

Noble cause corruption

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Noble cause corruption is corruption caused by the adherence to a teleological ethical system, suggesting that people will use unethical or illegal means to attain desirable goals,^[1] a result which appears to benefit the greater good. Where traditional corruption is defined by personal gain,^[2] noble cause corruptions forms when someone is convinced of their righteousness, and will do anything within their powers to achieve the desired result. An example of noble cause corruption is police misconduct "committed in the name of good ends"^[3] or neglect of due process through "a moral commitment to make the world a safer place to live."^[4]

Conditions for such corruption usually occur where individuals feel no administrative accountability, lack morale and leadership, and lose faith in the criminal justice system.^[5] These conditions can be compounded by arrogance and weak supervision.^[6]

Contents

- 1 Origin
- 2 In policing
 - 2.1 Luna v. Massachusetts
- 3 In popular culture
- 4 See also
- 5 References
- 6 External links

Origin

In 1983, Carl Klockars used the film *Dirty Harry* as an example of the kinds of circumstances that seemed to justify what later became known as noble cause corruption. Within the story, three central actions are instances of noble cause corruption: illegal entry, torture, and murder.^[7] Klockars believed that this problem, which he dubbed 'the Dirty Harry problem', was a chief consideration of police work. He details how officers occasionally face problems in which they have to select between competing ethical codes. Often the choice is between legal means, which can allow dangerous offenders to go free, or extralegal means, which entails breaking the law to prevent truly dangerous offenders from committing additional crimes.^[8]

In 1989, the term "noble cause corruption" was coined by Edwin Delattre. Delattre was troubled that police officers might conceive of a goal or outcome that justified the use of questionable means, in particular, the use of force to obtain confessions. He argued that "some ways of acting were unacceptable no matter how noble the end." From Delattre's work, the noble cause has emerged as a problem for the utilitarian commitment to outcomes, because it permits a society to be protected through aggressive and illegal policing tactics.^[7]

In policing

In *Police Ethics* it is argued that some of the best officers are often the most susceptible to noble cause corruption.^[9] According to professional policing literature, noble cause corruption includes "planting or fabricating evidence, lying or the fabrication and manipulation of facts on reports or through testimony in court, and generally abusing police authority to make a charge stick."^[10]

According to Robert Reiner, a professor at the London School of Economics, stops based on statistical discrimination are also a form of noble cause corruption.^[11]

Luna v. Massachusetts

On February 17th, 1988, officers from the Boston Police Department executed a search warrant at the home of Albert Lewin. As they entered the premises, Lewin shot and killed Officer Sherman Griffiths. Lewin was charged with murder, but charges were later dismissed when it was discovered that the affidavit for search warrant filed by Detective Carlos A. Luna was based upon false information and a fictitious informant. Luna was indicted for perjury, conspiracy and filing false police reports^[12] while all of the charges against Lewin, including the murder of a police officer, were dismissed. The case outlines consequences of noble cause motivations when officers ignore the Constitution and fabricate evidence in the pursuit of justice.^{[2][13]}

In popular culture

Within the 2013 documentary film *We Steal Secrets: The Story of WikiLeaks*, journalist James Ball suggests Julian Assange has developed noble cause corruption, arguing that he is "unable to recognize when he does things that he would deplore in others".^[14]

See also

- Police corruption
- Police misconduct

References

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External links

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