



Cesare Beccaria: Unknown to Us, Influential on Our Founders

In the days since the tragic murder of 17 people at a high school in Parkland, Florida, on February 14, the number of people clamoring for tighter restrictions on the right to purchase or otherwise obtain a firearm crescendos daily, sometimes hourly.

Of course, those familiar with the Second Amendment to the Constitution for the United States of America (that is the official name) would never support such tyrannical proposals, particularly those well-versed in the nearly 1,000-year history of the Anglo-American protection of the right of self-defense.



There is an urgent need for Americans to refamiliarize themselves with the wisdom of the Founding Fathers on this topic, as well as the wisdom of those writers whose words inspired and informed our Founders.

One of the writers most often quoted by the Founding Generation was an Italian jurist who is widely considered one of the clearest and cleverest thinkers of the Enlightenment. It is no wonder, therefore, that he ranks as the seventh most frequently cited writer by the Founding Generation who wrote between the years of 1764 and 1805.

Today, of course, Cesare Beccaria's name is unknown to most Americans. Since the seizure of education by the Progressives and the socialists in the late 19th century, American children have been denied the opportunity to read the books that our Founders studied; thus they have been purposefully kept from being able to repair the intellectual foundation of the Constitution.

As James Madison once warned, "The advancement and diffusion of knowledge is the only guardian of true liberty."

So, here we are. Millions of Americans advocate for proposals that are not only violations of the Second Amendment to the Constitution, but they aren't aware of the reason that amendment was written.

Back to Beccaria.

One of the Founders most fond of Cesare Beccaria was Thomas Jefferson.

In one of his commonplace books, Jefferson copied a passage from Beccaria's book *On Crimes and Punishments*. Jefferson copied the quote in Italian (the language in which Beccaria wrote the book), but an 1809 English translation of the same passage was later owned by Jefferson.

The relevant passage from Beccaria's book reads:

A principal source of errors and injustice are false ideas of utility. For example: that legislator has false ideas of utility who considers particular more than general conveniences, who had rather



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command the sentiments of mankind than excite them, who dares say to reason, “Be thou a slave;” who would sacrifice a thousand real advantages to the fear of an imaginary or trifling inconvenience; who would deprive men of the use of fire for fear of their being burnt, and of water for fear of their being drowned; and who knows of no means of preventing evil but by destroying it.

The laws of this nature are those which forbid to wear arms, disarming those only who are not disposed to commit the crime which the laws mean to prevent. Can it be supposed, that those who have the courage to violate the most sacred laws of humanity, and the most important of the code, will respect the less considerable and arbitrary injunctions, the violation of which is so easy, and of so little comparative importance? Does not the execution of this law deprive the subject of that personal liberty, so dear to mankind and to the wise legislator? and does it not subject the innocent to all the disagreeable circumstances that should only fall on the guilty? It certainly makes the situation of the assaulted worse, and of the assailants better, and rather encourages than prevents murder, as it requires less courage to attack unarmed than armed persons.

What insight! What powerful logic!

Imagine how much more influential Americans who are proponents of the Second Amendment and its protection of the right to keep and bear arms could be if they knew Beccaria and could explain the principles set out in the passage above.

The logic of Beccaria’s explanation of the fallacy of believing that disarmament is an effective means of reducing crime could be put to good use by people tasked with defending their opposition to the gun grabbers in and out of government.

Finally, consider another paragraph of Beccaria’s *On Crimes and Punishments*. This selection sounds as though it was written by someone seeing our own time — a time when powerful politicians regularly use tragedy as a pretext for tyranny.

In Chapter 40 of *On Crimes and Punishments*, Beccaria writes:

It is a false idea of utility, that would give to a multitude of sensible beings that symmetry and order, which inanimate matter is alone capable of receiving; to neglect the present, which are the only motives that act with force and constancy on the multitude, for the more distant, whose impressions are weak and transitory, unless increased by that strength of imagination so very uncommon among mankind. Finally, that is a false idea of utility, which, sacrificing things to names, separates the public good from that of individuals.

Now is the time for Americans to research and remember the writers who taught our Founding Fathers the lessons of history upon which they relied to establish a government of enumerated and very limited power.

As the threats to our natural rights increase, our resistance to those threats (and those who make them) should increase in direct proportion.

Image of Cesare Beccaria: [UsurywhichdissevoH](#)



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