

Why You May Not Kill the Police, nor Destroy State Property



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

Chris Cantwell recently argued that “all police are aggressors”, and that killing an aggressor isn’t murder. Therefore, all police are fair game on ethical grounds to meet the business end of a gun. Similarly, Ben Stone has argued that state-controlled resources, like their buildings, are fair game for destruction, since the state acquired its buildings illegitimately. Here’re some reasons why both Cantwell and Stone are wrong.

Collectivizing the Police

To say that “all police are aggressors” may be true, but the extent of their aggression varies from individual to individual. That matters. Punishment for aggression, argued Stephan Kinsella, must meet the test of proportionality. You may punish a thief with forced restitution, but not death. Only murderers may be punished with death. Are all police officers murderers? As I’m not a collectivist, and I don’t think Cantwell is either, we must assess every police officer individually. Which ones *have* murdered? Those may be fair game for proportionate punishment. Which ones *would* murder? Likewise, they may be fair game. General police aggression rests on the enforcement of their monopoly of the provision of order, so the important question is: which officers *would* enforce that monopoly unto murder? They, too, may be fair game for the death penalty. But I’m skeptical that every police officer working for every state would defend the policing monopoly to that extent. As an individualist, I can’t collectivize police officers under a general role of murderous aggressor. Therefore, contrary to Cantwell, no, I may not kill any police officer I’d like.

Who Owns State-Controlled Resources?

When a thief steals something, it’s control has changed hands, but not its ownership. If you steal my bike, it’s still my bike. If someone else were to destroy my bike while in your possession, it would be an act of aggression *against me*. Let’s say that you steal my wallet,

and then use my money to buy a bike. The money, now in possession of the bike vendor, is still mine, and the bike, having been traded for on fraudulent grounds (that what you traded with was yours, ie. my money), still belongs to the vendor. If someone else were to destroy the bike, it would be an act of aggression *against the vendor*, and likewise for my money (which I still have the right to collect). Let's extrapolate to state-controlled resources. When the state takes our money (via taxation) and spends it to erect a building, it does so fraudulently. The new building still rightfully belongs to the vendors of its myriad parts, and the money it traded with still rightfully belongs to you and me. To destroy the building would be an act of aggression *against its rightful owners*. Therefore, contrary to Stone, no, I may not destroy state-owned resources.

Final Thoughts

One caveat on state-controlled resources: if they are being directly used to commit acts of aggression, like a tank or a warship, then one's right to self-defense justifies their destruction. Buildings and other such state-controlled resources, however, can't be used as weapons, and so would never qualify under this condition. In any event, both Cantwell and Stone seem to be either unaware or ignoring important considerations contrary to their arguments. I hope I've pointed some out.

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