

# Political Resistance: Between Expression and Self-Defense

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# The Plan

- What is Political Resistance?

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- How can it be justified?

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- What is Political Resistance?
- How can it be justified?
- In particular: how can we reconcile expressive and defensive justifications?

# Political Resistance



Figure 1: Extinction Rebellion on the A12 in Den Haag

# Political Resistance



Figure 2: Riots in Minneapolis after the death of George Floyd

# Political Resistance



Figure 3: Protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline

# What is Political Resistance?

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- often involves breaking the law
- and damage to property or persons
- when is that justified (if ever)?

# When is Political Resistance justified?

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- first way of justifying it: expression
- resistance forcefully articulates complaints
- conventionally quite narrow criteria for permissible communicative action!
- some inconvenience for others, but not much more
- especially where things become illegal
- civil disobedience at most

# When is Political Resistance justified?

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  - effectiveness

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- the other framework: self-defence
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- Four conventional criteria
  - effectiveness
  - necessity

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  - effectiveness
  - necessity
  - liability

# When is Political Resistance justified?

- the other framework: self-defence
- defending oneself/others through defensive harm
- Four conventional criteria
  - effectiveness
  - necessity
  - liability
  - proportionality

# The Problem



Figure 4: Ende Gelände activism against brown coal (2016)

# The Problem

## Tesla's Berlin plant shut after arson attack on electricity pylon. Far-left group claims responsibility



By Fred Pleitgen and Olesya Dmitracova, CNN

② 3 minute read · Updated 6:51 AM EST, Wed March 6, 2024



Figure 5: Sabotage against Tesla

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- self-defence is a framework for states and individuals
- it's not a political framework
- the political frameworks are mainly focused on the issue of whether you're allowed to break the law
- but the moral question seems to be whether the harm involved is permissible

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- explain what kinds of harms (if any!) we can impose in political resistance and when
- even when that harm is not guaranteed or not even likely to be effective at abolishing a certain injustice
- in a way that is congruent with our conventional understanding and intuitions about political protests

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- idea: attacks/threats come with secondary threats to/attacks on
  - honor
  - moral standing
  - dignity
- through expression we defend these goods against attacks
- and even when we can't avert the primary threat, we might succeed in averting this secondary one

# Example



Figure 6: Kenyan protesters throwing stones at police in 2024

## Another alternative

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- expression, but not *as defense*
- protests as *fitting* responses to injustice

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- still has conditions for adequacy

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- *communicative* effectiveness

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- proportionality
- liability/directedness

## Another alternative II

- still has conditions for adequacy
- *communicative* effectiveness
- proportionality
- liability/directedness
- adequacy to the wrong protested

# Example



Figure 7: 1971 Attica prison riots

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- take ecotage
- the basic idea: the continued destruction of the environment, largely indifferent to human and animal concerns warrants an assertion of rejection
- we refuse to be treated in this way
- and we express this rejection by destroying the infrastructure that is used to do this
- even though it will be repaired the next day etc.

# Some problems

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- is this a political framework?
- is this the rationale of protests?
- doesn't it have a certain attitude of helplessness?
- are there alternative forms of resistance that *would* be effective?

# The End

Thank you!