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In the United States Constitution, Americans have the right to bear arms under the second amendment. Citizens have the freedom to own guns and use them for things such as hunting and self-defense. In *Risk and Responsibility: Gun Control and the Ethics of Hunting*, Riddle argues that people morally ought not to own guns for the purpose of hunting. When he argues that people morally ought not to own guns, he relies on two premises. The first premise is that owning a gun for the purpose of hunting puts others bodily health at grave risk. The second premise is that if owning a gun puts others bodily health at risk, then people morally ought not to own guns (Riddle, p. 218). In this paper, I will show that Riddle’s argument against the right to own guns is false.

1. Owning a gun for the purpose of hunting puts others bodily health at grave risk
2. If owning a gun puts others bodily health at grave risk, then people morally ought not to own guns.
3. Therefore, people morally ought not to own guns.

I will first explain the authors defense of the first premise based on the second amendment and why he believes restrictions should be in place on it. I will explain Riddle’s reasoning behind his second premise and discuss the definitions of freedom his gives. Following, I will explain the examples he gives to defend his premises. The two counterexamples I give will show that his argument fails. The first counterargument fails him because it lays out restrictions that are already in place. The second counterargument will show that the responsibility of harm he gives fails. I then consider a possible objection to my counterarguments on the basis of utilitarianism. I conclude that Riddle’s argument is false and that it fails tremendously.

Riddle begins his argument of defense by comparing the first and second amendments. The author states that citizens of the United States accept restrictions that are put in place on the freedom of speech in the first amendment. For example, the majority of Americans accept that it is not okay to scream “fire” in a crowded theater; we accept this because we understand that it puts others well-being at risk. Riddle argues that because we realize that certain restrictions are in place to protect the well-being of other people, then we should also accept restrictions on the second amendment so that others are protected (Riddle, pp. 221-23).

Riddle gives the example of restrictions on smoking to defend his first premise. The author discusses how smoking endangers others health because of the risks of second-hand smoke. Due to the risks of second-hand smoke, smokers are not allowed to smoke in public places such as restaurants. Restrictions have been put in place to protect the well-being and bodily health of others from second-hand smoke. Riddle believes that the same should go for owning a gun: restrictions should be set in place so that people cannot own a gun so as to protect others from harm (Riddle, p. 226).

The second premise to Riddle’s argument is that if owning a gun puts others bodily health at grave risk, then people morally ought not to own guns. In his essay, Riddle lays out two different types of freedom: intrinsically good freedoms and instrumentally good freedoms. The author believes that freedoms that are intrinsically good, or freedoms that are good in and of themselves, are quite rare. The example of intrinsically good freedoms he gives is the freedom to bodily health (specifically, freedom from violent assault). Riddle says that most other freedoms are those of instrumental good or worth. Instrumental freedoms are those that satisfy preferences that people have. Those freedoms include citizen’s freedom to do various activities to fill their leisure time. Riddle argues that intrinsically good freedoms should always come before instrumentally good freedoms. To put it into context, the freedom to bodily health and safety should always come before the freedom to own guns for the purpose of hunting, which is an instrumentally good freedom because it satisfies people and gives them something to do (Riddle, pp. 223-25).

Riddle gives another example to defend his position which he calls “*the case of the endangered waiter”* (Riddle, p. 227)*.* In this scenario,“You can order option A, an option that you would find satisfying. To prepare option A, the waiting staff would simply go back to the kitchen, place the order, and pick it up to deliver to your table. However, you could also order option B. To procure the ingredients for option B, the waiting staff must exit the rear of the restaurant and dive into hungry shark infested water, only to be put further at risk by angry poachers attempting to hunt the shark for fin soup” (Riddle, p. 226). Riddle states that while option B would make you happier, we can argue that it would be wrong to order it because you are putting others at risk. Similarly, you would put other people at risk if you were to own a gun in the case that it is stolen and used to hurt someone (Riddle, p. 227).

I do not agree with Riddle’s premises nor do I think they are true. In *the case of the endangered waiter,* I strongly disagree with Riddle’s comparison. The restaurant has made the choice to offer such a dangerous choice such as option B. Additionally, the waiting staff has made the choice to work at such a restaurant that puts them in harm’s way. Therefore, both the waiting staff and the restaurant are responsible for the danger that they are putting themselves in. This would only apply to harm to innocents from guns if the waiters or the restaurant were forced into such danger. If an innocent were to willingly put themselves in a position where they could be harmed by guns, then that is their responsibility, not the gun owners.

In his argument, Riddle wants restrictions placed on gun ownership; however, I object because there are already some restrictions in place. Riddle uses the comparison to restrictions on smoking to explain why there should be restrictions for people who own guns. However, while there are restrictions on smoking, it is still legal and people are free to smoke if they wish. Additionally, there are already restrictions in place on hunting. For example, you cannot hunt in your own backyard, you can only hunt during season, and you must have a license in order to hunt. Those restrictions are already in place for safety reasons. At one point, Riddle states that the “freedom to own a gun […] is a freedom that possesses only instrumental worth, and ought to be restricted to secure the freedom of bodily health” (Riddle, p. 225). However, there are already restrictions in place that make it illegal to shoot or harm someone with a gun. This is a restriction whose purpose is to secure freedom of bodily health; therefore, Riddle’s argument fails.

Riddle also argues that if someone owns a gun, then they risk the gun being stolen and used to hurt someone else. I do not think that it is the gun owner’s fault if someone is harmed by their stolen gun. It is the gun owner’s responsibility for securing their property so that it could not be stolen. If it is stolen, then that is their fault. However, the harm to an innocent is the fault and responsibility of the person who stole the gun, not the person who originally owned the gun.

People should also be allowed to own guns for self-defense as well as hunting. What if, as in the scenario above, person A steals a gun in order to shoot person B. If person B also owns a gun, then they can defend themselves against person A and possibly shoot them first. However, if there are restrictions on gun ownership and person B does not own a gun, then they have no way to protect themselves against person A.

A possible objection to my counterargument could be a utilitarian argument. Someone could argue that allowing guns to be owned could cause more harm than good. It would not maximize utility because the harm to both humans and non-human animals is greater than any good that could be achieved. If guns were not allowed, then person A would not have been able to steal a gun in the first place. When there are no restrictions on guns and hunting, then there are more dolors than hedons. It is not justifiable to say that people should own guns because it brings them pleasure and happiness when it puts other people’s lives at risk.

Riddle makes several arguments about how people morally ought not to own guns due to the grave risk it puts on others. However, his arguments are weak and not plausible. I think his argument is valid, as his premises support his conclusion however I do not think his premises are true. I disagree with Riddle’s premises and his rationale behind them.

Works Cited

Riddle, C. A. (2015). On Risk & Responsibility: Gun Control and the Ethics of Hunting. *Essays In Philosophy*, *16*(2), 217-231.