

**Rebecca Gordon.** *Mainstreaming Torture: Ethical Approaches in the Post-9/11 United States.* Oxford University Press 2014. 240 pp. \$31.95 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780199336432).

Since the first images of Abu Ghraib in 2004 shook the world and severely affected the USA's image of 'just war' and 'war for peace', torture has been mainstreamed in the media. Popular culture has also had a field day with the theme, mainly in the form of a TV series (24) and the hugely successful genre of 'torture porn' (*Saw*, *Hostel*). Academic interest in torture aligned with the sustained attention to human rights crises in various parts of the world has also instantiated in the form of massive volumes of critical studies, from disciplines as diverse as literary-cultural studies, legal studies, human rights studies, and philosophy. Rebecca Gordon's book is interested in institutionalized state torture, defined as the intentional infliction of mental and/or physical suffering that seeks to dismantle the victim's sensory, psychological, and social worlds with the effect of establishing or maintaining the inflicting entity's power (7).

Gordon opens with the legal, political, and phenomenological definitions of torture in chapter 1, before coming up with her working definition, cited above. She then moves on to examine US torture practices in the post-9/11 era and argues that these practices fit the above definition. More worryingly, Gordon notes in chapter 2 that this set of horrific practices is not a deviation (the 'few bad apples' argument Rumsfeld forwarded in the wake of the Abu Ghraib revelations), but rather the norm. She notes the official, juridico-legal approval and indeed active encouragement provided for such practices. Returning to the CIA's notorious KUBARK interrogation manuals, Gordon traces its continued presence in the present day USA. Gordon argues that if war is a more visible mode of imposing American power, torture has been an equally effective, if insidious, method of frightening potential threats and even civilians in various parts of the world.

In chapter 3, Gordon turns to the two dominant philosophical positions on the ethics of torture: consequentialism and deontology. Gordon notes that the deployment of the outcome/effects argument (consequentialism) and motives argument (deontology) both end up treating torture as an extraordinary, or isolated, incident. Gordon proposes that we need to use a contextualized approach and see torture as socially enabled and even embedded. Extreme situations that both consequentialists and deontologists posit as the setting of torture are hypothetical, she argues, founded on the 'if... then' supposition. Instead, torture should be seen as *practice*.

Alasdair MacIntyre theorized practices as a set of actions that humans employ in order to achieve goods, in the course of which they come up with virtues. The practices are socially established through cooperative action and thinking. In chapter 4, Gordon argues that there is an inescapable relativism in MacIntyre's theory of virtue ethics. She proposes, instead, the capabilities approach (Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum). Gordon argues that while torture is not a 'practice' in MacIntyre's sense, it is still a practice because it generates internal goods and generates moral and intellectual qualities among its practitioners.

Chapters 5 and 6 are explorations of torture as a practice. Gordon proposes that it *is* a socially cooperative act, and it produces a version of truth and identity (us and them, enemies), and reproduces the torturers themselves. However, she also argues that, like all practices, torture also 'deforms' its practitioners in four key virtues: justice, temperance, courage, and prudence. It also

damages related qualities such as faith, hope, and love. Thus in the case of torture, a practice generates a different order of reasoning, intellectualism, and capabilities.

Gordon concludes (chapter 7) with a call to the end of torture as a practice. This, as she admits, requires enormous efforts by legal scholars, journalists, historians, activists, and civil society. Unless we put in place a system of accountability for those responsible and convicted of torture, and end impunity to high public officials who authorize torture, the practice will not end.

Gordon's detailed and closely argued work illuminates the route 'into the dark chamber' (the title of JM Coetzee's 1986 essay on torture in apartheid South Africa). The most troubling aspect, as Gordon documents, is the *official* sanction for torture. Without such an active (not tacit) approval the Lyndie Englands, Charles Graners, and Janis Karpinskis would not do what they did. However, this is, to my mind, only one aspect of the mainstreaming of torture, although an important one.

While official sanction, of course, is the dominant formation that legitimizes torture, we also need to examine the social roots of this official authority. Thus, I would read Gordon's argument alongside the work of Susan Sontag and other critics (Anne McClintock, Nicholas Mirzoeff, or Darius Rejali, who documented the link between democracy and torture in his 2007 book) who argue that there is an American *social* audit that approves torture as well. It is this tacit, unstated approval that is itself a form of the practice that Gordon speaks of; for if a cultural imaginary is given to torture, then the discourse and material effects are not so far apart. This frightening cultural imaginary is what leads Mark Danner, author of *Torture and Truth*, to declare in his 2005 *New York Times* essay: 'we are all torturers now'.

**Pramod K. Nayar**, University of Hyderabad, India