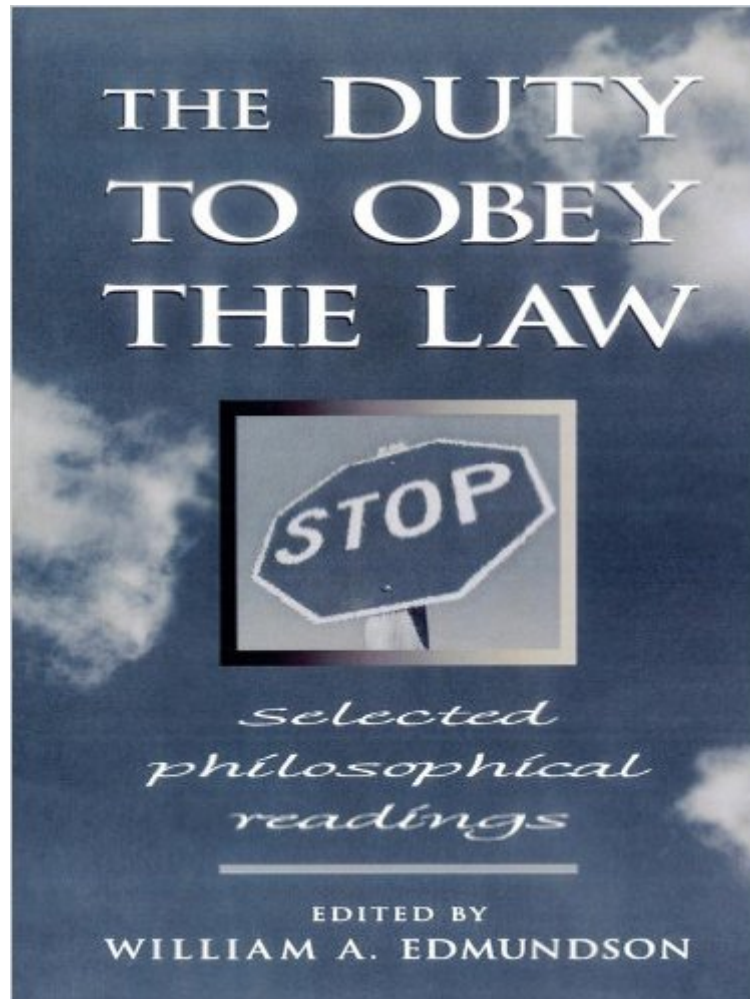


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The Duty To Obey The Law: Selected Philosophical Readings



Synopsis

The question, 'Why should I obey the law?' introduces a contemporary puzzle that is as old as philosophy itself. The puzzle is especially troublesome if we think of cases in which breaking the law is not otherwise wrongful, and in which the chances of getting caught are negligible. Philosophers from Socrates to H.L.A. Hart have struggled to give reasoned support to the idea that we do have a general moral duty to obey the law but, more recently, the greater number of learned voices has expressed doubt that there is any such duty, at least as traditionally conceived. The thought that there is no such duty poses a challenge to our ordinary understanding of political authority and its legitimacy. In what sense can political officials have a right to rule us if there is no duty to obey the laws they lay down? Some thinkers, concluding that a general duty to obey the law cannot be defended, have gone so far as to embrace philosophical anarchism, the view that the state is necessarily illegitimate. Others argue that the duty to obey the law can be grounded on the idea of consent, or on fairness, or on other ideas, such as community.

Book Information

File Size: 1131 KB

Print Length: 364 pages

Publisher: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers (December 23, 1998)

Publication Date: July 30, 2013

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00E9Z1542

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #900,990 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #666

inÂ Books > Law > Philosophy #1114 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Political #1434 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Ethics & Morality

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This is a good grounding in legal theory in relation to the reasons as to why people obey the law. An

excellent reader for those who are interested in the competing reasons for civil obedience.

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