

# Evil amongst social contract theory



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Throughout and currently within our world history, many have suffered through traumatic events, such as experiencing the horrors of war or battling a mental or physical illness, these events shape our mentality of the world and how to pursue a peaceful and happy life. Many of those seeking comfort and answers look towards a religious path, their paradigms of how to achieve peace and tranquility somehow fulfill their need of enlightenment throughout their darkest hour. Although Thomas Hobbes is not a founder of a religious order, his philosophical thoughts establish a reform of how to create harmony amongst society with Contractarianism, otherwise known as Social Contract Theory. Hobbes' Social Contract Theory first depicts natural equality, in which, it states that "all cannot retain rights to all things" and it is essentially the survival of the fittest amongst society.[1] To rectify the potential chaos amongst humanity, Hobbes proposes that human beings should give up some rights in exchange for security and protection from the State.[2] This philosophy has been adopted by many countries such as the United States of America where they incorporated the concept within Thomas Jefferson's "Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom".[3] However, with the belief that the relinquishment of someone's right for the protection and security of the State, it could be questionable as history has shown that even with the protection of State, an individual can be thrust into heinous situations or events. With the promise of protection and security and the failure to provide that to a society who was dependent on the State, could the concept of Social Contract Theory encourage and allow evil acts to occur? In this essay it will assemble the evidence that Contractarianism, also known as Social Contract Theory, plays a roll in providing a basis for evil to

occur throughout our history within the world, whether if it is through a religious or political perspective.

Initially the theoretical framework of Contractarianism requires individuals within society to relinquish their rights in return for the protection and security the Sovereign of the State can provide from the dangers that exist in the state of nature.[4]The fear and danger within the state of nature derive from the notion that individuals enter the world with social obligations and are equal amongst others.[5]With equality within society it creates a brutal and dangerous society as “ every man has a Right to every thing; even to one anothers body” where it implies that because everyone is equal to one another, it is gives individuals the right to steal and hurt other individuals as it is their natural right.[6]In the notion that anyone can implement a “ survival of the fittest” lifestyle in order to survive life because of natural rights, it brings along fear within society as Rousseau believes that individuals are weak and incapable of defending themselves and therefore need a social contract between the State as a means to gain protection and security against the threats within the state of nature.[7]Although there are some benefits within a social contract to gain security and protection from a sovereign of the State, social contract theory has its flaws as it does not explicitly state who the sovereign is protecting. Throughout world history, the problem of fairly treating women, ethnic minorities, and others has been on going to present day and resolutions such as applying Contractarianism has not made any progress. According to some critics of social contract theory, women, minorities, and other individuals/groups are placed in a category called the “ outliers” that enable individuals from gaining justice

and the benefits from subjecting themselves to a social contract between the State and its people.[8]Reasons to exclude these minority groups from the theoretical perspective of social contract theory is that it allows to distinguish those who contribute to society and to those who do not.[9]In spite of the social contract the State had made with society to protect and secure them from the dangers and evilness within the state of nature, discriminating individuals/groups based upon their gender, ethnic background, and disabilities they may face through life can be seen as evil in itself. The “ outliers” are a part of society; although their role may be small or unrecognized by society during the period of the time when social contract theory was developed, they had intentions of gaining protection and security from the State in exchange for relinquishing their natural rights. Instead, the State declares that their role amongst society doe not create a big impact and therefore the State’s protection is limited. By deceiving individuals into believing they are protected by the State through a social contract only to discover that it is a false claim, I believe that it is an evil act as the State is powerful and society looks to the sovereign to protect them but when the trust is broken through this deception, individuals are left to defend and protect themselves when it is the State’s responsibility to protect and secure their citizens.

Another perspective of how Contractarianism could be the basis of evil is seen through how the sovereign of the State can command and gain society’s trust into relinquishing their natural rights to the State in order to be protected from oncoming dangers that may exist outside of the State. In an approach that Wintrobe developed, he proposed that dictator sovereigns

often use repression and loyalty as means to achieve their objective, whereas other political sovereigns such as totalitarians and tinpots extract power by maximizing power from utility and remaining at the level of power at which secures them.[10]With establishing the importance of recognizing how sovereigns maintain their power amongst society, the introduction of Olson's "stationary bandits" can be worrisome as they are a type of sovereign that only has the interest of retaining and controlling power to benefit their self-interests.[11]Although there have been researchers such as Henning and Lu that determine that Olson's predatory state is most likely to not happen, there have been instances where the State has been acting on the best interest of the sovereign and not the population of the State. In looking at the government of the United States of America, President Donald Trump is retaining control to benefit his self-interests through his businesses that he had previously started before his campaign.[12]According to the New York Times, after the 2016 elections had ended, the government of Kuwait moved their event location to a Trump International Hotel; in trying to buy graces from the newly elected president, foreign governments are spending money at the President's establishments to bypass the Constitution that forbids government officials to accept gifts unless it is approved by Congress.[13]With the United States as one of the leading world powers, the President should be thinking in the best interest for the people as to oppose the self-interests through his business ventures mixing in with political affairs. By consenting to exchange their natural rights and the agreement of putting their faith into a sovereign for security of the State, it is an evil to have to consent to actions the sovereign as it may affect the lives of the people living under the sovereign's ruling as they are bounded by the social

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contract to obey and accept that it is in their best interest when it is not.

[14]Although there are heinous intents behind theoretical framework of social contract theory when dissecting through a simpler version, academic scholars developed a theoretical approach on preventing the framework to cause additional harm onto society.

With the issues of the social contract theory being seen as a basis of evil, some researchers have attempted to reform the theoretical frame as to resolve the problems that is connected to the theory itself. As mentioned previously, the theoretical framework discriminates against women, ethnicities, and other minority groups as they barely or do not contribute to the societal needs of the State.[15]To resolve the issue of discrimination against minority groups within a social contract theory framework, Silvers and Francis propose that the process of social contract theory should be emphasized within a trust culture instead of a bargaining culture.[16]The central argument to implement a trust culture within the framework of social contract theory is that it eliminates the term “ outlier” onto minority groups where they are seen as important and equal within the community with gain the benefits that were not available to them before; with the implement a bargaining culture that was based on mutual agreements between individuals that benefited their own needs.[17]Thus, eliminating immoral actions of contractarianism. However, with the formatting of using a trust culture within a social contract theory frame could be accomplished, it neglects the reality of life in the perspective of Hobbes. In Hobbes’ reality, humans are naturally driven through their needs and desires by performing benevolent acts to attain them, in other words, the brutality of the world is

caused by humans' need to attain their desires.[18]By ignoring the basis of Hobbes' philosophical thoughts that developed social contract theory, it cannot be fully be recognized as the theoretical frame of contractarianism. In an opinionated belief on how to reduce the malicious acts that appear alongside social contract theory, the aspect of having a lone sovereign assert their dominance over a community by public vote is slightly alarming as the community is driven to place a sovereign into power through what they are campaigning to achieve once they are placed in the State. The use of fear as a tactic to gain to community's approval to be their sovereign can be seen frequently such as the United States and within the Philippines. In Southeast Asia, the targeted areas when politically campaigning to become the States' leader is by appealing towards religious and ethnic divides and working and lower-middle classes as they are driven to have a leader that has a solution to improve their lives.[19]In 2016, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte campaigned that he would end the war on drugs within the country through violence and dismantling corrupted government officials who were in office. [20]Through utilizing society's fear of the war on drugs, Duterte was able to win the election within the Philippines and implement his violent plan of ridding drugs from the country which imposes more fear as he has already killed around twelve thousand people since his appointed into office. [21]Allowing sovereigns like Duterte to gain power and control over a society could be detrimental as it could be equally dangerous as if the social contract between the State and the population did not exist.

Hobbes' social contract theory, also known as Contractarianism, imposes that a social contract is needed for humans to survive the brutal world within

the state of nature.[22]By contracting a social contract between the people and a powerful sovereign, the community is able to survive under the protection and security of the sovereign and in return they renounce some of their natural rights in exchange.[23]However, in close analysis, I set out to argue that social contract theory enables evil to be carried out effortlessly. Throughout the paper, it is founded that social contract theory allows for sovereigns to easily discriminate and disregard women, racial minorities, and other groups that the State identifies as unable to contribute to societal needs.[24]Also, the sovereign can act on their own self-interest instead of the community's best interest, in which, they use tactics such as manipulation and playing on the fear of the people to create a basis for them to publicly determine that that one individual is to be their sovereign. [25]This can be evident in the analysis of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte through his ascension to power. In concluding the paper, social contract theory can be beneficial to society as provides a connection between the population and the State to create a harmonious society when all participants within the contract plays their role. However, when one of the participants acts selfishly enacts on their own accord to benefit themselves, namely the sovereign, the harmonious society is faced with the brutality of their actions and must live through it as the social contract is binding. As to answer the initial question that was stated in the beginning of this paper, “ Could the concept of Social Contract Theory encourage and allow evil acts to occur?”, I believe that the premise of which social contract theory is based upon is not evil, but a sovereign of the State may be an evil towards society dependent of whether the sovereign is enacting based on the interest of the people or enacting on their own self-interest.



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Endnotes

[1]Murphy, Andrew R. “ The Uneasy Relationship between Social Contract Theory and Religious Toleration.” The Journal of Politics, vol. 59, no. 2, 1997, pp. 368–392.

[2]Murphy, pp. 374.

[3]Murphy, pp. 369.

[4]Dicus, Andrew. ““ Some Man” and the Savage.” Prose Studies 37. 2 (2015): 97-111. Web.

[5]Dicus, pp. 98.

[6]Dicus, pp. 98.

[7]Dicus, pp. 98.

[8]Sillers, Anita, and Leslie Pickering Francis. “ Justice through Trust: Disability and the Outlier Problem in Social Contract Theory \*.” Ethics 116. 1 (2005): 40-76. Web.

[9]Sillers & Francis, pp. 42.

[10]Kirstein, Roland, and Voigt, Stefan. “ The Violent and the Weak: When Dictators Care about Social Contracts.” The American Journal of Economics and Sociology 65. 4 (2006): 863-889. Web.

[11]Kirstein & Voigt, pp. 865.

[12]Leonhardt, David, and Ian Prasad Philbrick. “ Trump’s Corruption: The Definitive List.” *The New York Times* , The New York Times, (2018), [www.nytimes.com/2018/10/28/opinion/trump-administration-corruption-conflicts.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/28/opinion/trump-administration-corruption-conflicts.html).

[13]Leonhardt and Philbrick, “ Trump’s Corruption: The Definitive List.”

[14]Kirstein & Voigt, pp. 865.

[15]Slivers and Francis, pp. 42

[16]Slivers and Francis, pp. 43

[17]Silvers and Francis, pp. 44

[18]Mcgraw, David K. “ A Social Contract Theory Critique of Professional Codes of Ethics.” *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society* 2. 4 (2004): 235-43. Web.

[19]Kurlantzick, Joshua. “ Southeast Asia’s Populism Is Different but Also Dangerous.” *Council on Foreign Relations* , Council on Foreign Relations, (2018) [www.cfr.org/article/southeast-asias-populism-different-also-dangerous](http://www.cfr.org/article/southeast-asias-populism-different-also-dangerous).

[20]Kurlantzick, “ Southeast Asia’s Populism Is Different but Also Dangerous.”

[21]Kurlantzick, “ Southeast Asia’s Populism Is Different but Also Dangerous.”

[22]Mcgraw, pp. 236

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[23]Mcgraw, pp. 236

[24]Silvers and Francis, pp. 41-42

[25]Kirstein & Voigt, pp. 865.