

Enlightenment Packet

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Two Treatises of Government, 1690

John Locke, a contemporary of Sir Isaac Newton, published Two Treatises of Government in 1690. Locke was trying to justify the Glorious Revolution and England's new government. His work later supplied the philosophical support for revolutions in both the American colonies and in France.

(Primary Source:)

To understand political power, we must consider the condition in which nature puts all men. It is a state of perfect freedom to do as they wish and dispose of themselves and their possessions as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature. They need not ask permission or the consent of any other man.

The state of nature is also a state of equality. No one has more power or authority than another. Since all human beings have the same advantages and the use of the same skills, they should be equal to each other. The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it. Reason is that law. It teaches that all men are equal and independent, and that no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions. All men are made by one all-powerful and wise Maker. They are all servants of one Master who sent them into the world to do His business. He has put men naturally into a state of independence, and they remain in it until they choose to become members of a political society.

If man in the state of nature is free, if he is absolute lord of his own person and possessions, why will he give up his freedom? Why will he put himself under the control of any person or institution? The obvious answer is that rights in the state of nature are constantly exposed to the attacks of others. Since every man is equal and since most men do not concern themselves with equity and justice, the enjoyment of rights in the state of nature is unsafe and insecure. Hence each man joins society with others to preserve his life, liberty, and property.

Since men hope to preserve their property by establishing a government, they will not want that government to destroy this objective. When legislators try to destroy or take away the property of the people, or try to reduce them to slavery, they put themselves into a state of war with the people who can then refuse to obey the laws. When legislators try to gain or give someone else absolute power over the lives, liberties, and property of the people, they abuse the power which the people had put into their hands. It is then the privilege of the people to establish a new legislature to provide for their safety and security. These principles also hold true for the executive who helps to make laws and carry them out.

Perhaps some will say that the people are ignorant and discontented and that a government based on their unsteady opinion and uncertain humor will be unstable. They might argue that no government can exist for long if the people may set up a new legislature whenever they do not like the old one. But people do not easily give up their old forms of government. In England, for example, the unwillingness of the people to throw out their old constitution has kept us to, or brought us back to, our old legislature of king, lords, and commons.

However, it will be said that this philosophy may lead to frequent rebellion. To which I answer, such revolutions are not caused by every little mismanagement in public affairs. But if a long train of abuses, lies, and tricks make a government's bad intentions visible to the people, they cannot help seeing where they are going. It is no wonder that they will then rouse themselves, and try to put the rule into hands which will secure to them the purpose for which government was originally organized.

JOHN LOCKE

(Secondary Source)

THE NATURE OF MAN

Man is born with a blank mind (tabla rasa). Man has only the senses, taste, sight, smell, touch, and hearing with which to absorb knowledge.

THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE

The more that is known the less there is to argue about. Knowledge reduces intolerance.

Man acquires knowledge through the senses; this is stored in the memory; this is used for thought and thought becomes reason. Man has different points of view and this leads to intolerance.

Intolerance is due to our stubbornness which is caused by lack of knowledge.

THE PERFECT SOCIETY

All government and human relations should be based upon contractual consent. People should conduct their affairs like a business. People should agree what is to be given and for what price.

People should develop mutual understanding and respect for one another. There should exist among people cooperative toleration.

No one has the right to harm another in his life, health, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. The government should protect these rights.

IMPROVING LIFE AND GOVERNMENT

Kings make laws for themselves. Therefore, government should be based upon consent of the majority of the governed.

Government should have built in checks and balances. If government fails and uses force against its citizens, then the citizens should use force to overturn the government.

ETHICS AND VIRTUE

Happiness is determined by the will of the people, not the king or a self-appointed person.

Morality is the product of an individual's intuitive sense of good and bad.

Virtue is action by a person guided by prudence. A person's prudence is based upon his knowledge and reason. God's laws can be discovered by empirical (looking at the real world) investigation.

Two of God's laws are all men are created equal and men should help one another.

PROPERTY

Man can own private property which is the result of his labor; but he cannot own more than he needs until others have had a chance to work to get their share.

“THOMAS HOBBS (Secondary source)”

The key to Hobbes's political philosophy is a brilliant myth of the original state of humankind. According to this myth, human beings in the natural state are generally inclined to a “perpetual and restless desire of power after power that ceases only in death.”⁷ As all people desire and, in the state of nature, have a natural right to everything, their equality breeds enmity, competition, diffidence, and desire for glory begets perpetual quarreling – “a war of every man against every man.”⁸ As Hobbes put it in a famous summary:

In such condition there is no place for industry because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; 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.⁹

Whereas earlier and later philosophers saw the original human state as a paradise from which humankind had fallen. Hobbes saw it as a corruption from which only society had delivered people. Contrary to the views of Aristotle and Christian thinkers like Thomas Aquinas, in the view of Hobbes human beings are not by nature sociable, political animals; they are self-centered beasts, laws unto themselves, utterly without a master unless one is imposed by force.

According to Hobbes, people escape the impossible state of nature only by entering a social contract that creates a commonwealth tightly ruled by law and order. They are driven to this solution by their fear of death and their desire for “commodious living.” The social contract obliges every person, for the sake of peace and self-defense, to agree to set aside personal rights to all things and to be content with as much liberty against others as he or she would allow others against himself or herself. All agree to live according to a secularized version of the golden rule: “Do not that to another which you would not have done to yourself.”¹⁰

Because words and promises are insufficient to guarantee this state, the social contract also establishes the coercive force necessary to compel compliance with the covenant. Hobbes believed that the dangers of anarchy were always far greater than those of tyranny and conceived of the ruler as absolute and unlimited in power, once established in office. There is no room in Hobbes's political

philosophy for political protest in the name of individual conscience, nor for resistance to legitimate authority by private individuals – features of the *Leviathan* criticized by contemporary Catholics and Puritans alike. To his critics, who lamented the loss of their individual liberty in such a government, Hobbes pointed out the alternative:

The greatest that in any form of government can possibly happen to the people in general is scarce sensible in respect of the miseries and horrible calamities that accompany a civil war or that dissolute condition of a masterless men, without subjection to laws and a coercive power to tie their hands from rapine and revenge.¹¹

It is puzzling why Hobbes believed that absolute rulers would be more benevolent and less egoistic than all other people. He simply placed the highest possible value on a strong, efficient ruler who could save human beings from chaos attendant on the state of nature. In the end it mattered little to Hobbes whether this ruler was Charles I, Oliver Cromwell, or Charles II, each of whom received Hobbes's enthusiastic support, once he was established in power.

⁷ *Leviathan Parts I and II*. ed. by H. W. Schneider (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill. 1958), p.86.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 107

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 130

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VOLTAIRE
(Secondary Source)

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

People should work to make the world a better place by cultivating their own garden. People should get rid of the weeds that threaten good and beauty. People should take care of themselves rather than letting others take care of them. They should not be greedy.

People should try to harmonize their plans with the plans of others.

THE SOURCE OF ERROR AND EVIL

Superstition, intolerance, greed and oppression are the main problems of the world. Man is by nature a brutal sort. The chief wrong in the world is man's inhumanity to man.

THE NATURE OF GOD AND RELIGION

Religion should be without superstition and sectarianism. There should be one religion for all. It should be a religion without ritual and without hate.

The bible of the religion should be the Book of Nature. The best way to worship is by tending to one's own business (cultivating their own garden) by freeing oneself of intolerance and superstition.

IMPROVING MANKIND AND THE PERFECT SOCIETY

Voltaire did not believe in a perfect world. People are too greedy, intolerant and dishonest for that.

He did believe that through education humans might become more enlightened and tolerant. Human beings are improved by civilization and by those who attempt to change laws for the betterment of people.

He did not believe that people were capable of ruling themselves. He thought enlightened kings were better able to improve the condition of people. People, he thought, should "écrasez l'infame," destroy the infamy. The infamy was intolerance, greed and oppression.

THE NATURE OF MAN

All people who work are good. It is the idle that cause the problems.

The Philosophical Dictionary

Voltaire

Selected and Translated by H. I. Woolf
New York: Knopf, 1924
(Primary Source)

Civil Laws

EXTRACT FROM SOME NOTES FOUND AMONG A LAWYER'S PAPERS,
WHICH MAYBE MERIT EXAMINATION.

LET the punishments of criminals be useful. A hanged man is good for nothing, and a man condemned to public works still serves the country, and is a living lesson.

Let all laws be clear, uniform and precise: to interpret laws is almost always to corrupt them

Let nothing be infamous save vice.

Let taxes be always proportional.

Let the law never be contradictory to custom: for if the custom be good, the law is worthless.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT, 1762

Jean Jacques Rousseau

(Primary Source)

I assume, for the sake of argument, that mankind at some time reached a point when the disadvantages of remaining in a state of nature outweighed the advantages. Under these conditions, the original state of nature could no longer endure. The human race would have perished if it had not changed its way.

Men, being human, cannot develop new powers. But they can unite and control the powers they already have. Men in the state of nature could get together, pooling their strength in a way that would permit them to meet any challenge. They had to learn to work together under central direction.

A real concentration of human powers could be brought about only as the result of an agreement among individual men. But each individual man relies on his own strength and his own freedom of action to protect and preserve himself. How can he limit his strength and his freedom of action without injuring himself. . . ?

Some form of association must be found which can rally the whole community for the protection of the person and property of each of its citizens in such a way that each man, because he is a voluntary member of the association, renders obedience to his own will and hence remains as free as he was before. That is the basic problem solved by the social contract.

The provisions of the social contract are determined by the nature of the act (of association) in such a way that the least modification will make them invalid. Even though the terms of association may never have been formally accepted in open meeting, they are everywhere the same and universally recognized. If the social contract were in any way broken by anyone, then each individual could at once resume all the rights which were his in the state of nature. He would regain his natural liberty by losing the liberty of the social contract for which he originally gave up his freedom of action.

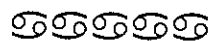
The essence of the social contract can be stated simply: Each individual surrenders all his rights to the community. Since each man surrenders his rights without reservation, all are equal. And because all are equal, it is to everyone's interest to make life pleasant for his fellows.

Since all rights have been surrendered to the community without reservation, no one has any claim against the group. If any rights were left to individuals and no one was given authority to decide between individual rights and the public good, then each man would try to extend the scope of those rights he had reserved for

himself. This situation would mean that a state of nature still existed. All rights must be surrendered; none may be reserved. . . .

The heart of the idea of the social contract may be stated simply: Each of us places his person and authority under the supreme direction of the general will; and the group receives each individual as an indivisible part of the whole. . . .

In order that the social contract may not be a mere empty formula, everyone must understand that any individual who refuse to obey the general will must be forced by his fellows to do so. This is a way of saying that it may be necessary to force a man to be free; freedom in this case being obedience to the will of all.



JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU (1712 – 1778)
THE SOCIAL CONTRACT, 1762

- ▶ “Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains.”
- ▶ “The oldest of all societies, and the only natural one, so that of the family; yet children remain tied to their father by nature only so long as they need him for their preservation. As soon as this need ends, the natural bond is dissolved. Once the children are freed from the obedience they owe their father, and the father is freed from his responsibilities towards them, both parties equally regain their independence. If they continue to remain united, it is no longer nature, but their own choice, which unites them, and the family as such is kept in being only by agreement.”
- ▶ “Since no man has any natural authority over his fellows, and since force alone bestows no right, all legitimate authority among men must be based on covenants.”



JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU

(Secondary Source)

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

Man can only live happily in a natural state. Civilization corrupts man and makes him dishonest. Man must avoid education and follow his instincts rather than his reason.

THE SOURCE OF EVIL

As long as man lives in a natural state and has enough to eat he is friendly toward others. When humans become educated and develop hungers beyond food they become aggressive, spiteful and eager for a fight.

The educated and rich want to enslave others to satisfy their hungers. The evils of civilization and education are due to people listening to their minds rather than their hearts.

THE NATURE OF MAN

Man is naturally good. His environment and civilization make him bad. All people are equal.

THE NATURE OF GOD AND RELIGION

God is good and he is everywhere in nature. If man follows his heart, he will discover that there is one religion for all and everyone will be saved. There will be kindness, tolerance and

understanding among people. This will be achieved only if man lives in a natural way.

THE PERFECT SOCIETY

The perfect society is formed by people through a social contract. Through the social contract all people will have an equal voice. The will of the people must be represented, not through electing representatives, but through the people voting directly on issues. If the people have enough information, they will always make the right decision.

The government does not have the right to give anyone special favors. The state has the right to weave the interests of individuals into the common good.

Private property will be abolished because property leads people to take advantage of others. The people will own all property through the government and it will be managed in the interest of the common good of all people.

The "ideal government" will reflect the "general will" of all the people.

Montesquieu Defends the Separation of Powers

The Spirit of the Laws (1748) was probably the most influential political work of the Enlightenment. In this passage Montesquieu explained how the division of powers within a government would make that government more moderate and would protect the liberty of its subjects. This idea was adopted by the writers of the United States Constitution when they devised the checks and balances of the three branches of government.

Democratic and aristocratic states are not in their own nature free. Political liberty is to be found only in moderate governments; and even in these it is not always found. It is there only when there is no abuse of power. But constant experience shows us that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it, and to carry his authority as far as it will go. . . .

To prevent this abuse, it is necessary from the very nature of things that power should be a check to power. . . .

In every government there are three sorts of power: the legislative; the executive in respect to things dependent on the law of nations; and the executive in regard to matters that depend on the civil law (the realm of the judiciary). . . .

The political liberty of the subject is a tranquility of mind arising from the opinion each person has of his safety. In order to have this liberty, it is requisite that government be so constituted as one man need not be afraid of another.

When the legislative and executive powers are united in the same person, or in the same body of magistrates, there can be no liberty: because apprehensions may arise, lest the same monarch or senate should enact tyrannical laws, to execute them in a tyrannical manner.

Again, there is no liberty, if the judiciary power be not separated from the legislative and executive. Were it joined with the legislative, the life and liberty of the subject would be exposed to arbitrary control; for the judge would be then the legislator. Were it joined to the executive power, the judge might behave with violence and oppression.

There would be an end of everything, were the same man or the same body, whether of the nobles or of the people, to exercise those three powers, that of enacting laws, that of executing the public resolutions, and of trying the causes of individuals.