

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

The Sexual Contract

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible position on an issue, rather than another.

Reading

Pateman, C. (1988). [Chapter 1]. In *The sexual contract* (pp. 1–18). Stanford University Press.

Questions

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. According to Carole Pateman, what two interpretations are commonly given about social contract theory, presenting it as “a story about freedom” (1988, p. 2)?
2. If “the social contract is story of freedom” (Pateman, 1988, p. 2), then what is the sexual contract a story about? What exactly does Pateman mean by the sexual contract? How is it sexual in two different senses?
3. What two reasons does Pateman give (on pages 3 and 4) to explain why the sexual contract often goes unnoticed and/or undiscussed? How does she further explain (on pages 9 through 13) the problems that occur from these two misleading blind spots?
4. According to Pateman, what sort of “singular problems arise about contracts to which women are a party” (1988, p. 5)? What sorts of problems about contracts *in general* (even for those only between men) is this supposed to reveal? How does Pateman justify (on pages 13 through 15) that a more egalitarian understanding of self-ownership is unlike to truly help feminists (and socialists)?
5. Going back to the first question above, and in light of your answers to the other questions, why does Pateman believe that the two common interpretations of social contract theory are seriously mistaken?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.