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# Three forms of contractarian arguments

**Entry for the third CG 3MT Competition 2019**

# Three forms of contractarian arguments:

## An argument using a historical 'social contract'?

We pay our taxes so that the government can provide us with services. This starts with security services — military protection being, often, about the only service some early states were really able to provide. By now, of course, the government provides all sorts of things. All of this is said to go back to some sort of original "social contract" that everyone somehow agreed on, though no one really knows exactly when or by whom, or why we should be bound by the decisions of distant ancestors on this one matter when we don't feel particularly bound by the decisions of our distant ancestors on anything else. (Graeber: *Debt, First 5000 Years*)

-> No social contract theorist actually uses this argument! Instead:

- 1) Express or tacit contract: Everyone has actually made a contract with the government, individually.
- 2) Interest-based arguments: Living in a state is in every individual's interest; it's better than the state of nature.
- 3) Hypothetical contract: Let's do a thought experiment; if people were in an original state, what kind of society would they decide to build from scratch?

## A list of literature:

Early modern contractarian works: Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651); Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* (1689); Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature, Book III* (1740); Rousseau, *Du contrat social* (1762); Kant, *Über den Gemeinspruch...* (1793).

Modern contractarian works: Rawls, *Theory of Justice* (1971); Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974); Buchanan, *Limits of Liberty* (1975); Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement* (1986).

Secondary literature: Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social contract tradition* (1986); Taylor, *Possibility of Cooperation* (1987); Kraus, *Limits of Hobbesian Contractarianism* (1993); Kersting, *Politische Philosophie des Gesellschaftsvertrages* (1994).