

Midterm Written Questions

1. Explain why Hobbes believes that the State of Nature is invariably a State of War.

Hobbes believed that since there is no common power to control men in the state of nature, they had free will and rights to do as they pleased for their own preservation. This type of social structure causes a nasty and brutish lifestyle characterized by selfishness for the sake of survival. These free wills also collide with others wills and needs and so we have cyclically infinite conflict. Hobbes finds that for self-preservation in such a social structure, it must be war of every man against every other man.

2. Why, according to Hobbes, is it usually impossible, or at least very difficult, to make a promise or a covenant in the State of Nature? How does Hobbes think this difficulty is overcome when a Commonwealth is established? Explain why the authority of the Sovereign in a Hobbesian Commonwealth does not rest on a promise or covenant made by the Sovereign himself?

It is difficult to make a covenant in the State of Nature for many reasons. Laws such as the Fundamental Law of Nature, which urges people to make as much peace as is reasonable for their own self-preservation, only apply when there is a higher power. Since there is no higher power in the State of Nature to enforce any sort of laws, it is hard to trust anyone. Therefore, it may seem more reasonable to some to break their covenants

rather than blindly hope for another to see out his end of the agreement. Once a commonwealth is established, you have some sovereign who clearly will be able to enforce laws. This sovereign is also bestowed with the power to keep everyone fulfilling their covenants. The sovereign may punish those who break their covenants, giving disincentives to everyone to break any covenant. This is why covenants are more likely to work and be fulfilled when a commonwealth is formed.

3. What is one saying about something when one says that it is a “Law of Nature” in Hobbes’s sense of the term? Explain how the first three Laws of Nature are grounded in what Hobbes calls the Right of Nature.

A law of nature according to Hobbes, is some general rule that any logical person realizes, that one should not do something that is against their own preservation. The first law of nature is to always endeavor peace, but if that be impossible, to take advantage of war. The second law of nature states that one should lay down their rights to the same extent that others are willing to, only for the sake of making peace. There are caveats or exceptions such as the fact that you may not lay down your right to resist violence. The third law of nature is that one should perform his covenants always, since it will best preserve your life. The Right of Nature says that to achieve felicity, we may do anything we deem necessary to preserve our life. The three laws of nature are specifically going about giving specific situational advice to further one’s own Right of Nature. By following the three above laws, we are making sure to use the right properly, that which has already been bestowed upon us.

- 4. Explain the four features that Kavka attributes to Hobbes's conception of practical reason, and explain why he thinks this conception of practical reason makes good sense of Hobbes's response to the "Foole."**

The first feature Kavka attributes to Hobbes's conception of practical reason is one of forward looking practical rationality. He then attributes three more features: most choices happen in uncertain conditions, avoiding risk, and prior commitment to Laws of Nature. Both Kavka and Hobbes believes that breaking the rules leads to public ostracization. The Foole rather sees "golden opportunities" and highly encourages people to break the rules, as need be. This is for the sake of seizing golden opportunities but the Foole doesn't seem to think that any other side effects of breaking rules would negatively outweigh the short-term benefits.

- 5. Why is it important to Hobbes to resist the suggestion (found in Chapter XVII) that there is a crucial respect in which humans resemble such animals as ants and bees? Explain Hobbes's argument for the claim that there is no such resemblance because people are "continually in competition for honour and dignity." How does this argument appear (at least) to undermine Hobbes's overall position?**

He must resist the suggestion since that would imply we do and act in similar ways in nature. He gives many reasons for why we are different. Some include that the common good is different from the personal good in humans unlike bees and ants, and

men are filled with ego/pride while believing they can run society better than those in charge. He also considers bees and ants as irrational beings as compared to humans. The point of this is to show why man needs a sovereign to guide him unlike bees and ants. This is slightly peculiar given that he believes the state of nature (for all beings) is a state of war. He is giving examples of how nature is not necessarily a nasty and brutish life but instead can be, as shown by bees and ants, a mutualistic lifestyle. Therefore, doubts may arise in the reader as to why nature is so bad and why we need to get out of that state. However, this is remedied when he draws the above distinctions to smooth out any doubts.

6. Is there any limit to what the citizens of a commonwealth are obliged to allow the Sovereign to do to them, according to Hobbes? If so, what? Why does Hobbes think the way he does about this question?

Since one cannot lay down their right to defend themselves if attacked, the only thing that the citizens may not allow the Sovereign to do to them is to maliciously attack them. The reason for him thinking this way is since each person's self-preservation is most important. We leave the state of nature since it is better for our own preservation to have more security in a political society. When this is also not guaranteed, there is no point in allowing a sovereign to harm you. This is why Hobbes feels the way he does about the subject in relation to his Sovereign.

- 7. What is the Law of Nature, according to Locke? Explain how Locke derives the conclusion that in the State of Nature we all have property rights with respect to one another from the claim that we are all God's property.**

It is something that is found out by reason, by everyone, as time progresses whereby people have all freedom and liberty to do what is necessary for their own self-preservation. They may also punish others, to whatever extent necessary, who break morality or the law of nature as a means of preserving natural order. All men are equal since God created them so. People must follow the Law of Nature. To self-preserve ourselves, we may have to labor on objects/property. When we do so, it is through our labor. Our labor is now inextricable with the object/thing we have labored upon. When this happens, the object becomes ours and no one else should benefit from our own labor. Therefore, we have property rights even though we belong to God.

- 8. Explain how and under what circumstances it is possible and legitimate to acquire private property in the State of Nature, according to Locke.**

It is possible and legitimate to acquire private property through labor upon objects. Yet the validity of your property claim is only alright so long as you do not harm another person while acquiring private property, you leave enough and as good the object for everyone else, and you take no more than you can use before it spoils. From this point, one can acquire objects and create property by doing labor unto this object. The

idea being that, according to Locke, our labor is now inextricable with the object itself. This transformation that we have caused is a modification that makes the object our property. This is how one may legitimately acquire private property according to Lockesian principles.

9. Explain how and under what circumstances it is possible and legitimate to acquire a slave, according to Locke. How is Locke's position on this issue consistent with his claim that it is never possible or legitimate to sell oneself into slavery?

If someone has wronged another, the victim may conquer the criminal and own them to punish them for their original crime. In this case, where the conqueror forces the criminal into obedience it is slavery. Yet at the same time, this is consistent with his previous idea that you can't sell yourself into slavery. The conqueror has leverage over the slave and therefore even though the slave will not want to be obedient to his conqueror, he is forced into it. Specifically, he is forced into it since he is dispossessed of his physical rights to his body and has no choice but to be a slave. This is how this situation is still consistent with the idea that one cannot sell himself into slavery.

10. Explain Locke's distinction between tacit and express consent. How, according to Simmons, should we understand Locke's thinking about the difference between the rights and obligations of perfect members, denizens, and aliens in a commonwealth in the light of this distinction?

According to Locke, tacit consent is whereby one agrees to the ideals of a commonwealth and its preservation but does so in an ambiguous and non-explicit way. On the other hand, express consent is where one gives an explicit public oath of allegiance to the commonwealth. All types of members in a commonwealth must oblige to the same rules but do so for different durations. Simmon's believes we should understand Locke's thinking on perfect members as those people who defend the nation and pay taxes. He disagrees with Locke regarding denizens. Locke believes denizens give tacit consent to the commonwealth by the very act of living within the commonwealth's boundaries. Simmons would like us to understand that this is wrong since the ability of denizens to make a clear and free choice is impeded by the bias of them living in the commonwealth beforehand. Lastly Simmons understands Locke's position on aliens which is that they are present to enjoy the benefits and security of a government while acknowledging that their stay must be temporary. Without this, they would not be aliens and instead be denizens.

11. What is the purpose for the sake of which people form a commonwealth, according to Locke? What are the three inconveniences of the State of Nature that motivate them to form a commonwealth in order to pursue that purpose? How does the purpose for the sake of which a commonwealth is established entail that no one in a commonwealth may be taxed without their consent?

According to Locke, people ultimately form a commonwealth for the preservation

of one's own property. The three inconveniences in the State of Nature that motivate people to form this commonwealth include: there is no established, settled, and known law, there is no known and indifferent judge, and there lacks someone with power to enforce a sentence/punishment. One enters civil society with the idea that a commonwealth will make it the easiest for an individual to protect their property. Taxation requires the taking away of someone's property by the higher power running this government. This is rather problematic. Why would anyone enter into civil society to only have their property taken away? Therefore, for people to be more inclined to join a commonwealth, it needs to be established that without one's own consent, the government may not tax that person.

12. Is there any limit to what the Sovereign is entitled to do to the citizens of a commonwealth, according to Locke? If so, what? Why does Locke think the way he does about this question?

The Sovereign is beholden to protect and preserve the welfare of all subjects. If the Sovereign decides to violate a subject's "Property" (the right to life, liberty, and pursuit of property) this would be against preserving the welfare of all subjects. In such cases, the Sovereign does violate their duty. When we identify a situation that this occurs, we can consider it a limit to the power the Sovereign has. Locke thinks this way because he is obsessively repetitive about the idea that all life really amounts to is the acquisition and maintenance of "Property". The only point of joining civil society is because it will

make it easier for one to maintain “Property” without others unrightfully stealing it from you. So what would be the point of consenting to a Sovereign for such a force to attack you unjustly to take your “Property”? At least by staying in nature, you are more likely to expect someone to rob you of your “Property” unlike under a civil government.