

A rebellious past

According to all the major polls, it seems like John and his party are going to sweep the elections. He is en route to becoming the next prime minister. It is not surprising that all the press outlets want to interview this charismatic and intellectual character – still a political neophyte, but already a force to be reckoned with.

One line of questioning in particular always brings back a deep sense of nostalgia for John – what was he like as a youth? Has he always been such a high-flyer?

John always answers no (with a chuckle). He was in fact very much a class rebel, questioning every school rule and regulation, and challenging the class prefect's authority at every turn. It might in fact be considered ironic that he is now seeking the highest position of authority in the country...

Why follow school rules?

It was only the first week of school and Jeremy the class prefect is having a difficult time getting the class to follow the school rules. Offences range from eating, changing and kicking a soccer ball in the classroom.

Not wanting to snitch to a teacher, Jeremy decided to confront the class' main offender with REASON. This is how the conversation went.

Jeremy: Why do you persist in eating in the classroom despite knowing it is wrong to do so?

John: Huh? Why is it wrong?

Jeremy: It is against the school rules!

John: I know, but so what? Why should we follow the school rules?

Jeremy: Rules are rules! We just have to follow them!

John: We have to follow rules because they are rules? That does not sound reasonable.

Jeremy: Now I am unreasonable?

John: Seems so. Let me shine the light of reason into your life. Let me tell you why it is *not* wrong to eat in the classroom, and in fact why we should sometimes break the school rules.

John: Eating in the classroom is not wrong because I am not harming or inconveniencing anyone in doing so. On the other hand, the school rules are an inconvenience to the majority of the school population, not to mention an infringement of our rights.

Jeremy: Rules are not an infringement of our rights!

John: They are; they rob us of our freedoms! Furthermore, imagine a terrorist threatens that if you do not eat in the classroom, he will bomb the school, surely it is our moral duty to break the school rules?

Jeremy: Ok... granted, but other than in such extreme circumstances, school rules are inviolable!

John: Why?



Is it morally permissible to
break the school rules?

Authority

Are there any parallels between the justification for school rules and the laws of a country?

What justifies governmental authority?

What are the limits of governmental authority?

When is it justified (if ever) to disobey the law?

One day, a magical quantum spacetime warp occurs on Earth, teleporting **100 random adult humans** – 50 males and 50 females – to a deserted island in a galaxy far way.

On the island, there is **everything the humans need to survive** – food, water, materials for building shelter and making weapons to fend off the roving beasts that live on that island – but in **barely adequate quantities**. Moreover, the **best resources are scarce and far between**.

Given time and the correct developments, it is *theoretically* possible for the humans to redevelop modern technology with the resources on the island.

What do you think would happen in **six months**' time?

What do you think would happen in **ten years**' time?

You are one of the hundred that has been teleported to that island. You are a highly capable, charismatic and rational individual, so much so that you would be able, by force, guile, or reason, to successfully implement any laws and **system of government** (*democracy, monarchy, others?*) you desire. Assume also that you are not just a self-interested individual, but one who desires to **do what is best, in as moral a way as possible**, for your fellow involuntary space-travellers.

Keeping in mind your predictions regarding what will happen on the island, *which system of government would you choose to implement? Why?*

What would your first three laws be?

The **state of nature** is a *hypothetical* scenario where humans live together in the absence of a government.

Human nature is the fundamental set of psychological and behavioural characteristics that humans have, *prior to moulding by the environment*.

- Your view of human nature determines your view of the state of nature.
- Your view of the state of nature might justify the existence of a government to fulfil certain functions.
- It might also lead you to conclude that (only) a certain system of government is justified because they are better able to fulfil these functions.

Prime Minister John's Speech at First Cabinet Meeting

We have done it! After months of campaigning, we have been voted into office by the nation. But now comes the more arduous task of governing! I intend to be different from my predecessors. We shall be principled, rational and just in our rule!

But what exactly does that entail, some of you might ask. Months of campaigning have not answered the question of what policies we shall adopt. More fundamentally, there are questions that we have not decided regarding our governing philosophy. What do we see as the **role of the government**? How should we restructure our government to achieve these goals? In other words, what **political system** should we adopt?

PM's Speech (cont'd): Locke and Hobbes

In search of answers, I have read the works of the great political philosophers. Alas, they do not all agree on these fundamental questions, not least on the proper role of government.

Locke believes that the role of the government is to **preserve the people's right to life, property and liberty**. He argues for **democracy** as the system that will best ensure this.

Hobbes, on the other hand, thinks that the role of the government is to **protect us from one another**. He believes only an **absolute monarchy** – or in the modern context, an authoritarian state – will be able to do so.

PM's Speech (cont'd): Agenda for First Meeting

Both philosophers' arguments are convincing, but they cannot both be right. To break the impasse, we cannot just argue for or against either's *conclusion*. We have to challenge the *arguments* themselves, and show why they are wrong. That is, we must either show that they **RELY ON FALSE PREMISES**, OR that their **CONCLUSIONS DO NOT FOLLOW FROM THEIR PREMISES**. We need to come up with **COUNTER-ARGUMENTS** to Locke's and Hobbes arguments.

That will be the agenda for our first cabinet meeting.

Cabinet Meeting: Challenging Social Contract Theory

After hours of debate and discussion, the minister for law suddenly steps forward and gives the following speech:

“We have been arguing for hours on whether Locke or Hobbes is right, but everyone seems to be accepting the underlying assumption that social contract theory is right. According to social contract theory, governmental power is justified because we agree to give up some of our rights in exchange for some benefits from the government.

“But when have we ever signed such a contract?”

Cabinet Meeting: Challenging Social Contract Theory (cont'd)

The minister for immigration replies, “We might not have explicitly agreed to any contract, but we have *implicitly* done so. We agree to give up some of our rights and freedoms, and submit to the laws of the land, when we choose to be a citizen, or to continue to be a citizen, of this country.”

The minister for law is not convinced. “How many of us have made such a choice? And even if we have, does doing so really mean that we agree to give up some of our rights to the government?”

Next, the minister of education suggests, “Whenever we say the pledge...”

When, if ever, did we sign the social contract?