

# CS 3001-C: Computing, Society, and Professionalism

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Week 4: Social Contract Theory  
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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?

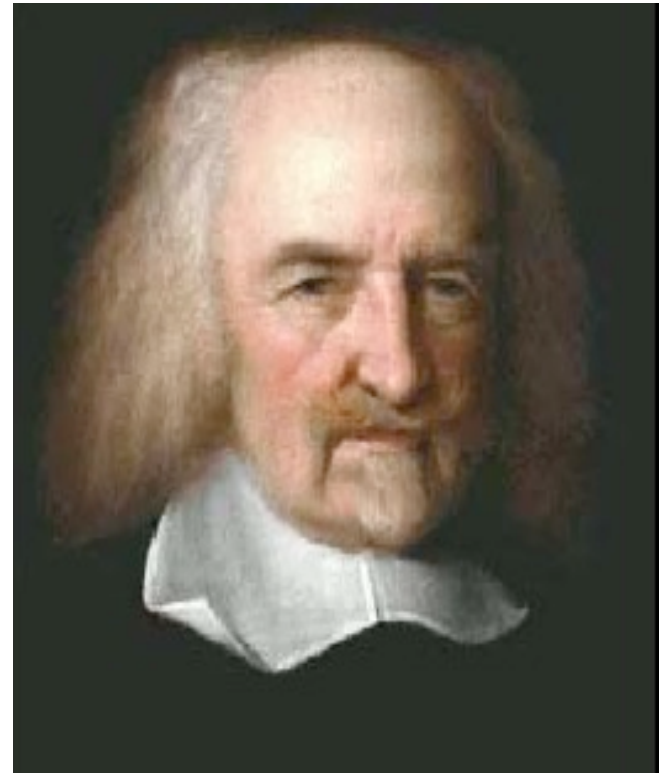


# Social Contract Theory

## Thomas Hobbes

Social Contract Theory

Lived during the English civil war era and saw the consequences of social anarchy




# History

- 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 society

No agriculture

No pleasure

No seafaring

Continual Fear



Why does this occur?



# Contract Law and Morality

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.

# Position of SCT


- “ . . . 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 “Noble 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