

HS0.301: Classical Text Readings-1

Term Paper- 1

Q:

Do you agree with Hobbes that words like right, wrong, justice, injustice, mine, and yours, have meaning only where there is government or sovereign to institute the laws (cf. p. 95 of Hobbes' *Leviathan*)? What are the implications of holding such a view? Critically analyze and argue for your position.

Word Limit: 1200-1500

Ans:

Defining something 'right' or 'wrong' is full of complexities. As 'right' or 'wrong' are not absolute terms, one couldn't just realize the measure of how wrong or right an act is. A popular belief is that all moral laws are just shared beliefs of a society. The 'right' and 'wrong' don't exist objectively, and they vary from place to place and from time to time and represent society. Hence, these terms' definitions depend upon the authorities you are governed by or the culture and society you live in. Sometimes, an action that may appear right to someone may be considered wrong by someone else.

Now, let us consider vegetarianism; Is it 'right' to eat non-vegetarian food? It is one of the most discussed problems regarding the morality of right and wrong. The vegetarian always insists that eating meat and killing innocent animals for food is wrong, and he presents arguments to support his beliefs. The meat eater would respond by rejecting the vegetarian's premises. Then, the meat eater presents his argument to support his views, and similarly, the vegetarian would reject the premises presented by the meat eater. In such debates, most of the arguments are based on subjectivism. In simple subjectivism, when someone says any action is right or wrong, they mean that they approve/disapprove of it personally, and both sides have their sort of aspects to justify their deeds as appropriate.

Hobbes claimed that words like right, wrong, justice, injustice, mine, and yours have meaning only where there is government or sovereign to institute the laws. However, I cannot entirely agree with his claim. Regarding my analysis, I would say that terms like right, wrong, justice, injustice, discrimination, positive discrimination, prejudice, etc., don't have an absolute definition and vary in various states. We all know that 'right' and 'wrong' exist but disagree on 'right' and 'wrong'. Therefore, although we realize that 'right' and 'wrong' do not exist objectively, we cannot eliminate them, as they instil in us. The debates of morals have a rich history with varying opinions. In every state, be it a tyrant leader or a generous leader, the supreme authority takes steps for what is right according to their principles. Moreover, even in a small society of many people, the morals of justice and injustice exist without the state's intervention because of one's consciousness. Therefore, we can not say that these terms don't have a meaning without the state instituting laws about these terms.

However, the fact that these terms don't have absolute definitions may lead to conflicts of interest among the mass population, as what is right according to one group may offend another, leading to unfavourable situations. With this in mind, a nation of government as a guardian of the meaning of these terms is a better way to unite the population and avoid any unfavourable conditions over a long period in a larger territory. It is better to say that these terms exist without the correlation of the existence of a state. However, it is necessary to have a government that follows specific rules abiding by the people to uphold these terms' values. Hence, these words come into play for a peaceful tenure of a sovereign body.

That's why in the absence of a ruling body, individuals or a group of individuals who share the same ideology do what they want. For example, if we consider the recent events in Afghanistan, the Taliban replaced the government, resulting in chaos in the country. Hence, It is evident that a government or a sovereign must institute some laws to uphold the meaning of these terms. At this time, even if one's action is unjust to someone, he continues to do that since there is no one to keep a check on their actions.

In addition to this still, these people tend to find meaningful justification for their actions. According to Hobbes, there is no such thing as justice. Every man's conservation and contentment are committed to his care. Therefore, there could be no reason why every man might not do what he thought. It cannot be denied that there be covenants and that they are sometimes broken, sometimes kept, and that breach of them may

be called injustice and the observance of them justice. Therefore, a rational and sovereign body must uphold the principles behind the terms like justice, injustice, right, wrong etc., while governing many populations to maintain a peaceful situation.

And again, as there is nothing such as right or wrong, justice or injustice, mine or yours. No action is entirely right or wrong. For example, killing a human is considered wrong, but killing in self-defence can be justified. It is just that some actions seem less wrong as compared to others. Therefore, I agree that the definitions of these terms aren't absolute, but a sovereign state is necessary to maintain the meaning and values of the same.

Moreover, this allows certain men to openly protest against the parliamentary decisions and register or testify to their disagreements with sovereign political subordinates. However, otherwise, they are obliged to pay the debt they incur and may be responsible for the crimes of other men. But in the sovereign parliament, anyone who protests there denies their sovereignty, depriving them of this freedom. Also, whatever is commanded by sovereignty on the subject is justified by its commandments. And a sovereign state acts as a guardian of the values stated by Hobbes.

References:

1. Leviathan, THOMAS HOBBS