

Guns, Control and the Law

I've often heard the expression, "Gun control is less about guns and more about control." Debate has raged on both sides of the issue for years, decades even, so let's put aside the rhetoric and emotion and look at the issue.

The right to own, carry and use guns is entrenched in our culture and, by that, I mean the "American culture." Looking at it dispassionately, a gun, or firearm, is merely an extension of the concept of weapons. Spears, knives, swords, axes bows and arrows and other implements of defense and aggression all existed before some Chinese inventor put together the ingredients of gunpowder and invented fireworks. A gun, or rifle, performs the tasks of its predecessors more efficiently. When our forebears chose to live on this continent, they brought their firearms with them for protection and for hunting. It might be said that the gun and rifle made our civilization, and the subsequent search for freedom on this continent, possible.

Owning a gun isn't any more complicated than a person's right to own *anything*. Under the Constitution of the United States and its several Amendments, our form of republic makes that possible more than any other form of government. Forget all the emotional issues. Our right to own *whatever* is undeniable. Some things are dangerous and some aren't, it's a fact of life, and no one has the right to abridge that. The only exception, in my view, would stem from mental incompetence and criminal activity. We don't let the insane, children, or criminals handle dangerous things.

Today, even in our republic, governmental organizations impinge too much on people living their lives. As I see it, it stems from one thing only, the desire to control our behavior. Some of the reasons stem from citizens' apathy and abrogation of responsibility regarding important aspects of our lives, misuse of possessions (especially potentially dangerous ones), to outright hostility. Which brings me to the last word in the title—the law.

Let me start by saying that, in a pluralistic society, the law is important to set forth what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. If clear and unambiguous, it works well. If not, it can be manipulated. That's not to say that governing bodies can't react to extenuating circumstances on a case-by-case basis—it's why we have courts. Regardless of what a person owns, if (s)he uses it responsibly, without infringement of the rights of others, or danger to their persons, no problem. Problems occur when lawmakers, citizens like all others, think they know better and seek, arbitrarily, to abridge certain, overall rights. One look at the veritable maze of legislation coming out of Washington demonstrates that.

The curious thing about law is that it works best when citizens respect and honor it. Think of it for a moment: if society at large decided to ignore existing laws en masse, how would it be possible for law enforcement to enforce it? Ultimately, we'd have chaos. Good people obey laws. Bad people don't. So ... how do a raft of laws against *anything* help? Quite frankly, they don't.

We follow laws every day. When driving, for instance, we observe the directions on signs, stop at red lights and check our mirrors to avoid collisions with other drivers. When we go to a restaurant, we assume that that business observes the health code laws ensuring untainted food. When we take the elevator to the thirtieth floor of a high-rise building, we trust that the elevator builder and operator has followed the safety laws so it won't break free of its cable and plummet down the shaft. For that matter, we trust that the contractor who put up the building followed the construction laws so that the building won't crumble. You don't need much imagination to picture the chaos that would ensue without those laws.

Which brings me to my final point—the *reasonableness* of any given law. If said law is reasonable and logical, the majority of people will follow it gladly. If it isn't, depending upon its unreasonableness, people may follow it reluctantly. If it is egregious, many will choose *not* to do so and the larger society experiences problems.

One example, writ large, revolved around Prohibition, enforced by the Eighteenth Amendment to our Constitution in 1920. It sought to deny honest, hard-working, free citizens the use of alcoholic beverages. Regardless of moral intent, that use should not have been tampered with, as men and women have used alcohol for millennia. Because of its unreasonable premise, millions of otherwise law-abiding citizens became scofflaws en masse. Its inadvisability soon became apparent and, after over a decade of crime and general public unrest, the Twenty-first Amendment repealed it in 1933.

Getting back to guns and gun control, laws seeking to abridge gun ownership *only work on law-abiding people*. They do nothing to control criminals, who don't care about laws and operate counter to them. That's why they're considered criminals. Adding law after law toward controlling guns, in response to some emotion-inducing tragedy does *nothing* to stop such a tragedy. That's right ... nothing. The perpetrator violated all the known laws on the books. Why would (s)he be concerned about another? Even the most ardent proponent of gun ownership won't argue with laws governing the *reasonable* use of firearms. When government begins to place *unreasonable* restrictions on guns, the fireworks begin.

So, what laws do we need regarding guns? What if a criminal robs us at gunpoint or, heaven forbid, shoots and kills someone? What laws would apply here? 1. Do not steal. We have laws for that. 2. Do not kill. We have laws for that as well. The instrument used to commit the crime is, quite frankly, irrelevant. We prosecute the crime, not what the perpetrator used to commit it. At least, we should. What gun control law on the books would aid that process? People rob, we prosecute. People kill, we prosecute. Simple.

Those who seek to legislate guns from our society labor under the erroneous assumption that society would be safer. That's nonsense. Take away guns and criminals will use other weapons to commit crimes, or, worse yet find guns and prey on an unarmed public. Cars, knives and *hammers* kill far more people than guns, yet we don't seek to legislate them out of existence. Why pick on guns? Yet, there are some who go after guns as if they represented evil incarnate.

It irritates me no end when some billionaire uses his vast fortune to try to control *my* legal rights. It goes against the very premise of our republic, devolving into the realm of the tyrant and dictator. As long as I do nothing to hurt him/her, I'm not any sort of threat to their lives and well-being. Therefore, that person should leave me alone to live my life as I see fit, so long as that pursuit is done legally. There is nothing in our Constitution that gives them the right to abridge that.

Period.