

*Justifying Republican Political Obligations*

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I will claim in this paper that the notion of political obligation makes a good tool in understanding republican arguments better, and will try to outline what the justification of republican political obligations would be and what these obligations would specifically entail. Republican political obligation in general refers in my interpretation to active participation of citizens in public life, above and beyond mere obedience to laws, as the notion is customarily understood. The argument for republican political obligations could run as follows. A cooperative, lawful community is instrumentally good because it protects individual lives against harm and it enables individuals to follow their aims more fully by ensuring a safe and orderly system of political cooperation. A democratic political community is the best form of political body in ensuring individual rights and encouraging the development of individual qualities. Individuals recognize that being part of a system of cooperation is necessary for their protection, development and the fullest realization of their capacity for reason, of their interests and objectives. For purposes of convenience, a representative form of democracy is the most practical form of government in large contemporary political societies, but checking on those who act as official representatives is a necessary protection against corruption. Given that there is a constant danger of corruptibility of the officials that are in charge of representing the interests of the body politic, citizens are responsible to hold their representatives to account in a more substantive way than regular but infrequent elections can allow. What generates obligations in this case is the intrinsic and instrumental value of the democratic community of which individuals are members of. That would be the very general outline of the argument. It is, however, crucial to clarify why the democratic community has intrinsic value for individuals and why it requires more than obedience to laws. Active contestation and deliberation could be required if we assume that the democratic system is not only a necessary safeguard of individual freedom but also a fragile enterprise that needs to be constantly defended and reenacted. If this were shown to be the case, then maybe we could justify the specific obligation of taking part in public debates when issues of particular importance to the individual are being raised; the obligation of deliberating from public reason and the obligation of contributing to the others' minimum welfare, so that they too can afford to enact the previous two obligations and ensure the endurance of the democratic polity.