believe happened and why, as well as what they believe the police featured in the report should have done. Officers’ first response almost always addressed the question of Ajay’s guilt rather than the issue of torture, even though Ajay does not seem to belong to the category of “hardened criminal.” For example, when I asked a low-ranking officer from Haryana why the NGO is critical of the police, he concluded, “the

NGO must have thought that the guy is innocent. That is why they are criticizing the police.”

Another officer reacted similarly to a news story that circulated widely in India and in the international human rights community. Members of the Border Security Force (BSF), a Central Armed Police Force that patrols India's borders, had been caught on camera stripping naked and beating a man from Bangladesh. It became a rallying cry for human rights advocates who have long been concerned about mistreatment of Bangladeshis at the border. The salient factor for the officer I interviewed was not the physical abuse itself, but who the victim is and what he may have done. “It was shown on TV. The BSF doing excess” this relatively high-ranking officer remarked, continuing, “But why were they doing this? It was because he was a smuggler.” To overlook the issue of the victim's guilt is to overlook the key issue, in the officer's mind. This suggests an understanding of justice as based on merit that extends beyond officers' stated view that ideally such violence should be limited to only exceptional categories of people.

In summary, officers' conception of justice that prioritizes merit and punishment is a strong prior belief that is in tension with the inalienable, universal conception of rights advanced by the human rights movement. These very different conceptions of justice are part of why officers are often baffled by the attacks of human rights activists, while activists often assume that police have no conception of justice and act only for self-interest.

The Complexity of Circumstance: The Category between Absolutely Right and Absolutely Wrong

Officers see violence against “hardened criminals” and “terrorists” as absolutely right, and they understand violence against a generalized conception of people whom they believe are guilty as still in keeping with their principles of justice. In the messy world of everyday policing, though, officers concede that they use violence more widely than their own conceptions of justice allow. They defend the use of extrajudicial violence against people who may not inherently “deserve” it, as well as smaller compromises of legal procedure, by arguing that justice requires these actions given the political, legal, and material circumstances in which they work. They view the Indian legal system as biased in favor of criminals, and they argue that, to counterbalance this bias, they must take action outside the law on a wide spectrum of people. And because their conceptions of justice allow for torture as a legitimate means of upholding justice, they are able to see this as an imperfect implementation of principle rather than as an outright violation of

it. Below I outline the way officers draw from aspects of the context in which they work to explain and defend violence.

Corruption and Political Interference

Police claim that criminals often have influence over the politicians, who, in turn, have power over the police; a claim that is supported by the reports of both government bodies and human rights activists (Law Commission of India 2012; Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative 2010). In keeping with such reports, police assert that if they were to follow legal procedures and formally arrest a powerful criminal, he would likely be released because of his political connections. For example, one officer who commands a paramilitary unit argued:

This is why there is extrajudicial killing, false encounters [staged assassinations] . . . Why are the police agencies compelled to rely on false encounters? In the eyes of the police, he knows a person has committed a crime. With great difficulty he arrested a person, a gun-toting person backed by politicians. If you arrest them they pass on their mobile phone to you and the person on the phone says 'He is my person. Come on, do the needful. Get him released on bail. Why are you taking this so seriously?' And the level of threat—'Hey, you want to lead a happy life?' He will be released and after that he will not be silent either. He will keep on teasing the police officer. And you will never feel secure. You will always worry about your children. If he is arrested and I know he is a habitual criminal then my duty is to send him to prison but if he is influential the police will go on arresting and he will go on coming out. And there will be increasing pressure by society, 'You are not able to keep control of criminals.' So what will you do? This is how encounters [assassinations] take place.

While the interference of politicians in police work is well documented (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative 2010; National Police Commission 1983), less attention has been paid to the way this interference informs officers' views on appropriate action in their own work. This interference undermines officers' faith in the legal system and contributes to their view that only by acting outside the legal system can justice—and their own safety—be protected. Hence, the protection of human rights is constrained not only by systemic problems (e.g., officers' lack of agency in relation to political bosses). It is also constrained by the way in which officers interpret what they should do with the agency they have, in response to this environment.

Judicial Inefficiency

Human rights activists, government committees, and law enforcement officers alike lament the inefficiency of the legal

system. Police as well as activists and government reports observe that trials often are delayed decades, so witnesses and evidence become increasingly tenuous and suspects are most often acquitted. But as is the case with political interference, their views of the appropriate response to this problem diverge. Police argue that if they were to arrest someone, even someone without sufficient political connections to be released, it is still unlikely that the courts would produce justice. As such, they argue that they must act outside the law to uphold justice. The paramilitary officer quoted above continues to explain the legitimacy of using force outside the law by drawing on the anticipated failure of the court system. He asserts, "Who will come and depose against [the accused]? Trials take years and witnesses will have to wait and travel."

Even in cases where officers do not explicitly argue that extrajudicial force upholds justice, they still draw on inefficiencies in the legal system as a way of undermining its legitimacy and disregarding it. For example, a constable in Delhi described a case where one man was owed money by another man, and explained the rationale for using bribery and torture to retrieve it:

If these people refuse to pay a bribe to the police then he tortures. If they don't pay they are tortured. But the legal way is also a kind of a torture. If police follow the legal way and deposit the money the man was owed with the court, he will have to fight for years to get his money back and this is also a kind of torture, a mental torture. In these simple cases people have to fight for sometimes twenty years. So this legal way is also a kind of torture. So both legal and illegal ways are a kind of torture. If the police start solving cases legally the way the NGOs want the jail would be overflowing. People can be arrested for many things. And the courts will be overloaded.

Numerous reports from civil society and the government have analyzed and sought to address judicial backlog. But these interviews suggest that such weaknesses in the legal system have an impact beyond their obvious, immediate consequences. A weak legal system holds little legitimacy, and hence, provides police with a rationale to act outside of it.

Material Context

As is the case with corruption and judicial inefficiency, both human rights activists and police identify the lack of resources and training for law enforcement as a problem. For example, a staff member of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative in New Delhi noted in an interview that police do not always have access to vehicles to travel to a crime scene, or enough gasoline for the

vehicles they possess. Police however interpret these conditions as further justifying extralegal activities such as torture.

Explaining torture by referencing poor material conditions allows officers to express support for human rights in principle while still endorsing extralegal behavior. They frame this behavior as unfortunate but necessary, and contingent upon the straight-forward addition of resources and skills. For example, one high-ranking officer states:

The system should be developed with respect to human rights. On the basis of technology. Technology can be a substitute for the third degree if police are equipped properly . . . DNA matching, finger-printing, and narco-analysis test should be in police stations . . . We have no technological support. We are left with nothing if we catch someone and we know he is lying.

This reflects a common assertion among judges and other experts in India that torture has decreased in other countries due to the development of alternative means of investigation and the resources to support these means, and that this is what is needed in India (Lokaneeta 2011). However, many scholars doubt the significance of material changes alone, pointing to the persistence of torture in wealthy, modernized countries, and suggest instead that growing sophistication may lead to less visible means of torture rather than its eradication (Lokaneeta 2011; Rejali 2007; Wisniewski & Emerick 2009). Although analysis of a causal relationship between material conditions and incidence of torture is beyond the scope of this paper, it is clear that poor material conditions, similar to political interference and flaws in the judicial system, help police to defend the use of torture.

In summary, officers' interpretations of how they should respond to these flaws in the justice system broaden the instances in which they believe it is right to use violence, which extends beyond even what their own conceptions of justice allow.

Discussion

Previous researchers conclude that officers' circumstances and socialization result in a moral disengagement that makes violence possible (Conroy 2000; Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo 2002). Although they note ideologies that support torture, they describe these not as genuine beliefs but as rationalizations that enable police to disengage from their acts (e.g., Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo 2002: 203). They often point to officers' lack of shame as evidence of moral disengagement. My

research suggests a different reason for this lack of shame: police genuinely believe that what they do is right.

Ultimately, though, the police endorse a more frequent use of violence than even their own conceptions of justice allow. They understand this wider use of violence not as a violation of their principles, but as what is necessary to uphold their principles given the context of their work.

Moral Beliefs versus Moral Disengagement

According to Sykes and Matza (1957), if perpetrators really believed that what they do is right, they would express indignation regarding their crimes rather than shame. The police in my study are often passionately indignant when defending torture. Moreover, the officers in my study valorize the “honest” officer who uses torture because he cares about justice and denigrate the corrupt officer whom they believe does not care enough about justice to use violence.

Sykes and Matza also argued that because delinquents differentiate between those who are and are not appropriate victims for their crimes, this suggests that they do not believe that their acts are universally right, and therefore, not truly “right” at all. However, this assumes that all conceptions of justice operate on the premise of universality. Differentiating between people based on what they deserve is an essential part of how the police in this study understand justice. Furthermore, Sykes and Matza assert that delinquents exist within a network of people who endorse mainstream values, such as parents and school leaders, and they are likely to internalize these values. Police exist within an organization that supports the use of violence, as these and previous interviews suggest.

Moreover, the main function of neutralization is to deflect shame by reconciling inconsistencies between one’s principles and actions (Sykes and Matza 1957). However, whether or not something is an inconsistency depends on to what one is accountable. If a person believes that all people should be treated with dignity, then using torture on some people is an inconsistency that requires neutralization. However, if one believes, as these officers do, that some people deserve and require violence, then using it is consistent with their beliefs. Hence, Sykes’ and Matza’s arguments to show that their subjects do not truly believe the views they express in support of their crimes do not seem to apply to the officers in this study.

Other researchers have argued that moral disengagement occurs through an escape into “professionalism,” wherein performing a job well according to the norms of the professional organization trumps ethical action. Interviews for the current study

suggest, however, that for these officers professionalism does not replace moral engagement. Instead, their understanding of professionalism—of what a “good officer” does in a given situation—reflects their moral perspective.

The police in this study believe that the mark of a good professional is definitive action to resolve a case and ensure that the guilty are punished. If circumstances mean that this cannot be done by following due process, then a “good officer” will achieve his professional goals by bypassing such rules. Police often explain such judgments through a discourse of professional pride, such as an officer who argued that torture is sometimes necessary because first and foremost he is “an investigator.” As he said these words, he pounded his heart with his hand. He also expressed the conception of justice shared by the other officers in this study, wherein what someone deserves depends upon who they are and what they have done. Hence, there seems to be a close connection between professionalism and personal morality—between officers’ beliefs about what a good professional does and what a good person does.

An examination of previous scholars’ examples suggests that such a connection between personal morality and conceptions of professionalism might exist for their interview subjects as well. Huggins et al. differentiated between violence workers who explain torture by reference to a “just cause” and those who rely on a discourse of professionalism. The former see what they do as right, for example, because it protects the nation or an innocent person (198), while the latter view their actions as justified because they are “professionally attuned to their organization’s policies and practices.” The authors state that these police see their actions as legitimate because they conform to professional norms and as “neither good nor bad” (201). But their example of such a police officer suggests that the category of the professional is not separate from how officers understand what is right beyond their professional roles. The officer states:

I don’t use . . . violence outside the standard of my conscience as a human being. I am a conscientious professional. I know what to do and when to do it. (Brazilian police officer quoted in Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo 2002: 209)

While the authors state that this comment typifies the professional as *opposed* to the moral or “just cause” explanation for torture, a different interpretation suggests that this officer’s idea of the professional is at least in part based on what he thinks is good and just. The fact that his first explanation for when to use violence draws on his “conscience as a human being” suggests that his idea of the professional is connected to his moral views outside a narrow conception of job performance and organizational norms.

Beyond such interpretive differences, another reason for the difference between the conclusion of this and previous studies may be the timing of the interviews. Most studies of police torture are conducted years after the violence took place. Public condemnation, hindsight, and changes in their roles within society may undermine the beliefs the officers once held in support of torture and motivate them to diffuse responsibility for their behavior to others.

Moreover, researchers may be reluctant to describe officers' views as "moral" given the brutality these views support. Indeed, Huggins et al. note that even seeking to understand violence workers' motivations places researchers under suspicion of sympathizing with them (Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo 2002: 26). Asserting that officers' views are a form of "moral" belief creates even more risk that readers could see researchers as excusing brutality. Given the distance between most researchers' principles and those police express in support of torture, it is understandable that researchers often attribute officers' explanations to something other than a recognizable "moral" belief.

Officers' moral beliefs do not however exist independently from the context in which they work. Their interpretations of their circumstances create an intermediate category between torture that is absolutely right and absolutely wrong. Huggins et al. also identified an intermediate category of torture. This consisted though of torture that is admittedly wrong but that can be excused by circumstances. The officers in the current study believe that circumstances expand the types of torture that they believe are *right*.

The Role of Circumstances: Interactions between Beliefs and Perceptions of the Environment

Officers believe that while ideally only exceptional types of people should be tortured, flaws in the legal system mean that they should use violence more widely in order to uphold justice. Their argument can be summarized as follows: In a system without pervasive corruption and paralyzing inefficiency, criminals could be punished without violence unless they are "hardened criminals" or "terrorists." But given the circumstances in which they work, even "regular" people will not be punished and hence justice will not be upheld without violence. In this way, officers' moral beliefs lay the groundwork for how they think they should respond to their environment, and conversely, their environment expands the kind of violence they endorse beyond what their beliefs about ideal action condone.

This reliance on circumstances to explain the torture of "regular" as opposed to exceptional types of people hues more closely to Sykes and Matza's neutralizations, and the work of other

scholars who see explanations for violence based on circumstances as a way to diffuse responsibility (Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo 2002). Is this then a technique to “neutralize” their shame, a rationalization that does not reflect officers’ genuine beliefs?

I argue that it is not. Although officers draw on their circumstances to explain their wide use of torture, their argument is not that circumstances beyond their control force them to use violence. Rather, they argue that they must use violence in these circumstances in order to uphold justice. They see the use of violence as a choice they make based on principle, in response to circumstances, rather than depicting themselves as victims of circumstances that leave them with no choice. This suggests that police are not attempting only or primarily to diffuse responsibility.

My assertion that officers are not merely diffusing responsibility or rationalizing their actions is further supported by the contrast with times when they do explain violence in these ways. Officers believe that some types of violence are wrong, and in these cases, they engage in just the type of rationalizations that previous scholars have described. Like the officers in previous studies (e.g., Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo 2002), officers diffuse responsibility for the torture of innocent people by blaming others, such as supervisors and politicians who pressure them to arrest people they know are innocent. And like the Brazilian officers in the study by Martha Huggins and her colleagues, police also explain the torture of innocent people by referencing a “just cause” (in this case, of determining who is in fact guilty), while admitting that the act is not in itself right. That officers employ such neutralization techniques selectively suggests that they distinguish between the kind of torture they see as right, and the kind they are unwilling to wholeheartedly defend. These differences in how they explain different types of torture indicate that not all their explanations operate on the same principle of moral disengagement.

At the same time, police may never be motivated by their beliefs about justice alone. It is likely that in any situation, multiple factors such as the desire to please supervisors and obtain a bribe, exhaustion, and a lack of training are responsible. But officers’ beliefs play an important role by making these less defensible reasons morally acceptable to themselves and others. The fact that he was paid a bribe to use violence appears far more excusable to a perpetrator and to onlookers³ who believe that using violence upholds justice. Hence, an officer might consider torture wrong if he engages in it

³ My research suggests that police officers’ beliefs about violence are shared by many members of the general public and by high-ranking government officials (see Wahl 2013b).

only to please a supervisor or receive a bribe, but consider the violence legitimate if he thinks it upholds justice in addition to serving these other purposes.

To be sure, there can be no definitive proof that police are telling the truth in interviews. They may be lying about the reasons they actually use torture, and they may also be lying about their beliefs about why torture is justified. The first possibility would not alter my argument. This study seeks to understand how officers perceive right and wrong in regard to violence. An effort by police to improve their image by saying they torture for reasons they think are good would reveal what they believe they should be doing, even if they are not doing it. It would suggest that the ideal to which police compare themselves is one in which they use torture only for good reasons against certain people. Their shame, then, would revolve around their use of torture for what they consider bad reasons on the wrong people. It is important for police reform advocates to recognize that the source of officers' shame would be this ideal, rather than principles of universal protection that may motivate most educators and activists.

The data suggest that the second possibility, that officers are lying about their beliefs, is unlikely. Officers have no incentive to argue that torture is justifiable if they do not believe it is. Nobody is accusing them of engaging in torture; they could easily condemn it. If officers were going to misrepresent their beliefs, it is more likely that they would espouse a human rights perspective, especially to an interviewer who contacted them through their human rights course as I did. This is particularly the case considering that they hope to gain professional opportunities through the course. Moreover, if the officers were merely attempting to defend the reputation of the police, they would be more likely to deny that the police use torture, or make arguments for why all torture in which police engage is right. Instead, they defend only some police violations, rather than place an idealized gloss on all police violence.

Conclusion

The foregoing suggests several conclusions that extend beyond the police in India. First, to understand support for acts of brutality, it is important not to assume that perpetrators begin with conflicting moral precepts that require "neutralization." Someone whose conception of justice is premised on equality and the protection from harm would need to neutralize feelings of shame that arise from torturing anyone. But a police officer whose conception of justice is based on differentiating between those who do and do not

deserve harm only needs to neutralize shame arising from torturing the wrong people.

This finding does not refute scholars' assertions that political forces and organizational culture contribute to torture. While I do not focus on these external forces, my interviews and other reports reveal that the political and legal systems in which these officers operate not only tolerate but encourage the use of torture, and that the police and military organizations expect officers to use it. I argue that along with these other factors, officers' moral beliefs may facilitate torture by providing what they understand as a moral basis for it.

It may be that socialization within the police draws on and intensifies conceptions of justice that officers already hold. For example, the police organization may socialize police to dehumanize particular groups of people. Many researchers have written of this as a common socialization to violence, and the police in this study reveal such beliefs. For example, the police officer quoted above who alleges that hardened criminals lack a "soul" bears much in common with the Brazilian torturers who see certain types of criminals as less than human, as described by Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo (2002). Socialization into this way of thinking may succeed in part because it connects with a conception of human nature and justice that is held by many people, including the police in this study: that the world consists of different types of people who are either good or bad, and who deserve different treatment. Hence, the genuinely held moral beliefs of officers may facilitate socialization to beliefs that even more directly serve the needs of the police organization. Furthermore, officers may also disengage from aspects of this violence, such as becoming insensitive to the suffering of their victims. But this does not mean that their moral beliefs are only rationalizations; rather, these beliefs may convince officers that such insensitivity is good.

Moreover, research suggests that police across different national contexts share similar beliefs. "Noble cause corruption" wherein police believe that it is right to violate the law to uphold what they see as justice has been described extensively in countries such as the United States. The current study builds on noble cause corruption research by probing the precise beliefs about human nature and justice on which police draw in their view that torture serves a "noble cause."

The current study also builds on previous work on noble cause corruption by analyzing how such beliefs interact with the context in which police work. The prevalence of noble cause corruption in contexts such as the United States suggests that the beliefs revealed in the current study are not bound by culture or context, but rather

are prevalent among police across the world. Elements of the Indian context exacerbate the capacity of officers to act on such beliefs, however. My study shows that officers' perception that the legal system is too corrupt, inefficient, and under-resourced to function effectively expands the situations in which they believe it is "noble" to break the law; and this same corruption protects them from prosecution when they do.

As such, while my earlier assertions about the importance of taking perpetrators' beliefs seriously extend beyond the particularities of context, my conclusions about how these beliefs translate into police officers' actual judgments will apply to police in the many countries with weaknesses in the legal system similar to those of India, above all: pervasive political corruption and judicial inefficiency. Police in these settings have more leeway to act on their beliefs and more reasons to believe it is reasonable to disregard the law.

Why does it matter whether police are morally engaged and genuinely hold beliefs that support torture, or are morally disengaged and seek primarily to neutralize the gap between principles and action? And why does it matter what police think they should be doing if there is no certainty that they act on it? For one, what police believe about torture has important implications for interventions to prevent it. Assuming that officers do not really believe that what they do is right, and that they act out of an absence of morality or knowledge, trainers often try to replace this presumed lacuna with belief in and information about the principles and laws of human rights.⁴ The current study suggests an obstacle to this approach. Police respond to such efforts with a deeply held conflicting view of justice. They believe that what the trainers tell them is not only impractical; they think it is also *wrong*.

Instead, a more effective approach may be to frame nonviolent interrogation techniques in a discourse that is salient for officers, such as the desire many of them express to be professional and successful investigators. In addition, trainers should take seriously and address the reasons officers believe they should use torture. Although some current training programs currently use this approach, most human rights educators interviewed for this study focus on the diffusion of human rights principles and laws.⁵

Unfortunately, the approach I recommend will also be limited in its effectiveness. In order to fully change police practices, officers' beliefs as well as the structures within which they work must change. However, it is these two elements—moral beliefs and the

⁴ Authors' interviews with human rights educators, New Delhi 2011–2012.

⁵ For a more detailed explanation of these recommendations, please see Wahl 2013a, 2013b.

institutional environment—that are most resistant to educators' efforts. Deep transformation in officers' beliefs would likely require a more prolonged and intensive education than most human rights training entails. Institutional factors such as incentives to use violence are rooted in the interests of many people and are difficult to change through persuading any one group of officers. As such, although it is crucial to address these beliefs and structures, limited educational interventions are not likely to be the most effective way to do so.

Police training programs then can only be one piece of a reform effort. Reformers who wish to effect more comprehensive change might consider measures such as campaigns to persuade local elected officials and police leadership that nonviolent techniques serve their personal and professional interests. Such campaigns could be followed by the provision of funding to develop "police capacity" that is contingent on the reduction of violence and the punishment of officers who use torture, and importantly, the supervisors under whose watch torture occurs. Such funding could be used both for the sake of offering rigorous training in non-violent interrogation and as an incentive for compliance. These are merely examples though of how any effort to combat torture must be multipronged, addressing not only officers' beliefs and knowledge, but also the system of rewards and punishments in which police operate.

Finally, my argument that officers' beliefs reflect genuine moral commitments is not a statement in support of moral relativism, in which all views are equal because they are all recognizably moral. Rather, I argue that it is important to recognize the struggle against torture as a contested moral ideal *that is no less important and legitimate for that contention*. In theory, scholars likely recognize that movements to eradicate torture are moral in nature and contested. But when researchers describe the beliefs of those who support torture as mere rationalizations, it implies that the anti-torture struggle represents a neutral, universal conception of the good from which there is no genuine dissension. In so doing, researchers commit the same fallacy of "professional" discourse of which they accuse the violence workers. They avoid the moral nature of the commitment upon which much research on violence is premised by cloaking it in terms of rational, universal, and neutral principles from which all disagreement is a mere rationalization. I suggest instead that the struggle against torture is a crucial effort to promote a particular, contested conception of the good. The consistency and passion with which police and military officers argue against it shows the vulnerability of this struggle and should deepen rather than weaken the efforts of those who are committed to it.

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