

# A glimpse of social contract theory



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The Social Contract Theory was based on the ethical idea of the Franco-Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau who lived during the English war and had first-hand experience of the brutal fatalities of the war. During the war, everyone had to do the best that they can to protect their own properties and defend themselves against the brutalities created by other individuals. According to Rousseau, in this state, everyone lived in fear.

He called this condition the state of nature. Rousseau continued by saying that individual men have no authority by nature to all other men. Therefore, this authority must be governed by an agreement or a covenant. For the benefit of all in a society, the key is to give up individual rights for the good and the safety of the entire society. They should “ find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before. An individual will be forced to obey to this collective moral association once he realizes the benefits of it to his/her society.

Therefore, ethics or morality is not dependent on the individual but to the people who collectively accepted to act a certain way in order to keep each of their rights. Rousseau also argues that an individual, once forced to protect his/her property or himself/herself, is forced to change his/her principles and to follow the principles of others which will bring him/her good. To quote, “ it is only then, when the voice of duty has taken the place of physical impulse, and right that of desire, that man, who has hitherto thought only of himself, finds himself compelled to act on other principles

and to consult his reason rather than study his inclinations. " Under the Social Contract Theory, right was also categorized.

There is what we call negative right, positive right, absolute right and limited right. A negative right is a type of right which is guaranteed when other individuals leave a person alone to exercise that right. Read questiona aboutPositive right is another type which another person must be pro-active in order for an individual to exercise his/her right. On another perspective, absolute right is a type of right which has no exceptions and limited rights has its limits. Campus Security with Video Surveillance There has been a continuous debate on the ethical issues of video surveillance in schools.

A number of individuals have raised their views on video surveillance in schools invading the privacy of students. Right to privacy, in accordance to the Social Contract Theory, is a negative right. In this point of view, an individual with a right to privacy should be kept alone. However, in the past few years, shootings in school campuses have pushed educational institutions to become more vigilant of their territories to better protect the students at their watch.

Parents have started demanding their children's schools to implement more effective surveillance system for the safety of the students . This collective demand raised by the parents is a form of association which Rousseau through the Social Contract Theory has cited in his work. Due to recent incidents, the parents and the students have become more concerned about safety in schools that they were willing to give up their rights to privacy to some extent in order to protect and defend themselves. When you look at

the right not to be put in harm's way or the right to live, these are considered as negative rights in that an individual should be left alone to exercise that right.

However, with the perceptive that violence can never be cancelled out of the equation, the right not to be put in harm's way or the right to live becomes a positive right. People should do something to counteract harm and death. In this case, the educational institutions should do something to place the children out of harm's way and to protect them from death. With this, a proactive countermeasure should be done and this may include several actions such as video surveillance systems. The Social Contract Theory dictates that almost all positive rights are absolute rights.

For example, the right to live is absolute because everybody can have it without any limit. Same goes with the right to privacy. The right not to be put in harm's way is also an absolute right. However, there will be limits as to protecting other people or oneself, hence it becomes a limited right in this point of view. Since the various shooting incidences took place, by the school year 2003-2004, a third of elementary schools, almost 50% of middle schools and 60% of high schools already utilized video surveillance systems .

Due to this increasing trend, ethical issues placed against video surveillance invading the privacy of students has slowly diminished. Even if parents and students agree and demand video surveillance systems, invasion of privacy still has to be kept to its minimum as the ethical issues against video surveillance may shift back to focus. There are several ways of doing this. First is that teachers, parents and students should be informed that a video

surveillance system has been placed on campus. There are several ways of announcing this - through a memorandum, posters in all school bulletins, press releases, school or local newspapers. By informing these people, they would feel safer about their environment and at the same time, avoid legal repercussions.

A number of people may still oppose the idea of having video surveillance systems hence, it will also be helpful to let them realize the reason behind such action. Once they realize the importance of having a video surveillance system, they will not hesitate into having one at the school campus. As Rousseau has mentioned, individuals will be forced to follow other people's principles or the "association" once he is compelled to do so for his/her safety and protection of property. Second is that the school should carefully plan and strictly implement clear processes for handling of the video footages taken from the surveillance system.

Rights to privacy of the students are usually hampered because of not being able to manage and store the video footages properly. If these video footages reach wrong hands, the education institution will have a serious problem. This can cause more harm than good to the students and therefore, the video surveillance system will be viewed as an unethical practice. To be able to avoid this, an agreed plan of how the video footages is to be managed should be put into place. This plan should include where the footages should be kept. Confidentiality of the files should be kept to its maximum when deciding where the footages are stored.

Deciding on whether or not to keep the storage in-campus or off-campus will also involve factors of cost and effectiveness. The plan should also include who will be responsible for the safekeeping of the files. Limiting the access to only a few people will minimize leakage and hence protect the students. The school should also maintain ownership of the files so that no one else can take it without authority. Previous files which do not warrant any investigation should be destroyed or disposed of. With this, there should be a properly laid out plan on when files should be kept.

Only when investigation is necessary should the school hand over the footages to legal authorities. The question on who should handle the video surveillance system leads to another question - should it be outsourced or someone hired by the educational institution. Outsourcing may jeopardize the privacy rights of the students. Hence, the advantages and disadvantages of both scenarios should be thought of well before a decision is to be made.

There are systems available today which provides fast mass notification/communication hence outsourcing may not be necessary.