

Candice Delmas. *A Duty to Resist: When Disobedience Should be Uncivil*. New York. Oxford University Press. Pp. 295

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Calls for a “non-ideal turn” in political philosophy are increasingly common in the field. Political philosophers are repeatedly asked to step out of their ivory towers and get their hands dirty with the real moral and political crises that surrounds them. These calls are not surprising, given the dysfunctionality of politics in many states of the world—including prospering democracies—and the bleak promises their futures hold. But the task of doing non-ideal theory, which involves translating abstract concepts and ideals into political principles for our messy reality, is far from straightforward.

A Duty to Resist is a prime example of how to execute this task. Candice Delmas’s analysis of the grounds and scope of citizens’ duty to resist injustice is philosophically sound and written for the political reality of our time. She engages with complex ideas and advances controversial claims, but remains engaging and accessible. Remarkably, she does not shy away from making specific, action-guiding recommendations for the politically and morally perplexed citizen.

The first thesis *A Duty to Resist* advances is that the political obligations of citizens in real-world, advanced democratic states include not just the obligation to obey the law but also, and perhaps more crucially, the obligation to resist unjust laws. While this idea already appears in republican accounts of civic duties, Delmas deploys an ecumenical strategy to support it. Examining the most mainstream theories of political obligations, she shows that each of them grounds a duty to engage in principled, political resistance to state injustices. In fact, given the ubiquity of injustice and oppression in most states of the world, Delmas implies that the traditional philosophical focus on citizens’ duties of obedience is a form of philosophical negligence (2018, 224).

The first theory of political obligations that Delmas discusses is the popular (at least amongst political philosophers) natural duty to justice view. The natural duty to justice, Demas tells us, “addresses individuals as free and equal citizens and therefore cannot obligate them to maintain legal and sociopolitical conditions that deny people that free and equal status” (74). It therefore grounds a fairly strong obligation to resist both policies that disrespect other citizens and policies that commit serious harms against non-members (74-84). Similar conclusions follow from the fair play theory of political obligations: Those who argue that citizens ought not free ride on their fellow citizens by failing to obey the law should also recognize that citizens ought not benefit from exploitation or wrongdoing (116). Citizens who do find themselves benefiting from state injustices (as do most privileged citizens in most states) ought to counter the receipt of wrongful benefits by working towards the radical reform of their society (123). Next, Delmas examines the Samaritan Duties account of political obligations. According to this view, the duty to obey the law is an instantiation of our natural duty to assist those in dire need. Given that the absence of a coercive state would make all people vulnerable to serious threats, we all have a Samaritan duty to submit to the authority of the state (137-140). But surely, Delmas argues, if our state *subverts* the fulfilment of our Samaritan duties by prohibiting us from assisting those in dire need (for example, by enacting laws against sheltering undocumented migrants) or by adopting policies

that more generally threaten other citizens' access to basic needs (for example, mass incarceration policies in the US) (144), then citizens have a Samaritan duty to resist such a state. Similar conclusions follow from the associative obligation theory of political obligations. Focusing on Roland Dworkin's version of this account, Delmas argues that oppressed citizens have a duty to protect their own dignity and that of their fellow citizens, and they do so by resisting the state's attempt to humiliate, objectify, exploit and marginalise them (175).

This systematic analysis of the sources of the duty to resist is a welcome expansion of the existing literature on the relation between citizens and their state. But one upshot of Delmas's ecumenical approach, in which she discusses one theory of political obligation after another, is that it leaves unclear whether it matters which particular theory of political obligation one relies upon in order to ground a duty to resist. For example, a familiar objection to the natural duty to justice view is that, in contrast with the fair play or associative obligations view, the obligations it grounds are not owed specifically to one's own state. Does it follow then that on the duty to justice account one has a duty to resist any injustice in the world, while on the fair play or associative obligations account one has a duty to resist only the injustices associated with one's own state? Or consider the question of the costs that a citizen can be expected to incur when discharging her political obligations. Delmas addresses this question in various places in the book (for example, 101, 133, 139), but it would have been useful to offer a comparison of the costs that citizens can be expected to bear across the various theories she uses. For example, it seems that since on the fair play account citizens who wrongly benefit from an injustice ought to resist that injustice, this account requires such citizens to incur higher costs than the Samaritan Duties account, which relies on people's general duties of assistance. Exploring such issues might show that it does in fact matter which theory of political obligation one starts from.

The book's second core thesis is more polemic. Here Delmas argues that citizens' duty to resist injustice is not limited to conventional protest and to civil disobedience. Rather, resisting citizens have the right and perhaps even the duty to engage in *uncivil* disobedience. Uncivil disobedience includes forms of resistance that do not comply with the requirements of civility, publicity, non-evasiveness and nonviolence—the properties typically associated with civil disobedience. Uncivil resistance can be covert, evasive, offensive and even violent. It includes “coercive strikes, riots, guerrilla street art, DDoS actions, hunger strikes, covert assistance to undocumented migrants, unauthorized whistleblowing, vigilantism [...] ecosabotage and animal rescue operations” (45). In advancing this claim, Delmas again criticizes many mainstream accounts of political philosophy, which typically defend an idealised version of civil disobedience as the most radical form of protest permitted in democratic societies (24-35). These accounts not only mischaracterise actual campaigns of civil disobedience; they are also out of synch with political reality. Given the ubiquity of oppression and injustice in most real-world societies, oppressed citizens often find that defiance and violence are necessary to draw the attention of the callous and the indifferent, and to kickstart social reform (156-157). In addition, the resort to uncivil disobedience may be required in order to achieve other valuable goals, including: affirming oppressed citizens' dignity, communicating their dissent and asserting their solidarity and their agency (68).

The idea that even in democratic societies political resistance may turn uncivil and even violent will strike many as counterintuitive, and throughout the book Delmas carefully considers various objections to this claim. She also offers several real-world examples of harrowing state injustices, presenting them in such a way that many readers, and perhaps especially liberal and left-leaning ones, will accept the conclusion that the victims of these crimes were justified in resorting to noncivil protest. (Examples of such state injustices surveyed in the book include: slavery, lynching and political violence against African Americans; and denial of asylum to refugees). But perhaps Delmas could have paid more attention to the sorts of controversial examples over which there is less widespread agreement. Consider, for example, the question of the right to abortion, or the right of gay couples to marry, or the right of trans persons to self-identify with their gender. Many think that disagreement about these hard questions is reasonable and yet deeply entrenched. Does it follow that pro-life, anti-gay or anti-trans activists may also resort to uncivil protest? Should they be allowed to boycott institutions that hold gay marriages? May they troll radical feminists? May they resort to rioting in states that permit abortions? Is uncivil disobedience only permitted in those cases where there is no reasonable disagreement? Or alternatively, should the extent of the disagreement over the nature of a given injustice dictate just how uncivil, offensive and violent the protest against it may be?

A second set of questions, which the book also leaves open, has to do with which theory of political obligation one chooses to use in order to ground the duty to resist. Here one might wonder: Do different theories allow for different types and levels of uncivil resistance? For example, if the fair play account of political obligations shows that privileged citizens wrongly benefit from injustice, does it not follow that, as agents who are themselves involved in wrongdoing, privileged citizens are liable to incur a high level of harm from offensive and even violent protest? And higher than what, say, the Samaritan Duties account would prescribe, given that it takes citizens to be passers-by to their state policies? (146) And might it be the case that the associative account of political obligations, with its emphasis on victims' duties to assert their dignity and on their associative duties to fellow oppressed citizens, grants the oppressed a permission to engage in acts of defiance against their oppressors more so that, say, the duty to justice account? Here too I would have liked to hear more about the possible implications of choosing one theory of political obligations over another.

Leaving these further refinements of the account to the side, it is worth highlighting another important virtue of the book, which concerns its methodological approach. As Delmas herself notes time and again, neither of her core claims—that citizens have a political duty to resist, or that their duty to resist is not limited to conventional civil protest—will come as news to many political activists, who typically take recourse to unconventional protest, and do so out of a deep sense of political duty (4, 7, 27, 87, 136-167, 142, 186). Indeed, one of the most refreshing aspects of *A Duty to Resist* is its direct engagement with and reliance on the voices of real-world activists. Political actors like Vira Mistry, a member of the Indian Black Noise activist group, or the 1976 Irish Hunger Strikers, are given prominent space here, alongside John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin and their like. In addition, Delmas supports her claims with both generous readings of a wide range of philosophical texts and with novels, films and folksongs—sources which will resonate as familiar with readers who are not versed in recent philosophical literature. This inclusive methodology strikes me as the right way to carry out non-ideal theorising—theorising

that is meant to guide political actors in the real world by using their own words and drawing on their own experiences.