

Introduction to Legal Studies

Spring 2007

Reading Questions for Tuesday, February 20th

Tom Tyler's *Why People Obey the Law* is one of the major studies in seeking to understand legal obedience. His desire to weigh in on debates about prison and policing in the early 1980s provided the impetus for this study. When many politicians were suggesting that in order to deter crime we should have more police on the streets (such as Milgram's study might suggest) or longer prison sentences, Tyler wanted to explore whether it was in fact a fear of getting caught/punished that made people obey.

1. Tom Tyler's article lays out the only social scientific study of why people obey the law. What does he find? What are the factors that determine people's obedience?
2. How does Tyler come to these conclusions? What is his method? What problems might you suggest his method has?
3. Where do you believe his findings are vulnerable to criticism? Do you think that his explanation is valid in all circumstances?
4. Think of an example of a situation where Tyler's explanation might *not* explain why people obey the law. Does it accurately describe why you obey (or disobey) the law in such a situation?
5. According to Tom Tyler, would putting more cops on the streets and increasing prison sentences have a significant impact on the crime rates?
6. What author that we've read so far do you think would agree with Tyler's conclusion? Why?