

PLATO'S EU

Philosophical Learning
Applied To Online
Surroundings

Draft of the workshop:

“Rights and
responsibilities:
digital contract /
do I have to sign
social contract?”



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0. DRAFT OF WORKSHOPS

“RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES SOCIAL CONTRACT / WHO MADE ME SIGN SOCIAL CONTRACT?”

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

This workshop will focus on issues of political philosophy. More specifically, we will address the questions, "What is the social contract?" "What is the central idea of the social contract?" "What are the preconditions for the emergence of a social contract?" "Where to look for the origin of this idea?" "What historical and social events influenced the emergence of this concept?" "Which philosophers have most extensively developed this idea?" "Does this idea have a place in modern political philosophy?"

In the first step, we will learn which political events contributed to the emergence of the idea of the social contract. In the second step, we will learn about the most important representatives of social contract theory. We will talk about the fundamental differences between the different concepts. In the third step, we will focus on the characteristics of the most influential modern social contract theories. Finally, this lesson will include a discussion of what principles would respondents consider indispensable for being willing to sign a social contract? The expected duration of the workshop is 90 minutes.





2. LESSON OVERVIEW

The learning activities in this lesson are designed to cover basic issues in political philosophy - specifically social contract theory. The title already foreshadows the question "Rights and Responsibilities - The Social Contract / Who made me sign the social contract?" is meant to lead students to problematize seemingly obvious things. The lesson will begin by characterizing the central idea of social contract theory - legitimate power is the artificial product of the voluntary agreement of free agents. We will then turn to a description of the historical and social events that influenced the emergence of this idea. We will characterize the most important modern conceptions of social contracts (T. Hobbes, B. B. Spinoza, J. Locke, J.-J. Rousseau, I. Kant). We will also focus on the conceptions of modern political philosophers who built on the modern authors and created influential social contract ideas (J. Rawls, R. Nozick). We will ask how society would function without the acceptance of social contract rules. Since the workshop is a composite of a number of activities, several materials and tools are needed to complete all of them. If you have a trouble securing all the needed equipment, you can easily improvise (e.g. use a laptop instead of a smartphone etc.)

Materials that should be issued include: several sheets of white paper (A3 or A4), pens, smartphones, resources on selected topics (see section 3.2. below), data projector and projection screen.

Learning outcomes that will be attained through workshop:

- Students will gain a better understanding of the concept of social contract;



- Students will become aware of how to understand the central idea of the social contract;
- Students will be introduced to who and under what historical and social events the concept of the social contract originated;
- Students will gain an awareness of the significance and relevance of social contract concepts for the present day;
- Students will gain an overview of the most significant social contract concepts in the modern and contemporary periods;
- Students will become aware of the responsibilities we have as citizens.

3. LESSON BREAKDOWN – WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES

The lesson consists of five learning activities that are related to each other. Each of them is described in a separate subsection.

3.1. The Natural state

To begin, ask groups of students to try to think of a state that preceded the idea of a social contract. For inspiration, we will play them a segment from the movie *Lord of the Flies*.

We will pose the following discussion questions to the students:

1. What are rules for?
2. How did people function in a situation without mutually accepted rules?
3. What legitimizes an institution to gain power over subjects?
4. What benefits do people gain by committing to respect the rules?



3.2. The Consent of individuals

Legitimate political power depends on the free consent of those subject to it.

At the beginning of this activity, divide students into groups. In groups, students will discuss under what conditions they would give their voluntary consent to enter into a social contract. What benefits would this entry guarantee them? What would they be willing to give up? Would you agree to any degree of limitation on the use of digital technologies? Could we discuss the terms of the social contract not only in person but also in the digital space? If so, under what conditions? What would students in each group agree on?

3.3. The Social contract

The main idea of social contract theory is that legitimate power is the artificial product of the voluntary agreement of free people. The greatest development of the idea of social contract was in modern political-philosophical thought (T. Hobbes, B. B. Spinoza, J. Locke, J.-J. Rousseau, I. Kant). In this period, many authors asked the question: How is the existence of a social order possible?

We will begin this learning activity by dividing students into groups of three to five. We will then ask them to try to characterize the social contract in their own words, also based on a survey of available sources both on the Internet and in available books.

3.4. New-age concepts

The most important and influential conceptions of the social contract emerged in the modern period. The teacher will make a short general introduction about the development of social contracts. For this activity, divide students into five groups. Students will draw on analyses and interpretations of selected portions of the works of the modern contractualists (T. Hobbes, B. B. Spinoza, J. Locke, J.-J. Rousseau, I. Kant), with each



group focusing on the ideas of one of these authors. After presenting the results of the analyses, students will explore the similarities and differences in each concept. They will evaluate the weaknesses and strengths of these ideas.

After the groups present the results of their work, we will try to discuss the following questions with the students:

1. Which of the social contract concepts analyzed seems to be the most comprehensive?
2. Which concept is the least internally consistent?

3.5. Modern concepts

The teacher will point out that the idea of the social contract was revived in the 1970s. The revival of the idea of the social contract is linked to the work of John Rawls, to whom Robert Nozick responded critically. According to both authors, free, equal and rational people, pursuing only their own interests, agreed on the rules for the functioning of the social state.

Students will be given excerpts from the works of J. Rawls and R. Nozick.

Questions:

1. What advantages and what disadvantages do these theories have?
2. Would you like to live in a society in which even the most disadvantaged are guaranteed to live a decent life?
3. Do you think the idea of a flat tax is fair?

1. DISCUSSION CHECK

The following questions can be used to expand on the topics explored through the course of workshop:

- *What civic duties would you consider essential in a social contract?*
- *What would you be willing to commit to when entering into a social contract?*
- *What freedoms would you be willing to give up in order to enter into a social contract?*



2. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- https://files.libertyfund.org/files/869/0161_Bk.pdf
- <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/morality-definition/>
- <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-morality-5076160>
- <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/morality>
- <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/morality>
- [https://philosophynow.org/issues/152/The Enigma of Reason by Hugo Merzier and Dan Sperber](https://philosophynow.org/issues/152/The_Enigma_of_Reason_by_Hugo_Merzier_and_Dan_Sperber)
- https://www.motherjones.com/files/emotional_dog_and_rational_tail.pdf

6. ANNEX