

The Amazing Secret Weapon of the Gun Control Movement

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"The metaphor is perhaps one of man's most fruitful potentialities. Its efficacy verges on magic." -- Jose Ortega y Gasset

"All perception of truth is the detection of an analogy." -- Henry David Thoreau

Self-help guru Anthony Robbins often meets with President Bill Clinton. Robbins and other motivational counselors like Steven Covey and Werner Erhard (remember "est"?), should not be taken lightly.

Many corporations (FedEx, Xerox, IBM) swear that they have benefited from these advisers.* Dating back to the early 70s, Erhard's programs invented phrases like "paradigm shift" and "making a difference" -- slogans that are now part of our national vocabulary and consciousness.

A major premise of Erhard's seminars was that "life is (like) a conversation." If you change the conversation, you change your life. LIFE IS A CONVERSATION is, of course, a metaphor. Most of these gurus are masters of metaphor. I call them "metaphoricians."

What does this have to do with gun rights?

I am going to attempt to introduce a new way of looking at how we might better protect our Second Amendment rights. In marketing, "new" usually means more, better, and different.

I would like to think that my approach is beyond merely "new." NEW usually means "changed." But there are many degrees of change. Change can be cosmetic, or truly profound. Change can be revolutionary, but even a revolution might only be the rearrangement of the same old ingredients. However, TRANSFORMATION is the highest form of change: the ingredients themselves are transformed, and become something totally different. The caterpillar becomes a butterfly.

When a transformational idea is first presented, it may be quickly discounted, dismissed, or denounced because it is difficult to understand, or cannot be seen as fitting in to or replacing current ideas and thinking. Transformational tactics can automatically be rejected because their applications are not clear, or, more simply, they have just not been done before.

Transformational solutions, especially when presented to older organizations, are commonly rejected because they are initially perceived (in knee jerk fashion) as impractical, taking too long to implement, too obtuse, or too expensive. We must be practical and action-oriented; if we can't sink our teeth into it, we throw it away. Portions of a transformational idea may be sufficiently familiar to elicit the response, "I already knew that," or, "Shucks, this is just old stuff in a new package."

Heavily borrowing from Eastern philosophy, the gurus of the new transformational technologies divide human knowledge into three domains. First, we know what we know (e.g., we know that we know the English language). Second, we know what we don't know (e.g., we know that we don't know how to speak Russian). Third, we don't know what we don't know (e.g., some of us don't know that we don't know how to speak Russian because the thought simply never occurred to us).

The gurus assert that in our personal lifetimes, what we "don't know that we don't know" actually affects most of the content of our personal lives. It shapes what we have, what we do, and what we are -- it largely determines what happens to us, our personal destiny or fate. In their seminars, the metaphoricians enable and empower the average person to get his or her hands on the levers and controls of what actually determines the outcomes of their lives.

A final illustration of resistance to new ideas:

The Student and the Master were having tea. The tea was very hot, and they waited for their cups to cool.

"I am ready for my lesson," the Student said.

The Master picked up the tea pot and began pouring more tea into the Student's cup. The tea spilled over the rim of the cup and onto the table and floor. The Master continued pouring!

"Master, what are you doing?" cried the astonished Student.

"I am showing you that your teacup is like your mind," the master replied. "It is already full of ideas and opinions. There is no room for learning, or information, or the truth."

* * *

I will now make my opening assertions:

We are losing our Second Amendment rights -- and will continue to do so -- primarily because our opponents are fully exploiting the dynamics of transformational METAPHORS. It is as if we have been hypnotized without our knowing it. Like martial arts experts, the anti-gun intellectuals are turning the energy of our own movements back against ourselves.

If we are unable or unwilling to understand this brilliant exploitation, we will ultimately lose our right to keep and bear arms. Our immediate task must be to comprehend their use of transformational metaphors, and, hopefully, to discover or invent new metaphors for our position, and to enroll the public.

METAPHORS WE LIVE BY**, by Professors Lakoff and Johnson, was a breakthrough book on this subject. Metaphors are not mere poetical or rhetorical embellishments, but are part of everyday speech that affect the ways in which we perceive, think and act.

Reality itself is defined by metaphor!

The authors explain that "The idea that metaphors can create reality goes against most traditional views of metaphor. The reason is that metaphor has traditionally been viewed as a matter of mere language rather than primarily as a means of structuring our conceptual system and the kinds of everyday activities we perform. It is reasonable enough to assume that words alone don't change reality. But changes in our conceptual system DO CHANGE what is real for us and affect how we perceive the world and act upon those perceptions."

Anthony Robbins, Clinton's personal guru, certainly must have read the above-mentioned work. In his bestseller, AWAKEN THE GIANT WITHIN***, Robbins devotes an entire chapter to the transformational power of metaphors. Robbins asks, "What is a metaphor? Whenever we explain or communicate a concept by likening it to something else, we are using a metaphor. The two things may bear little actual resemblance to each other, but our familiarity with one allows us to gain an understanding of the other. Metaphors are symbols and, as such, they can create emotional intensity even more quickly than the traditional words we use. Metaphors can transform us instantly."

Like Stealth bombers, two major metaphors have devastated our position. They are:

(1) GUNS ARE (LIKE) PEOPLE, and

(2) GUNS ARE (LIKE) DISEASE.

Or, gun-are-people, and guns-are-disease.

Never mind that both metaphors fail basic tests of logic. These sensational metaphors are now firmly embedded in the national mind and consciousness. The effectiveness of a metaphor is not determined by its truth, accuracy, or even that it is fully understood. An efficacious metaphor merely requires belief from its adherents.

The term "ASSAULT WEAPON" IS A METAPHOR!

I am convinced that Josh Sugarman, the one-man anti-gun think tank, has fully utilized transformational technologies. The term "assault weapon" is based on the metaphor that guns are like people. Like people, some guns are more evil than others. The most evil-looking guns are labeled "assault weapons." Our opponents said, "Let's at least ban the most evil ones" -- and, presto, we got hit with the 1994 AW Ban. The anti-gunners instantly enrolled the general public into the perception that something non-human is human (or has human characteristics).

Our movement has been decimated from the fall out from this preemptive blast. Every day now we hear the term "gun" violence -- instead of "human" violence). "Gun violence" is an outrageous metaphor that is largely accepted and goes without challenge. (We never hear about "car violence" or "plane violence.")

The transformational metaphor that guns are (like) germs has created a national gestalt allowing guns to be addressed as a public health issue by misguided medical professionals. The tax-funded Center for Disease Control (CDC) pretends to treat the "gun violence epidemic."

These new mainstream metaphors, reinforced by a sympathetic liberal media, have gone far beyond merely reframing the gun debate. They have created the grounding itself for the debate. They have TRANSFORMED the playing field!

We find ourselves being relentlessly battered, all the while trapped inside the major metaphorical cages created by our opponents. We are forced to use their weapons on their field, but their weapons were designed only to be used on us! Because we are imprisoned in their metaphorical cages, every time we speak and use their terms -- on their battlefield -- we can only shoot ourselves in our collective foot! We only add mass and density to their original metaphor.

When our side is not suicidally reiterating the same metaphors as our opponents, we usually revert by default to our worn-out but familiar BATTLEFIELD, MILITARY, or WAR metaphors. We "stand guard," we "fight" for the Second Amendment, we try to "shoot down" their arguments, and we develop new "strategies." Unfortunately, many people are offended by military terms. The WAR metaphor often limits us to defensive language, postures and strategies. Trapped in our own old metaphor, we are often helplessly reactive instead of being proactive.

And so long as we remain imprisoned in the metaphors invented by our opponents, all we can do is chatter helplessly amongst ourselves in the belly of the anti-gun whale.

One example of a more practical and powerful metaphor for our side -- and one that must be stressed and further developed -- is the GUN RIGHTS ARE CIVIL RIGHTS metaphor. Or, most simply, GUNS ARE RIGHTS. (Guns are the right of self-preservation, our basic human right to life itself. Our rights are, of course, everyone's rights -- whether or not some choose not to own firearms. GUN RIGHTS is a metaphor -- it actually means HUMAN RIGHTS. Often there are no rights at all for a disarmed population.)

Properly "cultivated" -- ideas are like plants, another metaphor! -- the GUNS ARE RIGHTS metaphor may lead us to new insights and levels of understanding. I had the following online public dialog (slightly edited here), in Time

Magazine's Forum on AOL, with Richard Duncan, then Executive Editor of Time Magazine:

JASPAR: Society is not giving us pro-gunners the protection, status, and empowerment usually offered to victims who are denied their civil rights. Gun owners are clearly losing rights with each new gun law. Society may have an implicit or hidden list of "good" victims and "bad" victims. Gunners, as "bad" victims, are not given any of the standard entitlements available to those with victim status. This may be because liberals often view conservatives as "bad" (e.g., extremists), while conservatives tend to see liberals as "misinformed."

DUNCAN: Liberals see conservatives as bad, and conservatives see liberals as misinformed. Very good. Hence in the gun debates, the gunners are frantically trying to correct statistics, bring up yet another example, demonstrate yet one more misunderstanding of the mechanical arcania of firearms. And the gun banners don't even want to be educated because they are convinced regardless of all that information that the real problem is that the (evil) gunners have hate and violence in their hearts. Following which a number of gunners can be counted on to make hateful and violent statements, and a couple of banners will usually mistake a revolver for a shotgun. And off we go. Gun attitude is destiny.

JASPAR: There may be a congenital predisposition if not an actual undiscovered gunner (and banner) gene! Gunners are from Mars, Banners are from Venus. A hopeless dance. How do we deconstruct this ballroom?

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Using the secret weapon of transformational metaphor, the gun control movement has TRANSFORMED the national conversation -- and reality itself -- regarding guns and gun rights.

OUR IMMEDIATE JOB IS TO TRANSFORM THE CONVERSATION ONCE AGAIN.

In summary, and on a positive note, I suspect that at least some of our other current and related problems (e.g., the primary media's bias), will automatically take care of themselves (the New Media [internet] is expanding geometrically).

Even though Napoleon received mail every day, he usually waited a full month before opening it. He felt that most of the problems described in breathlessly urgent daily letters tended to be resolved by the time he got around to opening his mail.

But the anti-gunners' metaphors will not wait for us. They are already here. We are IN them. We must acknowledge that our opponents are using much more effective metaphors than we are currently using. We must see the almost complete vulnerability of our present condition.

The logistics and strategies of the repeal of the AW ban, the promotion of the right to carry, and other issues, are probably much less important than the envelope -- the metaphor! -- in which these issues are displayed and delivered to us and to the general public.

If we do not immediately develop and implement new metaphors for our cause, we will continue to be USED -- gunned down! -- by our opponents' masterful manipulation of metaphor-bullets!

Hopefully, this brief essay has moved some of us from the domain of "we don't know what we don't know" to the domain of "we NOW know what we didn't know that we didn't know." The new technology of transformational metaphors profoundly affects our perceptions, ideas, attitudes, arguments, personal lives, our rights, and reality itself.

The discovery, invention and use of transformational metaphors by our side will put us solidly in the domain of "we know what we know" regarding metaphors. This is the place we must be.

Succeeding, like winning, is always an ongoing process. Winning is never final, and there is no permanent condition of "success." We all know well that our vigilance must be eternal. But our present vigilance must shift swiftly into this new, all-powerful domain of knowledge. It is the place where we are now fighting, if only we can be taught to see it. It is a frightening place that we have not chosen for ourselves, and we continue to suffer critical losses.

Like it or not, it is the place where the coming major battles will be fought. It is a new and unfamiliar terrain. We need new maps, and we need them right now.

Or we are going to lose the war.

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Footnotes:

* U.S. News & World Report, (Jan. 23, 1995). p. 19.

** George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, "Metaphors We Live By," University of Chicago Press, 1980 (paperback)., pp. 145-46. Amazingly, the authors devote about a dozen pages on the idea of GUNS AS METAPHOR! No doubt our opponents read this book!

*** Anthony Robbins, "Awaken the Giant Within," Summit Books, 1991, pp. 237-256.

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