

Enrolled without asking.

Consent you never gave

You did not ask to be born, and once you were, a great many things were assumed about what you would agree to next.

This page runs one argument twice: first in its old and respectable form, where it has been contested for centuries, and then in its new commercial form, where it is not contested at all.

The old version, which at least got an argument

The question of why anyone should be bound by a state they never chose is one of the oldest in political philosophy, and the usual answer has been tacit consent: you stay, therefore you agree.

David Hume took that apart in "Of the Original Contract", published in 1748, and the passage is still the best short demolition of the idea:

Can we seriously say, that a poor peasant or artizan has a free choice to leave his country, when he knows no foreign language or manners, and lives from day to day, by the small wages which he acquires? We may as well assert, that a man, by remaining in a vessel, freely consents to the dominion of the master; though he was carried on board while asleep, and must leap into the ocean, and perish, the moment he leaves her.

The point generalises past its century. Consent means nothing where exit is impossible, or where the cost of exit is ruin. A choice that can only be declined at unacceptable cost is not a choice; it is a formality performed on the way to an outcome that was never in doubt.

Whatever one concludes, notice that it has been argued about seriously for nearly three hundred years, by people who took the legitimacy question to be genuinely difficult.

The new version, which gets none

Now run the same structure through a shop.

You buy a pair of socks. By that single act you have been entered into a set of relationships nobody described to you. You are placed in a cohort of people who resemble you on measured characteristics, and you are assigned a projected figure representing what you are expected to be worth over the course of the relationship.

Neither of those is a metaphor. The cohort is called a lookalike audience, a standard tool in advertising since Facebook introduced the term in 2013 and now offered across most large ad platforms. The number is called customer lifetime value, a fixture of marketing practice since the late 1980s.

So you are now in a family you did not join, and the family has expectations. Having bought socks, you are held to want the shirt. Your subsequent behaviour is read as either confirming the projection or deviating from it, and deviation is something to be corrected with a better offer.

The striking part is not that this happens. It is that no equivalent of Hume exists here. There is no serious public argument about whether a purchase constitutes agreement to be modelled, predicted and addressed indefinitely. The enrolment is simply assumed, and the burden of objecting falls entirely on the person who was enrolled.

Why the consumer version is harder to refuse than the political one

There is an uncomfortable asymmetry between the two cases, and it does not run the way you might expect.

Citizenship is at least explicit. You know which country you are in. The obligations are written down, debated in public, and changed through processes you can, in principle, take part in. You can see the thing you are inside.

Commercial enrolment is none of those. It is not announced. The cohort you are placed in has no name you will ever learn, the projection attached to you is not disclosed, and the criteria are trade secrets. There is no register you can inspect and no ballot in which the terms are decided. Hume's peasant at least knew what country he was in.

And where the political version has an exit that is merely difficult, the commercial version increasingly has no exit at all, because declining to participate does not remove you from the model. It only makes you a person about whom less is known, which is itself a signal.

What follows

Nothing here argues that commerce is illegitimate, or that a company inferring what you might like next is a moral outrage. The offence is narrower and duller than that.

It is that the arrangement is presented as consent when it has none of the properties of consent. Nothing was explained, no alternative was offered at

comparable cost, and the agreement was inferred from an act that had an entirely different purpose. You wanted socks.

Which is why the practical answer is not to argue better, but to be smaller: fewer enrolments, fewer inferences with anything to work on. That is the **companion argument**, and the tools in this workshop are what it looks like when you build for it.

Where to read more

- **Sovereignty as a Service**: the argument this page belongs to.
- **The cost of refusal**: what saying no actually costs, measured in clicks.
- **Rented sovereignty**: why sovereignty sold as a service cannot be sovereignty.
- **The Smaller Kingdom**: leaving fewer records for the model to work on.

Frequently asked

What is tacit consent?

The idea that by remaining somewhere or continuing to accept its benefits, a person agrees to be bound by its rules without ever saying so. David Hume argued in 1748 that this fails where leaving is impossible or ruinous, since a choice that cannot be declined is not a choice.

What did Hume say about consent?

In 'Of the Original Contract' (1748) he compared a poor labourer who cannot afford to emigrate with a man carried aboard a ship while asleep, who must leap into the ocean and perish the moment he leaves. Remaining aboard is not agreement to the captain's authority.

What is customer lifetime value?

An estimate of the total net profit a business expects from a customer over the whole future relationship. It is a standard marketing measure, and it means a projected figure is attached to you from an early purchase onward.

Does buying something count as consent to be profiled?

Legally it depends on jurisdiction and on what notice was given. Philosophically it has none of the features usually required for consent: it was not explained, no comparable alternative was offered, and the agreement was inferred from an act performed for an unrelated reason.

From Offline.Ltd, Amsterdam. The web version of this page lives at <https://offline.ltd/sovereignty-as-a-service/enrolled-without-asking> and is kept current there.