

BOOK REVIEW

Political Obligation in Ancient Greece and in the Modern World. By MOGENS HERMAN HANSEN. Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 2015. Pp. 80. Hardcover, 100 kr. ISBN 978-87-7304-391-2.

Hansen addresses the philosophical problem of political obligation to one's state, whether one grants implicit or tacit consent to the laws (demonstrated by continued residence, with or without political participation) or explicit agreement (civic oaths). The comparative study examines historical records and philosophical considerations in ancient Greek city-states and modern democratic ones. Hansen pointedly notes that no modern state requires all citizens to take a loyalty oath, but many ancient Greek *poleis* did require sworn statements (24)—Athenian males at eighteen years starting from an uncertain date.

The case of Socrates of the deme Alopece, the philosopher Plato portrays in *Crito*, presents insoluble problems, since “Socrates”—the Platonic persona needs quotation marks—discussions of obligations never cites the (subsequently) well-known, and certainly relevant, “ancestral” and annually administered Ephebic “loyalty oath” or any other, related civic oath. Hansen surveys other oaths known to have been administered in Socrates’ lifetime such as (26): the 411/10 BCE oath to oppose anti-democratic initiatives (Demophantus’ decree) and the oaths of amnesty and reconciliation (not to bear grudges) taken in 403 and renewed in 401. Plato’s “Socrates” describes democracy as a constitution in which citizens disobey laws and verdicts without consequences (*Resp.* 557e, 563d, quoted on page 31). “Socrates” modestly minimizes but recalls his hoplite participation in the battles at Potidaea, Amphipolis, and Delion (28e) and his bouleutic *prytanis* moment at the Arginusae generals’ notorious trial (*Apol.* 32b5, *Xen. Hell.* 1.7; *Mem.* 1.1.18 asserts as *epistates*). “Socrates” conforms to the patriotic but politically inactive image promoted by many litigants in Athens’ courts (e.g. Lateiner *RSA* 11 [1981] 147–160; *CW* 76 [1982] 1–12). This apragmatic hoplitic *persona* contradicts “Pericles” laudation of citizen-soldiers who died preserving and expanding Athenian imperialism perceptions derived from Thucydides’ negative dictum (2.40.2) about “idiots’ quietism.”

Hansen proffers five reasons generally advanced for justifying obedience to the laws: debt of gratitude for benefits, membership in the community, “fair play” payback for benefits, implied consent to laws by non-emigration, and, last, collapse of the state, if everyone so behaved (18–24). Hansen starts with the modern philosophical debate (9–15), advances to the curious case of “Socrates” (16–18; 24–6; and 29–31), and then surveys ancient Hellenic city-state oaths (32–69) encouraging *homonoia* (“think alike” concord) and requiring adherence to current constitutions. “Socrates” touches every base. Hansen might have better started from his recognized expertise in comparative polis institutions before parsing the problematic *Crito*, a seemingly simple work by the crafty disciple and dramatic apologist for the citizen-martyr.

Hansen presents Plato’s version of social contract theory in the *Republic*, then Locke’s presentation and Hume’s critique, and versions of Blackstone, Rousseau, and Kant. Once that position has been set aside as an obsolete fiction, contemporary philosophers split into those who see duty for citizens as well as obligation and those who see neither. Both camps, however, begin with the pre-dawn Socratic dialogue *Crito*, evaluating arguments in “Socrates”’ fantasy conversation with personified female Laws. The Athenian Law-Ladies point out to their subject that he has agreed to abide by them (51e). The *Nomoi* refer to his and their *homologia* and *syntheke*, agreement and contract “in deed [for seventy years] if not word” (52d, 54c).

This *ergon-logos* cliché becomes oddly crucial to Hansen’s weak argument that the historical Socrates never took the ephebes’ oath of loyal service in 452/1—or any other oath (25), later. Hansen inadequately accounts for why “Socrates” would *not* have sworn and acknowledged this (later) universally administered (*Lyc.* 1.76), Athenian oath of civic and military service. Athenian cadets had to apply for “club membership,” citizenship, at the deme-level *dokimasia* and be accepted—or enslaved (R. Kraut, *Socrates and the State*, 1984: 154–55). Hansen must believe either that this omission reflects a later requirement for ephebes, that Plato intentionally distorted facts, or that it constitutes Plato’s (unlikely) oversight. It seems impossible that young Socrates avoided the oath on principle and was overlooked by the deme authorities—when he reached eighteen—and again at ages fifty-one and sixty-five. However, why does the Platonic monologue in two voices (“Socrates” and the Laws’) repeatedly echo and allude to Athenian language of their Ephebic oath (M. Finkelberg, *SCI* 27 [2008] 9–15; cf. P. Siewert *JHS* 97 [1977] 101–111)? Hansen believes that Socrates’ peculiar (accidental?; 68) unsworn circumstance led to this dialogue providing the only

Hellenic source for philosophical consideration of political obligation (31). We never, however, know what the historical Socrates ever swore to, in or out of court.

Oath-demands intended to warrant loyalty or reconciliations. Hansen eventually asks the crucial question, how often were such oaths observed (65). The 279 known *staseis* in 122 *poleis* suggest that the fanatical nationalisms of the present ceded to other loyalties (the family, the deme, or economic group). Oaths within *poleis* and outside provided a weak cement of dubious worth where severe differences separated parties. This situation describes Hansen's probably accurate "gloomier picture" (69).

Hansen segues to emigration, more feasible and realistic in the small Aegean polis-world than in ours, as the example of Plato in Megara, if historical, shows (Diog. Laert. 2.106, 3.6). Hansen does not explore parochial loyalties, but "Socrates" explicitly stated a desire to live and die nowhere but in Athens. Some reconciliation oaths (e.g., Keian, 46) explicitly invite those dissatisfied with the settlement document to take their property and move elsewhere. Ancient *stasis*, civil division, often led to assassination and judicial murder, however. Hansen quotes several loyalty oaths *in toto*, e.g., the lengthy one from the polis Chersonesos in the Crimea (ca. 275 BCE; page 41). It calls for abjuration, sworn recantation of any previous oath that contradicts *this* oath—a convenient let-out clause for god-fearing, conspiratorial oath-takers.

What limits are there to an individual's ancient or modern political obligation? John Locke identified several, and the Greeks recognized a right to rebellion under limited circumstances (54). Whatever the monarchically inclined philosophers recognized as possible regimes, the historians, orators, and inscriptions generally disregard autocracy and aristocracy as bygone options. They recognize tyranny and oligarchy as contemporary deformations of rule, but consider the only popularly legitimate form of government to be democracy (54–57; Aesch. 1.4, 3.6; cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1286b 20–22). Hansen realizes that the decrees that he has considered pertain to nominal democracies. "The numerous *poleis* governed by a tyrant or an oligarchical elite" leave us in deplorable ignorance about their hopes and expectations of loyalty. The *homonoia* that was an alleged goal of the oligarchic Athenian Four Hundred's last meeting (Thuc. 8.93.3) became personified as a distant goddess with rituals before the next century ended (62).

The handsome pamphlet is divided into sixteen brief chapters with an extensive bibliography, including eleven publications of Hansen himself. One Attic

stele excavated in 1932 records both the Epehebic Oath and the Oath of Plataea. Its image graces the dust jacket (texts in Rhodes and Osborne, *GHI 404-323 BC*, #88). The text stimulates readers to reconsider the nature of obligations owed in ancient democracies.

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