



Against the State: An Introduction to Anarchist Political Theory

Crispin Sartwell

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Irreverent and incisive critique of liberal theories of the state.

In *Against the State*, Crispin Sartwell unleashes a quick and brutal rejection of the traditional arguments for state legitimacy. Sartwell considers the classics of Western political philosophy—Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, Hume, Bentham, Rawls, and Habermas, among others—and argues that their positions are not only wrong but also embarrassingly bad. He separates the traditional pro-state arguments into three classes: social contract theories, utilitarian justifications, and justicial views, all while attacking both general strategies and particular formulations. Sartwell argues that the state rests on nothing but deadly force and its accompanying coercion, and that no one is under any obligation to obey the law merely because it is the law. He concludes by articulating a positive vision of an anarchist future, based on the “individualism” of such figures as Emerson and Thoreau. *Against the State* provides a rigorous and provocative foil to the classic texts, and also serves as a concise statement of the anarchist challenge.

“Sartwell’s work stands in the Thoreauvian tradition he admires—simultaneously lyrical and plainspoken, intensely personal yet theoretically compelling. Transcending the hackneyed opposition between individualist and communitarian approaches to politics, Sartwell’s spirited, engaging, and insightful critique of the state reminds us of the essentially barbarous nature of that institution, forcefully engages the classic arguments on its behalf, and makes a vigorous and inspiring case for a humane anarchist alternative.” — Roderick T. Long, Auburn University

“Sartwell is unabashed and unrelenting in pointing out the unquestioned absurdities at the foundation of the state’s legitimacy. His refusal to accept any assumption on faith or to turn away from logical conclusions is the book’s greatest strength.” — Dana Ward, coauthor of *Political Reasoning and Cognition: A Piagetian View*

Crispin Sartwell is Associate Professor of Political Science at Dickinson College and the author of several books, including *Obscenity, Anarchy, Reality and Extreme Virtue: Truth and Leadership in Five Great American Lives*, both also published by SUNY Press.

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