

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?

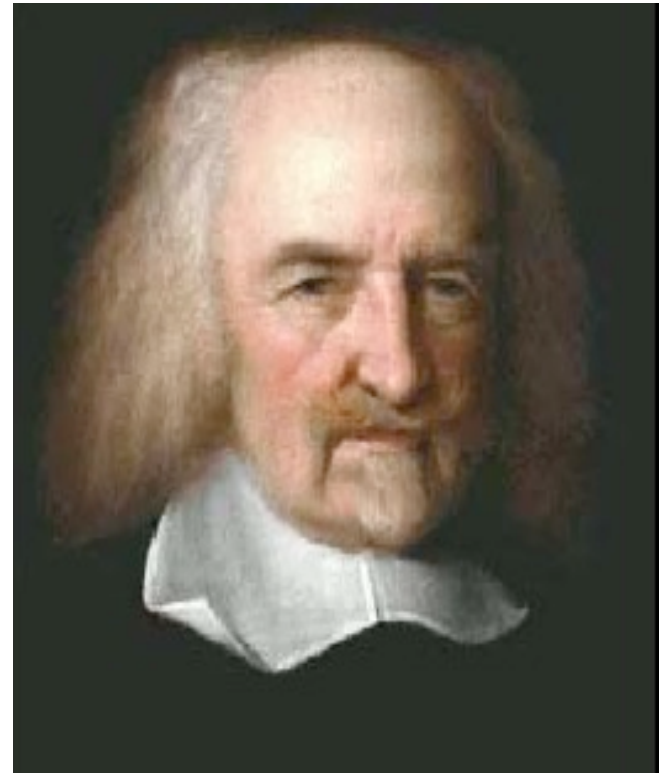


Social Contract Theory

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