

Several Examples of "50" Midterms

**SAMPLE 1**

1. In this passage, Locke details the way in which the use of money solves the problem of spoilage of goods. Interestingly, he does not treat the accumulation of goods as wrong in itself, and indeed he goes as far as to refer to this accumulation as "rightful." In making *spoilage* the villain in the system of exchange, money is portrayed as a welcome solution to this dilemma. Alternatively though, it can be argued that money is not the savior that Locke would have us believe it is, but rather a mechanism borne out of greed, and a desire to hoard more than is necessary. When Locke discusses inequality in this excerpt, and throughout the book for that matter, he treats it as an inevitable - and arguably desirable - outcome. Therein lies a key issue of Locke's book. As one gets deeper into his work, the focus of his rhetoric seems to drift gradually from the lofty ideals of liberty, freedom and the use of reason to something else entirely - the freedom to own. The endorsement of capitalism permeates *The Second Treatise of Government* and its presence as a running theme put Locke's true motives into question - a fact that is somewhat disquieting.

2. In this excerpt, Locke outlines what constitutes a just revolt. He takes care to emphasize that even though citizens of a nation have the right to revolt, the circumstances must be especially extenuating in order for it to be justified. While Locke feels it necessary to endorse revolt, he pays close attention to the parameters within which citizens can revolt. He even goes as far to mention that people will usually endure some measure of injustice before they turn to revolt. He attempts to encourage the preservation of the social contract between a people and its government, from both sides. According to Locke, it is the duty of the government to protect the interests of the people, and it also in the best interests of the people to support their government, so as long as the government fulfills its purpose. In trying to defend the position of both the government and the people, however, Locke at times becomes muddled in his views, particularly when it comes to defining a justifiable revolt in greater detail.

3. (A) If taken out of context, this section of Equiano's narrative could have just as easily been written by a slave owner rather than a former slave. As he tends to do throughout his book, Equiano writes from a perspective that is distinctly detached from that of his fellow Africans in bondage. It can not be denied that he is writing for the purpose of encouraging slave owners to better treat their charges, and in the larger context his contribution to the abolition of slavery can not be trivialized either. However, it is the way in which he does so that can be unsettling for the reader. He petitions for the better treatment of slaves not on

the grounds that it is the inherent right of the slaves to receive such treatment, nor because there is any moral obligation of the slave owners to act in this way, but rather because it is more *profitable* to do so. It is possible that Equiano is astute enough to realize that the best way to impact the minds of the slave owners is to make his ideas attractive to them by their monetary value. It is more likely however, that Equiano has been so immersed in the capitalist system that it natural for him to reduce the welfare of people - even his spiritual brothers and sisters - to a 'money relation;' a tendency that is all too prevalent in capitalism, both in Equiano's time and in ours.

4. In this scene, the monster confronts Frankenstein, yearning equally for acceptance as much as for revenge for the anguish caused by his rejection. It mirrors the reunion of a child, abandoned at birth, and its uncaring parent. The monster that Frankenstein created is not so much a savage beast as it is a scared and insecure child, deeply scarred by the abandonment of its father. Both miserable creatures, Victor Frankenstein and his creation resent each other; both seeing the other as the cause of their wretchedness. Consumed by his selfish obsession with achievement, Victor recklessly released the monster into the world, and then cowardly shied away from the responsibility of even bothering to look for it. Just as it is often said that the flaws of a child reflect the failures of its parents, so does the monster's savagery reflect Victor's callousness and neglect. It is fascinating that in era where one of the major themes was the desire to become fused with one's work, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein provides a harrowing account of how easily that same fusion can spiral out of control.

5. In these lines from "Tintern Abbey," William Wordsworth extols the virtue of becoming fused with one's environment. In keeping with one of the major themes of the Romantic era, Wordsworth writes about the desire to have the 'I' and the 'outside world' become one. When he refers to "an eye made quiet by the power of harmony," he is referring to a state of contentment brought about by fully synthesizing oneself with the world. This search for peace is comparable to what some would call a religious experience, except with god substituted by 'nature.' He also writes about a 'spirit that...rolls through all things,' again referring to the interconnectedness of all things - a way of looking at the world that is clearly different from that of the Enlightenment thinkers that preceded him. It is an expression of Wordsworth's appreciation for life's simpler pleasures, and his desire to achieve a state of blissful harmony.

## SAMPLE 2

1) John Locke never plainly comes out and praises money in the *Second Treatise*, but his discussion of its creation veers between ambivalence and veiled cynicism. He repeats his considerable anxiety concerning the immoral "spoilage" of valued perishable goods—a violation of others' rights to them, but *also* an obstacle to the large accumulation of wealth in a barter economy. He glosses over barter economies in anticipatory certainty of money's positive durability. The actual object that becomes "money" doesn't matter to Locke; the

only thing of interest is the magical event of mutual, consenting transvaluation of a useless durable object into a form of currency. Once this is accomplished, hoarding becomes "legal" according to the Law of Nature (it does not infringe upon another's ability to prosper), it becomes one of Man's freedoms, and as such virtually affirms that an unequal distribution of wealth will follow (using, ostensibly, the England of his day as illustration). This is supported elsewhere by his examples of how money/property can be consolidated by family and hereditary connections, but here he takes care to explain that in societies that form around money-users, all social contracts are implicitly designed to defend money's agreed worth and also to defend property, unequal distribution and all. Locke's philosophy of government is silent on alternatives to this system, although he leaves recourse to legislative change open as an option. It is of interest that Locke repeats that value comes from labor, but he sets no imaginary boundaries on exactly how labor and money transvaluate—the very issue that germinates into class warfare, and the one that capitalism has struggled with ever since.

2) One of Locke's major tenets is that for humans to give up the natural liberties of the State of Nature, they must by necessity *improve their state* by consenting to social contracts. In no uncertain terms is a malfunctioning government considered by Locke to be a worse situation than the State of Nature, and he finds it only natural and right that people should seek to improve their lot. In cases where government turns into tyranny, unlawfully seizing life, limb, and property, or simply degenerates into abandoning the people's lawful expectations, Locke appears to wholeheartedly support revolt. Not stated here is his condition that *so long as methods of judicial recourse exist*, then outright revolt is unjustified. He also maintains another condition: that the majority of citizens have to consent to revolt for it to be a righteous act. This condition is a subjective one because even for the majority to have the right to revolt, they must somehow clearly be able to see a pattern of systematic abuse. Yet they may also revolt if the abuses aren't to the whole, but to a minority whose case appears symbolic of encroaching systematic abuse. Then, worryingly, Locke exhorts the reader to almost *intuitively* understand where a possibly abusive government is heading, so that the people may recourse or revolt *while there is still time*, despite the fact that leaves open a rather large window for society to be "hasty" in judgment. Locke's only cover for this is to say that the masses are by their nature almost *mulish*. This is case-by-case wisdom to say the least, and it is easy to get the feeling that Locke is himself quietly assenting to certain revolutions of his day, while deeming others barbaric.

3B) Equiano is, upon liberation from slavery, describing freedom not in the radical or Romantic sense, but wholly in terms of the paradigm he has been heretofore shackled to. This paradigm features slavery as a given and defines Western Man as an entrepreneurial selfhood: free...that is, to acquire. Liberation from bondage is actually acquisition for Equiano—he acquires legal ownership of himself, along with the name "Freeman" and a tidy new suit. That he speaks only of the latter two acquisitions is troubling, for it indicates that his priorities are somehow twisted. To be overjoyed at a receiving a (lesser) title in the very

society that enslaved him casts doubt on the depth of his childhood recollections and his African identity, previously held up to be idyllic. More troubling still is that he acquiesces (with gratitude) to rejoin his former masters as a paid employee, strangely in spite of his confessed and newfound sense of "noble" propriety. Only someone deeply resigned to injustice or *who has his price* (double-entendre intended) would consider something so cosmically back-handed. It remains unclear whether Equiano's emulation of his masters' worldview is a psychological pathology (to be pitied), or a survivalist triumph (to be admired?), for he writes in a mode of self-possession, regardless of his circumstances in the story. As an abolitionist of no small voice, we know that Equiano sought to end slavery; from his autobiography, we often see a willingness to rationalize and compartmentalize slavery--under the rubric of socioeconomic "excellence."

4) Victor Frankenstein's monster appeals to him to bear it in some regard that involves responsibility, emotion, and affection. Frankenstein, meanwhile, is obviously furious towards the creature for causing no less than two deaths in the Frankenstein family. But Frankenstein fails to appreciate the technical blamelessness of the creature. His creation of the monster was a selfish, power-mad atrocity of Enlightenment science: an ill-conceived synthetic life that is a mockery of God's creation, and one that he callously abandons out of cowardice. That the creature understands this state of affairs better than Frankenstein is no small irony: the creature, although rejected by Frankenstein, still desires, however destructively, to be attended to by his creator—much like a child longing for its parent's attention. This inner nobility/emotional honesty of the creature effects a reversal of the apparent morality of the scenario, for although it is the murderer, it is truly Victor Frankenstein who is the inhuman monster. Meanwhile, the apparent monstrousness of the creature is barely described, but from the little the reader knows, it is a huge, hideous puzzle of deceased body parts, seams, and chemicals. Made out of inert nature, the creature is anything but—a perversion of Enlightenment power over matter. Insofar as it approximates humanity in its thinking, it is a truly Romantic tragic figure, focused inwards yet out in nature; so long as it remains an abomination of nature, however, it will always be a lone thing apart from benevolence, and will ever fail to attain human status.

5B) Wordsworth seeks to express an epiphany he has had while in communion with nature, a movement of thought that regards the spiritual life of things, and ultimately his "co-authorship," with Creation itself, of the world he experiences. He begins by using simple language to describe the Romantic pleasures of nature and the bitter-sweetness of temporality and memory. It is when he starts to discuss how a landscape *remembered* can almost mean more to him, and can exist so internally within him, that he proclaims that there is indeed a *metaphysical* aspect to experiencing nature, quite in opposition of the cold rationality ascribed to it in previous generations. His understanding of this transcendence is entirely intuitive, emotional, and admittedly non-objective, so to get the reader to follow his train of thought, he increasingly employs indulgent imagery, rhythmic language and poetic abstraction. He wishes to make the reader's act of intoxication mirror his own intoxication with this inner reality. Ideally, the state he is describing is one of suffusion and

radiance, a communing with mystery, immensity, and the principles of the universe. This gathers in intensity at the poem progresses, until he becomes less an observer or participant in existence, but also a creator, just as he is creating the poem and we are creating the meaning of it. The subject-object/mind-body breakdown so crucial to Enlightenment logic has broken down for Wordsworth by the end of the poem into an affirmation of the natural "something" or state-of-being that both pre-exists and constitutes consciousness.

### SAMPLE 3

1. In describing the function of exchanging needed goods for non-perishable goods, John Locke proposes that property is only limited by the perishing of possessions, not its quantity. He does not however choose to describe how a barter economy would function which would reflect the function of an egalitarian society. Instead he focuses on man's attainment of property which is apparent in his treatise's function to support the *individual's* rights of equality and freedom. And although in the form of exchange he describes, one does not invade others' rights of property, he avoids seeing consequences of largeness of property which mirrors the industry-oriented thought emerging in Locke's time, in where there is little concern for ecological consequences or shortage of land. Locke conveys the appearance of the use of money as something that "came in", without referring to the cause of man's urge to earn a surplus of goods. And in deducing that men *tacitly* agreed to an unequal possession of land, he delineates a mindset that man's attainment of security is one obtained through material stability, thus his theories supporting an individualist society and a government with empirical objectives.

2. Locke's theory on when it is just to revolt is made of a set of rules which become foggy or even contradictory as one attempts to abide to them. They depend on the perspective of a majority which can be dubious. The line between that stage of a government leading to a tyranny and that one of an established tyranny can be grey and fine, since not all observe or sense injustices mutually at a certain time. What may be misuse of power to one individual, may not be for another. These rules, as well as the other main theories in Locke's Treatise are based on man reacting to an innate reason, for Locke mentions this reason from the beginning of his work in describing man's "state of nature". However, this state being a conceptual one causes tensions and contradictions throughout his theories. Just as government can misuse its power due to lack of this reasoning, so can the people misuse their voice and revolt frivolously or, in an other extreme, not make a murmur due to ignorance of certain patterns which can lead to something difficult to repair.

3. Olaudah Equiano emphasizes his new state of freedom being one acquired through economic status in describing his identity of "Freeman" by the use of his new fancy attire. His freedom having been bought with money is thus measured by material value, reflecting the adoption of Western and capitalist thoughts of his captors. Although this freedom he worked long for is attained, he continues to work for his masters, which breaks with the conventional slave narrative. When Equiano states his goal to be in London, he immediately

promises to visit a past master of his. For he traveled the seas the majority of his life and gained a different kind of freedom through these travels, including that of spiritual liberation. And he cannot leave his masters behind him for having abducted him at a ripe age, they represented the closest notion to the male paternal figure, thus his becoming emotionally attached. Having never physically shed blood as a slave, he separates himself from that of the other captives. In the passages that he describes other Negro slaves, he does so at a distance, not including himself as a negro slave. This notion he has of himself as a "chosen" or special individual is carried throughout the narrative, even from the time of his life in Africa, where he was destined to carry the "mark of grandeur".

4. #9; The relation between creator and creation is seen parallel to various relations between characters in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein". As a result of the monster's feelings of loneliness and rejection from society and more so his own creator, he retreats to nature. Just as Victor isolates himself from his family and social relations, so does the monster from his creator and society, although for different reasons, but essentially both characters are focused on the self due to such circumstance. The monster expresses the misery of being rejected and separated from his creator from the moment he came to be, which is also parallel to the death of Victor's own mother and the killing of the female creature. In this passage, the creature's feelings reflect those of his creator ("...am I not alone, miserably alone?"). In addition, both characters express feelings of love and hate towards one another. Such complex and contrasting states of mind are reflected in the detailed descriptions of nature's land formations.

5. In the poem "Tintern Abbey", William Wordsworth revisits a place in nature from his past and reflects upon it, describing ornately its beauty, keeping the reader in a blank state of mind avoiding any other topics of distraction. In comparing the impressions of the past with those of the present he portrays those elements that make up beauty, such as the decay of the abbey and theories of time and fragmentation. He remarks upon the importance this setting of nature has been to him in his life, for his remembrance of such beauty was an aid to purify his mind of the city's polluting ambience. Wordsworth then mentions the mystery of nature's beauty which when fused with, becomes a metaphysical experience in which he is in harmony with nature, thus sees life in a clear perspective, with a different purpose. He further supports this notion in personifying nature's spirit and addressing to it in second person, becoming more intimate in his relation to her. He compares his relation to nature as a child with that of now in which he discovers the divine being in his self when he perceives the divinity in the nature that surrounds him. The short stanzas then begin to fuse into longer, more rhythmic ones which parallel the flowing of his thoughts in this altered state of mind, just like the flowing of that river which wanders through the woods. This poem exemplifies the Romantic Movement which retreated to nature to escape the development of industrialization, and which fled to an alternate state of the mind to escape the rational.