

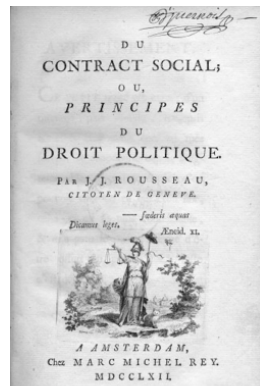
# Social Contract Theory

US275 Scientific Ethics  
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# Social Contract Theory

- people collectively agree to
  - behave morally
  - as a way to reduce social chaos
  - and create peace



Cover of *Social Contract*,  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1762.

# Why be moral?

1. Why does society need moral rules?
2. Why should I be moral?



Russian army fires into Polish patriots Warsaw 1861.  
Anonymous print from 19th century (after 1866)  
Wikimedia Commons

# Why does society need moral rules?

- State of nature
  - in absence of laws or rules
  - individuals act based on their own perceived self-interest
  - seek gratification and avoid harm
  - will cause state of conflict



Thomas Hobbes  
Unknown, 17th century  
Wikimedia Commons

## Social Contract / covenant

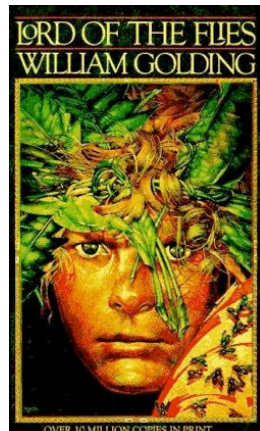
- Rules and Laws
- social control
  - give up some individual liberties
  - to receive protection
- fear of punishment
  - enforceable
  - penalties for not following code of conduct



Image scanned from *Book of Days*, 1st edition.  
Robert Chambers, 1869

## Lord of the Flies

- Are people naturally good and occasionally do bad things
  - or are people naturally bad and act good only because of laws and fear of punishment?
- in the absence of social order
  - society breaks down



# Why should I be moral?

- harmony of the soul
  - immorality corrupts
  - virtue purifies
- fear of punishment
  - by God
  - by society



*Buddha and the robber*  
Maximilian Reinitz, 1922

## Conflict of morality and self-interest

- principles of morality
  - advantageous if everyone always follows the rules
- but sometimes,
  - breaking the rules (being immoral) is to your personal advantage



*Confirmation of the Rule*  
Domenico Ghirlandaio, 1483-1485  
Wikimedia Commons

## Modified Principle of Rational Self-Interest

- I should be moral because
  - there is a long-term benefit,
  - even when there are occasional short-term disadvantages to acting morally.



*Self-portrait*  
Leonardo da Vinci, 1513

# Game Theory: Risks versus Benefits

- present situations where individuals have to decide to
  - adhere to principles/rules
    - for limited or no gain
  - violate principles/rules
    - for bigger risk and bigger gains



Argument over a Card Game  
Jan Steen, 17th Century  
Wikimedia Commons

## Social Contract and Character

- habits force us into predictable behavior
  - hard to turn morality on and off
  - feelings of guilt will diminish the gains of acting immorally.



The Death of Valin and Tara's Discourse, 1720  
This scene from the Ramayana series is the climax of the struggle for rule of the monkey kingdom. Rama confronts Sugriva's brother, Valin, the legitimate king of the monkeys, and kills him. Sugriva, now mourning his brother and feeling intense guilt at his role in the death, stands to the side.

## Assignment

### **The promise of societal values:**

#### In your discussion group:

What values are promoted in today's society?  
Should these values be elevated to rights that are provided by society (i.e. the government) to all citizens that follow the laws.

Assignment

# Readings

Chapter 5: Social Contract Theory

Pojman & Fieser,  
Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong



*Imaginary portrait of Epictetus.*  
Engraved frontispiece of Edward Ivie's Latin translation of Epictetus' *Enchiridion*, 1751

# Any Questions?

Email me at:  
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<http://www.vipitbullennets.com/images/animated-question-mark.gif>