Associative Political Obligations

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Abstract
This article aims to provide some insight into the nature and content of the theory of associative political obligation. It does this by first locating the view in the wider debate on political obligation, analyzing the view in terms of four central elements that are shared by many of its versions, and then discussing important criticisms that have been made of each of these, as well as some rejoinders by defenders of the theory.

Do we have any moral obligations to support our political community? And, more narrowly, do we have a moral obligation to obey the law? These two questions are traditionally taken to comprise the question of political obligation. Some – called philosophical anarchists – deny that there are such obligations.1 But many resist this conclusion. They believe that people like us in societies like ours have obligations to their fellow citizens and are obligated to do what the law requires.2 Indeed, it is often feared that the anarchist conclusion might even threaten the legitimacy of states.3 The theory of associative political obligation has recently become a popular approach to the question of political obligation. According to theories of associative political obligation, people can have political obligations just because they are members of a political society.

This article aims to provide some insight into the nature and content of the theory of associative political obligation, as well as some of its main criticisms. I will first offer a brief general description of the theory and locate it in the wider debate on political obligation (Section 1). I will then analyze the view by identifying four central elements (Section 2), and describe some important criticisms that have been made of these, as well as some rejoinders by defenders of the theory (Section 3). In a companion article (‘Associative Political Obligations: Their Potential’), I go beyond this exposition and adopt a more critical perspective, asking (i) in what form the proposal is most persuasive and (ii) what conclusions it might support.

1. The Idea of Associative Obligations

The theory of associative political obligation is a special case of a wider currently popular idea: that membership in groups can bring about (associative) obligations.4 Such theories object to the way in which the landscape of our moral duties and obligations is sometimes viewed. It has been said that there are only two kinds of moral requirements. The first, often labeled duties, we owe to all persons unconditionally. These consist (mostly) of prohibitions, like duties not to kill, lie, rape, steal, etc. The second, typically called obligations, are whatever additional requirements we may choose incur to individual persons. Obligations are different from duties in both respects: we owe them only to particular individuals and they arise only out of our voluntary undertakings. Promises create paradigmatic examples of obligations.
According to associativist authors, this way of understanding our moral landscape ignores an important third category of moral requirements: associative obligations. These arise out of one’s membership in a group or community and are based on the particular relation in which such membership puts us with others. Associative obligations are different from the duties and obligations just mentioned on both counts. First, they are neither owed to all of humanity nor to particular individuals as such: we owe them to (the members of) groups like our family, neighbors, or fellow citizens. Second, associative obligations are neither unconditional nor depend on voluntary choice: we have them in virtue of membership.

It is sometimes said that associative theories are part of a wider critique of liberal theory, called *communitarianism* (e.g., Wellman, ‘Associative’). In short, communitarians object to (liberal) attempts to ground universal moral principles in properties persons may possess irrespective of their relations or history, such as autonomy. Such (liberal) thinking, they argue, is mistaken because it is organized around an excessively insulated or atomistic view of persons. Instead moral principles are said to rest on our particular, historically situated roles that are constitutive of our identities (MacIntyre; Sandel; Taylor).

Some associativists indeed argue along these lines. They see obligations of membership as arising precisely out of these particular and historically situated roles. That is, they argue that acknowledging that persons are deeply socially embedded shows that we have obligations to the members of the various (salient) groups of which we are members ourselves (Horton). So the anarchist conclusion may well be the correct implication of liberal thought, but this simply shows its deep flaws. However, identifying associative and communitarian theories is too simple. For a steadily increasing number of authors defends the theory as a necessary corrective to – or true interpretation of – liberal theory (Dworkin; Tamir; Smith).

### 2. The Argument for Associative Political Obligations

Most theories of political obligation attempt to establish that people have such moral requirements in terms of their voluntarily accepted obligations or unconditional general duties. But it has proven a tall order to show in this way that all members of a political society have political obligations. Consider the obligation to obey the law. It is simply not plausible to say that all citizens of existing states have voluntarily incurred obligations to obey. (When, say, did you last promise to do so?) And given that we owe our general moral duties to all of mankind there seems to be a serious disconnect between duties and political obligations. Political obligations are supposed to be specific to our society.5

The theory of associative obligation is better positioned to address the problem of political obligation. Applying the idea to political societies, it has the potential to establish that all, and only, members of such societies owe political obligations to one another, and only one another. Moreover, the theory does not rely on unrealistic assumptions about people’s voluntary acceptance. If successful, the theory of associative political obligation (henceforth APO) could show that all members of political societies have special obligations to one another, are obligated to obey the law, and possibly that the states governing those societies are legitimate.

Let us look in more detail at the theory. There is considerable variation between different versions of the theory, and their arguments are often sophisticated and complex. Instead of trying to recount the specific arguments defended by different authors, I will try to clarify the idea of APO by offering an analysis of what we may regard as the family of such views. I will do so by identifying four core claims shared by most versions of the
theory. Throughout I will indicate as much as possible how various authors fit within this schema. The reader should keep in mind that this discussion (inevitably) contains many simplifications, draws distinctions that some may regard as artificial, and does not exhaust all available views.

2.1. A METHODOLOGICAL CLAIM: THE ROLE OF INTUITION

The first element to consider concerns method in political philosophy. One way of approaching political philosophy is to examine our intuitions about political life in light of independently plausible moral principles. When the implications of those principles conflict with our intuitions we should change either our principles or our intuitions. We might choose to abandon the intuition, for example because we have more confidence in the principle or because abandoning it will allow us to construct a more coherent overall set of beliefs.

Such an approach may lead one to accept philosophical anarchism. Say one considers very plausible the principle that persons can have obligations only if they voluntarily incur them. It would seem then that the only way citizens could have political obligations is if they voluntarily incurred them – something which many surely have not done. Perhaps the conclusion that many have no political obligations is counterintuitive, but as long as the principle of voluntarism is more solidly anchored in our overall set of beliefs, it should be accepted.

Defenders of APO typically ascribe a much more central role to our intuitions about political life. This emphasis on intuition comes in varying strengths. Some hold that intuitions have a kind of protected status, and thus that it would be a very serious advantage of a theory if it explains widely held beliefs about our obligations to obey the law, the legitimacy of states, and so on. However, many associativists take a stronger view and see themselves as essentially engaged in a project of explicating or ‘making sense of’ our shared political experiences and practices (Dworkin, Law’s; Horton 1st 172–5; Gilbert 43–53, 268). The approach taken by such authors may be best described as hermeneutic or interpretative.

2.2. A CLAIM OF MORAL PRINCIPLE: MEMBERSHIP CAN GENERATE OBLIGATION

The most important claim made by defenders of associative obligations is that membership can ‘in and of itself involve obligations’ (Gilbert 18). Being obligated, it is said, is part of what it means to be a member (Horton 1st 159–60; Nielsen). Associativists emphasize that such obligations cannot be reduced to other kinds of obligation (Scheffler, ‘Relationships’). These assertions point in the direction of a fundamental moral truth or principle: one’s relation to others (like shared group membership) can be the source of obligations.

I will follow Yael Tamir and call this the principle of community (95). A central – and highly controversial – element of this principle is that it allows members of groups to have obligations toward one another even if they never voluntarily chose to be members or to become obligated. It is membership itself that gives rise to associative obligations.

Associativists consider this principle attractive in light of their emphasis on intuition. First, it seems that many people think that they have special obligations to, for example, their family members that they do not have to others and that such obligations do not depend on being voluntarily accepted. The principle of community provides an explanation for such beliefs: they are the kinds of obligations that come with occupying a
particular ‘role’ in a group or relation (Hardimon; Smith) something that ‘attracts’ obligations (Dworkin, Law’s 197; Utz; Perry 195). Second, the principle might defeat philosophical anarchism.

2.3. A DEFENSE OF THE PRINCIPLE

Many defenses have been given of the principle that membership can generate obligations. What is perhaps its original defense was particularly popular during the middle of the twentieth century. Some, conceiving of philosophy as the analysis and clarification of concepts, thought that philosophical anarchism was false by definition. Membership in a political community, they argued, conceptually entails political obligation. Thus, while we might intelligibly ask whether we should oppose or support particular laws or governments, we cannot intelligibly deny political obligation altogether. To do so is to betray that one fails to understand the meaning of ‘political society’ (MacDonald 109–10; McPherson 64–5; Pitkin). This argument is often called the conceptual argument.6

The conceptual argument has come into severe criticism (see note 11). But many have since tried to provide a more robust justification for the idea of APO. We can distinguish between two broad approaches here which identify different conditions under which persons are considered members of a group the membership of which generates APO. Some consider APO to be premised upon what we might call a ‘thin’ sense of membership. According to this view, a sufficient condition for membership in a community – and thus for APO – can be that one is formally identifiable as a member, for example by being a legal subject. A standard way of arguing for this position is to point out the non-instrumental value of a community as such, for example the value of a community in which persons enjoy equal status. Others point to more than merely formal or ascriptive membership as the basis for APO. On this approach, membership in a community is described in terms of a particular kind of involvement of the will as well, such as the taking up of a particular stance or attitude toward others in the community. Call these ‘thick’ membership views. A standard way of arguing for this is to point out the non-instrumental value of such mutual stances or attitudes.

I will discuss and classify different views depending on whether they are most reasonably read as supporting the conclusion that a person’s thin membership can be sufficient for having APO, or that (additionally) a form of thick membership is required. It is worth emphasizing once more that I am here carrying an analytical apparatus to the literature that some defenders of APO may not accept.7 However, for purposes of exposition and analysis I believe the present distinction is valuable (see also ‘Associative Political Obligations: Their Potential’).

2.3.1. Thin membership views

The first kind of argument holds that those who are members of a community in what we may call a thin sense can have APO. By thin membership I mean, roughly, membership of groups that can be ascribed to persons on the basis of non-will-dependent facts about them. For example, one might be considered a (thin) member of the Dutch nation by being born and raised in the Netherlands. And one might be considered a citizen of a particular state simply by that state identifying one as such. Thus thin membership theories may hold that all citizens of a polity have, because of their formal citizenship, APO.

Ronald Dworkin has probably provided the most influential defense of the thin understanding. On his view, APO are a consequence of the so-called interpretive properties of a community. Dworkin argued that membership in a community can generate obligations
when that community is a ‘true’ instead of a merely ‘bare’ community. A bare community can become a true community when it acquires certain interpretive properties. True communities, says Dworkin, are ones with shared norms the best interpretation of which expresses a complex kind of reciprocal equal concern for and on the part of their members (Law’s 198–201). If a community is a ‘true’ community, all who are formally members (crucially: all who are subjects to the law) have APO, irrespective of whether they share or endorse the relevant norms (Dworkin, Law’s 201; see also Perry 196–8).

Similarly, some argue that communities can become, what they label, ‘ethical communities.’ Communities become ethical in this sense when they are characterized by high levels of social trust, cooperation, mutual special concern, and so on. This view is often labeled nationalist since many of its defenders regard nations as especially capable of becoming ethical communities. When a community is an ethical community, it is argued, thin membership such as being a co-national can generate obligations (Miller 49–80; Moore; Hurka).

2.3.2. Thick membership views

Others suggest that associative obligations are premised upon more than thin membership alone. Such views typically invoke an account of membership that involves people’s wills or self-understandings, and stress their moral importance. Membership here involves not only being formally recognizable as such, but certain will-dependent features as well and associative obligations are premised upon this more complex understanding of membership. We can call these thick membership views since in this case it seems most plausible to say, with John Horton, that ‘[i]n understanding ourselves … “thick” ethical concepts to characterise that understanding’ (2nd 171, emphasis in original).

Two lines of argument can be grouped together here. The first draws on communitarian political theory, although it is defended by non-communitarian authors as well. This argument focuses on the central role that communities, social groups, and family play in shaping our personalities and characters. We cannot conceive of ourselves in isolation from the groups in which we grow up, live, work. Community, in other words, is partially constitutive of the self; it partially defines how we identify ourselves. Moreover, people see themselves as connected to others through their shared membership in groups. Members of groups, in other words, identify themselves as members in various ways. And these ways in which we regard ourselves as intertwined with our community, family, and other groups, are reflected in our obligations (Higgins 155; Horton 1st 48–9, 117–9; Tamir 99–102; Raz).

A second view is the rich and complex argument defended by Margaret Gilbert. For while Gilbert’s view is different in that she denies that APO can be straightforwardly understood as moral obligations, her theory is usefully grouped here because the source of obligation it identifies is closely analogous to what I have labeled thick membership. According to Gilbert, APO arise as a result of people undertaking what she calls joint commitments. Two or more people are jointly committed to do X if it is common knowledge between them that they have expressed a willingness to do X with the other(s). When people take up such commitments, they come to make up a ‘plural subject’ (a ‘we’), making them members of that group. Such commitments, Gilbert argues, provide people with obligations to one another to perform certain acts (147–64). If the group in question is a political community, its members can have APO (165–81). Gilbert’s theory invokes a thick view because obligations of membership are premised upon a person’s partaking in a group’s joint commitments (53–4).
It is worth emphasizing here that thick views do not regard APO as voluntary. There is a difference between identifying oneself as a member, or taking up a joint commitment, and voluntarily accepting obligations or membership. The former may happen even though one explicitly tries to resist the latter. In such cases, thick membership views will consider one obligated.

2.4. A SUBSTANTIVE CLAIM: THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PRINCIPLE

The final element concerns the implications of the principle of community: to what is one obligated in virtue of APO? Two conclusions are most frequently defended. The first is one to which virtually all associativist authors probably subscribe: members of a political society are obligated to support their society and show special concern for its members, for example by redistributing wealth to the domestic poor instead of the global poor (Dworkin; Mason; Miller; Moore; Tamir).

The second is that members are obligated to obey the law. This is often taken to be a special case of the requirement to respect the norms and rules that exist within one’s group. Associative ties are said to render the norms of a community authoritative, and the laws of a political community ‘characteristically define the terms of association within a polity’ (Horton 1st 165; see also Dworkin; Gilbert; Mason; Perry; Raz; Smith).

A third conclusion is defended less frequently. Some, following Dworkin, argue that the APO of members of a political community are the key to state legitimacy. Since obligations are often thought to license the use of force, the fact that a state’s subjects are obligated to obey could show that a state could rightfully issue and enforce law, thereby rendering it legitimate (Dworkin, Law’s 190–206; Perry 188; Tamir 139).

3. Some Critiques and Rejoinders

All four of the main claims made by the associativist identified above have come into (sometimes severe) criticism. This section summarizes some of the main critiques aimed at three of the four elements distinguished above: the role of intuition, the principle of community, and its implications. I leave aside criticisms of specific defenses of the principle of community as discussion of these would have to be far too detailed for present purposes (for references, see note 1). I will also mention some rejoinders offered by associativist authors.

Throughout, the reader should keep in mind that many of these critiques are meant to apply to multiple versions of the associative argument. For the sake of clarity I have grouped objections under what I take to be the most pertinent heading – including at times points initially provided as objections to a particular theory, but that apply more generally.

3.1. THE ROLE OF INTUITION

The first line of criticism addresses the role of intuitions in associativist theories. Two points are frequently put forward. The first challenges whether we can move as easily from intuitions to conclusions as associativist thinking suggest. Surely there is an important distinction between believing we have obligations and actually having them. And surely political philosophy should be able to have revisionary implications, showing us that our intuitions are mistaken. Associativist theory might not allow enough room for political philosophy to do its work (Simmons, ‘Associative’ 256–7).
The second questions the reliability of intuitions about political obligation in particular. For even if people believe that they have an obligation to obey the law, it is said, these beliefs may well be the result of manipulation by self-interested authorities, a piece of ‘false consciousness’ (Simmons, ‘Associative’ 264; Wellman, ‘Associative’ 198).

In response, some associativists argue that the first charge simply misses the point of the theory. At least on thick membership accounts, the associative argument simply is that certain feelings (more precisely: certain complex attitudinal features of persons) can give rise to obligations (Higgins 155; Raz 173). Of course more would need to be said for this to be plausible, but the charge that the associative proposal conflates felt obligation for genuine obligation may be more a blunt denial of the theory than an argument against it. Others have stressed that theirs is a project of interpreting shared political experience or phenomenology, and that such a project cannot but take intuitions as its point of departure (Horton 1st 172–5).

Against the second objection, associativists argue that claims about false consciousness are implausible. To show intuitions about political obligation to be unreliable, it is not enough to point out that we are sometimes mistaken in our beliefs. Instead, for the sceptical attitude of critics to be warranted, it should be the case that there is structural indoctrination or confusion across societies across time. But this seems an exaggeration (Horton 2nd 153, 157–8).

3.2. THE PRINCIPLE OF COMMUNITY

The associativist claim to have uncovered a fundamental moral truth or principle is the most heavily disputed. Virtually all critics of associativism deny the principle of community. I will mention three objections.

The first line of critique denies the principle by pointing out that it leads to seriously counter-intuitive results. For example, there are and have been many communities that are unjust or even positively evil. Surely it is a mistake to say that (membership of) such a group is valuable for its own sake. And surely it is a mistake to say that the oppressed subjects of tyrannical regimes have political obligations. Yet if only just societies are valuable, is it not more plausible to think that the moral importance of justice, not community, is doing all the work? (Dagger; Simmons, ‘Associative’; Utz 303)

A second objection holds that the principle of community lacks certain necessary features shared by all moral principles: their universal form. Moral principles do not single out groups of people, but are neutral between them. Thus, whites and blacks, men and women, and yes, compatriots and foreigners all have equal moral status (Simmons, ‘Associative’ 266–71; Vernon). By contrast, associative arguments about partiality, and the feelings of connectedness and special allegiance on which they rest, are mere illusions of tribal or national allegiance (Wellman, ‘Associative’ 184–6).

Third, it is objected that while associativists provide numerous assertions and illustrations of their view, they do not offer any argument in favor of the principle of community. This critique looks at the defenses mentioned above (Section 2.3) and points out that in all cases the term ‘obligation’ appears in the conclusion but in none of the premises. The associative argument invariably seems to move from observations about (membership in) communities to an assertion about obligations without providing an argument for that step. Therefore the associative argument is mysterious. As a result A. John Simmons, probably the most incisive critic of APO, argues that the only way we can understand obligations of membership is to tie the fact of membership to some independently plausible ‘external’ moral principle, which would then carry the justificatory
burden (Simmons, ‘Associative’; Simmons, ‘External’; Simmons, Moral 16–24; see also Wellman, ‘Associative’).

Responses to the first objection have varied. Yael Tamir (101) and Margaret Gilbert (289) simply accept that in unjust communities membership can generate APO. And the conceptual argument surely is committed to this implication as well (but see note 13). Virtually all others accept that associative obligations cannot arise out of membership of a morally corrupt group, but deny that this strikes against their view. Other moral principles are similarly hedged without thereby losing their force: no one thinks that the observation that a promise, say, to kill a person fails to bind undercuts the moral force of promising (Horton 2nd 160–1; Mason 42–5).

We can identify here a second dividing line among associative theories (in addition to the thin/thick distinction): some employ a moralized conception of community, requiring that its norms display mutual equal concern, respect, trust, and so on; others hold that associative obligations can obtain in communities regardless of their moral quality. I attempt to classify different authors along these two dimensions below.

The second objection goes to the heart of associative theory. However, its defenders argue, it crucially begs the question. To argue that morality must be neutral between compatriots and foreigners is to simply assume that morality could not contain associative principles (if it did, we would no longer accept that morality is neutral between them). Moreover, David Miller (ch. 3) has argued that even if we accept that moral principles must be universal in form, this does not settle the case against ties of community. The important question is the following: over what feature should a theory universalize? All moral theories hold that people who are morally relevantly similar should be treated similarly. And while it might be true that all humans are similar in all relevant respects, this is just what the associative proposal denies. It holds that other features about persons – such as their nationality – are relevant as well. And if they are, associative theory commits no violation of universality (see also Horton, ‘Defending’).

Finally, the objection that the term ‘obligation’ appears in the conclusion of the associativist argument but in none of the premises is considered equally unimpressive. Again this just denies the claim that membership is what justifies obligation. Indeed, any theory making a claim about a fundamental justificatory principle must at some stage take this form. We cannot, so to speak, justify ‘all the way down’. Compare the principle that promises can generate obligations. Why do promises obligate? At some point, the story can go no further than that, quite simply, they do (Perry 195, 202).

3.3. THE IMPLICATIONS OF MEMBERSHIP

Finally critics have argued that the conclusions that associativists claim their arguments establish do not follow even if they are right about the principle of community. I will mention two objections to this effect.

The first takes aim at the conclusion that APO show that members have an obligation to obey the law. Here it is pointed out that a requirement to show special concern for fellow members of one’s group or to go along with its norms is open to many different interpretations. And it is not up to government officials to determine how subjects fulfill their moral obligations. Disobeying the law, in other words, need not express disrespect to the community (Simmons, ‘Associative’ 271; Green, ‘Associative’ 273).

Second, Christopher Wellman has argued that the moral upshot of associative ties is not to be understood in terms of obligations at all, but of virtues and vices. That is, the
demands of membership have more to do with how we evaluate people’s characters than their outward actions. This is illustrated by the fact that when people fail to show proper concern for their community we do not disapprove so much of their actions (in the sense that they may be punished for these), but disapprove of them as persons (Wellman, ‘Associative’; Wellman, ‘Friends’).

Many proponents of the theory accept that APO cannot be equated to a duty to obey the law. For example, Gilbert and Horton argue that APO may sometimes require that one disregard legal rules – although both clearly think that political obligation will almost always require obedience to the law (Horton 1st 162–7; Gilbert 12–5, 279–86; cf. Higgins 173–8; Parekh). I am not aware of any associativist author responding to Wellman’s objection, but it is possible to construct a response here by appealing to the wider literature on associativism. It is often said that associative ties can conflict with our other moral obligations and that, at times, they can win the day (Lazar). Given that obligations are typically taken to be binding in a way that virtuous acts are not, it would seem that the only way to make sense of this is to understand the associative proposal in terms of obligations as well.

In the companion piece to this article I ask whether theories of APO can support the third proposed conclusion, that APO can show states to be legitimate. I will end this article by grouping some of the more prominent associativist authors along the two broad dividing lines identified above: (i) whether a community must have certain morally relevant features for obligations of membership to arise, and (ii) whether a thin or thick sense of membership is a (further) condition for APO.

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<td>All communities</td>
<td>Pitkin, MacDonald, (McPherson?)(^{13})</td>
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<td>Only ‘moral’ communities</td>
<td>Dworkin, Utz, Perry, Miller, Moore, Hurka, (McPherson?)</td>
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Short Biography

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Notes

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1 The classical treatment of the problem of political obligation, and defense of philosophical anarchism, remains Simmons (Moral).
2 Virtually all theories of political obligation see these obligations as capable of being outweighed by other moral duties or considerations.
3 The argument that state legitimacy and political obligation are connected is defended both by anarchists (such as Simmons) and defenders of associative obligations (such as Dworkin).
4 For an influential treatment, see Scheffler (Boundaries).
5 This is the so-called particularity requirement, first formulated by Simmons (Moral, Chapters II and IV).
6 The term, I believe, was coined by Pateman.
7 Many draw on both types of argument. See e.g., Mason (ch. 2), Dworkin (Law’s), Horton (2nd 143–6), Gilbert (279–86), and Miller (42).
8 Note that holding that communities are non-instrumentally valuable because of, say, the high levels of social trust they foster, implies a revisionary account of value according to which something can have non-instrumental value conditional upon its instrumental value. For a defense see Anderson.
9 Some communitarians may resist classification as a thick view. They might hold that community is constitutive of identity even in the absence of identification – making this a thin membership argument. However, there are serious problems with trying to derive morally significant conclusions from such a view (Mason 24–5, ‘Associative Political Obligations: Their Potential’). Moreover, to emphasize, thick views do not hold that membership can be wholly chosen: thin membership may be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition.
10 For this reason, Gilbert’s view is widely regarded as associativist, despite the fact that she labels her theory a version of contract theory.
11 *Thick views*: The most forceful critique of the conceptual argument is that it answers a question of justification by pointing to the mere meaning of terms (Pateman 223–4; Simmons, ‘Associative’ 253–5). Objections to Dworkin’s proposal are (i) a community’s virtues cannot generate obligations (Green, ‘Associative’ 275) and (ii) the best interpretation of a community’s norms must depend on people’s attitudes, rendering the theory ‘thick’ (Wellman, ‘Associative’; Simmons, ‘Associative’). Apart from a brief response to Green, Dworkin has not revisited the topic (‘Replies’ 376–80). Others who have defended his view are Perry and Utz. *Thick views*: A common objection holds that thick membership presupposes a close familiarity absent in political society (Simmons, ‘Associative’; Wellman, ‘Associative’; Crittenden 134; Green, ‘Associative’; Jeske). This is denied by Mason (38–41) and Horton (2nd). Objections to Gilbert’s view hold that (i) obligations cannot arise from merely going along with (coercive) political practices, (ii) APO must be moral obligations (Higgins 173–8; Horton 2nd 144–5, 155–6), and (iii) Gilbert confuses reasonable expectations for obligations (Simmons, ‘Associative’). Gilbert (ch. 11) extensively responds to Simmons’ criticisms. In response to the latter objection Horton points to English law which, sometimes, treats such expectations as binding (2nd 154–5).
12 These rejoinders do not make for a defense of the associativist emphasis on intuitions. As Leslie Green has argued, this would require a more extensive argument, addressing the relation between intuition and argument in political philosophy – a relation that may be more complex than associativists allow for (Green, ‘Who Believes’).
13 It is unclear how to classify McPherson. He claims that his argument applies only to liberal democracies, but also that political obligation is categorically different from moral obligation. For criticism of this latter point, one shared by Gilbert, see Higgins (173–8) and Horton (2nd 144–5, 155–6).

Works Cited


