Study Questions: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*

These study questions are intended to focus your reading and review on key issues and concepts in Hobbes' analysis. Answers to these questions prepare the way for a basic understanding of the argument contained in the *Leviathan*. You should use them as a guide to your close reading of the text. They're arranged sequentially. Make note of where these items are discussed in the text and write out brief answers where possible. If you cannot find or make sense of the answers, make of note of that as well and use it as a basis for our class discussions.

1. What exactly is Hobbes saying in his definition of “sense”? How is sense related to the formation of concepts and ideas in the mind? (Note that Hobbes’ use of the terms “accident” and “fancy” are not quite the same as in contemporary English usage. Consult the glossary of the text for more details.)

2. Hobbes argues in 1.1.4 that colors or sounds are not in the objects that cause them. What exactly does this mean? What reasons does he give for thinking this is true? (State his reasons as explicitly as possible.)

3. What is imagination? How is it related to sensation? How is it related to memory?

4. What is experience? What is its relation to imagination?

5. What are the different kinds of imaginations?

6. Hobbes argues that the waking state is distinguishable from the dream state. State the argument.

7. Hobbes distinguishes “mental discourse” from “discourse in words”. What is the difference? Are the two related? If so, how?

8. What are the two types of mental discourse?

9. What are the two kinds of regulated thoughts? How does this relate to our thinking about the past and the future?

10. Why does Hobbes think prophecy is impossible?

11. Hobbes claims that we can form no thought or conception of “the infinite”. What reasons does he give for believing this?

12. What is the general function of speech? What are “names”? What purpose do they serve?

13. What are the “special” (particular) uses of speech?

14. What are the “abuses” of speech?

15. What’s the difference between proper and common names?

16. Hobbes claims that truth and falsity are attributes of language not things. Explain what he means by this.

17. What are definitions?

18. How does Hobbes define “understanding”?

19. How does Hobbes define “reason”? What is the “right use of reason”? Explain the procedure that Hobbes has in mind.

20. How does Hobbes define “science”? How is it related to reason?

21. Hobbes discusses the differences between prudence and sapience. What are these differences and how is this distinction relevant to the discussion of reason?

22. In chapter 6, Hobbes provides his own taxonomy of the passions. While much of this is tedious, I would like you to focus on the distinction between voluntary and involuntary motions. How is passion related to motion? What is deliberation? What is the will? What is the connection of the will to rationality? Given Hobbes’ definition of “will”, how would you define freedom of the will?

23. What is power? What’s the difference between “natural” and “instrumental” power?

24. How does Hobbes measure the value or worth of a human being?
25. What does Hobbes mean by “manners” and how are they related to “felicity” (happiness)? How does Hobbes use his theory to explain differences in human behavior?
26. What is the nature of the desire for power among humans? Why do they desire power?
27. Under what conditions would one obey a “common power”?
28. Hobbes argues that all human beings are by nature equal. What argument does he use to support this view of equality?
29. How does equality lead to war?
30. What are the principle causes of discord and quarrel among humans?
31. What is the nature of war? of peace? How does Hobbes describe human life under conditions of war?
32. What is the role of justice and morality in the condition of a war of all against all?
33. What are the feelings (passions) that are likely to lead to peace and escape from the conditions of war?
34. Restate in your own words Hobbes’ definitions of “right of nature”, “liberty”, and “law of nature”.
35. In the following sections (1.14.1-9, 1.15.1-3) Hobbes gives his famous argument for the social contract. Summarize the overall argument by isolating the most important points (premises and conclusions) and restating them in a logical and orderly fashion. This will not be easy, but do your best.
36. What subsequent “laws of nature” does Hobbes articulate? Notice the reasons Hobbes gives to justify each of these “rights”.
37. What general rule does Hobbes use to summarize the specific laws of nature that he has enumerated?

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