

PERSONALLY SPEAKING

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ARISTOTLE AND GUNS

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Aristotle knew as much about guns as he knew about Twinkies, diesel engines, and iphones. *Nada*. So why do we turn to him on this hot-button issue of guns and gun control? It's for two reasons. First, he instructs us on the four kinds of causes for change to take place. Second, he teaches us the importance of the Golden Mean.

The Golden Mean is the point reached by intelligent humans of good will who are forced to deal with two extremes. Extremes such as too much and too little. Too soon and too late. No access to guns and total access to guns. The issue at hand is to manage the discourse on guns and gun control is a way that is *morally* acceptable. The Golden Mean is reached when the parties involved have agreed to a moderate position somewhere between no access to guns and total access.

The no-access position is ruled out by the Second Amendment and by the specter of a police state that would confiscate all the guns held by private citizens. The complete access to guns leads to a Mao-ist state in which all power comes from the end of the gun and the powerful destroy the weak.

Finding the Golden Mean requires both Congressional Democrats and Republicans to moderate their rhetoric and political maneuvering, wherein the advocates of one side of the argument are willing to acknowledge that there is some merit to the other side. President Trump's own harsh and harmful rhetoric must be moderated if we are to arrive at the Golden Mean.

The best chance for reaching the Golden Mean lies in everyone directly involved in the debate in Congress vowing to never attack with the intent of belittling another person's character. This is a tall order for Congress that for years has been deeply divided along partisan lines where both sides have been posturing to the 24-hour media news cycle that they are right and their adversaries are wrong. The effect has been to push away from the Golden Mean by holding fast to an extreme position. The outcome too often is no action at all when action is most needed.

Following Aristotle again, there are four causes that must be in place to make change happen: material, formal, efficient, and final.

The *material* cause addresses the question as to what is it that is to be changed. In this instance it is human behavior, specifically from violent to peaceful. In the recent Las Vegas slaughter of innocent lives the media have chosen to show the violent behavior of the one gunman and the caring behavior of the many first responders including civilians in the crowd. To reach the Golden Mean we must first know why certain human beings act violently. In this instance, why a 64 year-old man intentionally fired upon and killed so many people. Did he leave behind a manifesto or was he acting to perpetuate an evil spectacle?

The *formal* cause relates to how one determines when the change from violent behavior to peaceful behavior has occurred. Clearly there must be some movement away from violent behavior. In this regard we are reminded of the efforts of Martin Luther King to change human behavior through expressly nonviolent means. What this calls for is finding a way to moderate the human knee-jerk violent response to a violent attack in which both sides attempt to justify their use of violence on grounds that they are right and the other side is wrong. This is what we saw in Charlottesville. Removing statutes and monuments is futile because it does not *in and of itself* change human behavior for the better.

The *efficient* cause addresses the question as to who or what brings about change in human behavior from violent to peaceful. The answer is simple enough – you and me. Perhaps a cooling off period in which all private organizations voluntarily suspend protests, demonstrations, rallies, and public gatherings of all kinds for the next 90 days, and members of Congress put their fundraising activities on hold in order to find the Golden Mean.

In any case, we must reject the notion that some human beings are superior and others are inferior and that the superior ones have a duty to eliminate the inferior ones for the purpose of building a population of superior persons who produce superior children and thereby improve society. This was the Nazi way and the eugenics way. We have not yet rejected the eugenics way; American women have a constitutional right to destroy their own unborn babies. Freedom of choice pits the weak against the strong. And the strong prevail.

The eugenics way most recently has surfaced in an ACLU lawsuit demanding that Hawaii expand access to the abortion pill Mifeprex. NPR reported that one of the plaintiffs has stated that the State's present law combined with its high poverty rates makes it difficult

for impoverished women to access the pill. The cryptic message is that Hawaii must rid itself of the unborn babies of poor women in order to cleanse the gene pool. In the United States, according to the Guttmacher Institute, 75 percent of all women having an abortion in 2014 were from poor or low-income households.

Behavioral change from violent to peaceful requires recognizing that every human being, weak or strong, male or female, bright or challenged, white, brown, black, or yellow has a sacred dignity that cannot be compromised through practices such as human trafficking and human slavery, not to mention mass killings in entertainment venues and abortion clinics. Human behavior must respect that inherent dignity.

The *final* cause brings up the question as to the end that is to be achieved. The answer is an end to killing and most especially an end to mass killings. Quite often the end to be achieved is difficult to articulate. In this case, however, it is easy because we see the slaughter through news channels and are in general disgusted by the evil human behavior that triggered it.

Too often we are reduced to saying “somebody must do something.” This is true but it leads nowhere. We must recognize (1) the rights affirmed in the Second Amendment, (2) that changing human behavior is a very difficult undertaking, (3) that the only way to find the Golden Mean between no access to guns and unfettered access is through civilized public discourse where no one is deliberately demeaned, and (d) that all human beings have a sacred dignity that must never be compromised.

It’s human behavior that must change not gun ownership.

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