Moral Obligation and Social Contract Theory
—
Negative Case, Written by Benjamin McKay

**Summary**

On Aff, many will attempt to take the moral high ground by claiming it is unjust to violate a person’s rights, regardless of what beneficial results may occur. In response, Neg wants to do two things, (1) establish that the individual has obligations to their community and (2) set up the debate such that to vote affirmative arguably ignores these obligations.

The philosophical backing for this thinking stems from **social contract theory,** being a collection of ideas that define what societies are and what conditions they introduce to human experience. Obligations to one’s community as well as justification for limiting one’s freedom are among the core principles of social contract theory. Many great philosophers comment on their particular views of social contract theory such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. While these particular views of social contract theory are not discussed in this case, the core concept is that membership in a society depends on individuals accepting limits to their faculties and behavior. This concept of limitation must then be applied to the right to property just as it applies to any other freedom, right, or faculty of a person in society.

Moral Obligation

We are gathered today to answer an important question: what does it mean to be part of society? It is because I believe that to be part of a society is to possess obligation to one’s community, that I stand ***Resolved: That the individual right to property ought not to be valued above the economic interest of the community.***

# Definitions

Before we examine my primary arguments, we need to define some key terms so that we understand what we're debating today:

**Economic:** is defined as by Merriam Webster Dictionary as “of, relating to, or based on the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services”(“Economic”).

**Right:** is defined byCollin’s Dictionary as “Your rights are what you are morally or legally entitled to do or to have” (“right”).

With the above terms defined, we can then define the larger terms in the resolution:

**The Economic Interest of the Community** can be understood as “the community’s interests as pertaining to economic concerns.”

**The Individual Right to Property** can be understood as “an individual’s rights in relation to his or her property.”

# Value

Now that we have my definitions and the actor clarified, let's consider my value, or what I believe should be the most important thing to uphold when making this decision. My value is **Moral Obligation.** This should be our value in today’s round for one primary reason: the ends don’t justify the means. This resolution discusses two objects of primary importance: property rights and economic interests. A just society must respond to difficult questions not with what is most expedient, but what is ethical and good, therefore, we must make this choice based on what upholds our moral obligation.

# Contention 1:

# Citizens Have a Moral Obligation to Their Communities

When discussing property rights and community interests, it’s important to stop and consider what it means to be part of a community. As noted by The Legal Dictionary, **“social contract theory”**, is a philosophical analysis that attempts to understand societies and our role within them (“Social Contract Theory”). This system of thinking poses in essence that in return for membership in a society, I accept limitations and obligations to that society (“Social Contract Theory”).

If, for example, I become a citizen of a country, I receive both benefits as well as limitations due to that membership. It is not unjust for me to be limited by the laws of my new nation and neither is it reasonable for me to receive membership without accepting those limits. Thus, citizens possess moral obligations to their communities.

# Contention 2:

# To Uphold Moral Obligation, Property Rights must be Limited.

In today’s resolution we are choosing between upholding an individual’s property rights and the economic interest of the community with the goal of upholding moral obligation. We have also established that an individual’s obligation to his or her society justifies the limiting of their freedom. Arguably, this condition applies to an individual’s property rights. Thus, limiting the individual right to property in so far as it is necessary to uphold the economic interest of the community is not unjust. On the contrary, the individual has an obligation to do so.

To clarify, this is not the complete elimination of an individual’s property rights (as this would violate the moral obligation of society to the individual member). However, reasonable limitations to ensure collective wellbeing are justified. Therefore, in order for moral obligation to be upheld, governments must hold citizens accountable and thus, *The Individual Right to Property Ought not to be Valued Above The Economic Interest of the Community.*

Works Cited:

“Economic” Merriam Webster, *Merriam Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/economic>, Accessed 16th Sept 2022.

“rights” Collins Dictionary, *Collins Dictionary*, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/rights>, Accessed 16th Sept 2022.

“Social Contract Theory - Definition, Meaning, Examples, and Summary.” *Legal Dictionary*, 14 Feb. 2019, <https://legaldictionary.net/social-contract-theory/#:~:text=Social%20contract%20theory%20is%20a%20political%20philosophy%20that,as%20you%20would%20have%20them%20do%20unto%20you.%E2%80%9D>.