

Political obligation



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The following research paper deals with the concept of political obligation along with various theories of political obligation and a critical analysis of the same. Towards the beginning the paper explains the meaning of the political obligation with examples and towards the end it explains the various theories on political obligation and critical analysis of each of them.

To begin with one must know what we mean by the word political obligation.

To a lay man the word means “ To have a political obligation is to have a moral duty to obey the laws of one’s country or state.”¹ In context of the subject politics, the word Political obligation is defined as “ When the authorising rule is a law, and the association a state, we call this political obligation.”² Political obligations have been in complete argument by the various political thinkers. The various questions such as the how can one and the number of people that can acquire political obligation? Is it merely being the member of the state or something more than that? Though many thinkers have tried to answer the question no one has been able to answer the question.

“ Political obligation is concerned with the clash between the individual’s claim to self-governance and the right of the state to claim obedience.” This was the statement given by one of the modern political thinkers Dudley Knowles. The statement not completely but to some extent has been able to bring out the characteristics of political obligation.

Before moving on further to the theories of political obligation one must know all the characteristics of political obligation. To start with one must

clearly understand that political science is not a branch that only stick to the topic which are political in nature but to all those that help in general good.

1. From the Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy.
2. Refer book Social Principles and the Democratic State pg. 298 by Benn & Peters.
3. Another characteristic to highlight is that all political obligations involve the issue of legitimacy. It helps to ensure people that the existing institution that command 'obedience' and 'obligation' in the state are legitimate. To prove this one can take the example that the people should have faith in the institution that are maintaining the obligation work for the development of the state and serves for the best interest of the society.

Other characteristics which is also one of the key characteristics of political obligation is that it is not only concerned with obedience of authority but is also concerned with resisting and opposing authority in special circumstances.

This can be very well explained in the following lines, " there are good grounds for accepting authority in general, but, there may be good grounds too for rejecting it in particular cases; if authority derives from a constitution, there would generally be good grounds for rejecting any exercise of it which was unconstitutional. Again, if its legitimacy depends on the way it is used, an invasion of a sphere where political authority is inappropriate might be grounds for disobedience or, in extreme cases, for resistance." 3

From the above we can make an important note that political obligation holds an important place in state and that one needs to understand state so as to understand the state better.

There have been many theories that have been developed over a period of time that have been developed by the various philosophical thinkers over a period of time. They can also be classified under various categories that have been mentioned. To begin with there are various theories which support unlimited obligation to the state followed by the theories that support limited theories and at last the theories that do not favour obligation that is they are against the political obligation.

4. Refer book Social Principles and the Democratic State pg. 308 by Benn & Peters.
5. To begin with the theories which are of the opinion that there should be unlimited obligation are the divine theory,