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PHL340

April 10th, 2024

Is it morally correct to ban all firearms?

Gun violence, murder, and death are a few of the most debated moral topics in the United States in recent years. Legal possibility and practicality aside, I want to explore the idea of whether is it morally correct to ban all firearms, the chief contributor to death and violence in America. In this paper, I want to focus on whether it is morally correct for a total ban, even though the matter would not be in contention in any serious political debate due to its impracticality. This, similar to Huemer's argument with the ideas of a total ban in his "Is there a right to gun ownership?", is not a rebuttal to a straw-man, but a discussion on the morality of the matter devoid of concerns for practically and the legal nuances.

The core issue with the debate on the morality of firearm ownership is that different people have completely different perceptions of firearms. Some treat firearms as tools for defense and hunting as they are, some, mostly due to a lack of understanding of firearms, tend to demonize them and perceive firearms as tools designed for murder and intimidation.

It is a lack of knowledge of weapons that makes people fear the weapons. Throughout my military career, mostly fighting in Ukraine, I've interacted with many people who have a deep familiarity with firearms. People who are in military and law enforcement, people who interact with firearms as a part of their jobs and not of their own volition. So they have a clear understanding of firearms and not all necessarily firearm enthusiasts. The mass majority of the said individuals would agree on the right to firearm ownership, even though most of them would

agree some form of training or restrictions should apply. As they have a clear understanding of firearms thus less likely to demonize them.

Michael Huemer in his “Is there a right to own a gun?”, established the idea that restrictive gun control can only be justified “If only it would save as many lives as it costs.” Meaning that it would be morally correct to ban guns if more lives can be spared in murder than lost in the ability to self-defense(Huemer, 2003, 4.2).

First of all, banning guns would not be a magical plug, stopping all guns and violence in the world, it would simply transform and revert to more simple and brutal ways. A lot of people may argue that guns cause a lot of the deaths and violence happening in the United States. This would be true but there are a lot of nuances on the matter; I do believe that it is an AMERICA problem and not a gun problem. Something changed in the latter part of the last century, maybe it was a general lack of interest in religion, maybe it was the disappearance of the middle class, or maybe it was the increasing wealth disparities-America had changed for the worse. Murder and gun violence rates have long since skyrocketed since the 1950s, even though gun control and regulation laws are stricter than ever. If simply banning firearms is the solution, we would’ve drastically reduced the number of firearm murders and violence, yet it only increases year by year.

Another example would be Switzerland. In Switzerland, citizens also have the right to own firearms, yet the gun violence, mass shooting, and homicide rate is close to zero. There are a lot of confounding cultural and social factors as to why Americans have such high rates of gun violence, however, America’s gun problem is a problem with Americans and not with guns. Guns don’t kill people, people kill people.

America is a rough and dangerous country, similar to some parts of Britain. Around the London area, the robbery rate is even higher than in the United States, with 3.6 per 1000 people, instead of 0.862 across the US(Plumplot, 2024). Banning guns would not have stopped criminals from hurting and intimidating innocent civilians, as it does not change the hearts of the criminals, only changes the tools of violence. The homicide rate in the UK is only slightly better off than the homicide rate in the US, as criminals just simply switched from shooting people to stabbing people(Stripe, 2023).

According to data from Pew Research Center, In 2021, the United States saw a record number of gun-related homicides, sitting at 20,958, twice the amount in 1968. However, in 2018 alone, there were an astounding 70,040 police recorded cases of defensive gun use alone, as discovered by National Crime Victimization Survey(Mascia 2022). Statistically alone, guns have saved more lives than they have taken, making Huemer's proposition to be true.

From a Utilitarian perspective, banning firearms would not be morally correct. Utilitarianism believes that the morally correct course of action would be to maximize the happiness as well as the well-being of all parties involved. Similar to Huemer's argument on the matter, which could be summarized as recreational shooting is a way of life and that life is about risks and a life without frivolous joys that involve risks would not be worth living(Huemer, 2003, 4.1). As we have established in the previous paragraph, violence, in general, would not be mitigated much by guns, or at least, the number of deaths caused by guns and the number of lives saved by guns are a point of contention by many, meaning no clear right or wrong could be discerned at the moment. However, the United States is home to 400 million firearms, which is the total number of houses and cars combined, and almost 70% of them are exclusively recreational. (Kaur, 2022) The amount of happiness that 400 million recreational uses of firearms could bring would mean

that from a utilitarian point of view, it is not morally correct to ban guns, as there is no clear evidence to support that there are more lives harmed than saved by firearms, yet firearms bring so much joy to so many people.

From a Kantian perspective, it's morally incorrect to ban all firearms. In his theory of universalisability, he noted “act only on that maxim through which you can concomitantly will that it should become a universal law”, meaning that a policy can only be morally correct if it can be applied universally without exception (Kant, 1785). Here's the nuance of a total private firearm ban. The bigger cities, such as Detroit or New York may benefit from a total firearm ban, but in places like rural Arkansas, it is unethical to take away their way of living and their means of support. There could be an analogy made, that taking away rural American's firearms because of a national wide firearm ban, is similar to taking away Native American's horses for a ban on private ownership of larger animals due to animal cruelty concerns. It would make sense in the context of bigger cities, but it would essentially destroy their way of living. Thus, from a Kantian perspective, it is largely unethical to enact a total firearms ban, as it does not fit under the theory of universalisability.

The harsh truth is that the world is a cruel and unfair place. There are going to be people with malicious intent that's physically stronger roaming around. Thus the need for self-defense arises. Thus, It's not morally correct from a feminist point of view, especially by the sameness approach denoted by Annaleigh Curtis in her “Feminism: The Sameness Approach”. In her writing, she described two premises, one is that “Women and men are the same in the relevant respects”, and the other is “If A and B are the same in the relevant respects, then A and B should be treated the same.” (Curtis, 2014)

In this respect, when the need for self-defense arises, it is an undeniable fact that women are physically weaker than men. However, firearms are the great equalizers. As the famous campaign for Colt pistols in the 1850s said, God made big men and small men, and a Colt 9mm made them equal. The same applies to many females, and carrying a firearm for self-defense will eliminate any physical disparities. Having satisfied the first premise Curtis proposed(Curtis, 2014), we can now make sure that women, now armed, are as physically capable if not more than the attacker, and thus should be treated the same, successfully defending herself.

Many claim that having firearms for self-defense is a sign of paranoia and having a victim mentality. On the contrary, Firearms are tools of empowerment, especially from a feminist perspective. For example, my fiancée, living in rougher areas of south central Los Angeles, got catcalled on a few occasions, and I during my travels around rougher parts of the country got called ethnic slurs dozens of times. In these situations, the smart thing to do is to keep our heads down and avoid confrontation, however, we would not be afraid to call out the unjust in the world if we are empowered by our firearms. This again, is not advocating intimidating others with a firearm, but rather pointing out the safety and physical empowerment a firearm can bring, similar to how someone would feel safer walking around at 6'9 300lbs compared to 5'2 and 100lbs.

From a feminist perspective, it is impossible to stop harassment altogether, but we can empower women physically so they can walk around at night without fear for their own safety. In conclusion, a total ban on firearms would be immoral, from a few different ways of argumentation; from a Kantian perspective, it would be immoral, as it cannot be justifiably universally applied(Kant, 1785); from Huemer's argument, it is also immoral, as statistics has shown gun-related homicide numbers are much lower than cases of defensive gun use(Huemer

2003); In a utilitarian view, the large number of recreational firearms in America meant that firearms brought people much happiness and joy, thus banning all weapons would not better people's happiness or wellbeing, thus immoral. From a feminist point of view, a total ban would not be moral, as firearms can be physically empowering to women(Curtis, 2014).

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