Week 4: Social Contract Theory
January 31, 2022
Context: Removal of Saddam Hussain’s government in Iraq in 2003

Question: Was the response of the Iraqi people typical given a lack of governmental authority and control?
Social Contract Theory

Thomas Hobbes

Social Contract Theory

Lived during the English civil war era and saw the consequences of social anarchy
Before society we were in the State of Nature.

An individual dictated what he/she could/could not do.

Survival of the Fittest
Life in a State of Nature – Hobbes called this a “state of WAR”
Why the state of nature is bad

No industry
No agriculture
No seafaring
No society
No pleasure
Continual Fear
Why does this occur?
Enter into a covenant with other people.

This is the basis of and reason for acting morally.

Explains the foundations of contracts: you both agree to give up some liberties.

In a state of nature, “upon any reasonable suspicion” the contract is void. (*Leviathan*, 1.14.18)
The Social Contract

It is the set of rules that rational people will agree to obey, for their mutual benefit, provided that other people will obey them as well.
“... parties do not know their conception of the good or their special psychological propensities...”

- The terms of the social contact are chosen behind a veil of ignorance.
Jean-Jacques Rousseau

• Believed that humans are born inherently good. He coined the term “Nobel Savage”.

• However, once the idea of private property was introduced mankind experienced a “fall from grace”.

• Individuals with many possessions saw that it would be in their best interest to create a government to protect their possessions.
John Locke

- British philosopher
- One of the first great defenses of modern empiricism and concerns itself with determining the limits of human understanding in respect to a wide spectrum of topics
Which laws/moral rules are legitimate to be considered under a social contract?
When is it permissible to break the rules/laws?
Why does social contract theory work? – Example of Bill selling customer information
Two Objections to Hobbes SCT

- One: The social contract is a fiction both historically and currently
- Two: The problem of duties to being that can't be part of the contract and can't reciprocate
Rawl’s Principles of Justice
Criticisms of Rawls’ Principles of Justice
Social Contract Theory

• The Case For
• The Case Against
Today’s takes on the SCT