



A Critique of Gun Fetishism

For those obsessed with having guns, the freedom to have a gun is seen as the quintessence of all freedom. From a psychological perspective, this is nothing short of bizarre. Such people often defend this “epitome of liberty” in very peculiar ways—demonizing any law that would intrude on its sanctity.

A common refrain from gun-fetishists to “explain” why gun control laws are a bad idea goes as follows:

“If we outlaw guns, then criminals will be the only ones who have guns. And that’s not good, ‘cause then the bad guys will be the only one’s who are armed...while the good guys will be deprived of their ability to be armed. We thus empower the bad guys while disempowering the good guys.”

It’s unclear whether one is being wantonly cheeky in taking this seriously...or is just so nutty about guns that one has selectively abdicated sound judgment. What IS clear is that millions of people actually think that this is a valid argument. It seems not to occur to them that it may be worth testing this line of reasoning in other contexts? Imagine the following argument against outlawing bank robbery:

“If we outlaw stealing money from banks, then criminals are going to be the only ones getting money from banks that isn’t theirs. And that’s not good, ‘cause then bad guys will be the only ones able to get free money.”

Bank robbery and gun-toting are, of course, not analogous crimes (one automatically harms other people while the other does not). However the aforesaid lines of defense for each activity stem from a shared logic—a logic that collapses the moment it is used in contexts other than those intended by those who wield it for their own ends.

Gun fanatics—like other kinds of fanatics—engage in ridiculous feats of rationalization in order to promote their cause. So we hear: “If there’s a criminal that’s going to want to do X, they’re going to do X even if it means disobeying laws against X. Meanwhile, the law-abiding citizens will be deprived of their ability to do X if we outlaw it. So what’s the point of legally limiting X? Doing so seems to only hurt the non-criminals.”

What such odd reasoning fails to note is that it must be the evaluation of (the nature of) X ITSELF, not the dynamics of obeying and disobeying laws pertaining to X, that determines whether X should be permissible or not.

“BAD people who want to X aren’t going to pay attention to the laws ANYWAY; thus you only end up inhibiting the GOOD people who want to do X when you legally limit X.” In other words, ONE KIND of person’s warrant to do X is garnered from the ill motives of OTHER KINDS of people who are expected to do X no matter what. Thus: “With laws against X, only BAD people will be the one’s doing X.”

Fine. So let’s replace X with an activity that most people would deem CATEGORICALLY deleterious to civil society...and see if the logic holds. Let X be:

- Driving one’s car at an unsafe speed
- Taking steroids in competitive sports
- Graft in politics
- Insider-trading in the investment banking industry
- Polluting the environment

In each case, one applies the logic-in-question only to reveal it to be patently absurd. Yet, when X = **carry a lethal firearm**, the logic is treated as perfectly sound by gun fetishists. This inconsistent application of such logic forces them to do one of two things for consistency: Either they must cease employing it for gun-toting...or they must endorse its employment for arguing against outlawing the five acts listed above.

Is this apples and oranges? After all, gun fetishists don’t deem got-toting something that is categorically deleterious to civil society...unlike the five acts listed above. But this begs the question. The point of contention is the legitimacy of the underlying logic employed in their argument against gun control laws. Applying the logic-in-question yields the following peculiar results:

- With speed-limits, only “speeders” will be the ones driving imprudently fast.
- With steroid prohibition, only juicers will be the ones benefiting from chemically-induced advantages.

- With graft prohibition, the grifters will have the easiest access to the biggest corporate donations.
- With SEC regulations, it's the insider-traders who will get rich easy.
- With EPA regulations, only companies that damage the environment by cutting corners will be allowed to cut costs in that way.

The only feasible response in each case: Well...NO SHIT.

(Another response may well be: Well, that's the point.)

In each case, the rejoinder could be: "But then the law-abiders get the shit end of the deal! But then the criminals get an unfair advantage!" In a sense, such a rejoinder is technically true. Yet we have such legal strictures ANYWAY. But why?

The logic-in-question is revealed to be preposterous the moment we make X anything that—we can all agree—is socially dysfunctional that confers a benefit/ advantage on those who do it (e.g. the five examples listed above). The gun fetishist thus has no choice but to abandon this particular line of argument—lest he subscribe to a logic that can be used in absurd ways.

To vet the logic one employs to justify any given act, one need only universalize that logic—applying it to other examples—to see if it maintains credence. For the present logic-in-question, theft is an easy example of such a litmus test. Here, the apologist for theft need only say: "If good people are allowed to steal money too, then at least good people will be able to get money AS WELL AS the bad people. For the bad people (the thieves) are going to be doing it anyway."

Most tellingly (on the scale of nations, pertaining to international law), let X = **stockpiling WMDs**. Mapping the logic-in-question to the global community (where the agents are nations), the fault of the logic-in-question becomes even more glaring. "Bad people are going to do X anyway, so why hurt the good people by making X off-limits to THEM?" So, then: Why don't we use this logic for nations—ANY nations—trying to accumulate WMDs? If it works for gun-toting, why doesn't it work THERE?

For those who think prostitution should be illegal, are they willing to apply this logic to prostitution? For those who think crack cocaine should be illegal, what would they say if we made X = **carrying crack cocaine**? In such cases, does the logic-in-question suddenly break down, or are gun fetishists willing to apply it consistently across the board to ward off prohibitions?

A common retort to the present essay may be: “But carrying a gun isn’t INHERENTLY bad...while theft IS. Assuming I’m a good person, me carrying a gun isn’t itself immoral...and isn’t going to harm anyone...UN-like theft. So the analogy doesn’t work!”

But such a retort is question begging. X must be evaluated on its own terms. The case can easily be made (and, in fact, HAS BEEN made) that having a gun—regardless of who you may be—IS, indeed, an inherently bad thing. It CAN (and often does) lead to others being harmed...EVEN IF you’re a “good” person. (This has been demonstrated time and time and time again. Thousands of people are killed every day by guns—and MOST of those incidents involve law-abiding people.) Very rarely does having had a gun on one’s person end up leading to a CURTAILMENT of harm.

Assessing the nature of X must never be a function of compliance trends with the established law pertaining to X. Gun control is about mitigating ACCESS. The logic-in-question misses this point entirely. Yet we constantly hear, “Why should we criminalize X...’cause the criminals will do X anyway!”

The contention that limiting guns is “the government trying to control our lives” is preposterous. One must feel sad for the man who deems his life “controlled” insofar as he isn’t allowed to carry a lethal firearm—and who only feels truly free insofar as he possesses a device designed to kill other human beings.

Over a hundred thousand innocent people are hurt or killed by gun-violence in the U.S. EACH YEAR. Yet, astonishingly, gun fetishists demand: “Guns, guns, we need even more guns!” When more and more people are killed, the solution, according to their bizarre alchemy, is quite simple: “Guns, guns, and more guns.” Each day, 34 more people are murdered in the U.S. Each time another person is killed, all the NRA will say is: “More people need guns.”

This tendency creates easier and easier access to firearms. Meanwhile—as the gun lobby is delighted to affirm—this trend is fantastic business for firearm manufacturers. So we must ask: To be safe, do we REALLY have to have guns? Is this REALLY about civil liberties...or is there something else at play?