

God in Action, The Nature of a Social Contract

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The concept of contracts should not be foreign to anyone who conducts business. The contract is what defines the relationship between the involved parties.

A business contract is written, read, understood and signed by all involved. A social contract often has no such rigid structure, nevertheless, the obligations of all the parties involved is not any less.

The social contract simply states, I will provide this and you will provide that. We each provide for one another, thereby fulfilling each others needs. Party One expects from Party Two and Party Two expects from Party One. When all expectations are met, then everyone is happy and the social contract is maintained, for the good of all involved.

Yet, what happens, if and when, the basic assumptions of the social contract are not met? What happens, if and when, one side comes to interpret the obligations and responsibilities of the social contract differently from the other parties involved? Needless to say, if one party of the contract fails to live up to expectations, the other party/parties feel slighted and consider the social contract to be violated.

When such a violation occurs, one of two things happen. Either the contract is irrevocably broken, with all parties involved no longer providing their share, thus creating a complete breakdown of relationship between the parties, or one (or all) of the parties seek to reestablish the contract, renegotiate it, or change its fundamental understandings.

Changes in fundamental understandings of social contracts is a dangerous undertaking. The social contract is by definition built upon mutual trust. Violate or challenge the implied trust and one violates or challenges the social contract itself. We all have expectations, some clear, others less so. Nevertheless, our relationship with one another is definitely defined by our unwritten social contract.

Again, our social, unwritten, yet understood, contract simply states, I give, you give. We each give and provide for each others individual needs.

The fundamental thing about any social contract is that it is easily entered into and just as easily exited from. There is no obligation to be in a social contract. However, once one party accepts upon themselves to receive the services and benefits offered by the second party, then they are obligated by social contract to reciprocate the provision of services, as understood within the arrangements of the contract.

If one does not like this arrangement, one can simply walk away. Use no services, and incur no debts or responsibilities to reciprocate. But, if you do make use of the services, then indeed you do incur both obligation and responsibility to reciprocate.

Not to reciprocate is a violation of the social contract, enabling, if not demanding, that the other party involved also withdraw and cease to provide its services. Can this relationship be anymore straightforward?

When, for example, one maintains an internet website that provides educational services, the operators of said website, if they make it so clear, expect the users of their services to offer appropriate compensation for the services they use. Although there is no enforcement function, the nature of the social contract obligates Party One to provide services and information, and for Party Two, when prompted (or not), to provide appropriate compensation for the services used.

There is no obligation to go to the website and take advantage of what it offers. But if one does do so, then one becomes morally obligated to a social contract of mutual support.

The “bottom line” is this, there is no such thing as a “free ride.” Eventually everyone must pay for what they use, although some may pay more than others and some benefit more from services used than others. Failure to pay breaks the system and violates the trust. It violates the commandment, “thou shall not steal.” This is common sense, which today is all too uncommon.

I give, you give. This is the social contract. There is no myth of freely giving. Only God gives freely. If one wishes to receive freely, let them go directly to God, and leave out all human intermediaries. Needless to say that such an idea is a foolish fantasy, but apparently, this does not stop the fool from embracing such fantasies. And the fool becomes disturbed when he/she is reminded of their obligations. Only the fool objects to their obligations, only the ungrateful fool rejects them. Unfortunately for us, there is no lack of fools today.

Everything has a cost. Books cost money. An education costs money. Someone has to pay for these things, they do not grow freely on trees. If you do not pay for your own, then someone else must pay for you and yours, alongside their own. Again, this is more of that all too uncommon common sense that is lost today.

So, as we celebrate the Passover holiday of freedom, remember your social contracts and fulfill your obligations. Everyone is depending upon you, just like you are depending on them.

We all work together, and united we stand, or divided, we fall. Freedom cannot be safeguarded in isolation. Freedom can only be protected when the free rally, join together and support one another. This is the social contract. This is why Israel was redeemed from Egypt and this is the message of freedom that we so need to remember today and restore to the realm of common sense.