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No. The term 'religious freedom' is not a license to torture anything.

■ JANUARY 10, 2019 BY RICK SNEDEKER ■ 12 COMMENTS

The term "religious freedom" in America has morphed, without consensus, to effectively mean for many "the authority to force others to comply with your own personal religious beliefs."



Before slaughter, a cow awaits "stunning" by a "captive bolt," now illegal. (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals)

The working definition apparently is still unsettled — and both people and animals continue to suffer physically and psychologically worldwide due to enforcement of traditional religious assumptions.

Take Kim Davis' private understanding of religious freedom, for example. As you may recall, Davis, in August 2015 as county clerk of Rowan County, Kentucky, infamously defied a U.S. federal court order to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

God's authority?

Notably, Davis refused to follow the court order "under God's authority." Apparently, she believes that "authority" sanctions discrimination and cruelty toward gays.

Davis' act of civil disobedience was preceded on June 26, 2015 by the U.S. Supreme Court decision in Obergefell v. Hodges, which ruled that the the fundamental right to marry is guaranteed to same-sex couples by the due-process and equal-protection clauses of the Constitution's 14th Amendment.

A fundamentalist, evangelical Christian who cleaves to a conservative, biblical view of gender and marriage, Davis cited her religious beliefs in refusing marriage licenses to homosexual couples. Author and attorney Roberta A. Kaplan described Davis as "the clearest example of someone who wants to use a religious liberty argument to discriminate." Afterward, all Kentucky country clerks were ordered to comply.

But when Davis was jailed for refusing a court order, then Republican presidential

candidate Mike Huckabee, a Christian Right evangelical minister and former Arkansas governor, described her incarceration as the "criminalization of Christianity."

Then, a conservative *Washington Post* columnist compared Davis' illegality with Alabama Gov. George Wallace's "Stand in the Schoolhouse Door" in 1963 to defy court-ordered school desegregation in the South. In a 2017 column, Jennifer Rubin reported that white Christians believe "they are the biggest victims of unfairness" in America, and that minority groups such as blacks and gays "don't experience a lot of discrimination."

But these are all invalid comparisons.

Davis chose to discriminate against Americans because their inherent homosexuality, while wholly legal and natural, simply offended her personal Christian beliefs. Her incarceration for violating the law was not a "criminalization of Christianity," as Huckabee tried to argue, but a valid punishment under the legal code; Christian doctrine is irrelevant in law. The same for Wallace's ignoble attempt to enforce continued racial segregation in schools; it was against U.S. law and constitutional authority.

Contrary to what many evangelical Christians believe, "God's law" does not supersede Man's on earth.

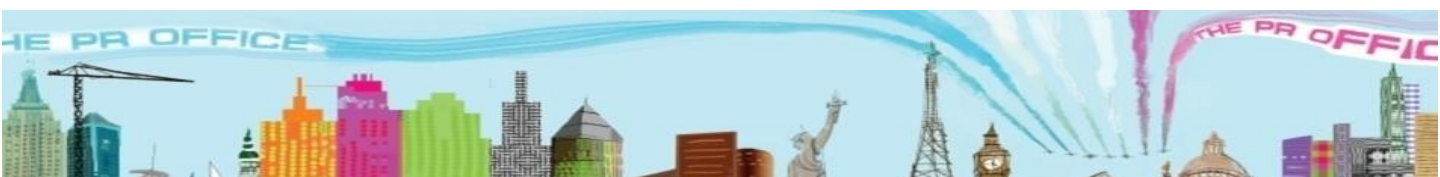
Cruel slaughter

I was thinking about these problems of civic law and religious belief the other day after reading a post by The Freethinker blogger Barry Duke, titled "A sad day for Jews: Belgium bans religious slaughter."

The crux of the post was a newly enacted ban on *kosher* and *halal* slaughter of animals, if they are not stunned before killing, in the Wallonia and Flanders regions of Belgium. The ban on religiously mandated but cruel slaughter techniques under Judaism and Islam, respectively, went into effect Jan. 1. The law is meant to alleviate animal cruelty, in that under both religious edicts the throats of animals are slit while the creatures are still alive. Duke writes:

"Judaism and Islam require that adherents to the faiths only eat meat from animals whose throats have been cut while they are still conscious. The slaughtered animals should also completely bleed out."

Pinchas Goldschmidt, the leader of the Conference of European Rabbis, decried the new rules as antithema to the two monotheistic religions.





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That may be. But that's not the question. The question is, what is ethically right? It is irrational, even immoral under practical humanist principles, to condone a practice that makes animals suffer needlessly today just to align with superstitious prohibitions from ancient books written thousands of years ago.

And it's not just Belgian people who have qualms about this sort of thing.

Poland, the Netherlands and Switzerland have debated placing legal restrictions on religious slaughter techniques, and a **petition** has been initiated in the United Kingdom, which has a large and growing Muslim population, seeking compulsory labeling of *halal* meat in markets that sell it. Austria only permits such killing in specially licensed slaughterhouses overseen by a veterinarian. The U.K. petition states:

"Halal and other meat which has been ritually slaughtered in the UK (either by pre-stunning or non-stun) is not clearly labelled in supermarkets and stores across much of the country. This means that without knowing it, British people may have consumed Halal meat. Consumers deserve to know what they're buying and should be granted the opportunity to make more informed choices."

Still, all animals slaughtered in the U.K. under halal and kosher religious requirements, are killed while they are conscious. The **government website** outlining proper slaughter of all animals state:

"You must stun all animals before you slaughter them unless an animal is being religiously slaughtered for halal or kosher meat."

In the U.S., however, **The Humane Slaughter Act**, or the Humane Methods of Livestock Slaughter Act (P.L. 85-765; 7 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.), approved August 27, 1958, is designed to decrease suffering of all livestock during any slaughter. Animals must be stunned or otherwise made insensible to pain before slaughter. The act states:

"No religion is exempt and all animals due to be slaughtered must be rendered insensible beforehand."

Amen to that.

Nonetheless, the website **Humanefacts.com** contends that the law isn't foolproof:

"In short, 'humane slaughter' means that farmed animals are *supposed* to be 'stunned' (rendered unconscious or insensible to pain) before their throats are slit. However, in addition to being arbitrarily defined, humane slaughter laws are largely unenforced. Why stunning? Slaughterhouse killing methods seek to

maximize speed, and it is widely believed that the fastest way to drain animals of all their blood is to slit their throats while their hearts are still beating."

The U.S. government, however, has reportedly increased enforcement of humane standards in the new millennium.

While it's encouraging that humane slaughter of animals in America is mandated despite any religious objections, it is sad that governments still wrestle with such a no-brainer elsewhere.

Yet religion is still butting into U.S. secular laws that are not lethal, such as the right of same-sex couples to marry.

Regarding private religious beliefs, to each his own, but temporal law is by everyone for everyone in the *real world*, and the faithful should resist trying to inject their gods into it. It's Caesar's business, after all, as the Bible concurs.

Image/PETA

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Image from "3,001 Arabian Days" — Son of an Arabian American Oil Co. (Aramco) employee learns to ride a camel in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, 1955. (Photo courtesy Saudi Aramco)

Available on Amazon!

FYI, my new memoir — **3,001 Arabian Days** — is now available in paperback and ebook formats on Amazon, **here**. It's the story of growing up in an American oil camp in the Saudi Arabian desert from 1953-1962.

Reader review:

"Author Snedeker's wit and insights illuminate the book's easy narrative. His

journalistic style faithfully recreates the people, places and events, and keeps the story crisp and moving from one chapter to the next. More than a coming of age story, 3,001 Arabian Days is a moving tribute to the intricacies of family, a celebration of Saudi Arabian culture, and a glimpse into a time gone by, but whose shadowy specter you can still almost reach out and touch." — Mark Kennedy

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/godzooks/2019/01/religious-discrimination-animals-slaughter/>

