Week 4: Social Contract Theory
January 30, 2023
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?
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)*
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