

## debate forum

IN DEFENSE OF  
THE HUMAN RACE

By Rana Odeh

America has accomplished many great things since its founding, such as introducing the light bulb, walking on the moon and creating "more humane" methods to legally kill human beings. We have truly come a long way from the days when criminals were ripped to shreds with the breaking wheel, burned to ash, hung, suffocated in chambers or electrocuted; now they are simply strapped down to a flatbed and injected with a solution that collapses the diaphragm and lungs, then stops the heart. That sounds quick and painless, right?

The U.S. Constitution outlaws cruel and unusual punishment, and Ohio law requires lethal injection to be quick and painless. A two-hour attempt to find an adequate vein for injection of lethal fluids was certainly not quick, and was seemingly cruel as it brought 53-year-old Romell Broom to tears. The day before Broom's scheduled execution, medical examiners evaluated Broom's veins and determined that veins in his right arm were accessible, yet for two hours executioners were poking needles into Broom's arms, and even his legs, only to realize their method was flawed. Governor Ted Strickland was informed of the long delay and ordered a stop to the longest execution ever to take place in Ohio. Strickland stated that the prison staff has been researching alternative procedures for lethal injection that would comply with state law, which clearly suggests that the method used during Broom's botched execution did not comply with the law.

Although Broom's case is unique, it is not the first time lethal injection has proven to be defective. In 2006, Angel Diaz suffered a 34-minute execution, twice the length of a normal procedure. Executions in Florida normally take no more than 15 minutes, and the inmate is supposed to be unconscious within three to four minutes. During the process of injecting the lethal fluids into Diaz's veins, the needle went through the vein and into his flesh, which made the procedure extremely painful and prevented the sedating chemical from taking full effect. Diaz was still blinking and moving his mouth in attempt to speak or perhaps scream for the first 24 minutes of the procedure, proving that Diaz was conscious and still had feeling while his organs were reacting to lethal chemicals; but could not speak because of the paralyzing effect of Pavulon which was administered shortly after the Pentothal. The Pentothal was supposed to react first by putting Diaz in a coma, which would prevent any feeling during other drug injections. Pavulon is a muscle relaxant which prevents the inmate from any movement. If

step one did not work, Diaz would not be able to say so, because step two made a successful trip into his veins. Could you imagine getting a tooth pulled while you were conscious because the anesthesia did not work? How about having open heart surgery while you were cognizant? Do you think it would be painful to feel your lungs collapse while you were conscious because the technique that was used to kill you was flawed? Nobody should ever have to endure such a painful and cruel death. Medical examiners did state that with evidence shown in his body, they were able to determine that Diaz died an excruciatingly painful and slow death.

Luckily, the undoubtedly imperfect solution of lethal chemicals was not administered to Romell Broom before the unusually long procedure was halted. After an hour of squeezing and poking with needles, Broom volunteered to help executioners find a vein to end his misery quicker. After a vein was located and a nurse injected it with saline, the vein collapsed. Broom covered his face and began sobbing. Some reporters say he was sobbing because he was distressed, but the pain he felt from a collapsed vein and two hours of pinching and jabbing went unmentioned. Broom stated that his experience was painful, distressful and that he was expecting the same kind of "torture" during the next attempt. Subjecting Broom to another long, painful and torturous execution attempt would violate the U.S. Constitution. Ohio law was broken during the first attempt, and if the execution were to follow through eventually, the constitution would be violated because there would be two situations in which one man was mentally and physically agonized.

Broom should be permanently removed from death row and should remain in prison for life. This argument is not in favor of Romell Broom in particular. It is in defense of the human race, shielding us all from cruel and unusual punishment. It would not be just to make exceptions to the Ohio law of "quick and painless" lethal injection or the constitution, because the method or procedure was inconsistent. There would be complete chaos if the law was broken from both sides of the fence; Broom broke the law, but that does not mean the state or enforcement should be allowed to break it as well. What kind of message would the state send to its people if it picked when it wanted to follow the law and chose when to break it?

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LETHAL INJECTION  
GETS TO THE POINT

By J.T. Ryder



To put into context the phrase "cruel and unusual punishment," one has to have a point of reference to illustrate how we have "evolved" in our collective methods of killing each other.

Although undocumented, I'm sure when Grog stole Bam-Bam's horde of Mammoth Jerky, justice probably came sure and swift, probably in the form of a large igneous rock being hashed repeatedly against Grog's noggin until the spark of life fled, leaving the carcass of Grog lying in the dust of ages, to eventually be dug up and unceremoniously displayed in some crusty museum. Since then, humanity has endured being bludgeoned, hung, dismembered, lit on fire and thrown out of windows as forms of capital punishment. Even Tibetan monks, abiding by their own code to not spill the blood of another human, took pains to figure out a method with which to dispatch the criminal element to another plane of existence. They simply sew them up in a wet animal skin and, as it dries, the victim is crushed and/or asphyxiated.

If you really look at the methods of capital punishment throughout the ages, a lethal injection is a virtual trip to the day spa compared to being rolled down a hill in a barrel with spikes nailed through it.

Is lethal injection to be viewed as cruel and unusual punishment?

As you reflect on some of the barbaric methods of execution alluded to above, you will see a trend towards "civilizing" the death penalty a bit more with every encroaching age. For example, the guillotine was named after Joseph-Ignace Guillotin, a French professor of anatomy, who was opposed to the death penalty, but saw that there needed to be a more humane way to dispatch those who had been deemed a menace to society. If we were debating the use of the guillotine now, not only would people decry the barbarity of the instrument as well as the practice, they would bemoan the fact that the victim would probably feel some form of separation anxiety when head and body parted ways. If the current trend of sterilizing the act of capital punishment continues, a prisoner will be laid out on a fluffy white bed of clouds and Julie Andrews will sing them lullabies until their head explodes into candy. After all, we wouldn't want to treat a criminal as if he had done something wrong or anything.

Lethal injection was actually proposed in 1888 by New York doctor Julius Mount Bleyer as a more humane method of execution. The introduction of lethal injection as a method of accepted execution did not make its formal appearance until 1977 when it was introduced and adopted by the Oklahoma legislature. Lethal injection was first used by Texas (go figure) in December 1982 to execute Charles Brooks, Jr., a convicted murderer. Since then, it has been adopted by every state in the country as almost

the exclusive method of execution.

Recently, however, the ACLU has come forward to block the use of lethal injection, calling it "cruel and unusual punishment," which has forced Governor Strickland to call for a moratorium on the state's slated executions pending further investigation. The investigation stems from the attempted execution of Romell Broom in which the state failed to find a usable vein in which to introduce the lethal dose of thiopental sodium, pancuronium bromide and potassium chloride. The damage to Broom's veins most probably stems from his previous intravenous drug use. After the execution was halted, Broom's attorney, Adele Shank, visited Broom and stated he was traumatized. "It really hurt him, I mean physically hurt him," she woe-folly told reporters.

Reasons behind Broom's arrival at this moment in his life appear lost in the preordained agendas and righteous rhetoric of those who oppose the death penalty. On September 21, 1984, 14-year-old Tryna Middleton was kidnapped, brutally raped, stabbed and left in an abandoned parking lot. Broom, who had been previously convicted of raping a 12-year-old was linked to the crime through eyewitness testimony of Middleton's two friends, both of whom claim were attempted abduction victims as well, and by DNA evidence from semen found on Middleton's body. Broom's lawyers filed appeals on his behalf, stating that East Cleveland police repressed evidence that could have changed the outcome of the trial, namely that Middleton and her friends had been drinking beer, smoking marijuana and had allegedly been promiscuous. Of course, had that evidence surfaced, would we have all unanimously concurred to immediately release Broom and give him the keys to the local Kinder Kare, warmly fuzzy in the knowledge that justice had been deery?

While the lawyers wrangle with writs and appeals and the anti-death penalty protesters hold up signs lamenting the fact that Broom has suffered irreparable psychological harm, not to mention some rather nasty pin pricks, we all have to step back and place all the pieces into a complete contextual visualization. Is lethal injection cruel and unusual? As opposed to what? Being ripped away from your life, a life that was just beginning, to be terrorized, tormented, raped and murdered? The last moments of your life being held in the hands of a monster as he violates you in a frenzy of self-serving desire before letting the knife slip into your flesh as you beg for deliverance? If it were a choice between this and the "cruel and unusual" lethal injection, I'd gladly roll up my sleeve.

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