1. **Philosophical and political anarchism**

Anarchism “proper”, or political anarchism: the authority of all states is illegitimate, and as a consequence we have a moral duty to resist, fight, and overthrow the state.

* Individualist variant: primary moral concern is protection of our inviolable right to individual self-determination

(classical text e.g.: Max Stirner *The Ego and Its Own* Cambridge University Press (2012 [1844])

* Communal variant: primary moral concern is the value of reciprocal and equal relations among people

(classical text e.g.: Pyotr Kropotkin *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings* Cambridge University Press (1995))

* Revolutionary variant: a branch of (more accurately: collection of branches of) Marxism that maintains that socialism proper must aim for a stateless society

(classical text e.g.: Mikhail Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy* Cambridge University Press, (1873 [1990])

* Anarcha-feminism: including the liberation of women from patriarchy as a goal of anarchist struggle against all forms of authority

(classical text e.g.: Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays* available with Project Gutenberg through the University Library website)

Philosophical anarchism: the authority of all states is illegitimate (but we are not thereby obligated to disobey the state)

For more on various kinds of anarchism see Magda Egoumenides *Philosophical Anarchism and Political Obligation* Bloomsbury Academic Press (2014)

Two categories of philosophical anarchism:

* A priori PA: a valid argument for the legitimacy of Political Obligation is impossible
* A posteriori PA: a valid argument for the legitimacy of Political Obligation is in principle possible but in practice unachieved

1. **Robert Paul Wolff’s a priori anarchism**

Wolff’s analysis of political obligation rests on two fundamental concepts:

**Authority:** according to Wolff, A exercises authority when B does something commanded by A *solely* because A commanded it (it is content-independent)

Contrast this with, for example, complying with the demand of a mugger to avoid harm (acting out of self-preservation rather than obedience)

Contrast also with following the orders of the captain of a sinking ship because one must play along with the pretense of the captain’s authority in order to maintain the obedience of other sailors and avoid a chaotic scramble

**Autonomy:** in Wolff’s use of the term, is an ethical goal, not a given feature of a person or institution e.g. an autonomous region.

One achieves autonomy through taking responsibility for the identification of the morally right thing to do. If I have done this, I have determined the moral law through my own reasoning, and thereby given myself a law.

**Obligation to autonomy:** we are obligated to take responsibility in order to determine the morally right course of action. We are thereby obligated to strive for autonomy.

**Problem with political (or indeed any) authority:** to obey a command purely for the sake of the command is to fail to take responsibility for determining for oneself the morally right thing to do

1. **Objections to Wolff**

*Objection 1:* Wolff’s account, if right, would mean not only that state authority is legitimate, but also that we do not have obligations to keep to contracts or fulfil promises, because we would thereby undermine out autonomy (see Simmons, 2001, p.111)

*Reply*: there is a difference between doing something on the basis of authority and doing something on the basis of a promise. One can argue against the former without objecting to the latter

*Objection 2*: Wolff does not sufficiently motivate his claim that the duty of autonomy is primary. This is doubtful given how demanding his concept of autonomy is (see John Horton, 2010, p.129)

*Reply*: Matthew Noah Smith has substituted duty to autonomy with the moral value of having a self that has been developed independently of the impositions of others. And that moral status *is* primary. But it is undermined by the state’s imposition of norms and values to steer our actions.

*Counter reply:* must all kinds of political obligation involve “state imposition”? What about consent-based theories?

Recommended further reading:

John Horton (2010) *Political Obligation*, (Palgrave MacMillan), 2nd edition

John Simmons (2001) *Justification and Legitimacy: Essays on rights and Obligations* (Cambridge University Press)

Matthew Noah Smith (2013) ‘Political Obligation and the Self’ *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* vol 86.2

1. **Leslie Green’s a posteriori anarchism**

Any justification of political obligation must meet five criteria:

1. *Morality* – the reason for PO must be moral. PO should not be justified by prudential responses to threats or incentives, and with the trivially true “because its legal”
2. *Universality* – PO, if it exists, must bind all citizens to all laws
3. *Particularity*: PO is to a particular State, not to all or any State
4. *Content independence* – PO must be independent of the content of the State’s commands, otherwise we are not talking about State authority but rather the value of the command
5. *Bindingness*: PO must bind us even when in conflict with considerations of self-interest or convenience (which really just unpacks the *Morality* criterion)

Does any theory meet all 5?

* PO grounded in prudence fails I
* PO grounded in utilitarianism fails I and II
* PO grounded in fairness also fails I and II
* PO grounded in natural duty fails III
* PO grounded in consent meets all five IF it is universal explicit consent to the authority of the State. But this is implausible

Green concludes: no available theory can meet all 5

1. **Criticisms of a posteriori anarchism**

What must I do if I am not subject to Political Obligation?

According to John Simmons:

* we may obey the state if we wish
* Sometimes we should obey the state because the plans of others depend on us doing so (e.g. tax payments)

**Objection1:** without political obligation, the price paid by a citizen cannot be demanded solely on the grounds of the inconvenience of non-payment (Thomas Senor, ‘What if there are no Political Obligations?’ *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 16(3) 1987)

**Objection2:** philosophical anarchism cannot just leave things as they stand. The absence of PO means that we cannot meaningfully talk of the government as *our* government, and may not even be able to make sense of being a citizen

(For a related point see John Horton, 2010, pp.133-136)

1. **Are all political philosophers anarchists?**

Consider a radical proposal: by even asking whether political obligation is legitimate, we are already philosophical anarchists. Why?

* I obey authority when the command of another is a reason for me to act without my enquiring about the value of what is commanded.
* An anarchist would never obey the authority of the State.
* A philosopher asks why we should obey the State’s authority: “what is the reason for doing what the State commands?” This in enquiring about the value of the State’s commands.
* Even if the philosopher argues in favour of following the State’s commands, this will not be obedience to authority because it is based on the value of the commands.
* Philosophers are anarchists.

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