12:00 PM–1:00 PM

The Ethics of Torture in *24*: Shockingly Banal

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Season Six of *24* opens with a shocking display of the results of torture. Our hero, Jack Bauer, has survived two years in a Chinese prison. The usually proud, defiant Jack shuffles slowly off a plane, shackled and bedraggled. A glimpse of his scarred back and hand reveals that he's been through something terrible. Later in the season, Audrey Raines also returns from Chinese custody. Torture has left her cowering, bruised, and battered—a broken woman.

Torture shocks us, which is one reason it's usually hard to justify. "Almost anyone looking at the physical act of torture would be immediately appalled and repulsed by the torturers."[1] Those who witness torture on *24*—even other counter-terrorism agents—usually express horror. Such reaction is typical and expected, which makes it disturbing when, in Season Two, President David Palmer fails to flinch as the screen on his desk shows Roger Stanton, Director of the National Security Agency, being tortured. Stanton screams as he is electrocuted barefoot in a bucket of water. The agent informs him the pain will only get worse, much worse. How could anyone inflict such pain on a fellow human being?

Ethics is concerned with how we treat one another. One approach called *deontology* says we should never act in ways that treat people as merely means towards our ends or goals. Torture certainly seems to do that: reducing people to mere means to get the information we want.

Back at the airport, the Chinese are trading Jack to the Americans,

1 Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 35. Page references to Scarry are to this work.

who will in turn trade him to today's terrorists. Bill Buchanan, Jack's boss and friend, now Director of CTU, is told by the Chinese that for two years Jack has remained silent. Whatever torture they inflicted, it simply hasn't worked. It's done no good at all.

Utilitarianism, another approach to ethics, focuses on results. Something is ethically justified if it leads to good outcomes for lots of people: the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run. One utilitarian argument is that torture can be justified if it saves large numbers of people, or avoids much harm. So does torture work? Does it save large numbers of people?

Jack is to be handed over to the terrorist Abu Fayed who will give CTU vital information on Hamri Al-Assad's location. Assad has waged a 20-year war of terrorism on the US, and is believed to be behind a recent spate of suicide bombings on US soil. Fayed wants Jack so he can avenge his brother whom he says Jack tortured and killed in Beirut. Torture has long-term implications, leaving Fayed with a deep-seated hatred and desire for revenge.

A third approach to ethics, *virtue ethics*, looks at the impact of actions on people's characters, their virtues. War and violence change people, yet torture seems particularly destructive of individual character, and not only for the one tortured. Jack's torture begins with Fayed's aborted attempt to cut off Jack's fingers. What *kind* of person does such a thing? Well, Jack for one. Later we see Jack slice off the Russian consul's finger with a cigar cutter to find out where the suitcase bombs are located. In Season Two he refuses to give Marie Warner pain killers for her bullet wound. Instead, he pushes the bullet into her bone to force her to reveal where the nuke is hidden.

Yet Jack is the hero. He not only combats terrorism, he effectively navigates the moral morass around him. His moral compass is nearly always right—or at least so we like to think. If Jack sometimes resorts to torture, maybe there are good reasons for it.

Cultural Context of Torture

According to the United Nations' *Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, "No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency,

may be invoked as a justification of torture."[2] Signed by over 130 nations, this convention builds upon the three hundred year old ban on cruel and unusual punishments in the English Declaration of Rights and the two hundred year old ban in the US Constitution.[3] Only deviant totalitarian governments or terrorists carry out torture. Even if *they* use it, *we* shouldn't.

Military tradition supports the prohibition of torture. The nineteenth-century *Devising a Military Code of Conduct* states, "the modern law of war permits no longer the use of any violence against prisoners in order to extort the desired information or to punish them for having given false information."[4] This ethical position has deep roots. The Roman Cicero, the fifth-century Augustine, the fourteenth-century age of chivalry, and the *Military Code* see war as justified only if necessary to attain peace. The *Military Code* bans torture and cruelty because "military necessity does not include any act of hostility which makes the return to peace unnecessarily difficult" (TEW, 579). This is precisely the sort of hostility afflicting CTU agent Curtis Manning, who cannot overcome his hatred for Assad for having tortured and beheaded his comrades during the Gulf War. Tragically, Manning's hatred and desire for revenge forces Jack to shoot him, thus preserving Assad's life.

The world of *24* suggests that views about torture may have changed. Allegations arise regularly that the US and its allies permit the use of torture in the war on terror. Photographs of hooded detainees, naked prisoners cowering in the face of snarling dogs, and men standing with electrical wires dangling from their bodies, speak loudly of the reality of torture. Mike Novick, President Palmer's Chief of Staff, claims death during torture is akin to accepting civilian casualties with bombings: "A few people may have to die to save millions."

Torture in *24* both reflects the way the world has become, but also makes it easier to accept torture in practice. A 2006 BBC News

2 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment," December 10, 1984, available online at www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/h_cat39.htm.

3 Michael Wilks, "A Stain on Medical Ethics," *The Lancet* 366 (August 2005): 429–431.

4 *The Ethics of War: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Gregory M. Reichberg, Henrik Syse, and Endre Begby (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 571. This work will be referred to herein as TEW.

survey found that almost one-third of 27,000 people surveyed in 25 countries agreed that "Terrorists pose such an extreme threat that governments should now be allowed to use some degree of torture if it may gain information that saves innocent lives."[5] In the US, 36 percent held this view, as did 43 percent in Israel, 42 percent in Iraq, 24 percent in Great Britain, and 14 percent in Italy. Countries facing political violence have a greater tendency to approve torture to prevent terrorist attacks. However, an overall majority in the world (59 percent) still favors an absolute ban, viewing torture as an inherently immoral activity that weakens respect for human rights.

Defining Torture

Torture is difficult to define precisely. Sometimes those being appropriately interrogated will claim they were tortured. And often those who truly torture will claim they were merely conducting a "coercive interrogation." Whether the distinctions are legitimate or euphemistic word-smithing has important consequences for detainees. In Season Five Christopher Henderson is clearly being tortured when he is strapped to a hospital bed and injected with hyoscine pentathol, an alleged truth serum. Henderson is a disgraced agent suspected of being in league with terrorists. Typical of torture, Henderson is tied down, unable to fight back or defend himself. In this regard, one cannot help but think, too, of Roger Stanton, Marie Warner, and a host of others. Intense pain brings people close to losing consciousness and to the brink of death.

But of course *24* also presents us with situations in which pain is inflicted—say, during a fight or a shoot-out—but we wouldn't typically classify these as instances of torture. In such cases each person in the fight can at least defend themselves. Pain can also be inflicted for another's good as in some medical procedures. Torture inflicts pain for reasons that have nothing to do with the good of the one tortured.

Torture must also be distinguished from coercion. Jack initially pleads with Henderson to disclose his information. He tries various methods to coerce the information from him. Earlier in Season Five,

5 "One-third support 'Some Torture'," *BBC News*, October 19, 2006, available online at www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/6063386.stm.

terrorists "shot" hostages on live TV in an attempt to coerce the government to meet their demands. These acts are repulsive, but they do not constitute torture. Under coercion, someone still makes a rational decision to do what is demanded. Under torture, the pain obliterates rationality. The person will do or say anything for the pain to stop. Coercion seeks to get the person to go along with the appeal; torture seeks to break the person.

Torture starts when persuasion, bribery, or coercion fails (or is not even attempted). Torture targets autonomy itself, and tries to overwhelm the tortured person's rational control over his own decisions. It does so "by literally terrorizing them into submission. Hence there is a close affinity between terrorism and torture. Indeed, arguably torture is a terrorist tactic."[6] The torturer uses drugs, deprivation of normal sense perception, severe pain, confusion, or anything else to gain control over the person's whole being. The goal is not just information, but to "break the person." "The self-conscious aim of torture is to turn its victim into someone who is isolated, overwhelmed, terrorized, and humiliated. Torture aims to strip away from its victim all the qualities of human dignity that liberalism prizes."[7] David Sussman argues that "torture is uniquely 'barbaric' and 'inhuman': the most profound violation possible of the dignity of a human being."[8] The victim's body is made an object to be manipulated and controlled by the torturer and used against the person's will.

Part of the twisted nature of torture is how even the victim's emotions are turned against himself.[9] In Season Six, Morris O'Brian is tortured into arming the terrorists' nuclear devices. Jack expresses disbelief that Morris "gave in" and betrayed the cause. Morris is driven away, deeply ashamed, yet he was the one deeply violated. Torture is not just a physical beating; it is a violent raping of a person's soul. Morris is then overwhelmed with guilt, especially when reminded of what he did. Studies show that those tortured are plagued

6 Seumas Miller, "Torture," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2006 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, available online at www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/torture.

7 David Luban, "Liberalism and the Unpleasant Question of Torture," *Virginia Law Review* 91 (2005): 1430. Page references to Luban are to this work.

8 David Sussman, "What's Wrong with Torture?" *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 33 (2005): 2.

9 The origin of the word "torture" comes from the idea of twisted, as in "tortuous"; torture was whatever left the body twisting uncontrollably.

for years with self-destructiveness, failure to reintegrate into their families, and an inability to take control of their lives.[10] Recovery is not easy when a torturer has used "the prisoner's aliveness to crush the things that he lives for" (Scarry, 38). Some survivors of torture have such psychological damage that they fail to ever return to normal, rational decision-making.

Thus torture usually involves some combination of the following: intentional infliction of extreme physical or psychological suffering; restriction of the person into a defenseless position; substantial curtailment of the exercise of a person's autonomy; manipulation of the person's sense of time and place; and an attack on the person's will, with a goal of breaking the person. Although we may have difficulty defining torture, it is clearly recognizable when encountered. Torture is very different from a physical beating or a manipulative deception. Torture goes deeper than the pain, which may tear the skin; torture seeks to tear the soul.

The reasons for torture vary, each raising different considerations.[11] Torture can be done for personal satisfaction, where the torturer is a sadist or psychopath. Torture can be used to terrorize people into submission, as some dictators have done. On *24*, the focus is on *interrogational torture*, where detainees are tortured to get information. Backward-looking interrogational torture tries to extract confessions from detainees about past activities. On *24*, we primarily see forward-looking interrogational torture, used to get information from detainees about a future event. People who argue that forward-looking interrogational torture is ethically justified will usually claim that the other uses of torture remain unethical.

Arguments for Torture

The torture scenes on *24* are an extended commentary on the main argument used to ethically justify torture: Henry Shue's classic "ticking

10 Robert Oravecz, Lilla Hárdi, and László Lajtai, "Social Transition, Exclusion, Shame and Humiliation," *Torture* 14 (2004): 4–15.

11 Vittorio Bufacchi and Jean Maria Arrigo, "Torture, Terrorism and the State: A Refutation of the Ticking-Bomb Argument," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 23 (2006): 360. Page references to Bufacchi and Arrigo are to this article.

bomb argument."[12] The innovative style of *24*, with its frenetic pace and action in "real" time, contributes to the continuous reminder that the clock is ticking. Time is always running out, and this has constant implications for what must be done. In Season Five, Homeland Security sends Karen Hayes and Miles Papazian into CTU to resolve their problems. Miles argues that Karen should authorize the torture of Audrey Raines to gather information about the terrorists' nerve gas attack. Miles uses core aspects of the ticking bomb argument: "We don't have the luxury of time. Intel indicates that an attack is imminent—within an hour. Tens maybe hundreds of thousands of Americans are at risk. And we just got information that Audrey Raines knows about it."

The ticking bomb argument is basically a utilitarian argument. The good consequences of discovering the sought-after information outweigh the bad consequences of torture. Finding and diffusing the bomb prevents many deaths and injuries; the harm of inflicting pain on the bomber, of denying his dignity, of violating his rights, is a small price to pay in comparison. Nonetheless, Bill Buchanan defends Audrey, arguing that she deserves different treatment. Karen replies: "If she is guilty, she doesn't deserve anything." Implicit in the ticking bomb argument is the claim that people can lose their right not to be tortured when the consequences of not extracting their information are high enough.

Torture, however, is one of several strategies normally not accepted in Western liberal democracies. The war on terror has helped promote a new, very utilitarian political philosophy. In Season Five, we saw martial law introduced. Behind the scenes in Season Six, the rights of those with Middle Eastern or Muslim connections are curtailed. The seriousness of the terrorist threat justifies what wouldn't normally be tolerated. Chief of Staff Tom Lennox takes a very utilitarian approach to ethics, telling Karen Hayes, now National Security Advisor: "Security has its price. Just get used to it, Karen."

24 graphically and dramatically portrays the urgent need for torture and its apparent legitimacy. Modern law enforcement agencies are placed in difficult situations. Traditionally, such agencies dealt

12 Henry Shue, "Torture," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 7 (1978): 124–143. Page references to Shue (1978) are to this work.

with crime after the fact and sought evidence for conviction. Rules dictate the searching and seizing of property and how confessions are obtained—if convictions are to result. But the mandate at CTU, and in the war against terror, changes this. Now the goal is to prevent terrorist attacks, and extracting information from captured suspects can do much good. In Season Two, the terrorist leader Syed Ali is tortured into disclosing the location of the nuclear bomb. Under torture, Roger Stanton names the same location. *24* gives life to the ticking bomb argument.

Even when a bomb goes off, the argument gains support. We didn't see the horror, pain, and devastation of the nuclear blast in Season Six. The mushroom cloud over a modern city conveyed enough of the effect. If torture could have prevented the bomb, would that not be justification enough? Fritz Allhoff, a utilitarian who accepts this view, believes it is so obvious and rational that it does not need defending. "If anyone wants to disagree with the permissibility of torture in this [ticking bomb] case, I simply do not know what to do other than throw my hands up in exasperation." Any argument to the contrary he finds "hopelessly implausible."[13] Yet such arguments do exist, and several are dramatized throughout *24*.

Arguments Against Torture

The main argument against torture is that it treats human beings in undignified ways. Torture is not just painful; it is humiliating, degrading, and terrorizing. The person is treated as an object. When introducing his ticking bomb case, Shue admitted, "No other practice except slavery is so universally and unanimously condemned in law and human convention" (1978: 124).

Most people are shocked when they see, read, or think about what one person does to another during torture. Consider the people on *24* who writhe in pain as torture drugs flow through their veins. In Season Two, Jack screams into the bloody face of terrorist Syed Ali, and then reaches down and appears to break his fingers. In Season Six, Jack cuts off the Russian consul's finger to find out where the

13 Fritz Allhoff, "A Defense of Torture: Separation of Cases, Ticking Time-bombs, and Moral Justification," *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 19 (2005): 257–258.

remaining suitcase nukes are located. These scenes elicit an emotional response which is itself part of the argument against torture. "If we treat someone in a way we generally find shocking, we do not treat her as a person—or, at least, we do not if we treat her that way against her will and without benefit to her."[14] Shock alone is not a sufficient argument, but it alerts us that something may be very wrong. Detainees are kept naked, cold, wet, hungry, or sleep deprived; some are forced to stand for days, their cells soaked with random noise, bright lights or darkness; others are placed in sexually degrading or other humiliating positions; their religious icons desecrated. Such practices are defended as necessary interrogation techniques, "torture lite"; means to important ends.[15]

24 does not portray this side of torture, though it is in the background, as when we glimpse Jack's scarred hand throughout Season Six. The ticking bomb argument that permeates *24* shows torture as a rational choice, a necessary evil when time is of the essence and the stakes are immense. Torture on *24* is sane and somewhat sanitized, mirroring the image in the ticking bomb argument. "Torture to gather intelligence and save lives seems almost heroic. For the first time we can think of kindly torturers rather than tyrants" (Luban, 1436).

Apart from Jack, Agent Burke is CTU's main torturer. A good-looking young man, his character is never developed, though he appears season after season. Maybe we don't want to know what sort of person he is and would rather think of him as the stereotypical "kindly torturer." But what does he do while waiting for the call to come in and torture someone? Maybe he's at home with his family, the call comes, and he kisses his child goodbye saying, "Sorry honey, Daddy's gotta go to the office." Maybe he must return quickly from a training course in Guantanamo. Or maybe he's at CTU, reading up on the latest research on "truth serums" or practicing new techniques on lab animals.

The ticking bomb argument suggests that torturers materialize when the need arises. *24* shows this is not the case. It was Christopher Henderson who taught Jack his methods. Agent Burke has training and equipment to support his work. If torture is accepted, society

14 Michael Davis, "The Moral Justification of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment," *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 19 (2005): 168.

15 Mark Bowden, "The Dark Art of Interrogation," *Atlantic Monthly* 292 (3): 51–76.

will need "a professional cadre of trained torturers" supported by biomedical research and legal developments (Luban, 1445). Such training is hardly so neat and clean as *24* portrays it.

Investigations at Abu Ghraib note that the torturers must have received "systematic training" in torture techniques developed elsewhere.[16] This training turns ordinary young men and women into torturers who dehumanize their victims. Torture not only devastates the one tortured, it ruins torturers' lives. Studies of torturers show they have a variety of psychological and social problems, often resorting to drug and alcohol abuse.[17] The father of a Greek military torturer said at his trial, "I had a good boy, everybody said so. Can you tell me who turned my son into a torturer and destroyed him and my family psychologically?" (Haritos-Fatouros). Torturers' relationships suffer also, with even their military comrades viewing them with contempt, as "defiled" (Arrigo, 554). *24* is thus unrealistic in portraying Burke, and Jack especially, as unaffected by torture. In the real world, torture changes torturers, often dehumanizing them. Their destruction must be included in any utilitarian calculation.

Central to the utilitarian argument is the assumption that torture works. As President David Palmer watches Roger Stanton resist torture, he confidently notes that "everyone breaks eventually." But Jack withstood two years of Chinese torture; and Henderson didn't break at CTU. In Season Six, when Jack tortures his own brother, Graem, with drugs and a plastic bag over his head, he gives up some information, but not the crucial pieces. Later, as General Habib also appears to succumb to torture, he slips in a way to warn his comrade, Fayed. Sometimes torture works, but most times it doesn't (Arrigo, 549–550). Of those tortured legally in France from the sixteenth century through the eighteenth century, between 67 and 95 percent did not confess. The Nazis used all sorts of torture on the resistance movement, yet got little information. An estimated 5 percent of

16 Mika Haritos-Fatouros, "Psychological and Sociopolitical Factors Contributing to the Creation of the Iraqi Torturers: A Human Rights Issue," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology Online* 16 (2), February 2005, available online at www.security.pr.erau.edu/browse.php. Subsequent citations are given in the text under the author's name.

17 Jean Maria Arrigo, "A Utilitarian Argument Against Torture Interrogation of Terrorists," *Science and Engineering Ethics* 10 (2004): 553. Page references to Arrigo are to this article.

the American prisoners-of-war tortured by the North Vietnamese gave the anti-American statements demanded of them. Steve Biko withstood years of torture in South Africa.[18] Even people who believe some torture is ethical admit it only works "sometimes"[19] and that "there are many instances of torture that are totally inefficacious by any measure."[20] Others say the idea that torture works is "one of those false beliefs of 'folk psychology'" (Arrigo, 563).

The ticking bomb argument is based on having the actual bomber in custody. But once torture is accepted, it spreads to other suspects. In Season Four, Paul Raines is tortured because his name is on the lease of a building used by terrorists. That makes him "a prime suspect" and eligible for torture. Jack douses him in water and sticks live electric wires in his chest to get some information—but certainly not a bomb's location. In Season Five, Audrey Raines is tortured, yet she was innocent, framed by the terrorists. According to past history, "a torture interrogation program . . . can anticipate that at least half to three-quarters of terrorist suspects may be arrested mistakenly" (Arrigo, 557). In reality, authorities can never be sure they have the right person. And when torture is accepted for the rare extreme incident, its application spreads. Recent history in the war on terror shows that torture has been accepted as part of "a more general fishing expedition for any intelligence that might be used to help 'unwind' the terrorist organization" (Luban, 1443). That is certainly the picture we get from *24*, where torture is employed with increased frequency and less justification.

Overall, the ticking bomb argument is viewed by some as a "dangerous delusion" and an "intellectual fraud" (Luban, 1452). Its details are so far removed from reality that it lulls people into thinking it is realistic and compelling. In reality, the committed terrorist is unlikely to break, especially knowing he must endure torture for a short time before the bomb goes off. Some terrorists are unafraid of death. Syed Ali is defiant in the face of Jack's threats, saying he woke

18 Steve Biko and Millard W. Arnold, *The Testimony of Steve Biko* (London: M. T. Smith, 1984).

19 Uwe Steinhoff, "Torture—The Case for Dirty Harry and against Alan Dershowitz," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 23 (2006): 342.

20 Sanford Levinson, "The Debate on Torture: War Against Virtual States," *Dissent* (Summer 2003): 82. See the chapter by R. Douglas Geivett for further discussion of whether torture is an effective means of collecting information.

up knowing he would die that day. Jack says he'll make him die in more pain than he ever imagined. Syed replies that will only bring him more pleasure in paradise.

In proposing the ticking bomb argument, Shue compares torture to cancer: "There *is* considerable evidence of all torture's metastatic tendency" (2003, 143). He has since reversed his position, concluding that his own argument is artificial and unrealistic. "Justifications for torture thrive in fantasy," he wrote in 2003.[21] Shue now thinks it would be more reasonable to believe that a dedicated terrorist being tortured on the morning of 9/11 would lie about his plans rather than tell the truth. But apart from those arguments, Shue states "the ultimate reason not to inflict agony upon other human beings is that it is degrading to all involved: all become less human" (2003, 91).

Torture's impact spreads beyond those directly involved. Allowing torture turns the whole liberal, democratic system of justice, law, and order upside down. "In its basic outline, torture is the inversion of the trial, a reversal of cause and effect. While the one studies evidence that may lead to punishment, the other uses punishment to generate the evidence" (Scarry, 41). Torture goes against the presumption of innocence and the right to a fair trial. It goes against human dignity as inherent and applicable to all humans—even criminals and terrorists. It undermines the belief that everyone has basic rights, including the right not to be treated in cruel, inhuman, or degrading ways. The utilitarian approach holds that human dignity is something earned, conferred by others, and therefore something that can be taken away. According to this view, the dignity of some people may be violated for the good of society.

This idea becomes part of a running debate in Season Six over proposals to curtail basic freedoms. President Wayne Palmer and Karen Hayes reject this notion, arguing that the gradual erosion of individual rights and human dignity will further undermine the fundamentals upon which a just society is built. Torture plays a key role in this erosion of core values. "Any State that sets up torture interrogation units will lose its moral legitimacy, and therefore undermine the political obligation of its citizens" (Bufacchi and Arrigo, 366).

21 Henry Shue, "Response to Sanford Levinson," *Dissent* (Summer 2003): 91. Page references to Shue (2003) are to this article.

It's Not That Simple

Again and again, *24* dramatically portrays why it is tempting to view torture as sometimes ethically acceptable. Torturing the person with his finger on the button can seem like the right thing to do to prevent destruction. But things aren't usually that simple. Torture did not get Fayed to give up the nuclear bombs. He was tricked into believing he was being rescued. Torture almost gave the plan away when General Habib warned Fayed about the plan. Old-fashioned police-work, good luck, and a Hollywood shoot-out saved the day, not torture.

At the same time, *24* shows many of the problems with torture. Even if the ticking bomb case is accepted, the practice of torture spreads quickly. Others, many of them innocent, get caught in the web of torture interrogation. When the prisoners talk, they might be telling the truth, or they might not. People will often say anything for the pain to stop. The benefits are not as clear-cut, and the costs extend far beyond the one tortured. The torturer's life is often ruined, and the program corrupts the military, police, political, medical, and legal systems it involves. Ultimately, all of society is impacted. Peace after terrorism may be difficult to imagine, but torture will make it even more difficult. Places like Algeria, South Africa, Chile, Greece, Israel, and Northern Ireland demonstrate the difficulties of social repair after torture is institutionalized (Bufacchi, 367).

Rather than violating someone's dignity in (often vain) attempts to obtain information by torture, another approach is to appeal to people's dignity. By refusing to deny others their dignity, a better way is proposed. That may have its price. The current justice system risks letting some guilty people go free rather than wrongly convict the innocent. So too, a society that refuses to torture *may* let some people sit in prison while bombs go off. However, it is not certain that even torture will get them to reveal where the bombs are located. Using torture risks the bomb's devastation on top of our own moral defilement and social degeneration.

The banality of torture in *24* should shock us into realizing how easily and quickly torture becomes acceptable. *24* dramatizes the need for torture, but also shows its problems. However, torture in *24* remains compatible with comfortable TV entertainment. The images from Abu Ghraib and testimonies from people actually tortured are harrowing and grotesque. We should never forget this, nor be seduced

by simplistic images that misrepresent the real world. Torture in *24* and the ticking bomb case are artificial and sanitized. Nevertheless, *24* provides an important way to explore the ethics of torture. We must do so openly and very, very carefully. Denying the fundamental rights and dignity of any person is a dangerous and degrading proposition.[22]

22 Much appreciation is expressed to Pat Brereton, John Keane, and the editors for their valuable input on earlier drafts of this chapter.