

Crime and the Voluntaryist



Send him mail.

“One Voluntaryist’s Perspective” is an original bi-weekly column appearing every other Monday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Skyler J. Collins. Archived columns can be found [here](#). OVP-only RSS feed available [here](#).

The primary means to solving problems for the voluntaryist are always nonviolent and peaceful. Persuasion, education, protest, boycotts, nonviolent resistance, as well as various other nonviolent tactics are all examples of voluntaryist means. When threatened by a mugger, the voluntaryist will either submit to his demands or attempt to persuade him to cease his crime. He’ll try not to, however match violence with violence. Though he would be “in the right” to fight back, such a response is likely to end in one or more deaths. Is your wallet worth your life? Is your wallet worth your assailant’s life? Interesting questions. But what about when the crime has been committed and is over? Should the voluntaryist call the police to report it? What about when there’s an ongoing crime, such as a society forcing underage girls into polygamist marriages? Should the voluntaryist call for the state to arrest the wrong-doers? To seize their property? The voluntaryist would say no.

Means and Ends

As Carl Watner, founder and editor of *The Voluntaryist* journal has often written, our means must be consistent with our ends. If we want a peaceful end, we must use peaceful means. Matching violence with violence is certain only to end in death and destruction. Whether it’s a mugger, a home invader, a local gang, a terrorist, your Congressmen, the tax-collector, the police, or the national guard, when a crisis arises, the voluntaryist must choose his means to resolving that crisis carefully.

As such, when the voluntaryist is robbed he’ll use his freedom (his ability to choose) to either submit or persuade. Failing persuasion and submission, meaning the assailant is after more than just your material possessions, the voluntaryist should stand ready to defend himself and his family. Once the danger is over, and assuming no one is dead or injured, he should proceed to attempt to persuade the criminal out of his life of crime. In other words, he should call him to repentance (if I may use the phrase) and convince him of the errors of his ways. Men are malleable, and people *can* change their ways.

What the voluntaryist, if he is to be consistent with his principles, would *not* do is contact the “authorities.” This probably sounds very strange, and I’ll admit I’ve tread very lightly into this area of voluntaryist thought. But for one who believes the state’s monopoly on law and law enforcement to be an illegitimate and unjust usurpation of authority, how could I exploit this monopoly when it is to my advantage? How could I invite state violence into an already violent or post-violent situation? It would seem that doing so would make me a hypocrite. Where there are peaceful means available to us, peaceful means the voluntaryist must use.

(Of course, hospitals and insurance claims often require a police report, and murders must be investigated by someone. In these cases one is legally or contractually bound to use state services.)

Larger Problems

You may or may not be convinced on the preceding thoughts, but clearly a mugger is small beans in comparison to much large societal problems. Terrorism is one. Of course, terrorism is mostly preceded by state violence. Get rid of state violence, as voluntaryists call for, and terrorism would be much less of a problem. That aside, what of what I spoke about in the first part of this column? What of a society that continuously forces underage girls into polygamous marriages? Take Warren Jeff’s West Texas ranch, for example. The Texas attorney general is calling for the state to seize the ranch.

Can a voluntaryist support that? I would say no. I don’t speak for all voluntaryists, but considering our views on the state and our desire to employ peaceful means to resolving crises, I don’t see how one could. Starting from the position of never using the state, what can be done regarding this seemingly deviant community? For starters, it should be remembered that many communities all around the world have practices that some people consider deviant. Circumcision is practiced by many societies. The political oppression of women and children are likewise practiced by many societies. Should we charge in guns blazing in an attempt to right wrongs? Are we so arrogant to presume the right to reap death and destruction on a community whose ways we disagree with? Even if crimes in the libertarian sense are being committed, if such crimes are long-going and integrated parts of a given society (or not), our best efforts in putting an end to such injustice will not be based on violence, considering the near futility of violent means.

Just like when trying to rid our society of the state, the greatest criminal enterprise in any society, the voluntaryist’s primary weapons are persuasion and education, and *never* violence. Hearts and minds must be changed and only reason can do that. As Watner wrote, “Coercion does not convince, nor is it any kind of argument.” Indeed. Though the crime may be momentarily discontinued, it will not be completely eradicated until men and women have voluntarily changed their behavior.

Final Thoughts

Whether it's petty crime, community-based deviance, or state power, the only lasting change comes from within. People must see the errors of their ways and be moved to become better people. They must be taught and given the opportunity to grow. Violence fails to do any of the things necessary for society to progress. It always stands in the way, and because violence begets more violence its use must be abandoned. Violence is death and destruction, not love and peace. Choose your means wisely.