

# The Social Contract

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In every mind there exists a Message-Channeling Chamber where the Messenger relays signals from the external world to a part of the brain that considers a range of socially acceptable responses. These responses are relayed back to the Messenger, and in turn, are relayed back to the individual, making available a range of socially acceptable responses. The responses are then transcribed and stored into the individual's memory for future use.

Lately, there had been an influx of incoming signals. The Messenger clasped its head in its hands, overwhelmed with the volume of inflow. *Should I greet him with a handshake or a bow? Is it too rude to refuse this food? I'm allergic. What's appropriate to wear to my co-worker's son's first birthday celebration? Was that joke offensive? Did she feel left out last night?* "How much longer?" Asked the Messenger.

"Sorry for the delay. I'm doing my best." SAN replied, working away at a lengthy document titled, "The Social Contract," which articulates what is socially acceptable amongst individuals. SAN (Socially Acceptable Norms) is responsible for drafting the rules of this document but was behind due to a flood of interactions among diverse cultures resulting in more questions and confusion than ever before. Cringing at SAN's response, the Messenger darted out of the room. SAN was too immersed in its work to respond.

"Something wrong?" RAD asked. RAD (Reasonability and Diplomacy) was another facet of the mind; its role: To resolve conflicts.

The Messenger looked exasperated, "I've been receiving too many questions and not getting enough answers."

"What gives?" SAN asked noting the Messenger's quick disappearance. "Signals are coming in as we speak."

"I can't take any more until you answer the questions you're given." The Messenger replied.

"And I can't record anything until you two get your act together." The Transcriber added, walking into the discussion. "You haven't sent anything recently."

"I'm backlogged. Everything is different and new. Until I find a model to base my answers on, it'll be difficult to respond efficiently."

"Perhaps we need a meeting." RAD suggested. "I'll call ODA in as well."

"Must we?" SAN asked wearily, noting what ODA (Obnoxious Devil's Advocate) stood for.

"I think we all know the answer to that." RAD replied. "ODA's criticisms are necessary."

"A necessary evil." SAN muttered, knowing that each meeting required SAN and ODA to agree in order for meeting proposals to take effect and how difficult it was for the two of them to agree.

"We need this meeting. The longer we wait, the worse it'll be. Confusion causes conflict." The Messenger noted, with the backlog of signals in mind. "People have been proposing a number of models. I'll present them. I'll even make it interesting. Give it a chance"

“Alright.” SAN said.

The meeting took place as scheduled. SAN, RAD and the Transcriber were seated when ODA stepped in shortly after.

“You’re late as usual.” SAN said.

“Only to bug you... as usual.” ODA smirked. “Besides, I’m fashionably late to this party. That’s socially acceptable, no?”

“This is not a party.” SAN said sternly.

“Not with you it’s not.” ODA remarked.

“Settle down.” RAD interjected before SAN and ODA could continue. “We all know why we’re here. SAN’s role is to refine The Social Contract, ODA’s role is to challenge SAN, and this meeting is in order because of the growing diversity among people interacting.” The Transcriber began taking notes of the discussion.

“Why the growing diversity of interactions?” ODA asked.

“Increased internet use, traveling, homestays, international relations... the list goes on. We have been receiving more and more messages from people originating from different cultures, lifestyles, and backgrounds, triggering us to determine a model on which we understand social interactions.” RAD explained. ODA nodded to RAD’s sensible explanation. RAD continued, “The Messenger should be here any minute to present some proposed models. Messenger?”

The Messenger rolled in a cart with a steaming pot sitting on top of it. “I hope you like soup.” RAD looked perplexed. “Told you I’d make things more interesting. Besides, it’s lunch time.” The Messenger said.

“I can eat at home. Why are you doing this?” ODA asked impatiently.

The Messenger paused briefly to think before speaking again, “In previous meetings, you’ve been a bit... well...”

“On edge?” RAD suggested.

“Right, so I thought it’d be better if I fed you first. You get hangry. And as Messenger, I get the brunt of it.” The Messenger explained.

“I get hungry because we always meet at lunch.” ODA explained, “I get angry because these meetings are a waste of time. Why are we lengthening them by having lunch? What does soup have to do with models?”

“We’d be having this meeting during lunch regardless of whether we had food so thank you for bringing that in.” RAD said while sipping away. “ODA does have a point that we should be conscious of time.”

“I agree,” The Messenger replied, “which is why you’ll be pleased to learn that soup is the first model under discussion.”

“Well played, Messenger, but soup?” ODA asked. “Who thought of that one?”

“Many people.” The Messenger replied, “It symbolizes inclusivity. People pool all their differences blending as one.”

“That’s a nice way of setting aside differences, welcoming everyone and finding common ground, which are great qualities for strengthening relationships.” SAN said. “It’s not as absurd as it first sounds.”

“Putting everyone in one pot to make them one product makes them the same, compromising diversity.” ODA noted.

“True. Perhaps we can compare it to another model.” RAD responded.

The Messenger returned to the cart, pulling out a jigsaw puzzle. Everyone watched the Messenger place it on the table and open it. “It was on sale.” The Messenger said regarding the picture of a world map on the puzzle. “The picture has no significance for my demonstration purposes.”

SAN looked at the pieces scattered across the table, “Are you expecting us to put this together?”

The Messenger nodded. ODA looked in dismay. RAD asked, “Is this necessary?”

“No, and we don’t have to finish, but it might be helpful to work on it while determining how suitable it is as the Social Contract model.” The Messenger replied. “Puzzle pieces represent individuals. Each piece distinct, like individuals are unique; by fitting them together, they make something greater.” The Messenger replied.

“Although the soup was more satisfying for my palette, I like this model more. Individuals keep their identity while working in harmony here, whereas with soup, people lose their unique qualities in the process.” SAN said while flipping the puzzle pieces right-side-up.

“I agree,” ODA replied while collecting the edge pieces. “It’s an improvement, but have you noticed that the pieces can only fit with certain pieces and not with others? Australia could never fit next to Russia, and Mexico would always sit north of Costa Rica,” ODA continued while forming a string of edge pieces, “Also, puzzles are finite. What if we have new people or pieces to incorporate? New pieces that don’t fit anywhere?”

“It doesn’t have to be finite. The edge could continue to connect to other pieces.” SAN suggested. “As for pieces only connected with certain others, some people get along better with others and some don’t connect well at all.”

“True that the edges can extend, but we’re trying to encourage diversity; not simply accept that individuals who don’t get along can never connect.” ODA explained. “That discourages inclusivity.”

“You’re near impossible to please.” The Messenger commented while putting the puzzle away, “It’s alright though.” It returned with a scrapbook stacked on top of a variety of magazine clippings and photographs, “Craft time; let’s make a collage.” The Messenger then pulled out a box with tile pieces, glass and rocks. “You can also make a mosaic. Both of these were frequently suggested.”

“What are we, children?” ODA asked.

“No, but there’s nothing wrong with that. If we think like children we could benefit by appealing to those minds. It is beneficial to base a foundation on a model that is easily understandable early in life.” RAD reasoned.

“Collages embrace each component’s uniqueness, as people should embrace each other’s individuality. All the components, the pictures, clippings and the like, collectively form something new.” The Messenger explained. “Mosaics also have good qualities. They are made of a collection of different materials, representing how people with different make ups can come together as one work.”

“I like how collages and mosaics don’t have the rigid structure of the puzzle, and allow for the components to be placed more liberally.” SAN noted while fiddling with the magazine clipping and tiles.

RAD and the Messenger looked to ODA anticipating a rebuttal and were not disappointed.

“Our model should stem from a person’s individuality to make up the whole; not have their identity suit the whole of the work, which is what collages and mosaics do. Collages are theme-based. Mosaics have a pattern to them. In both cases, there could be a piece that doesn’t fit the theme or pattern. We don’t want a model that encourages scrutiny of pieces that do not fit the rest.” ODA said.

“... It makes sense.” SAN reluctantly admitted, not wanting to give credit to ODA’s reasoning. “It’s surprising to have so much feedback come from someone who wants these meetings to be brief.”

“If I wasn’t here, we’d still be working off of models... like soup.” ODA scoffed.

“What are you implying?” The Messenger asked defensively.

“Settle down. We all have important roles here.” RAD said. Collecting itself, it looked to the Messenger, “Do you have any other models, or should we look at this another day?”

The Messenger sifted through its thoughts, then smiled, “I do. We have to go outside for this one.” It said and led the group out to a shore with rolling waves and an ocean stretching into the horizon. “Voila, the last model.”

SAN, RAD, ODA, and the Transcriber took a moment to appreciate the view. “It’s nice, but what exactly are we looking at?” RAD asked.

“The beach,” The Messenger replied, “How sand interacts with water. The grains of sand represent people around the world. The waves represent the circumstances upon which they interact with one another sometimes bringing them close; other times drifting them apart.”

There was a pause. The group took in the Messenger’s explanation as the Transcriber recorded the ongoing discussion. ODA began, “I like it. The only critique I have is that sand grains seem so monotonous, which doesn’t do justice for the uniqueness of individuals.”

“Sand particles are highly diverse under a microscope.” SAN told ODA. “The beach is the best model yet. In addition to diversity, it has the fluidity we need to encompass changing relationships. It doesn’t have the uniformity of soup nor the structured nature of puzzles, nor the conformity or patterns of collages and mosaics, respectively. If people think of themselves as grains of sand at a beach and how they interact with the waves when interacting with one another, perhaps they will be able to better understand relationships and embrace each other’s diversity.”

“... I can see that.” ODA said.

“So you agree?” The Messenger asked.

ODA nodded.

“Thank goodness, because I’m out of models.” The Messenger said.

“But is this the most suitable model?” ODA asked.

“For now, yes. At least we agree on its characteristics.” RAD replied. “In time, there may be a better one but this is a good start.”

The meeting was adjourned and recorded by the Transcriber into the mind’s memory. Upon SAN’s, the Messenger’s, and the Transcriber’s return to the Message-Channeling Chamber, the inflow of messages had increased even more, but the Messenger had a new mindset.

“Are you ready to take this on?” The Messenger asked.

“You bet.” SAN replied, using the new model to refine the Social Contract.

The Transcriber smiled, waiting attentively to record new memories on how to interact in an inclusive environment with others while embracing diversity.