

Mass Shootings: Manifesting the Nihilism of the West?



By Steven Yates

May 31, 2022

I'd planned an article on Peyton Gendron, the shooter who killed ten people in a Buffalo and injured three others in a Buffalo, N.Y. supermarket on May 14. Then I woke up this morning – it is May 25 as I write this – to learn that Salvador Ramos, also 18, shot and killed 21 in a Texas elementary school, 19 of them children.

I wanted to ponder the Great Replacement, given Gendron's 180-page manifesto, the fact that the usual suspects demonized the idea as a "baseless racist conspiracy theory," and the further fact that declining white populations all over the West can be read straight out of the demographics. Because this last is evident to anyone who can read and understand graphs, the only issue up for debate is whether this is a natural development however unlucky for white people, part of yet another long term nefarious scheme by the ruling elites, or just the result of monumental stupidity by the political classes of America and Western Europe who opened their borders and permitted unlimited immigration.

In light of May 24, I scrapped that article. Enough just said. We have bigger fish to fry.

For starters, however much Corporate Media, the Bidenistas, and leftists as a whole demonize white males, not all mass

violence is committed by white men.

Not by a long shot!

The guy who drove a vehicle into a Christmas parade late last year was black. The Colorado supermarket shooter was a Muslim. The subway shooter in New York a few weeks back was black. Salvador Ramos is Hispanic. Whatever is going on is not ethnicity-specific, however much pseudo-pundits try to make it so.

But most of these kinds of killings *are* occurring in the West. The lion's share are happening in the U.S.

It isn't simply a ready availability of guns. I've yet to hear of a gun that got up and went on a rampage by itself. So-called gun control would never be more than a quick fix for something that would soon show up in other ways. Killers using vehicles as murder weapons, for example.

I don't think seeking political solutions is going to get us anywhere. Because this is not fundamentally a political problem.

Something much deeper is going on, and the political class is helpless against it.

Some are speaking of a mental health crisis. We'll probably see a dozen or so analyses probing that theme in the near future. I don't disagree, not really, but I don't think such a diagnosis goes deep enough, either.

Let me just *state* what I think this comes down to. Behind the bulk of our contemporary crises is secular materialism. Secular materialism drives much of Western civilization.

Materialism is a worldview, a thesis about the nature of reality, how we fit in, and what life is or ought to be about.

It is not a product or discovery of any science. As a

worldview, it is a starting point, or premise.

Materialism denies that God exists. It asserts that human beings got here through a continuous natural process. From the standpoint of the physical cosmos, the totality of all that is real, there is nothing morally special about us: any of us. Morality is a human creation exclusively.

According to materialism, what can't be counted, measured, and brought under control, isn't real. Thus it yields a world based on empirical science (so-called, as its foundational level isn't empirical at all), technique, commerce, and the myth of progress.

A world in which most of us, even in so-called advanced nations, are destined for slavery to the Almighty Dollar. (Or the Euro or Peso or Ruble or Yuan.)

Unease with this metaphysical ideology goes back at least to the 1800s, with novelists such as Fyodor Dostoevsky suggesting ominously that "if God doesn't exist then everything is permitted."

By around 1900, major philosophers such as Bertrand Russell were noting openly that in the universe disclosed by science as he understood it, morally speaking we are on our own. In the hands of anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict (1930s), morality evolved because of its survival value to human populations. It can be studied like any other natural phenomenon.

Different people have responded in different ways to this. Most, of course, turn away from the problem altogether. I get it. We're all busy: working, or just living our lives.

A loose group of philosophers known as existentialists engaged the matter but granted all of materialism's premises. French author Albert Camus thus pondered whether the fundamental problem of philosophy was whether life was worth living (see

his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus"). He did not conclude that suicide is justifiable. Ultimately he, too, turned from the problem. Live your life. To live "authentically" is to live without the "illusions" of God or immortality or any transcendent source of meaning. Find meaning in your own immediate experiences, "enriching" them as you can.

That was the 1940s. The Beats, in the 1950s, took up this theme enriching their experience with sex and drugs (e.g. "bennies"). Psychedelics arrived in the 1960s. By the 1970s, part of a generation was burned out. Another part simply caved, opting for one of the premises of a materialist life: *money is what gives your life value. By the 1980s, greed was good.*

Meanwhile, the mass killings had begun, and were starting – very slowly – to accelerate in number.

Life had become meaningless. In society, all but a tiny handful of us (celebrities, those in the political class, and a few billionaires) had become ciphers.

Obviously, lives taken don't mean anything to the killers. Perhaps because life itself means nothing to them.

Unborn babies – aborted – don't mean anything to the abortionist, or in most cases to the would-have-been mother.

We are coming dangerously close, in elite circles, to the view that elderly "useless eaters" can be euthanized: "put to sleep" like animals. Especially those with conditions like Alzheimer's – and why should it stop there? Modern medicine has operated under an unstated materialist ethos for a long time now: people are just bodies, bodies can be drugged up, injected, cut open, and when these fail, put down. Especially if maintaining them is unprofitable.

Nihilism is the philosophical thesis that *nothing truly matters* (the word derives from the Latin *nihil*, meaning

nothing).

This is where we are, in the West, whether we know it or like it or not.

Most of our philosophy and political-economy, and entire industries, especially entertainment, are efforts to evade this. The first retreated into hyperspecialization. Political-economy has flown into competing ideological delusions. The entertainment industry, finally, reaps windfalls through creating and supplying steady streams of distraction people can use to numb their minds. Others kill their minds with alcohol or drugs – or, the culmination of this process, their bodies with suicide.

A few became purveyors of this or that form of *self-actualization*, an idea derived from psychologist Abraham Maslow. So we put *self* on a pedestal. Then what?

The bottom line is that human beings cannot simply exist. We are not mere animals. We cannot flourish without the firm belief that we have some higher purpose for doing so. This purpose cannot be hoked up out of thin air. It is not to be found in a job or career or even becoming a “creative.” Many have thought this and then come up short. Nor is meaning to be found in political activism – which is gradually failing us all.

Some respond to the particularities of their circumstances and respond with rage at the injustice of it all. They become human time bombs.

Fully healthy-minded people believe their lives, and the lives others – those around them and human beings generally – have *intrinsic value*: value *not* derived from what’s in their wallet or bank account, their social connections or position, the number of followers they have on Twitter, or anything else temporal and ephemeral. How many people today have this sense?

I'd wager, the number is disconcertingly small!

It surely excludes the person who picks up a firearm and shoots into a classroom of children. Such a person, knowing he could be killed by law enforcement and perhaps even welcoming such a death, clearly places no intrinsic value on his own life.

Some will reply: *lives have never had "intrinsic value" outside one's own tribe.*

It is true that materialism is not responsible for moral tribalism.

What was healthiest in Enlightenment thought tried to end moral tribalism by finding criteria for membership in a universal moral community that *transcended* tribalism of various sorts (nationality, ethnicity, and so on).

It counseled us to adopt the view that *all lives have intrinsic worth*, and to start building a world that manifested this.

The unhealthy side of the Enlightenment elected to base its efforts on secular materialism. It followed the worldly (secular) turn of the scientific and industrial revolutions, where things could be measured, counted, controlled, made money from, etc. It ceded the transcendent to the poets. It forgot that modern science had a Christian foundation. The first requirement of science, after all, is the idea that the universe we seek to understand is orderly and not chaotic, or prone to sudden, inexplicable change (such changes occur but are explicable). The second is that the order in nature is intelligible to the human mind.

Cultures where such notions were absent did not develop science. Period. They may have developed crafts, such as fortune-telling based on astrology, but crafts are not sciences.

If the world was created by a rational and morally perfect God, and if we were created as finite rational agents able to grasp, at least somewhat, the order in the Creation – the two conditions are satisfied. We also have a basis, if we are willing and able to infer it, to argue from our having been created in God's image that all human lives have intrinsic value, and elect to further policies that recognize and reflect this commitment.

It seems to me that somewhere in here is the basis for much that liberals once wanted, back when liberalism was sane. I am not comfortable with the sort of conservatism (or libertarianism) which sees us as a bunch of individuals running around. Nor would I promote the idea that, as my late father once said, that "what's good for Big Business is good for America." With Big Business have filled up with technocrats, today that is not just false but dangerous!

A healthy conservatism gets comfortable with the ideas of family (extended and not just nuclear), mediating institutions, community, and so on. We live in a world of others, not just self, and *one part* of a meaningful life is exemplified in using the superpowers God gave us to serve others in order to benefit ourselves – and sometimes *without* benefit to ourselves.

Yes, there is room to argue that women who have children they would otherwise have aborted should not merely be preached to about how they did the right thing but materially supported within caring families and communities.

Remove God from the picture, and every bit of this disappears. Little by little.

You end up with existentialism. You end up with postmodernism. With escapism of various sorts. You end up with *neoliberalism* and *neoconservatism*. The first of these is about capital accumulation as an end in itself. This will breed little

socialists when it concentrates wealth in the hands of the elites. The latter is about imposing capital accumulation on as much of the world as possible through military force where necessary. This breeds terrorism and other forms of violent reaction.

At home, we have identity politics: the *retribalization* of the world. You end up with violent groups and ideologies based on hate, whether of the extreme right (e.g., the KKK) or the extreme left (Antifa, critical race theory).

All part and parcel of a nihilistic civilization which denies its nihilism, but generates walking time bombs. Those not driven to rage by whatever particulars will destroy their lives and the lives of those around them more “peacefully” and hedonistically with illicit sex or porn, by overeating, by abusing drugs, etc.

We end up, at home and abroad, with a global civilization falling increasingly under the sway of that really *dangerous* minority, billionaire sociopaths who try to satisfy *their* compulsive craving for meaning by exercising power: GloboCorp, with its cabals of technocrats using technology to centralize the world under a single surveillance-and-control structure. The only difference between the Great Reset and overt totalitarianism will be the former’s preference for “nudges” based on incentives over guns pointed at people’s heads.

If anyone believes he/she has a solution to this other than revival, rediscovering and recovering the Christian God, inviting Him back into society and into our lives, making His moral imperatives the basis for our families and our communities, I’ll be happy to hear it. For:

“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ -Psalm 14:1

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork.” -Psalm 19:1

“Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Consider your ways!’” -Haggai 1:7

“So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: “Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land. Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame—the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, Lord, because we have sinned against you. The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against Him; we have not obeyed the Lord our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets.” -Daniel 9:3-10.

“For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God ... the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” -Romans 3:23, 6:23.

Steven Yates’s new book *What Should Philosophy Do? A Theory* (Wipf and Stock, 2021) is available [here](#) and [here](#).

Steven Yates blogs at [Lost Generation Philosopher](#), and has begun writing a philosophy course centered on freedom, its preconditions, and the choices a person must make in order to have it.

Do you wish me to continue? Please consider supporting my work on [Patreon.com](#).

© 2022 Steven Yates – All Rights Reserved

E-Mail Steven Yates: freeyourmindinsc@yahoo.com