

Major Political Science, Paper 3, Semester 3

Political Obligation

Introduction

Political obligation refers to the moral and political duty of individuals to obey the laws and institutions of their state or political community. It's a central concept in political philosophy, exploring why citizens should comply with authority, the limits of obedience, and conditions under which disobedience might be justified.

Theories of Political Obligation

1. Social Contract Theory:

- Thomas Hobbes: Obligation stems from individuals' agreement for security in Leviathan.
- John Locke: Consent in state of nature leads to political society protecting rights.
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau: General will basis of legitimate authority.

2. Natural Duty Theories: Moral reasons for obedience (e.g., fairness, justice).

3. Utilitarianism: Compliance promotes overall societal welfare (Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill).

4. Gratitude Theory: Benefits from state create obligation to obey.

5. Fair Play Theory (H.L.A. Hart, John Rawls): Benefits entail obligations to cooperate/rules.

Grounds for Political Obligation

- Consent: Explicit (e.g., oath) or tacit (e.g., residence, benefits use).
- Benefits Received: State provides goods/services implying obligation.
- Justice and Fairness: Legitimate states merit compliance.
- Tradition and Community: Ties to political culture/history.
- Consequences of Disobedience: Harm to order/stability considerations.

Limits of Political Obligation

1. Unjust Laws/Regimes: Debates on disobedience (civil disobedience).
2. Individual Rights vs. State Demands: Conflicts (e.g., conscientious objection).
3. Legitimacy Deficits: Questionable authority may weaken obligation.
4. Extreme Circumstances: Emergencies, oppression affecting compliance norms.

