

Capitalism as Disease: Spreading Governmental Tyranny and Gun Violence

The Tragedy of Being Human: A Mean Spirit

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Global Research, February 27, 2013

Region: [USA](#)

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When I grew up in semi-rural Pennsylvania, everybody had guns, and guns were never a concern. People had guns for hunting and for skeet and target shooting. I had a 0.22 long barreled Remington rifle for varmint hunting, mainly to keep from being inundated by migrating urban rats. My brother had a shotgun; I never knew what kind. My memory is that he used that shotgun only once. He had, at the time, a desire to be a pheasant hunter, and the first time he hunted, he came home with a bloodied carcass which he proudly presented to our mother. Never having dealt with a fully feathered bird full of buckshot before, she spent an agonizing afternoon trying to make it fit for cooking. By the time she finished, my poor brother's pride had been replaced by sorrow and chagrin. He never hunted again. Not another pheasant was ever killed by a member of my family.

But nobody had guns for protection. If guns are needed for protection, the society has already failed. The little community I grew up in had no police force; in the eighteen years I lived there, it had not a single officer. It had no jail, no courthouse, and not a single lawyer. No house was ever broken into, and no one was ever assaulted. People rarely locked their doors. The people in that little community not only liked each other, they cared for one other. They were not only pleased when the needy were helped, they eagerly took part in helping.

The government that existed was there when needed and invisible when not. People did not distrust their government, were not afraid of its becoming tyrannical, and trivial offenses were ignored. Although it was unlawful to sell alcoholic beverages on Sunday, the town had a speakeasy that was open seven days a week and no one ever cared. As a small child, I often accompanied my father when he went there. As he drank his tankard of beer, I sipped a modicum from a shot glass. And I did not become an alcoholic! A miracle, I'm sure! In the twelve years I attended public schools, no policeman or security guard was ever needed for any function, not even athletic events. (Good thing, since the community lacked one.)

That world is now gone. In less than a century, in a single lifetime! it vanished. Now many people refuse to help the needy and resent it when they are helped. A miasma of meanness now hovers over America. Although it does not afflict everyone, it afflicts enough to make meanness a dominant American attribute. It can be observed everywhere—in the halls of Congress and in our classrooms where students bully their classmates, in a college band whose members beat one of their own to death in an activity called hazing, in the killing that takes place on our streets and in our homes, schools, and places of work, in the dialogs spoken in movies and on television programs. No one likes or trusts anyone, especially the government. Americans are a poorly educated, uncouth, uncivil, uncaring people. (No, not everyone.) They have turned civil society into a mob.

I live in a sparsely populated, gated community that epitomizes this nation. With only a population of around 15,000, it boasts of 21 churches. Four of these are affiliated with the same protestant theological denomination; yet their congregations do not like one another well enough to worship together in the same building. Americans don't live together; they merely live side by side. America's Christians not only dislike non-Christians, they dislike each other too. In general, we are a mean spirited and spiteful people.

Americans who oppose the legalization of abortion because they claim to believe that life is sacred stand by silently as people of all ages are gunned down in their communities every day. It's as though the births are needed to ensure that shooters will always have targets since no provision is ever made to care for the newly born. The hungry have to rely on intermittent charity, the homeless, cardboard boxes, and the sick, seemingly endless waits in emergency rooms. An asthmatic resident of my home state recently died in one while waiting to be examined. A simple injection would have saved her. Abandoned street children unite in street gangs which hunt one another. The unemployed become hunters of people and gatherers of their goods. People seethe with covert racial, religious, sexual, and other biases. Love thy neighbor as thy self has no practical meaning, no cash value, as William James would have put it.

So what has happened? Well, answer these questions and try to figure it out:

What difference is there between a President who has a kill list and squads of assassins called navy seals and a *Cosa Nostra* Don who orders assassinations? Is the Director of the CIA whose agents assassinate people any better than a Mafia Godfather?

How can a government that boasts of killing people in faraway places seriously lament the killing that takes place in its own cities? Many more Americans were killed avenging 9-11 than were killed on that day. Revenge, a mean spirited activity, is more important than people's lives. Humane people never take pride in killing.

How can a nation that shrugs its shoulders over collateral killings in, say, Pakistan, bemoan the killings of bystanders in gangland crossfire or even those killed in their bedrooms during drive-by shootings?

How can a nation claim it values life while its police routinely get away with killing unarmed and often handicapped people by merely claiming a fear that their lives were in danger?

How can a government not be tyrannical when it consists of true ideological believers who seek to impose their beliefs on everyone else? Tyrannical governments are made up of tyrannical people. John Stuart Mill long ago proved in his pamphlet, *On Liberty*, that freedom is impossible without tolerance for differences. But even America's university graduates haven't read that little pamphlet. The expression "educated American" is for the most part an oxymoron.

Of course, there have always been two kinds of people—humanitarians and inhumanitarians. And a majority of the people in a mean society do not have to be mean. The amount of meanness perpetrated, not the number of people who perpetrate it, is the definitive element. The meanness evident in America is overwhelming. Civil behavior is almost entirely absent. Barbarians are at the helm of the ship of state and have been for a long time.

The meanness that has afflicted America is responsible for its domestic violence. It is also responsible for the violence Americans inflict internationally. Meanness cannot be compartmentalized. There is no such thing as a nice, mean fellow. No mean person is nice; nice guys are never mean.

The germ that carries this affliction is the predominant political economy fostered by the commercial, political, and economic communities. Capitalism is an extractive activity that exploits workers and consumers and has never succeeded in serving the needs of any nation's entire population. Marketing is a universal lie. People always fall through the cracks in institutions and the institutional elite care nothing about those who drop. Capitalist societies always consist of first and second class citizens; they are characterized by people who agree with Henry Vanderbilt's statement, "The public be damned." And the public is and always has been. America's elite have never sacrificed anything for this people in general.

Commercial competition does not foster concern for others. Individualism fosters antagonism. Looking out for number one always ends up denying what is needed to number two. Charity is not a commercial virtue. Capitalism is institutionalized meanness. It is the primeval miasma manifested in greed. It is the disease that makes human beings inhumane, and it is fatal.

Why then would those in other nations look up to America and want to emulate its culture of meanness? Why aren't they revolted by it? Why won't they simply stop being led by their noses?

There can only be one answer. The meanness has not only afflicted America, it has afflicted others too. The primeval miasma transcends national borders. That is the tragedy of being human.

Unless the meanness that pervades human societies can be ameliorated, no human society will ever be worthy of being called a force for good in the world. The violence in America, or anywhere else, will never be substantially reduced until the reduction of meanness itself, not its various means, becomes the object of human action.

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