Understanding Politics — Chapter 2 Student Practice Pack

Rights, Order and Political Authority: From Hobbes to Locke

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About this pack

This pack helps you work through Chapter 2 of *Understanding Politics* with the primary texts open. It moves from reading to writing: a close-reading worksheet, a self-test, short-answer questions and essay practice.

How to use it

1. Read Chapter 2 and the relevant sections of Locke's *Second Treatise* and Hobbes's *Leviathan*, chapters 13–21.
2. Complete the close-reading worksheet before attempting the self-test.
3. Take the self-test without the book, then check your answers against the chapter.
4. Use the essay section to plan at least one answer in full and write it under timed conditions.

Answers to the self-test, marking guidance and model plans are in the separate Instructor Pack, available to teaching staff on request from www.oxterpress.com.

Texts used. Quotations from Hobbes and Locke modernise spelling and capitalisation. Section numbers for Locke and chapter numbers for Hobbes are stable across editions, so you can use any reliable edition.

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Chapter at a glance

The chapter asks how political authority can be justified, and answers through three thinkers who start from different problems.

	Hobbes	Locke	Wollstonecraft
Starting problem	Insecurity without a common power	Protecting natural rights that already exist	Citizens formed for dependence, not judgment
Pre-political condition	War of every man against every man	Liberty bounded by natural law	Unequal education and household authority
Basis of authority	Authorisation of a sovereign representative	Consent creating a fiduciary trust	Rational agency developed through education

	Hobbes	Locke	Wollstonecraft
Limits on authority	Liberty to resist direct threats to life (ch. 21)	Government dissolved when the trust is broken (secs 221–243)	Political equality requires transforming domestic dependence
Key texts	*Leviathan*, chs 13–21	*Second Treatise*, secs 4–51, 95–131, 149, 221–243	*Vindication*, chs 2–4, 12

Key concepts to master: state of nature; laws of nature; covenant and authorisation; natural rights; the spoilage and sufficiency provisos; express and tacit consent; fiduciary trust; prerogative; Hohfeld's claim rights, liberties, powers and immunities; rights as trumps.

Close-reading worksheet

Work through each passage with a pencil. Underline the claim, circle the qualifications, and answer the questions in full sentences before reading the chapter's discussion again.

Passage A: Hobbes on the state of war

> *Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as is of every man, against every man. For war, consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known. … In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation … no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. (Leviathan, ch. 13)*

1. What exactly creates the condition of war: human nature, the absence of a common power, or both? Quote the words that decide it.
2. Hobbes says war consists in a 'tract of time' as well as in fighting. What does this add to his argument?
3. List what the passage says is lost. Which losses are economic, which social, which psychological?
4. Rewrite the final sentence in your own words without using any of Hobbes's adjectives. What is lost?

Passage B: Locke on labour and its limits

> *Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. … at least where there is enough, and as good, left in common for others. (Second Treatise, sec. 27)*

> *As much as any one can make use of to any advantage of life before it spoils, so much he may by his labour fix a property in: whatever is beyond this, is more than his share, and belongs to others. (Second Treatise, sec. 31)*

1. Identify the two limits on appropriation in these passages. Are they independent conditions or versions of one principle?
2. Section 31 says excess 'belongs to others'. To whom, and on what basis?
3. Read sections 36 and 50. How does money change the force of the spoilage limit?
4. Using Robert Nozick's question, if I pour my tomato juice into the sea, do I own the sea or lose my juice? Does mixing explain ownership?

Passage C: Locke on consent and judgment

> *Every man, that hath any possessions, or enjoyment, of any part of the dominions of any government, doth thereby give his tacit consent, and is as far forth obliged to obedience to the laws of that government, during such enjoyment, as any one under it; whether this his possession be of land ... or a lodging only for a week; or whether it be barely travelling freely on the highway. (Second Treatise, sec. 119)*

> *Here, 'tis like, the common question will be made, Who shall be judge whether the prince or legislative act contrary to their trust? ... To this I reply, The people shall be judge. (Second Treatise, sec. 240)*

1. List the three examples of tacit consent in section 119. Which is weakest, and why?
2. Does section 119 make obligation depend on consent or on receiving benefits?
3. In section 240, who are 'the people'? How would they exercise judgment in practice?
4. Connect the two passages: if almost everyone has tacitly consented, does that strengthen or weaken the people's claim to judge?

Self-test

Allow 20 minutes and answer without the book. Choose one answer for each question. Answers with explanations are in the Instructor Pack.

1. For Hobbes, what makes the state of nature a condition of war?
    - A. Human beings are naturally evil
    - B. There is no common power to keep people in awe
    - C. Resources are always scarce
    - D. Natural law commands aggression
2. Hobbes's three principal causes of quarrel are:

- A. Greed, fear and pride
- B. Property, religion and honour
- C. Competition, diffidence and glory
- D. Scarcity, ignorance and ambition

3. In Hobbes's covenant, the sovereign is best described as:
   - A. The beneficiary of a covenant made among subjects
   - B. A party to the contract who can breach it
   - C. An elected trustee removable by the people
   - D. A representative bound by natural law courts
4. According to *Leviathan* ch. 21, subjects' obligation lasts as long as:
   - A. The sovereign rules justly
   - B. A majority continues to consent
   - C. The original covenant is renewed
   - D. The sovereign retains the power to protect them
5. Locke distinguishes the state of nature from a state of war chiefly because:
   - A. The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it
   - B. There is no property in the state of nature
   - C. Everyone in it is equally strong
   - D. Government already exists informally
6. Locke's phrase 'a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of licence' means:
   - A. Liberty requires a written constitution
   - B. Only property owners are free
   - C. Freedom is bounded by natural law
   - D. Licence is permitted after consent
7. Which pair are the two limits Locke places on initial appropriation?
   - A. Consent of neighbours and payment of tax
   - B. Spoilage, and enough and as good left for others
   - C. Registration and inheritance
   - D. Labour time and market price
8. Locke argues that money allows:
   - A. The abolition of property limits by law
   - B. Government to tax without consent
   - C. Collective ownership of land
   - D. Larger possessions without breaching the spoilage limit
9. Which example does Locke give of tacit consent?
   - A. Signing an oath of allegiance
   - B. Voting in an election
   - C. Travelling freely on the highway
   - D. Serving in the army
10. Locke describes legislative power as:
    - A. A fiduciary power to act for certain ends
    - B. Absolute and arbitrary
    - C. Subordinate to the executive

    - D. Unlimited when exercised by a majority
11. To the question ‘Who shall be judge?’ whether rulers have broken their trust, Locke answers:
    - A. The courts
    - B. The legislature
    - C. The people
    - D. God alone
12. Locke’s prerogative is:
    - A. The monarch’s hereditary right to rule
    - B. Power to act for the public good without, and sometimes against, the law
    - C. A veto held by property owners
    - D. The right of resistance
13. Wollstonecraft’s image of the ‘gilt cage’ supports which argument?
    - A. Women prefer domestic life
    - B. Property should be held in common
    - C. Monarchy corrupts the poor
    - D. Education produces the dependence later called natural
14. In Hohfeld’s terms, a right that corresponds to another party’s duty is a:
    - A. Liberty
    - B. Power
    - C. Immunity
    - D. Claim right
15. Dworkin’s idea of rights as trumps means that rights:
    - A. Are not defeated merely because violating them would increase aggregate welfare
    - B. Can never conflict
    - C. Belong only to citizens
    - D. Are created by courts

Short-answer questions

Answer each in 100–150 words. Define the term, give a textual reference, and state one difficulty.

1. Why does Hobbes think covenants are unreliable without a common power? Refer to the claim that covenants without the sword are ‘but words’.
2. Distinguish Hobbes’s right of nature from a law of nature.
3. Why can Hobbes deny that the sovereign breaks a contract with subjects?
4. Explain the ‘enough and as good’ proviso and one reason it is hard to satisfy today.
5. What is the difference between consent to a political society and consent to each of its decisions?
6. Why is tacit consent a weak foundation for political obligation? Give one alternative ground for obligation.
7. What does it mean to call government a trust, and what follows when the trust is broken?
8. How does Locke’s account of prerogative create tension within a theory of limited government?

9. Explain Wollstonecraft's argument that observed differences between the sexes cannot justify unequal treatment.
10. Distinguish a liberty from a claim right, using one example of each.

Essay questions

Plan answers to at least two of these and write one in full: 1,500 words for a tutorial essay, or 45 minutes under exam conditions.

1. Does Locke succeed in justifying private property?
2. 'Tacit consent is no consent at all.' Discuss.
3. Is Hobbes's sovereign too powerful to be legitimate?
4. Who should judge whether a government has broken its trust?
5. Does Wollstonecraft show that liberal consent theory rests on unequal foundations?
6. Can political obligation be grounded in anything other than consent?

Planning an answer

1. **Define the key term in the question.** 'Succeed', 'legitimate' and 'consent' each need a stated meaning before you argue.
2. **State your thesis in the first paragraph.** Say what you will conclude and on what condition.
3. **Reconstruct the strongest version of the argument you examine.** Quote the text precisely and cite sections.
4. **Press one or two serious objections.** Choose depth over a list of criticisms.
5. **Give the author's best reply, then judge.** Say whether the reply works and why.
6. **Conclude by returning to the question.** A qualified answer is fine; a balance sheet with no verdict is not.

What a first-class answer does

- Answers the question set rather than a nearby topic.
- Uses short, exact quotations with section references and explains what each shows.
- Distinguishes what the author argued from what a modern defender might argue.
- Takes one objection further than a summary would, for example testing the proviso against scarcity or tacit consent against the cost of emigration.
- Reaches a clear, defended conclusion and states what would change it.

Common weaknesses to avoid: narrating the text in order; treating Hobbes as simply 'authoritarian' and Locke as simply 'liberal'; dismissing an argument because of its author's biography; ending without a judgment.

Glossary flashcards and further reading

Cover the right-hand column and test yourself.

Term	Definition
State of nature	A condition without common political authority, used to ask what government adds
Law of nature	A rule of reason binding people before government (Hobbes: seek peace; Locke: preserve oneself and others)
Authorisation	Hobbes's device by which subjects own the sovereign's actions as their own
Natural rights	Moral claims people hold independently of any government
Spoilage proviso	No one may appropriate more than they can use before it spoils
Sufficiency proviso	Appropriation is justified where 'enough, and as good' is left for others
Express consent	An explicit agreement to join or authorise political society
Tacit consent	Consent inferred from conduct such as owning land or using the highway
Fiduciary trust	Political power held for defined purposes and forfeited when misused
Prerogative	Executive discretion to act for the public good without or against the law
Claim right	A right correlating with another's duty (Hohfeld)
Liberty	The absence of a duty to refrain from an action (Hohfeld)
Rights as trumps	Rights that override appeals to aggregate welfare (Dworkin)

Further reading

- Hobbes, T. (1996) *Leviathan*. Edited by R. Tuck. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, chs 13–21.
- Locke, J. (1988) *Two treatises of government*. Edited by P. Laslett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, *Second Treatise*.
- Wollstonecraft, M. (1995) *A vindication of the rights of men and A vindication of the rights of woman*. Edited by S. Tomaselli. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Simmons, A.J. (1992) *The Lockean theory of rights*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Wolff, J. (2016) *An introduction to political philosophy*. 3rd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, chs 1–2.