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Root cause of Newtown tragedy is contempt

To the Editors:

I grew up in Weston and was in one of the first graduating classes from the new high school. Newtown was our rival in football and basketball. Those memories come now with a different feeling.

As a mother and a New York City teacher for 27 years, my heart is breaking for the families of the children and for the teachers of Newtown. And I'm awed by the courage they showed and by the strength and unity of that community in these days.

Nothing can bring back the precious lives that were taken with unspeakable violence on an ordinary December morning. But for true healing to begin and for an end at last to horrors like this one, an understanding of what made for it is imperative. And that understanding does exist.

While details surrounding the tragedy at Newtown are being sought with great care by investigators, the root cause of this terrifying occurrence, and others that have taken place like it, has been explained by Eli Siegel, founder of the philosophy Aesthetic Realism, in his understanding of contempt: "the lessening of what is different from oneself as a means of self-increase as one sees it."

That desire for contempt that is in every person can show itself in bullying, but taken far enough it leads to massive cruelty. Eli Siegel wrote:

"As soon as you have contempt, as soon as you don't want to see another person as having the fullness that you have, you can rob that person, hurt that person, kill that person."

As people ask over and over, what can we do to make sure this doesn't happen again—I know that the study of contempt as explained by Aesthetic Realism is the only way. It needs to be an urgent national study now.

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