

An Introductory Reader in Ethics and Literature, Seventh Edition
Louis P. Pojman & Lewis Vaughn

Chapter 1: What is the Purpose of Morality?

READING SUMMARIES

William Golding / *Lord of the Flies: A Moral Allegory*

William Golding is considered one of the most profoundly insightful writers of our age. His works explore the human condition and the need for moral consciousness. In this work, published in 1954, Golding describes a situation in which the veneer of civilization is stripped away from children, and a primordial evil emerges out of the depths of the human heart.

An indeterminate number of schoolboys, ranging in age from six to twelve, become castaways on an uninhabited island in the Pacific after being evacuated from England during a war. They are forced to create their own social system. All begins well. Ralph is democratically chosen leader of the group, and appropriate rules are agreed upon: keep the fire going, use proper sanitation, obey proper authority, and adhere to orderly procedures in the assembly. Bereft of modern technology, they must reinvent simple tools or use tools for innovative purposes: eyeglasses to focus the sun's light to start a fire, sticks for spears, etc. They construct shelters and build a fire on the top of the mountain in order to signal their presence to passing ships. They miss simple conveniences: scissors to cut their long, knotty hair, toothbrushes, sanitary facilities, and clothes.

For a while, the constraints of civilized society prevent total chaos. While the youngest children, "littluns," are frightened and homesick, the older boys entertain them. They seem ready to make the best out of their fate and recognize the necessity of substantive and procedural rules. Only he who has the white conch, the boys' symbol of authority, may speak at an assembly, and the democratically chosen leader is invested with limited powers. Even the sadistic Roger, while taunting little Henry by throwing stones near him, manages to keep the stones from harming the child.

After some initial euphoria at being liberated from the adult world of constraints into an exciting world of fun in the sun, the children come up against the usual banes of social existence: filth, competition for power and status, neglect of social responsibility, failure of public policy, and escalating violence. Two boys, Ralph, the son of a naval officer, and Jack, the head choirboy, vie for leadership, and a bitter rivalry emerges between them. As a compromise, a division of labor ensues in which Jack's choirboy hunters refuse to help Ralph and a few others in constructing shelters. Piggy, the bespectacled asthmatic, acts as the wise and rational counselor, and Simon, an epileptic, is portrayed as possessing special spiritual insight, but these qualities, rationality and spirituality, are tested by the Lord of the Flies. Freeloading soon becomes a common phenomenon as the majority of children leave their tasks to play on the beach. Sanitation becomes a problem, as the diarrheal children defecate all over the beach. Neglect of the fire causes it to burn out, which, in turn, results in failure to be rescued by a passing ship. We enter the novel as Jack returns with his choirboy hunters, having slain their first pig, only to be reprimanded by Ralph for not tending the fire.

Louis P. Pojman / *On the Nature and Purpose of Morality: Reflections on William Golding's Lord of the Flies*

Louis P. Pojman was professor of philosophy at the United States Military Academy and is the editor of this volume. In this essay, he analyzes Golding's novel in terms of the nature and purpose of morality. He relates it to Hobbes's account in the *Leviathan* (see the next reading) and identifies the larger purposes of morality.

Thomas Hobbes / *On the State of Nature*

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), the greatest English political philosopher, set forth the classic version of the idea that morality and politics arise out of a social contract. He was born on Good Friday, April 5, 1588, in Westbury, England, the son of an eccentric vicar. On the day of his birth, the Spanish Armada, the greatest naval fleet the world had then seen, was spotted off the coast of southern England. The chronicler John Aubrey reports that Hobbes's mother, seven months pregnant, startled by the news, fell into labor and delivered him. Hobbes wrote of this experience, "Unbeknownst to my mother at that time she gave birth to twins, myself and fear. And fear has been my constant companion throughout life." Hobbes's lifetime was filled with the dangers of war, the invading Spanish Armada, the religious wars of Europe, the Civil War in England. His political philosophy may be read as a cure against the fear and insecurity of people desperately in need of peace and tranquility. Hobbes was educated at Oxford University and lived through an era of political revolutions as a scholar and tutor (to the future Charles II).

Hobbes is known today primarily for his masterpiece in political theory, *Leviathan* (1651), a book written during the English civil wars (1642–1652), sometimes referred to as "the Great Rebellion," which pitted the forces of monarchy (the Royalists) under Charles I against those of Parliament under Oliver Cromwell. Hobbes's work was intended to support the Royalists, as he believed that the monarchy was the best guarantee for orderly and stable government. Yet the Royalists misconstrued his interpretation as supporting the rebels, no doubt because Hobbes rejected the usual grounds for the monarchy, the divine right of kings. For this reason, and because the book conveyed a materialist view of human nature, thought to be dangerous to religion, it was suppressed or violently attacked throughout Hobbes's lifetime.

What are the doctrines his contemporaries found so controversial? First of all, Hobbes breaks from the medieval notion that the state is a natural organism based on natural devotion and interdependence. He develops a moral and political theory based not on natural affection, but on psychological egoism. Hobbes argues that people are all egoists who always act in their own self-interest to obtain gratification and avoid harm. However, we cannot obtain any of the basic goods because of the inherent fear of harm and death, the insecurity in an unregulated "state of nature," in which life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and, short." We cannot relax our guard, for everyone is constantly in fear of everyone else. In this state of anarchy, the prudent person concludes that it really is in all our self-interest to make a contract to keep to a minimal morality of respecting human life, keeping covenants made, and obeying the laws of the society. This minimal morality, which Hobbes refers to as "the laws of nature," is nothing more than a set of maxims of prudence. In order to ensure that we all obey this covenant, Hobbes proposes a strong sovereign, or "Leviathan," to impose severe penalties on those who disobey the laws, for "covenants without the sword are but words."

WEB LINKS

[Crash Course Philosophy: Contractarianism](#) (video 9:37)

[The Ethics Centre: What Is the Difference between Ethics, Morality, and the Law?](#) (video: 5:13)

[The Ethics Centre: What Is Ethics?](#) (video 4:54)

[Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Ethics](#)

[Philosophy Bites: Quentin Skinner on Hobbes on the State](#) (podcast 17:40; [transcript](#))

[Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: The Definition of Morality](#)

TEST BANK

QUESTIONS INCLUDED IN THE ONLINE STUDENT RESOURCES ARE MARKED WITH A *.

Multiple Choice Questions

1. Golding's *Lord of the Flies* suggests that morality is

- a. unnecessary.
- b. pointless.
- c. necessary.
- d. mystical.

Answer: c

2. Golding shows that human nature is

- a. noble.
- b. rule-oriented.
- c. nonexistent.
- d. depraved.

Answer: d

3. According to Pojman, *Lord of the Flies* portrays a

- a. Victorian utopia.
- b. dystopia.
- c. Christian Eden.
- d. microcosm of civilization.

Answer: b

4. The title *Lord of the Flies* refers to

- a. meat.
- b. God.
- c. the devil.
- d. moral codes.

Answer: c

5. Thomas Hobbes believed that human beings always act out of

- a. altruism.
- b. perceived self-interest.
- c. pleasure.
- d. rational calculation.

Answer: b

*6. Hobbes's theory of morality is

- a. utilitarian.
- b. Kantian.
- c. Contractarian.
- d. religious.

Answer: c

*7. According to Pojman, morality is a necessary condition for

- a. the divine right of monarchs.
- b. the state of nature.
- c. evil.
- d. happiness.

Answer: d

*8. Hobbes developed a moral and political theory based on

- a. moral intuitionism.
- b. humankind's essential goodness.
- c. psychological altruism.
- d. psychological egoism.

Answer: d

*9. In *Lord of the Flies*, the defects of society are traced back to defects in

- a. laws.
- b. human nature.
- c. religion.
- d. education.

Answer: b

*10. According to Hobbes, in physical and mental abilities, nature has made us basically

- a. equal.
- b. unequal.
- c. powerless.
- d. superior.

Answer: a

*11. Hobbes says that we exchange some of our liberty for

- a. communal life.
- b. democracy.
- c. a social contract.
- d. a parliament.

Answer: c

*12. During the English civil wars, Hobbes supported

- a. Oliver Cromwell.

- b. Parliament.
- c. Spain.
- d. The Royalists.

Answer: d

*13. Hobbes claimed all of the following *except*

- a. life in a state of nature is brutish and short.
- b. we need an enforceable set of rules.
- c. a pure state of nature never existed.
- d. we need a *Leviathan*.

Answer: c

*14. Hobbes found that a principal cause of conflict among people is

- a. covenants.
- b. competition.
- c. empathy.
- d. reason.

Answer: b

*15. For Pojman, a key purpose of morality is to promote

- a. survival of the fittest.
- b. utilitarian goals.
- c. categorical imperatives.
- d. human flourishing.

Answer: d

16. According to Hobbes, whenever and wherever people live without a common power to keep them all in awe, there is

- a. negotiation.
- b. war.
- c. democracy.
- d. freedom.

Answer: b

17. According to Hobbes, in the state of nature, notions of right and wrong or justice and injustice

- a. still apply to the actions of people.
- b. refer to objective standards.
- c. have no place.
- d. serve as guiding ideals.

Answer: c

18. According to Hobbes, in the condition in which there is a state of war of everyone against everyone, every individual has a right to

- a. some things.
- b. lawful treatment.
- c. due process.
- d. everything.

Answer: d

19. According to Hobbes, the definition of injustice is

- a. disobedience to a sovereign.
- b. disobedience to God's law.
- c. failure to abide by a contract.
- d. failure to respect inherent rights.

Answer: c

20. The form of government favored by Hobbes is

- a. democratic.
- b. Marxist.
- c. divinely appointed.
- d. authoritarian.

Answer: d

True/False Questions

*21. Pojman writes that one of the purposes of morality is to ameliorate human suffering.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: a

22. Pojman believes that one of the purposes of morality is to provide the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: b

23. Hobbes believed in the divine right of monarchs.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: b

24. Hobbes uses the term *Leviathan* to refer to democratic government.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: b

*25. Hobbes writes that in a state of nature, life is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: a

26. Hobbes declares that under the law of nature, people need not perform their covenants.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: b

*27. Pojman agrees with Hobbes that people are self-interested egoists.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: b

28. Hobbes thought that only an absolute sovereign could establish or ensure peace and civil society.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: a

29. Golding suggests that only Christian morality can save people from deplorable behavior.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: b

30. Pojman thinks that morality may someday be unnecessary.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: b

31. Golding's allegory is a response to a Victorian British children's classic, *The Coral Island*.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: a

32. *The Lord of the Flies* recounts an actual event.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: b

33. Hobbes believes that morality is based on God's commandments.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: b

34. Hobbes's morality theory is based on natural affection.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: b

35. In the seventeenth century, philosophers like Hobbes defied tradition by defending social contract theory.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: a

36. Pojman believes in the divine right of monarchs.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: b

*37. Hobbes contends that living without a social contract would be a horrific nightmare of existence.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: a

38. Hobbes said that “fear and I were born twins together.”

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: a

*39. Pojman thinks we need a social contract to fulfill God’s plan.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: b

*40. Golding’s story symbolizes the triumph of morality and civilization over brutish desires.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: b

Essay Questions

*41. What is the main idea about morality that you get out of the selection from *Lord of the Flies*?

42. Piggy tells Ralph that he is going to Jack to order him to return his glasses. “I don’t ask for my glasses back as a favor. . . but because what’s right’s right. Give me my glasses. . . You got to.” What is Piggy presupposing about the situation and about the significance of morality? What is Jack’s response? How does he further respond upon being called a thief? Why is he infuriated by that charge?

43. Compare Ralph’s understanding of morality with Piggy’s and Jack’s. How do they exhibit different moral positions?

44. What, if anything, is the significance of the conch and how do you interpret its destruction?

45. What, according to Pojman, is the main message of *Lord of the Flies*? Do you agree? Explain.

46. How does Pojman relate Golding’s novel to Hobbes’s account of morality?

*47. Discuss Pojman’s five purposes of morality. Do you agree morality has all of these purposes? If not, explain. Can you think of other purposes it has?

48. Hobbes wrote, “The utility of morality and civil philosophy is to be estimated, not so much by the commodities we have by knowing these sciences, as by the calamities we

receive from not knowing them.” What does he mean by this, and does the selection illustrate it?

49. Is Hobbes’s view of human nature accurate? Do we always act out of the motivations of fear and distrust? Are people entirely self-interested egoists? Is psychological egoism, the view that we always do what we perceive to be in our best interest, too bleak and one-sided?

50. Hobbes thought that only an absolute sovereign could establish or ensure peace and civil society. Is he correct? What would his estimation of democracy be? Could democratic society make use of his analysis? How would democrats modify Hobbes’s theory?

51. David Hume criticized the idea that contract theories provide a justification of political authority. First of all, there is no evidence of an original contract ever being made and, second, even if our ancestors did sign an original contract, why should that give us any reason for obeying the laws of the state? Even as we are not bound by the marriage or business contracts of our ancestors, why should we be obligated by their political contracts?