

Political Philosophy I at Stockholms Universitet

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1 Reading assignment 1: Plato - Crito

Socrates' friend, Crito, soon before his planned execution, to attempt one last time to convince Socrates to accept help from his friends in escaping the prison.

Crito cites three reasons why Socrates should accept. Firstly, he is a beloved friend who cannot be replaced. Moreover, if Socrates is executed, Crito will be disgraced in society's eyes because people will think that Crito either couldn't or didn't want to save him. Finally, Socrates' children will be left as orphans.

There begins Socrates' explanation why he refuses to escape his penalty.

Firstly, he preaches to Crito that he should not be concerned with the public opinion. Good men will know things as they are, and the others' opinion is irrelevant. He uses multiple analogies, for example that of a gymnast and their trainer. The athlete should pay attention to their coach's criticism but not to anyone else's.

Then he presents arguments against escaping:

By escaping, he would undermine the authority law and the state. He would be setting an example for other Athenians to ignore the law and the collective decisions of direct democracy.

He claims that Athenians have a moral obligation to be obedient to the state out of gratitude for what they have already received: an upbringing, education.

Socrates also brings up the fact that every free Athenian, once they come of age, is free to take their belongings and leave where they wish. Therefore, by staying in Athens, they have implicitly accepted the social contract embodied by the law.

For Socrates, there are two acceptable stances in relation to the law: either obey the commands, or convince your co-citizens that the commands are wrong. Disobedience is out of question and in his eyes it is wrong in three ways: it wrongs ones' parents, it wrongs ones' teachers and it breaks the social contract.

Finally, Socrates states that by escaping, he would confirm the verdict of the judges, who deemed him as someone who corrupts the youth, someone who destroys the laws. By accepting his sentence, he will prove them wrong and show his virtue and justice.

2 Lecture 1: Plato - political obligation

Book for the course: *Political Philosophy* by Jean Hampton.

Handouts posted on Athena after each lecture.

On the forum, try to discuss with other posters instead of just posting your own essay. Short and concise answers more appreciated.

Regular quizzes will be posted on Athena.

Key concepts and ideas listed on last page on each handout.

Exam:

- 10 multiple choice questions
- Five short explanations and definitions
- Two 500-word essay questions
- The exam will be based only on material discussed in class

Socrates was sentenced to death for corrupting the youth. He was part of the losing party during political turmoil, so it was kind of political vendetta against Socrates.

Did Socrates have an *obligation* to accept his sentence and to refuse the chance to escape?

2.1 Power and authority

Power: X has power over Y if X can compel Y to perform some action *p*.

- X's power over Y gives Y *a reason* to obey, but it does not create an *obligation*

Authority: X has authority if X occupies a social role (e.g. in virtue of their expertise) from which they can provide reasons for Y to act in certain ways.

- X's authority gives Y *a reason* to obey, but it does not create an *obligation*.

Political authority: X has political authority over Y iff the fact that X requires Y to perform some action *p* gives Y a reason to perform *p*, regardless of what *p* is, and where this reason purports to override all (or perhaps nearly all) reasons Y may have not to perform *p*.

Preemptive (or exclusionary) reasons: Commands issued by political authority provide reasons that *preempt or override* other reasons. Political authority requires surrender of judgment.

- It is the *source of the command* that creates the reason, not its content or relation to other reasons
- X's political authority over Y gives Y an overriding reason = *obligation to obey*.
- Political authority can provide preemptive reasons because it has *entitlement to rule*.

2.2 The source of political authority

Natural subordination theories

The nature of some creatures is such that they instinctively submit and take direction from other beings whose natures fit them for dominance, rule, and power.

- The *natural roles* argument for natural subordination
 - Aristotle’s natural subordination theory
 - * The natural domination of master over slave who has lower cognitive abilities
 - * The natural domination of men over women
- The consequentialist argument for natural subordination
 - Enlightened colonialism (e.g. Mill)

2.3 Divine authority theories

A ruler has legitimate political authority iff his authority comes in some way from the authority possessed by God(s) whose rule over human beings is unquestionable.

- **Ruler is (a) God**, a divine authority himself
 - Egyptian pharaohs (Tutankhamum means *living image of Amun* the Sun god)
 - Dalai Lamas (re-incarnations of Avalokitesvara, *the lord who looks down*)
- **Ruler is descended from God(s)** and has divine status due to this relationship
 - Some Roman emperors (Augustus was *Divi filius*, *Son of the Divine One*)
 - Japanese emperors (descendants of the goddess Amaterasu, the goddess of the Sun)

Divine right view

Rulers are human but have been given the authority to rule by God (indirect authorization).

- Adam was given authority to rule the Earth by God and kings are his first-in-line descendants
- Robert Filmer (1588-1653), *Patriarcha, or the Natural Power of Kings* (1680)

Metaphysics and politics

Natural subordination and divine authority theories are *metaphysical*: politics is part of the natural world.

Politics as a moral problem

- If political authority is part of the natural order of the world, politics is not a moral problem (it is a question of metaphysics).
 - There were medieval books guidelines for rulers which instructed how to be a good political leader, not from perspective of being good to your subject but to satisfy God.
- If political authority is not part of the natural order, it must be explained how and why rulers can have it, and why subjects have an obligation to obey it – politics becomes a moral problem.

The single most consequential idea of Western civilization: *Politics is conventional*

2.4 Conventional views of political obligation

Natural duty accounts

There is a general non-voluntary obligation to maintain and promote just institutions.

Do you think that a state can exist and survive in which the decisions of law have no power, where they are ignored by citizens?

- How to explain your special obligations to your own state if political obligations are general?
- How are you bound to *your* state?

Associative accounts

There are special, non-voluntary (role-) obligations towards one’s political institutions created by social roles or identities (e.g. obligation from gratitude).

since you were brought into the world and nurtured and educated by us, can you deny in the first place that you are our child and slave, as your fathers were before you= And if this is true, you are not on equal terms with us... Just as you may do no violence to your father or mother, much less may you do violence to your country.

- Why does a social role or identity create political obligations in itself?
- How could the duties associated with a social role or identity that is morally indefensible be morally binding?

Transactional accounts

There are special, non-voluntary obligations towards political institutions, based on the requirement of reciprocity: political obligations are a matter of fairness.

Not only have we ... given you and every other citizen a share in every good that we have to offer, but we have even granted you and every Athenian the right that if you do not like us when you have come of age, you may go where you please and take your goods with you. None of our laws will forbid it or interfere with you. Anyone who does not like us, the laws and the state, and who wants to go to a colony or to any other city, may go where he likes, and take his goods with him.

- Fairness is owed to fellow citizens; how do duties to fellow participants in a cooperative scheme establish obligations to the state?

Social contract theories

Political obligations arise from voluntary acts (consent) either explicitly or implicitly.

Anyone who has seen the way in which we keep justice and administer the state, and who remains here, has entered into a contract that he will do as we command him. And if he disobeys us, he wrongs us... because he made an agreement with us that he will obey our commands.

- Does ”choosing to remain” constitute explicit or implicit consent?

- If consent is hypothetical, how can it create real-life obligations?

2.5 Are all political authorities entitled to rule?

Political legitimacy

Political legitimacy is *justified* entitlement to rule.

Two different views:

- **Political authority presupposes legitimacy.** Only legitimate political authority creates political obligations. That is, only *legitimate governments have political authority*. Illegitimate governments have only power.
- **Political authority and legitimacy are distinct.** Even illegitimate governments have political authority. That is, they are entitled to rule, even if their entitlements is not all-things-considered morally justified.

2.6 Are there legitimate states?

Philosophical anarchism

There are no preemptive reasons and hence no political authority. The authority of the state is not unique (it may have authority, but not political authority).

- Not to be confused with political anarchism, a view about social and political organization.