

JAMES ATWOOD, GUNDAMENTALISM AND WHERE IT'S TAKING AMERICA (Heather Wilson ed., 2017).

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**Why Gundamentalism Kills High Technological Guns,  
which May Be Against the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment**

*“In a world where even elementary school children are skilled in the use of smart phones, tablets, computers and a host of electronic technologies, no one should be surprised over attempts to Develop a smart gun that will fire only at the command of its owner... Countless gundamentalists, however, are afraid of this new technology and are diametrically opposed to its development.”<sup>1</sup>*

The author's argument is an expose of gun violence in America, and he argues that there are a group of citizens in the United States who hold the right to own firearms as the essential liberty granted to Americans, who subsequently perpetuate the violence used by guns. He calls these firearms enthusiasts “gundamentalists” and states that they hold these rights to such a high esteem that when a threat to their system of beliefs is presented; those presenting the perceived threat are out-casted, labeled anti-constitutional, lobbied by zealous political groups and even threatened through physical means. The author argues that new technologies, while able to

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<sup>1</sup> JAMES ATWOOD, GUNDAMENTALISM AND WHERE IT'S TAKING AMERICA 111-12 (Heather Wilson ed., 2017).

potentially assist and perhaps alleviate the gun violence problem in America, cannot get off the ground because of fundamentalists.

The purpose of this book review is to look at the information presented about gun violence and about the technological advancements attempting to be used for guns. I will assess whether these advancements will help or hurt gun violence, and question the constitutional integrity of their usage.

James E. Atwood is a Pastor Emeritus of the Trinity Presbyterian Church of Arlington, VA. His previous work is titled *America and Its Guns: a Theological Exposé*. He is considered one of the chief speakers and resource person at educational, ecumenical, and interfaith seminars throughout the country on gun violence.

The general area of law discussed is the 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment, and the constitutional right to domestic tranquility. The book breaks down the analysis by initially discussing history of gun use and its impact on culture and statistics of gun violence. The book moves on to discuss different types of guns and gun ownership statistics that offer insights to new technologies for guns. The rest of the book dives into gun owner's opinions, gun laws and their impact on gun violence, and solutions to gun violence and their viability.

The argument for this book is solutions to alleviate gun violence and the constitutional protection of domestic tranquility through means such as technology and the impact that gun rights activists have on progressing using these technologies under the shroud of the 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment.

The argument that the author proposes is fairly strong. He uses many examples and metaphors, and tries desperately to advocate for both sides of the argument. He mentions how his solutions aren't things that can completely eradicate gun violence, which I think is important, but

I think he relies too much on future generations. That is to say, I believe that the author suggests that solutions to gun violence is sort of lost on current generations but the ideas suggested by this book are to be influencing for future generations.

There are many strengths in the author's work. This includes the data that the author uses to support his hypothesis. The book uses data compiled by federal agencies such as the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. In addition, it uses data that was compiled by Federal Bureau of Investigation in the Uniform Crime Report. The Uniform Crime Report is a renowned source of data, and as a Criminal Justice major in my undergrad I know that the UCR compiles data from police stations from across the United States.

The author also provides plausible solutions to gun violence. He begins by analyzing the culture of the United States, and speaks of machismo and propensity to violence. In his opinion, Atwood states that the bible suggests that violence is a way to eradicate evil in the world, and that our culture subconsciously absorbs this solution to eradicate the world of evil and justifies the use of guns to carry out this affect. Other solutions throughout the book include influencing Congress to not be swayed by the political agenda of lobbyists. But, in a more technological approach, Atwood suggests that different technologies can be used to curve the upward trend of gun violence in the United States.

Besides these plausible solutions, Atwood discusses the issue of gun violence in America with an even keeled analysis. Never in the book does the author take a far winged political approach to the problem. Where lesser authors would argue for complete deregulation or complete restriction on guns, Atwood keeps a middle ground. He begins the book by stating how he himself had been a gun owner for years. He still holds gun owners accountable however. He mentions that when he sold his gun collection, he insisted on background checks for everyone

that purchased a gun. Throughout the entire book, Atwood is critical of gun owners and critical of anti-gun advocates. He appreciates the second amendment while still holding those that exercise it to a higher standard.

Like any work, this book can be critically analyzed as well as praised. The two major pitfalls of the work lie with the core incentive of the author. I find the author to be a tad religiously zealous. Atwood is a Southern Minister; and as such much of the book is centered on God. This distracts from the scholarly integrity in some ways. His motivation of religious advocacy is paralleled with his naïveté. The author is naïve because his solutions to gun violence include educating the masses and spreading God's love. For an author who is so well organized and uses sources that are academically valid, I find his message of love and tranquility underwhelming.

The book is written with the intention to be geared towards all citizens. However, I think it specifically is written for students. Partly I think it's written for students because of the author's aspirations for the book to be for future generations with the hope they take the knowledge and wisdom that the book possesses. It's also geared towards students because at the end of each chapter are reflective questions posed in the style that would be ideal for a classroom setting. It's not complex, not too long, and it uses common phraseology. The book tries to be objective and to give merit to both sides of the argument, which improves the overall quality of the book. The book is very readable, and the style is typical of a retired Southern minister, using metaphors with biblical references. The book did have some assumptions, however. Among them, the book holds the assumption that religion and God are motivational and influential for young people to change the cultural feelings on gun control. It also assumes that if more people were educated of the facts of gun violence that people would call for change.

The sources are sound, and are both academic in nature for some sources and others seem less scholarly. For example, as mentioned beforehand, the book uses the UCR, which is a reliable source, but it also uses news sources, which are known to be not very factual. In addition, the book does offer helpful websites to learn about gun violence, but the validity of each of these websites is in my opinion questionable, because most of the statistics come from independent organizations with ulterior agendas.

Probably the most compelling and interesting topic in the book is the discussion on smart guns. Smart guns are guns that are fitted with biometric security functions that render the gun unable to fire with the exception of an authorized user. The technology used for these weapons includes fingerprint identification locks and radio frequency devices that lock the firing mechanism in the weapon. The book mentions the German company Armatix, who is supposed to release their own personalized smart gun the iP1 that uses a smart watch to release the locking mechanism inside the gun. Atwood argues that gundamentalists are afraid of this new technology because of legislation that was passed in New Jersey in 2002, which would require all handguns to be fit with similar technology. Besides the burden of legislation, Atwood argues that gundamentalists do not like smart guns because it makes their guns less accessible, which is why he points to the work of Mossberg Corporation, which had developed a gun that can only be fired when one is equipped with a ring. In Atwood's opinion, smart guns will undoubtedly save lives, but their increasing popularity threatens traditional guns.

3D printed guns use high technological three-dimensional printers to create a gun made entirely of plastic. The gun can be made virtually anywhere, and will not set off a metal detector. This example illustrates how technology can be used against the agenda of decreasing gun violence. I believe the author also uses this example as a key element of why merely

restricting or even banning guns is not an effective solution to the problem of gun violence. The author mentions these as part of his analysis of how many guns are in the United States, and also goes into the short lived history of citizens releasing the blueprints of how to make these weapons online.

I believe that Gundamentalism hurts the possible benefits of the use of high technology with firearms. Gundamentalists can be extremely narrow minded, and they can also spark fear in others to take drastic measures. Because gundamentalists have historically zealously advocated for the rights of gun owners, different states have complied to what can be fairly extreme demands for gun deregulation. For example, Texas is a historically pro-gun state. But, when an unstable person goes into a house of worship in Texas and opens fire on churchgoers on a Sunday, liberal states call for tighter gun restrictions. These restrictions are taken to the tenth degree in some areas, and breed ideas like the 3D printer-gun. In an ironic twist, the call for looser gun control causes tighter gun control, which then creates a world where someone can upload instructions on how to build a working and undetectable gun. Technology that could be used for good is now used for evil, and without the zealous actions on both sides of the argument, the technology would not be abused. In sum, the gundamentalists agenda and unwillingness to compromise causes technology to move towards creating more gun violence not erasing gun violence.

Gundamentalism also hurts the benefits of technology with guns in regards to the smart gun debate. I believe that smart guns can save lives, just as Atwood believes. I agree that fear of change and fear of ineffectiveness are core reasons that gundamentalists do not like smart guns, but I think that these are not the only reasons that gundamentalists abhor smart guns. I think that gun advocates are afraid that further restrictions lead to further restrictions, and this slippery

slope in the eyes of fundamentalists leads to the destruction of the second amendment. The Second Amendment may protect citizen's rights to own guns, but if the government maintains that all guns must be smart guns, it robs citizen's of that right by making guns less affordable. What today makes people safer can rob future generations of the deep social, cultural and historic elements that make firearms important to those that chose to keep them. I don't think that the true reason that Fundamentalists actively try to kill smart guns is because of not being able to shoot an intruder, or because the gun advocates think that the government will take their old guns; I believe fundamentalists see smart guns as the avenue to robbing them of their culture. This culture is maintained through history, memory and the constitutional right to keep these pieces of living history.

I think, at least on a small scale, Atwood inspired me to be more moderate in the gun talk, but at the same time holding higher standards towards gun control. On a broader scale the book has great reviews nationally. I think that the book is so well perceived throughout the country because it is sincere, and it is a valuable and educational piece that should be read before one exercises opinions in such a confrontational topic such as gun violence.

This book is enjoyable. I think that in the current political and social landscape in the United States, this book is incredibly important. This book is entirely relevant, and its message can be used in many conversations concerning problems in the United States. One problem that is at the forefront of the American view right now is a case from California where an illegal immigrant, Jose Ines Garcia Zarate, accidentally fired and shot a young woman in the street. There are conflicting stories whether the gun that Zarate used in the unfortunate death of this young girl was stolen or found. The message in this book about the obsession with guns and the obsession with gun violence is an important anecdote for this story, but also the solutions

presented by the author are even more valuable. The solution of using smart guns in order to reduce violence and save lives seem self evident, but if Zarate had a smart gun, the gun would not have fired because he was not an authorized user of the gun, regardless if the gun was stolen or found. The solutions in the book, while having a tone that is a tad naïve and may be religiously zealous, are sound. As a southern gun owner, I think that James Atwood is very audacious to call for gun control. I think that it is a testament to the overall opinions of citizens in America; his opinions are not far Left nor far Right- they are sensible, moderate, respectful, explained thoroughly and fair. In conclusion, I believe that Fundamentalism can hinder technological advances in gun safety such as smart guns, while also push new technologies forward that are filled with malice, such as 3D printed guns.