

BY:



FOR THE ORLANDO VICTIMS

AGAINST GUNS

In the 11th of his Theses on Feuerbach, Karl Marx wrote that *“philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point is to change it.”*

- 1 I completely agree with him that the ultimate aim of philosophy is to change the world, not merely interpret it. So Marx and I are both philosophical liberationists: that is, we both believe that philosophy should have radical political implications. But I also sharply disagree with him, insofar as I think that the primary aim of philosophy, and its practices of synoptic reflection, writing, teaching, and public conversation, is to change our lives. Then, and only then, can we act upon the world in the right way. As a case in point, I'm now going to argue that not only (i) owning or possessing and using guns, but also (ii) the Second Amendment, are rationally unjustified and immoral. In order to do that, however, and for clarity's sake, I'll quickly introduce some terminology.
- 2 By coercion I mean: either (i) using violence (e.g. injuring, torturing, or killing) or the threat of violence, in order to manipulate people according to certain purposes of the coercer (primary coercion), or (ii) inflicting appreciable, salient harm (e.g. imprisonment, termination of employment, large monetary penalties) or deploying the threat of appreciable, salient harm, even if these are not in themselves violent, in order to manipulate people according to certain purposes of the coercer (secondary coercion).
- 3 So all coercion is manipulation. Therefore, whether it is primary or secondary, coercion should be carefully distinguished from what I will call minimal sufficiently effective, last resort, defensive, protective, and preventive moral force: As a last resort, only either using the smallest sufficiently effective level of violence or threat of violence, or deploying the smallest sufficiently effective threat of appreciable, salient harm, in order to defend against, protect against, or prevent, oneself or someone else being primarily or secondarily coerced, or having their rational human dignity directly violated.
- 4 All human persons, aka people, are (i) absolutely intrinsically, non-denumerably infinitely valuable, beyond all possible economics, which means they have dignity, and (ii) autonomous rational animals, which means they can act freely for good reasons, and above all they are (iii) morally obligated to respect each other and to be actively concerned for each other's well-being and happiness, aka kindness, as well as their own well-being and happiness.
- 5 Therefore it is rationally unjustified and immoral to undermine or violate people's dignity, under any circumstances.
- 6 People have dignity as an innate endowment of their rational humanity. Dignity is neither a politically-created right, nor an achievement of any sort. Nor can anyone lose their dignity by thinking, choosing, or acting in a very morally or legally bad way.
- 7 The primary function of guns is for their owners/possessors or users to manipulate, threaten, or kill other people for reasons of their own, namely, coercion. This is clearly proven by the history of firearms: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_firearm] Indeed, this is even admitted by the American Firearms Institute: [<http://www.americanfirearms.org/gun-history/>]
- 8 Notice that I said that the primary function of guns is coercion. Please do not let the fact that guns can have secondary or tertiary functions, say, for hunting non-human animals, or for recreational shooting, or for holding doors closed on windy days, conceptually confuse you.
- 9 Notice too, that if it turns out that owning/possessing and using guns according to their primary function is rationally unjustified and immoral, then owning/possessing and using guns according to their secondary and tertiary functions will be equally rationally unjustified and immoral. If it is rationally unjustified and immoral for you to own/possess and use a bomb that would blow up the Earth, then it is equally rationally unjustified and immoral for you to own/possess and use that bomb for hunting non-human animals, for recreational bombing, or for holding doors closed on windy days.
- 10 Now arbitrarily coercing other people is rationally unjustified and immoral because it undermines and violates their dignity.
- 11 Notice that I said “arbitrarily coercing other people.” That means manipulating, threatening, or killing other people either (i) for no good reason or (ii) for no reason at all, much less a good reason. “For no good reason” does not imply that there could be a good reason for coercion: all manipulation is inherently bad. People who act coercively either have bad motivating reasons for so acting (e.g., selfishness), or simply coerce without a reason, in a spontaneously bad way. And please do not let the fact that in some circumstances minimal sufficiently effective, last-resort, defensive, protective, and preventive moral force is rationally justified and morally permissible, conceptually confuse you.
- 12 Therefore, since it fully permits arbitrary coercion, owning/possessing and using guns is rationally unjustified and immoral, other things being equal.
- 13 Notice, again, that I said other things being equal. Please do not let the fact that under some special critical (in the sense of “involving a crisis”) conditions, when other things are not equal, when all else has failed, and when the only way to stop someone doing something horrendously immoral, and in direct violation of human dignity—e.g., rape, torture, murder, mass murder, genocide—to you, to someone else, or to many other people, that it is rationally justified and morally permissible to use a gun for the purposes of minimal sufficiently effective, last-resort, defensive, protective, and preventive moral force against that evil person, conceptually confuse you. No one may permissibly own or possess a gun, but sometimes, under some special critical conditions, it is morally permissible to use one. But this permissible use is only for last-resort, defensive, preventive, and protective purposes: it is never morally permissible to use a gun for coercion.
- 14 One very important moral and political consequence of the preceding argument is its direct bearing on the Second Amendment to the US Constitution, which says this: A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed. In other words, focusing on the material in boldface, the Second Amendment says that “the people,” i.e., all Americans, have the moral and legal right “to keep and bear arms,” i.e., the moral and legal right to own/possess and use guns, unconditionally.
- 15 This means that the Second Amendment fully morally and legally permits arbitrary coercion. The further historical question of whether the original intention of the Second Amendment was to establish a legal right to own/possess and use guns for militias only, or for all Americans, is irrelevant.
- 16 But arbitrary coercion is rationally unjustified and immoral.
- 17 Therefore the Second Amendment is rationally unjustified and immoral.
- 18 More generally, no one, which includes all Americans, and which especially includes all members of the police and the army, i.e., the “Militia,” has the moral right “to keep and bear arms,” i.e., to own/possess and use guns, other things being equal.
- 19 Immanuel Kant pointed out in “What is Enlightenment?” that for philosophers to publish unpopular ideas is a life-changing act, not only life-changing for the philosopher as an individual, but also as a necessary phase of the larger historical process of “exiting” our “self-incurred” intellectual and moral immaturity. Moreover, the intellectual and moral maturation process can be a painful one for all concerned. So I have no doubt in my mind that many or even most Americans deeply believe things about guns and the Second Amendment that are sharply contrary to what I have just argued.
- 20 But if what I have argued is sound, then they're wrong, and we should all change our lives for the better.

GUNS & US

