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Why you should be grateful: Analysing the strength of the gratitude theory of political obligations in its attempt to overcome the anarchist philosophical challenge

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Why you should be grateful:

Analysing the strength of gratitude theory of political obligations in its attempt to overcome the anarchist philosophical challenge

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Why is the state a legitimate factor to politically oblige its citizens, and do citizens have the political obligation to comply with the actions and policies of the state?” These questions have been at the centre of a long debate between political philosophers. Although the state seems to be the only form through which society can be organised, many political philosophers question the moral grounds on which the state is built and why citizens should be obliged to follow the law, and fulfil the civilian duties which the state forced upon them. Before the different philosophical schools will be discussed it is important to give a sufficient definition of political obligation. One can define it as: “The moral duty of the citizen to obey the law and fulfil its civilian duty”.

The *philosophical anarchist challenge* (anarchist challenge) has proclaimed that no state is legitimate, that the enforcement of political obligations is an infringement of individual autonomy, and thus morally offensive. One group of political anarchists formed their argument deductive grounds, the other on inductive reasoning (Egoumenides, 2004, pp. 18-19). Multiple theories have been developed in response to this challenge, aiming to legitimise the state and justify political obligations, all basing their theories on different moral principles. In this thesis the *gratitude theory of political obligations* (gratitude theory) will take the centre stage. Given the fact that not much has been written on this theory it is of academic interest to evaluate its strength, and test if it is able to overcome the anarchist challenge. Even if the subject of political obligation seems rather theoretical and abstract, the question of political obligation remains vital. Especially, if one looks at the current phenomenon of the “autonomen”, or “soeverainen” in the Netherlands. This group of citizens rejects the authority the state exercises over them, refusing to pay taxes and declining the civilian duties the state imposed on them. The Dutch government and legal system have had difficulties to adequately deal with the autonomen, stating that an individual citizen does not have the option to place itself outside the jurisdiction of the state, whilst they remain on Dutch soil. However, this answer fails to deal with individual autonomy referred to by the autonomen (NOS nieuws, 2023). This example, showcases the societal relevance of the anarchist challenge, and that a satisfactory response is desired in order to deal with this challenge. Therefore, I want to explore the following research question in my thesis:

“*Can the gratitude theory of political obligation overcome the philosophical anarchist challenge?*”.

To answer this research question the following subject will need to be discussed. In the following chapter the philosophical anarchist challenge needs to be thoroughly explored and overview of the different philosophical anarchist groups must be provided. In the third chapter, the answer provided by the obligation of gratitude theory must be analysed. Therefore a comprehensive examination of the theory must be given. In the fourth chapter, the objections to the obligation of gratitude theory will be reviewed. In chapter five, a well-rounded evaluation will be given in order to assess the gravity of the objections and the strength of the gratitude theory. Last, a conclusion will be drawn to determine if the gratitude theory of political obligation can suffice as a strong response to the challenge posed by the philosophical anarchist. As the research will be confined by the constraints of a bachelor thesis, the extent of the research will be limited. As a result, only the response provided by the obligation of gratitude theory will be considered, concerning the anarchist challenge. Other theories of political obligation will only be discussed if they are deemed relevant in answering the research question.

Chapter 2: The philosophical anarchist challenge

As mentioned in the introduction, first the philosophical anarchist challenge will be set out . There are two different groups of philosophers that have extensively written on this topic and have developed different positions. The first being “a priori anarchism”. It argues that the state’s inherent nature is uncompromisable with the autonomy principle, therefore no legitimate state can exist. “A posteriori anarchism” argues that a legitimate state is possible in theory, but cannot be found in reality (Egoumenides, 2004, pp. 18-19). The anarchist challenge, dichotomous in nature, will be further dissected in this chapter. For it needs to be thoroughly understood, if one wants to examine the response given by the gratitude theory.

A priori anarchism

To sufficiently grasp the argument made by the a priori anarchists, one must start with dissecting the concept of authority and state authority. Robert Wolff (1970) has defined authority as the right to command or the right to be obeyed, stating: “to claim authority is to claim the right to be obeyed” (p. 4) . First of all, this is an occurrence between two individuals but this relationship of authority can also be found between the state and a citizen. For the state can be seen as a group of persons that exercise supreme authority, over a given population within a certain territory. Many political philosophers have defined supreme authority, or sovereignty, as a distinctive feature of the state. It can be translated as concentrated authority within a state-like entity. The state, thus, claims the “ultimate” right to command its citizens, and expects obedience (pp. 4-5). Still, where does this “right” to command come from, and is there any normative moral ground for its existence?

A normative and deductive argument (an a priori argument) must be developed to explain why certain individuals (the state) have a right to rule a human community. In addition, through normative reasoning the specific conditions under which the legitimate state can exist must be substantiated. The argument must be deductive, if one is interested in the normative supreme authority the state exercises over citizens. A deduction of the concept of the state is needed to find the moral grounds of its legitimacy. There must be a moral source of legitimacy, within the concept of the state, from which the political obligation of the citizen stems. If such these moral grounds are not found, can we even justify the activity of these *de facto states* and the authority they exercise over their citizens (pp. 7-8)? In this light it is interesting to look at

the fundamental feature of the individual, according to Wolff: autonomy. For it introduces a detrimental problem for the legitimacy of the state.

A priori anarchism states that every individual in essence is rational, has a free will, and has the obligation to take responsibility for its moral beliefs and subsequent actions. Meaning, that they are fully able to self-legislate. This recital of characteristics can be captured within the moral principle of autonomy. The notion of individual autonomy rejects the “legitimate state”. As Wolff mentions: “The defining mark of the state is authority, the right to rule. The primary obligation of man is autonomy, the refusal to be ruled”. This contradiction has led to the anarchist challenge, for one has to conclude that the concept of the state cannot be seen as legitimate, as it intrinsically violates the autonomy of the individual (pp. 10-11). The lack of normative moral grounds on which the state authority is legitimised, and the presence of the moral principle of individual autonomy, can only lead to philosophical anarchism. Or to be specific, seen the normative nature of the argument: a priori anarchism.

A posteriori anarchism

The second group of philosophical anarchism is called: a posteriori anarchism. In contrast to a priori anarchism, this school of philosophical anarchists do believe that the legitimate state is possible, theoretically. However, in order to function the state has to unite the moral concept of individual autonomy and the state’s right to command. This could be done through a continual debate between the state and the citizen, in which the state explains and rationalises the political policies they will enact. Subsequently, the autonomous individual will give its consent for the duties they have to fulfil for it is the reasonable choice (Simmons, 2000, pp. 105, 110-111). The civilian consent legitimises the actions of the state and acts as the moral grounds on which the legitimate state is built. This theory has been known as the *consent theory*.

The consent theory finds its origins in the work of Hobbes (1651/2017), Locke (1690/2014) and Rousseau (1762/1968) and has been seen as one of the prominent theories on the subject of civilian obedience, political obligation and state legitimacy. The consent theory consists of four core assumptions: (1) man is naturally free (Simmons, 1979a, p. 62); (2) through voluntary choice a degree of natural freedom is exchanged for obligations (p. 64); (3) the individual is protected by the method of consent (p. 65); and (4) the state is an instrument for serving the interest of the citizens (p. 68). To clarify the third assumption, an individual needs to give its personal consent to the state before the any political obligations given to him. Only

through personal consent can the state be legitimised (p. 60). According to a posteriori anarchism, the consent theory has been able to form a moral argument through which civilian obedience and duty can be unified with the notion of individual autonomy. Stating that: “Personal consent is required for political obligation and unanimous consent for legitimacy.” (p. 73). Unanimous consent entails the individual consent of the commons which is needed to legitimise the state-authority exercised over the population.

However, the abovementioned state does not exist in reality, for there are no states that successfully employ the moral principle of civilian consent to legitimise their supreme authority. The aforementioned philosophers have tried to restructure the consent argument, introducing the concept of *tacit consent* and *majority consent*. Tacit consent entails that the citizen needs to actively reject state authority, or else the state can assume its consent (Simmons, 1979b, p. 75). Majority consent meaning that the consent of the majority is superior to the consent of the individual, when it comes to state authority (Simmons, 1979a, pp. 71-72). Simmons rejects both concepts, for actual individual consent is needed to legitimise the state. This has not appropriately been done, therefore only the de facto state, or illegitimate, state remains.

To summarise, the a priori anarchist rejects the legitimate state on theoretical grounds. For the inherent nature of the state will always violate the moral autonomy of the individual. A posteriori anarchism viewed the consent theory as the solution to the anarchist challenge. However, given the fact that no state has been found that correctly exercises the consent theory, the consent theory must be rejected on empirical grounds. In the next chapter the obligation of gratitude theory will be discussed, as it possibly could be the adequate response to the challenge raised by a posteriori anarchism. The gratitude theory has not been heavily discussed among political philosophers, hence, the academic relevance to explore this theory. The question is whether the duty to obey can be grounded in gratitude rather than consent, and in a way that does not violate the autonomy principle.

Chapter 3: Gratitude theory of political obligation

Before the gratitude theory will be set out the concept of gratitude will be explored. A short overview will be given to provide one with the necessary definitions of gratitude to sufficiently grasp the debate surrounding the gratitude theory. The work of Brickhouse (2019) has been used to explore the concept of gratitude.

Introduction to the concept of gratitude

The first account of gratitude can be found in the work of Plato (399-387BCE/2016). Gratitude for Plato is dichotomous: it is a *virtue* to be appreciative for the received gifts, and entails the *duty* to obey the benefactor in return (Brickhouse, 2019, pp. 9-11). The notion of gratitude as duty or virtue can also be found in the teachings of many other philosophers. Hume (1740/1985), Kant (1790s/1980), Wellman (1999), and Aquinas (1485/2020) defined gratitude as an important, and sometimes a moral, virtue. In addition, Aquinas introduced the notion of gratitude as a set of moral attitudes. In this set of attitudes the appreciation of the received benefits, and towards the benefactor, take the centre stage. Aristotle (350BCE/2016) sought to explore the concept of gratitude through the lens of friendship, distinguishing two relationships of gratitude. The first was a relationship of utility, which is characterised by the continuous quest to settle the account of the costs made and the benefits received, within a reciprocal relationship. The second relationship is defined *virtue*. Gratitude is not shown because it is obligated, but because one wants to honour the friendship. It characterised by willingness, instead of imperative need. Last, although both gave different arguments for this definition, Hobbes (1651/2017) and Seneca (59AD/2010) underlined that gratitude should be viewed as rather *supererogatory* and not as duty or virtue (Brickhouse, 2019, pp. 12-19, 54-58). With the necessary information provided, let us continue to the gratitude theory itself.

The gratitude theory

As stated in the first chapter, the gratitude theory will be explored to determine if it can act as the moral theory of political obligation in order to overcome the anarchist challenge. It therefore will have to harmonise the concept of autonomy and civil obedience. A rational moral argument will have to be constructed. In the former section an overview of the various definitions has

been given to familiarise ourselves with the concept of gratitude, and to provide the knowledge to fathom the debate of the gratitude theory.

One of the most prominent philosophers that has written on this subject is Walker (1988). The main work on the gratitude theory has been developed by him for he sought to construct an appropriate answer to the anarchist debate. Walker reasons that that from gratitude a political obligation can be derived, given all the benefits the citizen receives from the state (p. 192). First, the concept of gratitude is conceptualised as a *set of attitudes* through which the grateful response can be substantiated. The grateful response entails that one *appreciates* the benefits received, and shows *respect* and *goodwill* to the benefactor. Showing appreciation is rather declarative and part of good manners, whereas goodwill is a disposition towards the benefactor. The different attitudes of gratitude, lead to different reactions or obligations of gratitude (pp. 200-202).

Second, if one wants to form a moral and fundamental argument, the best option is to derive it from the attitude of goodwill. Since, it would be fundamentally wrong to act in ways contrary to the interests of the benefactor. It would go against the very disposition, or character, one has to embody in regards to the benefactor. If one does act in accordance with its disposition of goodwill, goodwill requires one:

- (a) to help him if he is in need or distress and one can do so at no great cost to oneself;
- (b) to comply with his reasonable requests;
- (c) to avoid harming him or acting contrary to his interests, and;
- (d) to respect his rights.

The violation of the abovementioned principles can be seen as ingratitude (p. 202).

Third, to form a moral argument based on one of the principles of gratitude, one has to test the relevance and independence criteria, according to Walker. *Relevance* meaning that the requirement has to be relevant to compliance with the law, if wanting to establish an argument of political obligation. *Independence* means that the principle must obtain its obligatoriness from gratitude, and does not depend on another concept for its source. Only principle (c) seems to adhere to these two requirements. Seen the fact that non-compliance with the law will damage the very being of the state, in theory, and violates the state's interests (relevance requirement). In addition, only those who truly bear goodwill towards their benefactor will try to avoid harming him (independence requirement). It will be this specific principle, principle (c), from which the moral argument of political obligation can be formed. The other three principles do

not meet the criteria. For example, principle (d) does not meet the independence requirement. It is evident that respecting someone's rights does not solely depend on the level of gratitude felt towards a person. Furthermore, principle (a) and (b) should be rejected on the grounds of the relevance criterion. Principle (b) states that the beneficiary needs to comply with reasonable requests, but the state does not request compliance, they command compliance. Moreover, the compliance of the law by a mere citizen cannot be seen as a gesture of rescue. It is not only in times of distress that the citizen needs to be compliant with the law, the state commands daily compliance. Thus, principle (a) will not suffice as a moral principle. It is only principle (c) that can be established as the independent and relevant principle of gratitude (pp. 202-204). From this principle the following moral argument can be constructed:

- (1) The person who benefits from X has an obligation of gratitude not to act contrary to X's interests.
- (2) Every citizen has received benefits from the state.
- (3) Every citizen has an obligation of gratitude not to act in ways that are contrary to the state's interests.
- (4) Noncompliance with the law is contrary to the state's interests.
- (5) Every citizen has an obligation of gratitude to comply with the law.

It is this very argument that forms the core of the gratitude theory (p. 205). Through principle (c) philosophical gratitude theorists have tried to overcome the anarchist challenge. They ought to form a rational argument based on a moral principle of gratitude through which the autonomous citizen has to accept its political obligation.

It is important to mention that indifference towards one's political obligation or minor felonies are regarded as actions of ingratitude, since they are not compatible with a disposition of gratitude. Thus, indifference or minor felonies should be regarded as morally reprehensible (p. 206). However, a citizen must receive significant benefits before the state can claim its right to be obeyed and lay down the burden of political obligations. If no benefits are received, no rational argument can be made why the citizen has to compromise its autonomy and bear the civil duty thrust upon him (207-208). In the following chapter several criticisms aimed toward the gratitude theory will be brought forward.

Chapter 4: The debate

In this chapter the several criticisms aimed at the gratitude theory will be discussed. In other words, the debate surrounding the gratitude theory will be set out. First the debate between a posteriori anarchism and the gratitude theory will be played out. The doctrine of posteriori anarchism has been explored in the second chapter. Second, the fairness theory will be introduced for it has been one of the most prominent critical theories regarding the gratitude theory. Subsequently, the response formulated from the gratitude theory will be given.

A posteriori anarchism versus the gratitude theory

The first criticism that will be discussed has been put forward by Simmons, who is known for his influential work defending a posteriori anarchism. As one can recall, a posteriori anarchism states that in reality there are no legitimate states. Theoretically, the legitimate state can exist, if they would succeed in securing the *actual* consent of the citizen. Only then there is a moral argument to be made in defence of political obligations (Simmons, 1979b, p. 100). The notion of consent is also important feature in the criticism presented underneath.

It is important to mention that many have considered that the gratitude theory of political obligation suffers from *vagueness*. Meaning that it has been impossible to sufficiently define gratitude given its elusive nature and what the exact circumstances are in which one has an obligation of gratitude (Simmons, 1979c, p. 168). However, an attempt has been made to determine when a situation of gratitude arises by Simmons. First of all, the notion of a debt of gratitude is mentioned by Simmons (p. 169). This debt a gratitude consists of the weight of the received and returned benefits. However, to establish an debt of gratitude the following conditions need to be satisfied, of which these two are the most prominent (p. 178):

- (1) "the benefit must be granted by means of some special effort or sacrifice" and;
- (2) "the benefit must not be granted unintentionally, involuntarily, or for dis-qualifying reasons" (such as reasons of self-interest or malice).

The two requirements put the focus on the *content* of the benefit, the *intent* behind the given benefit, and on the *consent* of the beneficiary. Thus, it is possible to establish obligations of gratitude within certain situations, if: the intent of the benefactor is of good nature and this is known to the recipient. Plus the content of the given benefit must have been given at the cost

of some special effort. Last, the recipient must have given consent for receiving the benefit. Only if these requirements are met an obligation of gratitude can arise. If applied to the setting state the first two may be satisfied through the communication of policy and the significant costs it takes to realise the benefits. The third requirement is rather problematic, for the citizen still must have the opportunity to reject the benefits given by the state. In practise, the citizen does not have this power (pp. 189-190). The argumentation behind this statement resonates with the grounds on which a posteriori anarchists have rejected the consent theory, as it is impossible to receive the actual consent of the citizen as a government. Meaning that the gratitude theory of political obligations must be rejected for it does not give a sufficient solution to the detrimental problem of consent. The gratitude theory fails to harmonise the notion of autonomy and state legitimacy. Therefore, Simmons rejects the gratitude theory for it cannot overcome the challenge as presented by a posteriori anarchism.

Walker (1988) has clearly stated that gratitude should be viewed as a set of attitudes, in which each attitude will produce a different obligations of gratitude. He underlines the fact that the definition of gratitude, as given by Simmons, is gravely simplified. One has to acknowledge the different obligations of gratitude in order to adequately discuss the topic. Simmons fails to do this. Second, the requirements presented by Simmons may indeed be applicable in a certain situation. Yet, fails to acknowledge the many other occasions in which an obligation of gratitude can arise. Walker has specifically based his argument on the gratitude attitude of goodwill, and is convinced his theory holds strong ground. He rejects Simmons' notion of actual individual consent and is critical of the transactional manner in which Simmons defines gratitude (pp. 193-195). In the subsequent chapter both theories will be evaluated and tested, to establish which of these two arguments can be perceived as the strongest.

The fairness theory versus the gratitude theory

Another prominent criticism that has targeted the gratitude theory originated from the *political obligation as fairness* theory (fairness theory). This theory argues that political obligation should be based on the moral principle of fairness, the principle being: "it would be unfair for A to profit from the benefits of X, which stem from the cooperative labours of the other X-ites, without doing his fair share." (Klosko, 1991, p. 33). Let us take a moment to dissect this moral principle, for several components of implications need to be emphasised. The fairness theory has made the societal dimension an crucial part in its argument of political obligation. In

addition, there is an essential comparative component to the argument. To be more specific, the collective labours produced by society stems from the reciprocal relationship between citizens and between the citizen and the state. If each citizen will contribute, through his political obligation, to the collective labours, non-excludable (essential) public goods will be made available to him. The production and contribution of essential public goods can only be made possible through the joint effort of society. Thus it would only be fair if one wants to receive benefits from the state that he contributes to the collective labours of society. Why would I be inclined to contribute to society through my political obligations if my neighbour receives the benefits without contributing anything? It would simply not be fair play. Therefore, the fairness theory states that if one receives benefits from the state, which stem from the collective labour, one must contribute its fair share. This fair share should be defined as the political obligation of the citizen. This is a moral duty (Klosko, 1987, pp. 345-355).

George Klosko has been a staunch defender of this theory. In addition, he has argued that the gratitude theory is inferior to the fairness theory (1), and when put in practice, will actually result in the fairness theory (2). Klosko argues that the argument of gratitude, and the obligations it puts forward, are rather weak. Given the fact that someone can easily forsake its obligation of gratitude whenever other interests or responsibilities enter the scene that “outweigh” their obligation of gratitude. Yes, someone will feel guilty for not upholding its obligation, but given the situation other duties will be given precedence. Thus the obligation of gratitude is weak and lacks the strength to form an moral argument of political obligation (Klosko, 1989, pp. 355). As an example Klosko provides a situation in which a committee has to determine which proposal they will approve. One proposal is handed in by a benefactor of one of the committee members. Yet, given the fact that the other proposals enjoy more support among the committee the benefactor’s proposal is denied. The beneficiary has not been able to uphold his obligation of gratitude not to harm his benefactor’s interests. Of course, the committee member will feel guilty towards his benefactor, however after careful consideration this was the decision he reached.

Second, Klosko views an obligation of gratitude as a certain debt. Moreover, the *content* and the *intent* of the benefit given must be known to the recipient. Both accounts are similar to Simmons reasoning (see former section). Only if the content and intent are known a debt of gratitude can be formed, and this debt has to be so strong that it can uphold an obligation of gratitude under any circumstances, this is often not the case (pp. 355-357). How can one be grateful for the received benefits if they are not known, and how is one sure that they are not

given out self-interest? Since the debt of gratitude is nothing more than the sum of the received benefits and once's attribution to the cooperative labours of society, why should the argument of gratitude not be seen as a subset of the argument of fairness. Especially, given the societal component of the fairness theory (p. 358). For example, one individual's disobedience of the law will not necessarily harm the interests of the state. In addition, given a population of a few million the state would not even notice the disobedience of a single individual. Hence, step 4 of Walker's argument will be undermined (see page 9) (p. 353). However, the fairness argument (as given on page 11) can deal with individual disobedience. Let us apply the argument of fairness on the concept gratitude and the following question arises: can one truly be the grateful citizen when its neighbour receives many benefits but has not, or will not, provide its fair share of cooperative labour (p. 354)? The answer is: "No!". The state may not notice the disobedience of the individual, it may not even harm the state in practise. However, the fellow-citizen will notice and will be disoriented by the fact that he has to bear the burden of political obligations whereas his neighbour forsakes to do his. When put in practise it seems that gratitude theory must fall back on the mechanisms of the fairness theory in order to justify the why the citizen must adhere to its political obligations, for it would be inexplicable towards it follow-citizen. Hence, the gratitude theory seems to be a nice contribution to the fairness theory, rather than an independent theory of political obligation.

Walker (1989) has immediately responded to the claims made by Klosko. First of all, he tried to tackle the Klosko's claim that the gratitude principle is not strong enough and will easily be forsaken given that other arguments are superior. The response given to this claim points out that one must be able to clearly differentiate the *diffuseness* (content) and the *stringency* (strength) of the obligations. Diffuseness begs the question if the obligation is clear in nature, and stringency asks if the obligation will be strong enough not to be overridden. An example given is the spousal obligation to show love to your partner. The exact content of this obligation is not always clear for one's love can be shown in many different ways. However, the stringency of the spousal obligation is strong, for it would be fundamentally wrong to put aside this obligation every time it would be convenient or pleasurable given the circumstances (pp. 360-361). Walker argues that the same case can be made for the political obligations of gratitude and that Klosko's anecdotal example of the committee member conflates the distinction between the obligations' diffuseness and stringency. Yes, sometimes it is unclear what the exact content of an obligation of gratitude entails, but as shown by the guilt shown by the committee member the obligation is rather strong. Subsequently, the example is gravely flawed given that

the setting of the example does not in any way can be translated to the relationship between the state and the citizen. In addition many anecdotal examples can be formulated to show that the fairness-principle will not suffice (p. 362)

Second, Walker focusses on the *exceptional character* of the benefits provided by the state. It is indeed correct that it is difficult to determine the costs paid and benefits received when one talks about public goods. However, no relationship of equality is necessary in order to establish an political obligation of gratitude. It would be almost impossible to conduct an adequate cost-benefit analysis between state and citizen, and among fellow citizens (pp. 363-364). Yes, the relationship of gratitude between state and citizen is atypical, given the fact that the intent of state policy and the precise nature of benefits is not always clear. Yet, can one not have an sense of gratitude, and goodwill, towards certain institutions if they provide one with essential benefits? The whole notion of a debt of gratitude, as Klosko has defined the gratitude theory, is put aside by Walker. Hume (1740/1985) and Kant (1790s/1980) state; ingratitude is abhorrent, whereas gratitude is one of the highest virtues to internalise (pp. 362-363). Therefore, Walker remains rather critical of the comparative element of Klosko's criticism. It is about a disposition of gratitude. The gratitude theory should not be denigrated to the comparison between citizens' contributions to the state, or the moral duty the fairness theory retracts from this comparison. The theory of gratitude has developed an argument that defends a *moral disposition*, that touches the very nature of the citizen. The citizen will be called out to internalise a disposition of gratitude in regards to the state. From this disposition of gratitude the citizen will comply with the law given the goodwill fostered (see page 9). The theory of fairness states that it is rather the comparison made between citizens that obligates one to take upon himself the *moral duty* of political obligations. Let us repeat the fundamental question underlying the fairness theory: why should I fulfil my political obligations if my neighbour does not, yet still receives the benefits from the state? Hence, my neighbour should take upon himself the burden of political obligations just as I fulfil mine. According to Walker the differences between the theories are rather clear; they differ significantly in their core assumptions: their moral arguments. Therefore the gratitude theory should never be perceived as a subset of the fairness theory. The question is rather: which more argument holds more strength and is most striking? This will be determined in the last chapter.

Chapter 5: The debate evaluated - The strength of the gratitude theory

In this chapter the academic debate presented will be evaluated. It is the aim of the evaluation to lead to a conclusion that can sufficiently answer the research question, as presented in the introduction: “Can the gratitude theory of political obligation overcome the philosophical anarchist challenge?”. Let us first focus on the philosophical anarchist challenge proposed by a posteriori anarchism, and evaluate if their conceptualisation of autonomy in relation to the state holds up.

Evaluation 1: Does the philosophical anarchist challenge hold up when tested?

The main challenge proposed by a posteriori anarchism, which has been tenaciously defended by Simmons (1979), entails that actual personal consent of the citizen could have been the vehicle through which state legitimacy, and political obligations, could be rationalised. Yet, the state has not been able to secure the consent of the citizen in any satisfactory way. Given the fact that individual autonomy and the concept of political obligations seem inherently excludable, only the consent of the individual citizen could have bridged this discrepancy. However is this truly the case? It must be emphasised that Simmons has defined the state negatively in regards to individual autonomy. The state, as perceived by a posteriori anarchism, remains illegitimate and their policies should be seen as an infringement of individual autonomy. Yet, we should try to explore if a positive definition of the state can be formed. If this is possible, there might be grounds on which we can reject the anarchist challenge. Let us formulate an example through which the relation between autonomy and the state can be explored, the example being: *the radical political protesters (RPP)*.

Imagine a group of radical political protesters, it does not really matter for which issues they protest, or why they are perceived as political radical. Important is that this group of citizens are perceived as radical, and that most of society does not agree with their doctrine and the means through which these are communicated. In addition, this radical group of protesters is highly critical of the government. Given their polarising nature, the group is subject to threats of violence. Whenever they are demonstrating the police is present to guarantee their safety. This is requested from the police since it is their duty to protect citizens. Moreover, every citizen should have the opportunity to express their opinion, this is a given right within the state. The police has also been able to locate those who threatened the RPP, and the judiciary will sentence them accordingly to their crimes. Last, the headquarters of the RPP was set ablaze. It were

firefighters that rescued several group members from the burning building, and put down fire. Although, not many politicians do foster much sympathy for the RPP, they are still shocked by the incident. They condemn the violence and vow to protect those in society that are different-minded, given the fact that certain rights embedded in, and protected by, the constitution have been violated. All in all, even if the group is perceived polarising and radical, they will be protected by the state. For every individual should be able to determine its own value system.

The example of the RPP highlights that there is not always an negative relationship between the state and one's personal autonomy. On the contrary, it is the state and its institutions that have protected and guaranteed the autonomy of each member of the RPP. Let's not forget, without the interventions and actions of the state many RPP members would have subjected to horrendous violence. It is the state, and its functions, that will enable men to be autonomous. The relationship between the state and individual autonomy is positive, rather than negative. However, one should go even further than defining the relationship as positive. For I am convinced that one could even say that without the state it would not even be possible to be an autonomous individual. Let us return to the example, it has been the state that has protected the RPP members. However, has it also not been the state that has provided the means to be an autonomous individual. The moment a citizen of the state is born, it receives the rights and means necessary to develop into an autonomous individual. It the state that created and safeguards the system (society) in which an individual can be autonomous, even if this citizen is a member of a radical political organisation.

To conclude, there is no negative relationship between the state and individual autonomy. The opposite is true, the state enables one to be autonomous. Without the benefits contributed to the citizen, the citizen would not be able to act as an autonomous individual. The What does this mean for the challenge as presented by a posteriori anarchism? First, the notion that the state takes away the autonomy of individual is false. Given without the state it would not even be possible to be an autonomous individual. Second, the belief that it is only the consent theory would be able to bridge the gap between individual autonomy and state authority should be rejected. As shown above, one can argue that such a gap does not even exists. The consent theory supposes a negative relationship between the state authority and autonomy, yet it is rather a positive one. This means that one can argue that philosophical anarchist challenge can be rejected and that the consent theory is insufficient. This means that philosophical anarchist inclination that no legitimate state can be found is false. Given that the anarchist challenge has been dealt with, the question is rather: how can the legitimate state, a state

enabling citizens to be autonomous, compels its citizens to take upon themselves their political obligations? What are the moral grounds on which political obligations can be based? Two different theories have made an attempt to answer this question: the gratitude theory and the fairness theory. Let us now move on the evaluation on which theory present the strongest argument of political obligations.

Evaluation 2: Does the gratitude theory present the strongest argument?

The gratitude theory and the fairness theory have both been discussed extensively. Both theories assume that there can be a positive relationship between the state and principle of autonomy. A legitimate state can demand of its citizens to obey the law and adhere to their political obligations. Both theories, however, have presented different accounts on how the state is able to legitimise the existence of political obligations.

First, a short repetition of both arguments will be given. The fairness theory can be defined as a relational account on the subject of political obligation. It supposes that the citizen must contribute to the collective labours, through its political obligation, if it wants to claim the benefits contributed by the state. If he does not, it would be unfair to his neighbour that is obeying its political obligation. All citizens should contribute to collective labours that enables the state to give the benefits necessary to be autonomous. Civilian disobedience should be perceived as unfair in comparison to the citizens that do contribute. Hence, all citizens have a moral duty to obey the state (Klosko, 1987 , pp. 345-355). The gratitude theory presents a different account. Given the fact that the citizen receives benefits from the state which create the possibility to be an autonomous individual, one should be grateful. Gratefulness is a moral disposition that will foster goodwill towards the benefactor. The notion of goodwill assumes that one will not act contrary to benefactor's interests. Thus, the citizen should comply with the law, as non-compliance is a violation of state interests (Walker, 1988, p. 205).

To test which of the two arguments presents the strongest theory of political obligation an example has been developed, an example I have encountered in my work as a high school teacher. The setting is as follows: the classroom is filled with students that all work independently on different subjects, all to their choice. It is the job of the teacher to maintain order in the classroom and provide students assistance if any problems or questions arise. At a certain point during the class, a student is creating a lot of nuisance in the classroom. Talking to other students rather loud and about topics not related to the any of the subjects that need to

be student. The teacher and calls her out on her behaviour, rational and calm, and asks the student to act according to the rules and norms in the classroom. Subsequently, the student gives a defensive, but rational, response. The conversation goes as follows:

Student “Why am I the only one being called out on my behaviour? There are many others in the classroom that are not following the rules.”

Teacher “That may be true but right now I am talking to you, and it has been your behaviour that I noticed.”

Student “Still, I have not been the only one that slacked off. So I think it is unfair that you are only calling me out and not the whole classroom.”

Teacher “I am not saying that the others should not better themselves. But, right now I am pointing out your responsibility as a student. As a teacher it is my job to provide students with an environment in which they can thrive as individual learners. It would be wrong for me to forsake my duty even when other teachers are doing so. You should not let your individual responsibility depend on the actions of others”

Student “Okay, fine. But what if I just do not want to study at the moment?”

Teacher “Maybe it would be correct to show some gratitude for the fact that you are able to study in an environment which enables you to pursue your interests and passions. You should be grateful for all the possibilities given to you. Your actions show an ungrateful character which does not reflect good on you as a person.”

In the end the student agrees with the teacher and promises it will improve their attitude.

I think it is rather clear how this dialogue acts as an analogy for the relationship between the state and the citizen; the teacher being a representative of the state and the student being the citizen. The student falls back on the argumentation of the fairness theory in order to justify its behaviour. However, the reaction of the teacher shows the detrimental problems the fairness theory causes when employed, given that the strength of the moral duty relies on the relational and comparative component between citizens: “The strength of A's feeling that he is obligated

to make sacrifices or bear burdens (in order to provide presumptive public goods to his society) will be heavily influenced by his views concerning the extent to which other individuals are making similar sacrifices or bearing similar burdens.” (Klosko, 1987, p. 358). The argument made by the student would be correct if one follows the logic of the fairness theory. In addition, it shows that a citizen will be able to forsake its moral duty of political obligations when its neighbour seems to be forsaking his. Hence, the state does not hold strong ground to reprimand the citizen if they also do not reprimand its neighbour. This begs the question, should the state then take upon him the form of all-knowing being, able to reprimand those the moment one forsakes its political obligations? This seems rather extreme and show strong signs of severe distrust, between the state and its citizens and among citizens themselves. In contrast, under the gratitude theory citizens do not have the opportunity make their obedience of the law dependent on the actions of its neighbours. The gratitude theory supposes that given the benefits received, one must instil a moral disposition of gratitude, which will lead to the obedience of the state. If a citizens show disobedience this will be a betrayal of his moral disposition as a citizen. The state can hold him accountable for this abhorrent betrayal, without the citizen being able to deflect its individual responsibility towards the actions of his neighbours, as he would have been able to do under the fairness theory.

To conclude, the gratitude theory of political obligation showcases a much stronger moral argument than the fairness theory, and is the best contender overcoming the philosophical anarchist challenge.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

It has been the ambition of this thesis to answer the following question: “Can the gratitude theory of political obligation overcome the philosophical anarchist challenge?”. In the last chapter the conclusion was reached that the gratitude theory can indeed be perceived as a strong theory of political obligation that is able to overcome the philosophical anarchist challenge. Let us look back on how this conclusion was reached. Subsequently, what are the possible limitations of the research and what could be suggested for future research.

First, the anarchist challenge has been set out, to review and understand the challenge that had to be answered. The two different stances were analysed: a priori anarchism and a posteriori anarchism. Moreover, the consent theory has been addressed, as it has been proposed by a posteriori anarchism as the answer to the anarchist challenge. However, whereas a priori anarchism has rejected political obligations on deductive grounds, a posteriori anarchism has rejected political obligations on inductive grounds. No state can be found that sufficiently employs the theory of consent, and adequately harmonises state authority with individual autonomy. The gratitude theory ought to develop a different answer to the anarchist challenge. Stating that given the benefits one receives from the state a moral disposition of gratitude must be instilled in the citizen. Through the attitude of goodwill the citizen will take upon him political obligations. Two different criticisms aimed to undermine the gratitude theory. Simmons (1979c) sought to intertwine the notion of consent within the concept of gratitude, therefore rejecting the political obligations of gratitude on the same inductive grounds as the consent theory. Klosko (1989) argued that the fairness theory is considerably stronger than the gratitude theory. In addition, the gratitude theory should be perceived as a subset of the fairness theory. The subsequent evaluation showed that the theory of consent should be considered irrelevant. The state does not violate individual autonomy. On the contrary, it provides the very means to be an autonomous individual. Given that all citizens receive these means, obedience to the state and the existence of political obligations seems justified, and best explained through the gratitude theory of political obligations. For it bases its theory on the moral character of the individual and not on a comparative component as the fairness theory does, under which the strength of one’s political duty can depend on the actions and beliefs of fellow citizens.

The societal value of this thesis lies in its capability to be a useful contribution to the discussion on civil disobedience. As has been mentioned in the introduction, the problem of the autonomous individual has not yet been met with a sufficient answer from the state. A civil discussion

between the state and the autonomen can be a step towards reconciliation. This thesis could provide the philosophical backing on why we as citizens are morally obliged to carry our political obligations. However, one must always acknowledge the academic limitations of its research. In this light I think it would be very interesting to test the strength of the gratitude theory against other theories of political obligations, given that this thesis has only been able to evaluate the consent theory and the fairness theory. Therefore, it would be of great academic interests to research and evaluate if the gratitude theory of political obligations remains the strongest theory when compared to other theories of political obligation.

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