

## **Honor Your Obligations**

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The bonds of society consist of a series of obligations and reciprocal relationships that hold our social order together. Whether it be in regards to family, community, nation, or country, social decay occurs when those bonds are no longer respected or attended to, or when the members of those assemblies decide they are no longer obligated to follow the laws or principles laid down by previous generations.

Sadly, something like a social obligation seems anathema to my generation. The idea that a citizen of a country, whether he or she is a private person or a public official, has an obligation to protect the life, liberty, and property of the whole seems absurd and archaic. We should only wish to get rich at the expense of our neighbors, we are told, and abandon outdated ideas like family ties, personal sacrifice, or respect for the rule of law.

But imagine a situation in which you leave your car at a repair shop and hand the mechanic a check, only to have the mechanic take your money, smile at you and say, "thanks for the check, but forget about the car. I just don't feel like fixing it." I have no doubt that you would feel the grossest injustice had been done to you, but in our society everyone wants to be that mechanic. We take everything and give nothing. To fulfill our obligations seems like too much of a burden.

When the social bonds are in such an advanced state of decay, and everyone wants to be that lazy mechanic, our neighbors and our elected officials turn their backs on one another. From a father who abandons his pregnant girlfriend, to a police officer who refuses to explain parking ordinances, to a phone company that abuses prison labor, to a prosecutor who uses anti-terror legislation against protestors, mistreating each other is easier than living up to our responsibilities.

We pay taxes, so we expect the fire department to respond to fires. We grant our government a monopoly on the use of force, and we expect that force will not be abused. Our elected representatives pass laws, and they expect that we will follow those laws.

A city official that would use eminent domain to expand a strip mall at the expense of the property of her neighbors has already decided that her own financial interests matter more than fulfilling her obligation to protect the property of her neighbors. Likewise, a man who steals from another has decided that his personal wealth is more important than upholding his obligation to honor his neighbor's property, as well as the law.

Breakdowns in the aforementioned social obligations, as well as countless other possible examples both small and large, lead to mistrust and hostility not only with each other, but with the arms of government as well. A society cannot function properly in an atmosphere where these kinds of obligations have become an unwelcome burden, or where personal enrichment takes precedence over the sacred responsibility to protect each other's fundamental rights to life, liberty, and property.