

PHL 308
Elementary
Ethics

Dr. Jeff Johnson
Lecture Thirty

The Social Contract

- Anarchism
- Social contract response
- Plato
- Hobbes
- Locke
- The “Founders”

The State of Nature

- Thought experiments
- Living together in a world without legal or moral rules
- Three words to describe such a world
- My students' responses
- Why?
- Human nature

Economic Rationality

- Utility maximization
- Rationality in the state of nature
 - General behavior
 - Attempt to escape
- The economically rational response to the state of nature

Rational Bargaining

- Bargaining
- I must gain something
- This must outweigh what I give up
- The prisoner's dilemma
- How to enforce what we have bargained to?
- How to enforce contracts?

Hobbes' Social Contract

- State of nature (war)
- Rational response
- Trade away total freedom for security
- Enter into a bargain with everyone else
- But how to enforce this bargain?
- The sovereign
- Contract with the sovereign

Problems with the Social Contract

- Never was a state of nature
- Never was an original bargain
- How could a bargain mean anything in a state of nature?
- Pre-existing morality?
- Tacit agreement to the contract
 - Accepted advantages
 - Didn't leave
 - Is this enough?

Tacit Agreement

- Hypothetical contracts
- Subjunctive agreement
- **If** I had found myself in a state of nature I **would have** agreed to the social contract
- The bus example
- Hypothetical contracts are not contracts at all

Lessons from the Social Contract

- State of nature is a prisoner's dilemma
- Law and government is a rational response to the prisoner's dilemma
- Law and government provide good things that outweigh the loss of total freedom
- But does this make law and government morally legitimate?