

— PYQ VAULT · DAY 13 · Western Political Thought —

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DAY 13

Western Political Thought — Hobbes, Locke & Mill · 10 questions

Every question carries a *Flow Snapshot* — and a handwritten model answer on the channel.

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PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2016 · 10 marks

"How would I and my fellow human beings behave if we were to find ourselves state of nature, and what does this behaviour tell us about our innate predispositions?"
(Thomas Hobbes)

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 state of nature = hypothetical condition → remove common power → behaviour exposes innate nature
- R2 start from man as matter in motion → self-preservation + fear → nature read off behaviour

Body flow

appetite/aversion, self-preservation, fear → rough equality + scarcity → three causes of quarrel: competition, diffidence, glory → each a threat to all → war of every man against every man → "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" → not wickedness but restless desire for power "ceasing only in death" → against **Aristotle's** natural sociability → guilt removed from selfishness, a fact of nature

Counter-view

Locke & Rousseau reject the pessimism → human nature not so bleak

Conclusion routes

- R1 behaviour mirrors innate nature: fear + self-preservation, not depravity
- R2 such a nature can be held in check only by a common power

For Thomas Hobbes, the state of nature is a hypothetical condition: strip away all common power and the way men behave reveals what they innately are. He begins with a hard view of man as "matter in motion", a creature of appetite and aversion whose deepest drives are self-preservation and fear.

Place such beings in a setting of rough equality and scarce goods and three causes of quarrel follow - competition, diffidence and glory. Each seeks survival and advantage, so each become a threat to all. The result is a war of every man against every man, where life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short".

This behaviour shows no natural wickedness, but a restless desire for power "that ceases only in death", and not the sociability that Aristotle assumed.

Hobbes removes the guilt from this selfishness and treats it as a fact of human nature. Locke and Rousseau later reject this pessimism. For Hobbes, only a common power can hold such a nature in check.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2017 · 10 marks

Comment on the Hobbesian notion of Political Obligation in 150 words

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1** define obligation (duty to obey state/law) → stake: nearly unlimited, self-imposed to flee war of all against all
- R2** start from fear / state of nature → escape needs one final authority → obedience is the price of peace

Body flow

covenant as ground → **Ebenstein**: sovereign is the creation, not a party; pact is among subjects → each authorises sovereign's acts as his own → disobedience contradicts one's own will → relapse into state of nature

Counter-view

obligation not blind → holds only while sovereign protects life → self-preservation inalienable → no duty to obey a command of self-destruction

Conclusion routes

- R1** ground debated: **Taylor's** prudence vs **Warrender's** natural law → fear + consent + duty, yet bounded by right to live
- R2** obligation strong but conditional → protection is the real measure → individual never fully absorbed by Leviathan

Public obligation is the citizen's duty to obey the state & its laws. For Thomas Hobbes this duty is nearly unlimited, because individuals create it themselves to escape the war of all against all.

Its strength lies in the covenant. According to William Ebenstein, the sovereign is not a party to the contract but its creation; the agreement binds subjects to one another. Each authorises the sovereign's acts as his own, so to disobey is to contradict one's own will and risk a return to the state of nature.

Still, the obligation is not blind. It holds only while the sovereign protects life; the right of self-preservation stays inalienable and none must obey a command of self-destruction.

Even its ground is debated. Alfred Edward Taylor reads obedience as prudence, since breaking peace only returns one to war. Howard Warrander grounds it in a natural law that binds before any sovereign command. Hobbes thus blends fear, consent and duty yet stops at the right to live.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2018 · 10 marks

John Stuart Mill is a 'reluctant democrat'. - C. L. Wayper

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- (R1) defends representative government → but conditions democracy at every turn → **Wayper's** 'reluctant democrat' → captures caution, not commitment
- (R2) representative government is his best practicable form → yet refuses unqualified majority rule → **Wayper** names this hesitation

Body flow

best practicable form (society too complex for direct rule) → also educative (reason, judgement, political efficacy) → but democracy no free gift → fitness via civic culture + education → benevolent despotism for colonies (India, China) → **Tocqueville's** fear: majority tyranny, mediocracy, mobocracy → safeguards: plural/weighted voting, educational filters, second chamber

Counter-view

radical-democratic strands pull back → women's suffrage, minority representation, broad participation, open voting, state education → not anti-democratic

Conclusion routes

- (R1) reluctant only in scope, pace, institutional design → label fits hesitation, not faith
- (R2) champion of democracy, critic of crude majoritarianism → committed in principle, hesitant in form

John Stuart Mill defends representative government, yet conditions democracy at every turn. This is why C. L. Wayer calls him a 'reluctant democrat' - a label that captures his caution, but not his commitment.

For Mill, representative government is the best practicable form, since modern society is too complex for direct rule. It is also educative: participation trains reason, judgement and a sense of political efficacy.

But democracy is not a free gift; people and society must first become fit for it through civic culture and education. He therefore restricts self-government to 'civilized' nations and accepts benevolent despotism for colonies like India and China.

Influenced by Alexis de Tocqueville, he fears tyranny of majority, mediocracy and mobocracy, so he builds in safeguards - plural & weighted voting, educational filters and a strong second chamber.

He still supports women's suffrage, minority representation, broad participation, open voting and state education. Mill is democratic in principle, reluctant only in scope, pace and institutional design. The label fits his hesitation, not his faith.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2018 · 20 marks

John Locke is the father of liberalism. Explain.

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- (R1) **Locke** at centre of modern liberal thought → **Seliger**: first to elaborate liberalism as a complete system
- (R2) rights + consent + limited govt + property + toleration + resistance, bound into one frame → set against divine-right rule → title earned

Body flow

reject **Filmer** / divine right → authority on consent, not inheritance → moral state of nature, not **Hobbes**'s war → natural rights (life, liberty, property) prior to state → government as fiduciary trust → society prior to government → only delegated power (make, execute, judge) under natural + standing law → liberty under law ("No law, no liberty") → property as fruit of labour + toleration (conscience) + right to revolt → liberal frame complete

Counter-view

Macpherson: possessive individualism / **Laski**: negative state → yet **Macpherson** still locates **Locke** at the fountainhead of liberalism

Conclusion routes

- (R1) contract theory shifted from absolute sovereignty → constitutional rule → liberty under law, power under trust
- (R2) rights, consent, limited govt, toleration, resistance in a single system → why **Locke** remains the father of liberalism

John Locke stands at the centre of modern liberal political thought. According to Martin Seliger, he was the first political philosopher to elaborate liberalism as a comprehensive system. Locke earns this title because he supplied the grammar of liberal politics - natural rights, consent, limited government, property, toleration & resistance; and bound them into one coherent argument against divine rule.

His starting point is the rejection of Sir Robert Filmer. Against the divine-right claim that Kings inherit Adam's God-given authority, Locke holds that political power rests on consent, not divine right or inheritance. His state of nature is a moral condition governed by reason, not Thomas Hobbe's war and the natural rights to life, liberty and property exist before the state and remain its limit.

For Locke, government is a fiduciary trust. Society is formed first and stands above it, so government holds only delegated power to make, execute & judge law, bounded by natural law & standing laws known in advance.

Liberty therefore lies not in the absence of law but under it -
"No law, no liberty": Property as the fruit of labour, toleration as freedom of conscience and the right to revolt against breach of trust complete the liberal frame.

Critics read this narrowly. Crawford Brough Macpherson treats Locke as the theorist of possessive individualism and Harold Laski sees only a negative state. Yet Macpherson still places him at the fountain head of English liberalism.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2021 · 10 marks

Comment on the J. S. Mill's ideas on women suffrage

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 Mill = earliest major male advocate of women's vote → sex no basis for political rights
- R2 restricted-franchise century → his stand = radical democratic intervention

Body flow

vote tied to liberty → defend own rights / stand on own feet / reject being "taken care of" → exclusion shown as relic of old "might was right" order, unfit for modern age → capability proven (Joan of Arc, Elizabeth, Margaret of Austria) → utilitarian necessity: no progress while half the talent is shut out → matched by practice (MP; 1866 petition, 1500+ signatures, House of Commons)

Counter-view

the older defence **Mill** overturns – sex as a ground for exclusion / women merely "taken care of" / "might was right" → set aside as pre-modern

Conclusion routes

- R1 women's vote = a liberal right + a condition of wider human development
- R2 equal right joined to social progress → half of society's talent freed for public life

J.S. Mill is among the earliest major male advocates of women's suffrage. For him, difference of sex is no basis for political rights. In a century of restricted franchise, his stand was a radical democratic intervention.

Mill links the vote with liberty. Women must vote to defend their rights and stand on their own feet, not be merely "taken care of" by husbands or fathers. He treats their exclusion as a relic of an older order in which "might was right", unfit for a modern age. Citing Joan of Arc, Elizabeth and Margaret of Austria, he shows women's capacity for public judgement.

Suffrage is also a utilitarian necessity, since no society can progress while excluding half its talent from public life.

Mill acted on this belief : as a MP, in 1866 he presented to the House of Commons a petition of over 1500 signatures.

His idea of women's suffrage is therefore both a liberal right and a condition of wider human development.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2022 · 10 marks

Comment on the Locke's Social Contract in 150 words.

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 contract argues for limited, consent-based government, not absolute power
- R2 men quit a *moral* state of nature (freedom/equality under natural law, not **Hobbes's** war) only for its inconveniences

Body flow

state of nature + inconveniences (no settled law / no impartial judge / weak enforcement) → chief end = life, liberty, property → distinctive two-stage split of society and government → unanimous community, then government as trustee → society prior to government, delegated power only → limited surrender (legislate / execute / judge) with natural rights retained → consent (express / tacit), unanimity then majority rule

Counter-view

Hobbes's single-stage contract → absolute sovereignty, against **Locke's** consent-based, revocable trust (**Waldron**: rights held as trust cannot pass to arbitrary power → absolutism ruled out)

Conclusion routes

- R1 government a conditional fiduciary trust; breach dissolves the government, not society
- R2 contract becomes the foundation of constitutional, accountable, limited rule

Locke's social contract argues not for absolute power but for limited, consent based government. Men leave the state of nature - a condition of freedom and equality under natural law, not Thomas Hobbe's war - only because of its inconveniences: no settled law, no impartial judge and weak enforcement.

The chief end of forming civil society is the protection of life, liberty and property.

Locke's distinctive move is to separate society from government in two stages. Individuals first agree unanimously to form a community; that community then sets up a government as its trustee. Society is thus prior to government, which holds only delegated power.

Men surrender only the right to make, execute, and judge laws ; their natural rights remain with them. Consent is the basis of obligation - express or tacit - with unanimity forming the community and majority rule thereafter.

According to Jeremy Waldron, rights held as a trust cannot be handed to arbitrary power ; so absolutism is ruled out and a government that breaks trust may be dissolved without dissolving society.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2022 · 15 marks

Individualism is inherent in Hobbes' absolutist ideology.
Comment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 claim sound → individual is the root of absolutism, not its casualty
- R2 absolute state built on individualist ground → individualism precedes and explains the absolutism

Body flow

starts with the separate individual (not community / virtue / common good) → ontological primacy + self-interested, possessive, self-preserving → **Sabine** "greatest individualist" / **Oakeshott** "morality of individuality" / **Macpherson** "possessive individualism" → natural liberty + equality belong to individuals before the state → unregulated liberty → war of all against all → individuals create all-powerful sovereign for life + possessions → state exists for the person → absolutism derivative of individualism

Counter-view

Macpherson's tension: "starts as individualist, ends as absolutist" → but tension internal to one system → retained right of self-preservation → individual never disappears under Leviathan

Conclusion routes

- R1 individualism not opposed to absolutism but built into it → absolute state = means, individual = end
- R2 absolutism the form, individualism the inner logic → inherence upheld

The claim is sound. Hobbes builds the absolute state from individualist foundations, so the individual is the root of his absolutism, not its casualty.

Hobbes begins with the separate individual, not with community, virtue or the common good. He gives the individual ontological primacy and explains society through the passions, fears and calculations of single persons. George H. Sabine calls him "the greatest of all individualists." Michael Oakeshott reads him as a thinker of "the morality of individuality", while Crawford Brough Macpherson names him "a father of possessive individualism." Natural liberty and natural equality belong to these individuals before any state exists.

Absolutism then follows from the same premise. Unregulated natural liberty ends in the war of all against all, so individuals create an all-powerful sovereign to protect life and possessions.

The state exists for the person; the absolutism is derivative of the individualism. Macpherson presses the tension - "Hobbes starts as an individualist but ends as an absolutist" - yet the difficulty is internal to one system. The retained right of self-preservation shows that even under Leviathan the individual never disappears.

Individualism is therefore not opposed to Hobbes' absolutism but built into it: the absolute state is the means, the individual the end.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2023 · 10 marks

Comment on the State of Nature as State of War (Hobbes) in 150 words

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- (R1) state of nature = hypothetical pre-political condition → no common power, law or judge → therefore a state of war
- (R2) start from human nature → equality to harm/kill + scarcity + endless desire → war is the natural result

Body flow

no common authority → natural equality of vulnerability + scarcity + unlimited desire → everyone a threat to everyone → three causes of quarrel: competition, diffidence, glory → "war of every man against every man" → war as known disposition, not actual fighting → consequences: no justice/industry/arts → force and fraud become virtues → life "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short"

Counter-view

war is not perpetual battle → it is the known disposition to violence while no assurance of safety exists → qualifies "state of war" without reducing its danger

Conclusion routes

- (R1) self-preservation impossible in this condition → security requires a common coercive power
- (R2) order placed before unrestrained liberty → all judgement surrendered to the Leviathan

The state of nature, for Hobbes, is a hypothetical pre-political condition with no common power, no law and no shared judge to enforce peace. In it, men are naturally equal in their power to harm and kill one another and this equality, joined to scarcity and endless desire, makes everyone a threat to everyone else.

Three causes drive the quarrel: competition for gain, difference for safety and glory for reputation. The result is a "war of every man against every man." But war does not mean constant fighting alone; it means a standing disposition to violence: "the nature of war consists not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary."

Without assurance of safety, there is no justice, no industry & no arts; force and fraud becomes virtues and life turns "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short." Self-preservation cannot be secured here. Hobbes therefore places order before unrestrained liberty, surrendering all judgement to the Leviathan.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2023 · 15 marks

The legal subordination of one sex to another is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human development.” (J. S. Mill). Comment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 Subjection of Women = **Mill's** fullest statement on gender justice → quote fuses two claims
- R2 equality as both justice and development → moral wrong + brake on progress

Body flow

wrong in itself → origin in force, “might was right,” no place in modern world → principle of perfect equality, “no privilege / no disability” → unequal marriage laws → domestic slavery → *hindrance to development* → excluding half wastes its talent → doubles brain trust, raises competition, strengthens democracy → civilizes men, companionate marriage → sex no ground for excluding citizenship

Counter-view

defence of subordination: women naturally inferior + voluntary consent → **Mill** rebuts → “nature” is really socialization; consent under dependence is no consent

Conclusion routes

- R1 justice + utility combined → **Gauba**: among the strongest vindications of the feminist cause
- R2 **Mill** transcended his age → foundational text of modern feminism (line running to **Friedan**)

In *The Subjection of Women*, Mill gives his fullest statement on gender justice. The line carries two claims at once: subordination is wrong in principle and it also blocks human progress. Equality is therefore both a matter of justice and a condition of development.

The wrong lies in its origin. Existing subordination rests on an older order where 'might was right' - a rule of force with no place in the modern world. Mill demands its replacement by a principle of perfect equality, admitting "no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other." Unequal marriage laws, absorbing a wife's property and income, reduced marriage to a form of domestic slavery.

The wrong is also a waste. To exclude half of society is to deny it that talent.

Equal freedom doubles the available brain trust, sharpens competition and strengthens democratic life; it even civilizes men and makes marriage more companionate. Difference of sex cannot justify exclusion from citizenship.

Defenders replied that women are naturally inferior and accept their place willingly. Mill answers both: what passes as female "nature" is the product of long socialization and consent shaped by dependence is no real consent.

Mill thus combines liberal justice with utilitarian welfare. As O.P. Gauba notes, his defence remains among the strongest vindications of the feminist cause.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2024 · 10 marks

Comment on the Locke's views on Revolution in 150 words

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- (R1) revolution flows from trust theory → state holds delegated power, real power stays with people
- (R2) **Locke** as defender of the Glorious Revolution → resistance to tyranny built into the social contract → right to revolt

Body flow

trust + delegated power → breach (arbitrary will / failure to protect life, liberty, property) → power returns to people → right to revolt → meaning narrowed → unlike **Marx**, not violent overthrow → peaceful constitutional change of rulers / no-confidence analogue → dissolution of government ≠ dissolution of society

Counter-view

conservative by temperament → **Sabine**: not a revolutionary, extreme cases only → **Plamenatz**: right confined to educated / propertied classes

Conclusion routes

- (R1) limited, defensive safeguard against tyranny, not radical change
- (R2) legitimacy rests on consent → consent withdrawn on breach → revolution as constitutional self-correction

Locke's view of revolution flows from his trust theory of government. In his *Two Treatises of Government*, the state holds only delegated power on trust, while real power remains with the people.

When government breaches this trust - by arbitrary will, or by failing to protect life, liberty and property - power returns to the people, who gain the right to revolt. Yet this right is narrow.

Unlike Karl Marx, Locke does not mean the violent overthrow of the state, but a peaceful, constitutional change in the set of rulers - like a no-confidence motion today. The dissolution of government does not dissolve society; one is simply replaced by another.

Locke was therefore conservative by temperament. According to George H. Sabine, despite his insistence on the right to revolt.

Locke was not a revolutionary, permitting it only in extreme cases. John Plamenatz adds that, in practice, the right was confined to the educated and propertied classes.

Lockean revolution is a limited safeguard against tyranny, not a doctrine of radical change.

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