**John Locke**

**Second Treatise of Civil Government**

**Chapter 18: Tyranny**

**199.** Whereas usurpation is the exercise of power to which someone else has a right, tyranny is the exercise of power to which nobody can have a right. That is what happens when someone employs the power he has in his hands, not for the good of those who are under it but for his own private individual advantage. ·It is what happens· when a governor, however entitled ·he is to govern·, is guided not by the law but by his own wants, and his commands and actions are directed not to preserving his subjects’ properties but to satisfying his own ambition, revenge, covetousness, or any other irregular passion.

**200.** If you doubt this to be true, or to be reasonable, because it is written by a mere lowly subject, I hope you will take it from the authority of a king! King James I in his 1603 speech to the parliament said this: In making good laws and constitutions, I will always put the welfare of the public and of the whole commonwealth ahead of any particular and private purposes of mine; because I think that the wealth and welfare of the commonwealth is my greatest welfare and worldly happiness. In this respect a lawful king sharply differs from a tyrant: for. . . .the greatest point of difference between the two is that whereas •the proud and ambitious tyrant thinks his kingdom and people are only ordained for satisfying his desires and unreasonable appetites, •the righteous and just king does on the contrary acknowledge that he has been given the task of preserving the wealth and property of his people. And in his 1609 speech to the parliament he said: The king binds himself by a double oath to observe the fundamental laws of his kingdom. •Just by being a king he tacitly binds himself to protect not just the people but also the laws of his kingdom. By his oath at his coronation he explicitly binds himself to the same thing. . . . If a king governing in a settled kingdom stops ruling according to his laws, he thereby stops being a king and degenerates into a tyrant. And a little after: Therefore all kings who are not tyrants, or perjured, will be glad to bind themselves within the limits of their laws; and those who ·try to· persuade them otherwise are vipers, pests, against both the king and the commonwealth. Thus that learned king, who had a good grasp of concepts, distinguishes king from tyrant through this and this alone: •a king limits his power to what the laws allow, and governs for the good of the public, whereas •a tyrant puts his own will and appetite ahead of everything.

**201.** It is a mistake to think that only monarchies can go wrong in this way; other forms of government are also open to it. Whenever power is put into some hands for the government of the people and the preservation of their properties, and is then diverted from that purpose and used to impoverish, harass, or subdue the people to the arbitrary and irregular commands of those that have the power, then that immediately becomes tyranny, whether the power-holders are one or many. There was one tyrant at Syracuse, but we read of the thirty tyrants at Athens; and the intolerable government of the Ten Men at Rome was no better.

**202.** Wherever law ends, tyranny begins, if the breach of the law brings harm to someone else; and anyone in authority who exceeds the power given him by the law, using the force at his disposal to do to the subject things that aren’t allowed by the law, thereby stops being an officer of the law; and because he acts without authority he may ·rightly· be opposed, as may any other man who by force invades the right of someone else. This is acknowledged to hold for subordinate officers of the law. Someone who is authorized to arrest me •in the street may be opposed as a thief and a robber if he tries to break into •my house to arrest me—even if I know that his legal authority (and the arrest-warrant in his pocket) empower him to arrest me when I am •out of my house. I’d like to know why this shouldn’t hold just as well for the highest as well as the lowest-ranked officials of government. ·We don’t accept that having great •wealth automatically entitles a man to have even more·. We don’t find it reasonable that the oldest brother, just because he has most of his father’s estate, should thereby have a right to take away any of his younger brothers’ shares; or that a rich man who possessed a whole county should get from that a right to seize the cottage and garden of his poor neighbour? Being the lawful owner of great riches,. . . .far from being an excuse (let alone a reason) for robbery and oppression, makes it much worse. Well, all of this applies equally to having great •power: having much power isn’t an entitlement to help oneself to more and engage in one’s own kind of robbery and oppression. Exceeding the bounds of authority is no more a right in a great officer of government than in a low-level one, no more justifiable in a king than in a constable. It is indeed worse in the king because •more trust has been placed in him, •he already has a much greater share than the rest of his brethren, and •his education, employment, and counsellors are supposed to have given him more knowledge of the measures of right and wrong.

**203.** You may want to object:- ‘Then may the commands of a monarch be opposed? May he be resisted whenever anyone finds himself aggrieved and imagines he hasn’t been treated rightly? This will unhinge and overturn all systems of administration, leaving us with nothing but anarchy and confusion instead of government and order.’

**204.** Here is my answer:- It is wrong to use force against anything except unjust and unlawful force; whoever opposes a government for any other reason draws on himself a just condemnation from both God and man; and my philosophy of these matters doesn’t bring a threat of danger or confusion, as is often suggested. ·Here are four observations in support of this·.

**205.** First:- In some countries the person of the monarch is sacred, as a matter of law; so whatever he commands or does, his person is still free from all question or violence, not liable to force or to any judicial censure or condemnation. Yet the subjects may oppose the illegal acts of any lower official, or anyone commissioned by the monarch. In those countries, the only way the monarch can lose his personal immunity is by putting himself into a state of war with his people, dissolving the government, and leaving the people to the defence that everyone has in the state of nature. When that happens, who can tell how it will all end? A remarkable example of how it can end is presented to the world by a neighbour kingdom. In all other cases the sacredness of the monarch’s person exempts him, while the government stands, from all violence and harm whatsoever. And this is a wise constitution: for the harm a monarch can do unaided is not likely to happen often, or to go very far. Even if some monarch is weak and ill-natured enough to want to do it, he can’t by his own personal strength subvert the laws or oppress the body of the people. When a headstrong monarch comes to the throne, he may do some troublesome things; but the disadvantages of those are quite outweighed by the peace of the public and the security of the government that comes from having the person of the head of government thus placed out of the reach of danger. For it is safer for the body politic that a few private men should sometimes be in danger of suffering than that the head of the commonwealth should be easily and casually exposed to danger.

**206.** Second:- This privilege of the king’s person doesn’t confer immunity against questioning, opposition, and resistance for those who use unjust and unlawful force and claim they were commissioned to do this by the king. Here is a plain case of that. Someone has the king’s writ to arrest me, this being a full commission from the king; but he can’t break into my house to arrest me, or carry out this command of the king’s on certain days or in certain places, if the law forbids him to, even if the commission doesn’t state any such exceptions. If anyone breaks the law, the king’s commission doesn’t excuse him; for the king has his authority only •through the law, so he cannot empower anyone to act •against the law. . . . The commission or command of any government official ·from the king down to the constable· to do something for which he has no authority is as empty and insignificant as the ‘commission’ or command of any private man. The only difference between the two is that the official has authority to a certain extent and for certain purposes, while the private man has none; ·but the restrictions on the official’s authority are crucial·, because what gives the right of acting is not the •commission but the •authority; and there can be no authority against the laws. But ·when private citizens resist commissioned but unauthorized action by government officials·, notwithstanding such resistance the king’s person and authority are still both secured, and so ·there is· no danger to governor or government.

**207.** Third:- Consider now a government in which the person of the ruler is not sacred. My doctrine of the lawfulness of resisting all unlawful exercises of power won’t on every slight occasion endanger him or disturb the government; for where the injured party can be relieved and his damages made good by appeal to the law, he can’t claim a right to use force, which is only to be used where a man is prevented from appealing to the law. No exercise of force by the government counts as hostile if it leaves open the possibility of such an appeal; it is only when force closes that door that it puts the user of it into a state of war, and makes it lawful to resist him. •A man with a sword in his hand demands my purse on the highway when I have almost no money with me; this man I may lawfully kill. To •another man I hand £100 to hold while I get off my horse; he then refuses to give it back to me, and draws his sword to defend his possession of it by force if I try to take it back from him. The harm this man does to me may be a hundred or even a thousand times more than the other intended to do to me (I killed him before he really did me any harm); and yet I can lawfully kill the one, and cannot so much as hurt the other lawfully. The reason for the difference is obvious. •The first man used force, which threatened my life, and I had no time to appeal to the law to make me safe. And once my life was taken, it would have been too late to appeal: the law couldn’t restore life to my dead carcass; the loss would have been irreparable; and it is in order to prevent that that the law of nature gave me a right to destroy the man who had put himself into a state of war with me and threatened my destruction. But •the second man did not put my life in danger; so I can have the benefit of appealing to the law and getting reparation for my £100 in that way.

**208.** Fourth:- If an official uses his power to maintain his unlawful acts and to obstruct the appeal to law for a remedy, this is manifest tyranny and there is a right to resist it; but even in cases like this, if the harm is slight there won’t be resistance that will disturb the government. For if the trouble concerns the cases of only a few private men, though they •have a right to defend themselves and to recover by force what through unlawful force has been taken from them, they will be disinclined to •exercise their right by engaging in a contest in which they are sure to perish. ·And they are sure to perish·, because it is as impossible for a few oppressed men to disturb the government when the body of the people don’t think themselves concerned in it as it is for a raving madman or headstrong malcontent to overturn a well settled state; the people being no more inclined to follow the oppressed few ·into a fight· than to follow the solitary madman

**209.** But suppose these illegal acts have affected the majority of the people, or have affected only a few but seem to set a dangerous precedent threatening everyone, so that the people are persuaded in their consciences that their laws are in danger and—along with the laws—their estates, liberties, and lives, and perhaps their religion too. When that happens, I can’t see how the people can be hindered from resisting the illegal force that has been ·or threatens to be· used against them. Such resistance is a difficulty that will confront any government in which the governors have managed to become generally suspected by their people. It is the most dangerous state that governors can possibly put themselves in, but they don’t deserve much pity because the trouble is so easy to avoid. If a governor really does intend the good of his people, and the preservation of them and their laws, the people are bound to see and feel this, just as the children in a family will see that their father loves and takes care of them.

**210.** But if everyone can see in the government •claims of one kind, and actions of another; •skill employed to evade the law; •prerogative employed contrary to the purpose for which it was given (namely to do good, not harm, to the people); •the ministers and lower officers of the law chosen with an eye to such purposes, and promoted or dismissed according to whether they further or oppose them; •various things done as try-outs of arbitrary power: surreptitious favour shown to the religion (though publicly denounced) which is readiest to introduce such power, and the operators in it [= officials of the religion in question?] supported as much as the government can get away with, and, when open support isn’t possible, still ·surreptitiously· approved and liked; - if a long train of actions show the ·governmental· councils all tending that way, how can a man not be convinced of which way things are going and look around for some way to save himself? Suppose you are in a ship whose captain is steering a course towards Algiers; cross-winds, leaks in his ship, and shortage of men and provisions often force him to head in a different direction, but as soon as the weather and other circumstances allow it he always turns back on course for Algiers. Won’t you conclude that the captain is trying to take you and everyone else in the ship to Algiers? [At that time Algiers was a maximally unattractive destination—a centre for maritime piracy, where many Englishmen were in slavery.] 69

**Chapter 19: The dissolution of government**

**211.** Anyone who wants to speak clearly about the dissolution of •government ought first to distinguish that from the dissolution of a •society. What makes a community, and brings men out of the loose state of nature into one politic society, is the agreement that everyone has with everyone else to come together and act as one body and so be one distinct commonwealth. When such a union is dissolved, it is almost always through conquest by a foreign force; for when that happens (so that the people can’t maintain and support themselves as one unified and independent body), the union constituting that body that must necessarily come to an end, returning everyone to the state he was in before, with a liberty to provide for his own safety as he thinks fit, in some other society. Whenever the •society is dissolved, it is certain that the •government of that society can’t survive. Conquerors’ swords often cut off governments at the roots, mangling to pieces the societies and separating the subdued or scattered multitude from the protection of the society that ought to have preserved them from violence. This way of dissolving of governments is too well known—and too much allowed—for me to need to say anything more about it. It doesn’t need much argument to show that when a society is dissolved, its government can’t survive; just as the frame of a house can’t survive when the materials of it are scattered and dissipated by a whirlwind, or jumbled into a confused heap by an earthquake.

**212.** Governments can be dissolved not only by being overturned from outside but also by being dissolved from within. ·There are two ways for this to happen. I shall discuss one in this and the following eight sections, starting on the second in section 221·. The first way is by the legislature’s being altered. Civil society is a state of peace among its members; they are kept from the state of war by the provisions they have made for the legislature to act as umpire, ending any conflicts that may arise among of them. So it is •the legislature that unites the members of a commonwealth, combining them into one coherent living body. •It is the soul that gives form, life, and unity to the commonwealth, bringing its various members into relationships of mutual influence, sympathy, and connection. Therefore, when the legislature is broken or dissolved, dissolution and death follow for the society, because the essence of the society, and its unity, consists in its having one will, declared and kept by a legislature established by the majority for that very purpose. The first and fundamental act of a society is the constituting of a legislature. . . . When one or more other people take it upon themselves to make laws, without being appointed to do so by the people, they are making laws without authority, so the people aren’t obliged to obey; and this is a way for them to come again out of subjection—·no longer under any government·—and be free to constitute for themselves a new legislature as they think best. For they will be entirely at liberty to resist the force of those who try without authority to impose anything upon them. When those whom the society has chosen to be the declarers of the public will are excluded from that role, and their place usurped by others who have not been appointed to it, everyone is free to do what he likes.

**213.** This is usually brought about by members of the commonwealth who have some power, and misuse it; so it’s hard to think about it clearly, and know who is to blame for it, unless we know the form of government in which it happens. So let us suppose that the legislature is placed in the agreement of three distinct persons. 1. •A single hereditary person, having the constant, supreme, executive power, and with it the power of convoking and dissolving the other two within certain periods of time. •2. An assembly of hereditary nobility. •3. An assembly of representatives chosen by the people to serve for limited periods of time. With a government of that form, four things are evident. ·I shall give them a section each·.

**214.** First, when such a single person (or king) sets up his own arbitrary will in place of the laws, which are the will of the society as declared by the legislature, then the legislature is changed. What makes something the legislature is its issuing rules and laws that are applied and required to be obeyed; so when laws are set up and rules announced and enforced other than those enacted by the legislature that the society has set up, it is clear that the legislature as been changed. Whoever subverts the old laws or introduces new laws without the authority of fundamental appointment [Locke’s phrase] by the society thereby disowns and overturns the power by which the old laws were made, and in that way sets up a new legislature.

**215.** Secondly, when the king prevents the legislature from assembling at its due time, or from acting freely to achieve the purposes for which it was set up, the legislature is altered. What constitutes a legislature is not merely •a certain number of men, or •a certain number of men meeting together, unless they have the freedom to discuss and enough time to complete the business of the good of the society. When the freedom or the time is taken away or altered, depriving the society of the ·fruits of· the proper exercise of the legislature’s power, the legislature is truly altered. . . . He who takes away the freedom or blocks the action of the legislature in its due seasons in effect takes away the legislature and puts an end to the government.

**216.** Thirdly, when, by the arbitrary power of the king changes are made in •who is to vote ·for members of the legislature· or in •how that vote is to be conducted, without the consent of the people and contrary to their common interests, there again the legislature is altered. For if the voting is done by people other than those whom the society has authorized to vote, or is done in another way than what the society has prescribed, those chosen are not the legislature appointed by the people.

**217.** Fourthly, if the people are delivered into the subjection of a foreign power, whether by the king or by the legislature, that is certainly a change of the legislature and thus a dissolution of the government. . . .

**218.** It is obvious why, in a three-part form of government such as I supposed in section 213, the dissolution of the government in these ways is to be blamed on the king. He has at his disposal the force, the treasure and the offices of the state, and he may persuade himself—or be flattered by others into thinking—that as the supreme officer of the law he isn’t under any control. Because of all this, he is the only one in a position to make great advances toward such changes ·of the legislature· with a pretence of lawful authority; and he alone has available to him the means to terrify or suppress any who oppose him, saying that they are factious, seditious, and enemies to the government. In contrast with him, no other part of the legislature or the people as a whole can by themselves try to alter the legislature except by open and visible rebellion. . . ., and when this prevails it has much the same effects as foreign conquest. Besides, the king in such a form of government has the power of dissolving the other parts of the legislature, thereby turning them into private persons; so they can never in opposition to him (or without his agreement) alter the legislature by a law, his consent being necessary to make any of their decrees valid. But if the other parts of the legislature do in any way contribute to any attempt on the government, and either promote such designs or fail to block them when they could have done so, they are guilty of taking part in this, which is certainly the greatest crime men can be guilty of towards one another.

**219.** There is one more way for such a government to be dissolved, and that is when ·the king·, he who has the supreme executive power, neglects and abandons his function so that laws that have already been made can no longer be •enforced. This is to reduce everything inevitably and immediately to anarchy, and so in effect to dissolve the government. Laws are not made for their own sakes but so as to serve as the bonds of the society that will keep every part of the body politic in its proper place and function; and they can do that only if they are •enforced. When enforcement stops, the government visibly comes to an end and the people become a confused, disorderly, disconnected multitude. When there is no longer any administration of justice for securing men’s rights, and no remaining power within the community to direct the public’s force or provide for its necessities, there is certainly no government left. When the laws can’t be applied it is the same as having no laws, and a government without laws is an absurdity. . . .

**220.** In cases like these, when the government is dissolved the people are at liberty to provide for themselves by setting up a new legislature that differs from the previous one either in its personnel or its structure or both, depending on what the people find to be best for their safety and welfare. For a society can’t ever through someone else’s fault lose its inborn original right to preserve itself, which it can do only through a settled legislature and a fair and impartial application of the laws the legislature makes. But the state of mankind is not so miserable that they can’t use this remedy until it is too late, ·which is how things would stand if they couldn’t work towards a remedy until the government had entirely collapsed·. When a government has gone—whether by oppression, trickery, or being handed over to a foreign power—telling the people ‘You may provide for yourselves by setting up a new legislature’ is only telling them that they may expect relief when it is too late and the evil is past cure. It amounts to telling them to be slaves first, and then to take care of their liberty; and telling them when their chains are on that they may act like freemen. This is mockery rather than relief. Men can never be secure from tyranny if they have no way to escape from it until they are completely under it. And that’s why they have not only a right to get out of it but also a right to prevent it.

**221.** That brings us to the second way in which governments are dissolved (·discussion of the first began in section 212·), namely when the •legislature or the •king act contrary to their trust. ·I shall discuss this in two parts. The •legislature will be dealt with in this and the following ten sections; the king will come into section 222, but only as manipulating the legislature. Discussion of the •king as acting other than through the legislature will start at section 232·. The legislature acts against the trust given to them when they try to invade the property of the subject, and to make themselves—or any part of the community—masters of the lives, liberties, or fortunes of the people, having all of these at the disposal of their will.

**222.** . .It can never be supposed to be the will of the society that the legislature should have a power to destroy what everyone aimed to keep safe by entering into society and submitting themselves to legislators of their own making. So when the legislators try to take away and destroy the property of the people or to reduce them to slavery, they put themselves into a state of war with the people, who are thereby absolved from any further obedience and are left to the common escape that God has provided for all men against force and violence. So whenever the legislature breaks this fundamental rule of society and—whether through ambition, fear, folly or corruption—try to grasp for themselves or for anyone else an absolute power over the lives, liberties, and estates of the people, by this breach of trust they forfeit the power the people had put into their hands for quite different purposes. And then the people have a right to resume their original ·natural· liberty, and to set up a new legislature. . . .to provide for their own safety and security. . . . What I have said here about the legislature in general holds true also for the supreme executive, ·the king·. He has a double trust put in him, both •to have a part in the legislature and •to be in charge of the enforcement of the law; and he acts against both when he tries to set up his own arbitrary will as the law of the society. He also acts contrary to his trust when he either •employs the force, treasure, and offices of the society to corrupt the representatives and win them over to his schemes; or •openly courts the electorate, persuading them to choose the legislators whom he has already won over to his side by persuasion, threats, promises, or whatever—thus getting the electorate to bring in ones who have promised before-hand how they will vote and what legislation they will pass. Regulating candidates and electors in this way, re-shaping the electoral procedures—what is this but digging up the government by the roots, and poisoning the very fountain of public security? The people kept for themselves the choice of their representatives, as the fences around their properties; and the only reason they could have for this was so that the representatives would always be freely chosen, and—having been chosen—would freely act and advise in ways that they judged, after examination and mature debate, to be necessary for the commonwealth and the public good. Representatives can’t do this if they have given their votes in advance, before hearing the debate and weighing the reasons on all sides. For someone to prepare such a ·legislative· assembly as this, and try to set up the declared supporters of his own will as the true representatives of the people and the law-makers of the society, is certainly as great a breach of trust, and as complete an admission that he plans to subvert the government, as could be met with. If there is any doubt as to whether that is what is going on, it will be blown away if rewards and punishments are visibly employed for the same purpose, with all the tricks of perverted law being used to eliminate and destroy all who stand in the way of such a design and refuse to go along with and consent to betraying the liberties of their country. It is easy to see what power in the society ought to be allowed to those who have used their power contrary to the trust with which they were given it; anyone can see that someone who has once attempted such a thing as this can no longer be trusted ·with anything·.

**223.** You may want to object: The people are ignorant and always discontented. To base government on their unsteady opinions and uncertain moods is to expose it to certain ruin. No government can last for long if the people can set up a new legislature whenever they take offence at the old one. I answer, Quite the contrary! It is harder to get people out of their old forms ·of government· than some writers are apt to suggest. It is almost impossible to get them to amend the admitted faults in the system they have grown used to. And if there are any systemic defects, or less deep ones introduced by decay or by the passage of time, it’s hard to get them changed even when everyone sees that there’s an opportunity to do so. This slow reluctance of the people to give up their old constitutions has, in the many revolutions that have occurred in this kingdom recently and in earlier centuries, still kept us to our old legislature of •king, •lords and •commons (or, when we didn’t keep to it, there was a period of fruitless attempts ·to have a different form of government·, after which we returned to the system of king, lords, and commons). And whatever provocations have made the crown be taken from some of our monarchs’ heads, they never carried the people so far as to give it to someone who is not in the same line of descent. **2**

**24.** ‘But’, it will be said, ‘this hypothesis creates a ferment for frequent rebellion!’ To which I have three answers. •First, It doesn’t do so more than any other hypothesis does: for when the people are made miserable and find themselves exposed to mistreatment by arbitrary power, praise their governors as much as you will as sons of Jupiter, let them be sacred and divine, descended from heaven or authorized by it, make them out to be anyone or anything you please, and the same thing will happen! The people who are generally and wrongfully ill-treated will be ready on any occasion to free themselves of a burden that sits heavily on them. They will want an opportunity to do this, and will look for one; and in the changes, weakness and accidents of human affairs they usually won’t have to look for long. Someone who hasn’t seen examples of this in his own lifetime must be very young, and someone who can’t cite examples of it in all sorts of governments in the world can’t have read much!

**225.** •Secondly, I answer that such revolutions don’t happen with every little mismanagement in public affairs. Great mistakes by the rulers, many wrong and inconvenient laws, and all the slips of human frailty—these will be born by the people without mutiny or murmur. But if a long series of abuses, lies, and tricks, all tending the same way, make the design visible to the people so that they can’t help •feeling what they are oppressed by and •seeing where they are going, it’s not surprising that they should then rouse themselves and try to put the ruling power into hands that will achieve for them the purposes for which government was at first established. When those purposes are not achieved, ·governments based on· ancient names and glittering rituals are no better than the state of nature, or pure anarchy. Indeed, they are worse, because under such governments the inconveniences are as great and as near as in the state of nature, and the remedy ·for them· further off and more difficult.

**226.** •Thirdly, to the charge that this hypothesis ‘creates a ferment for frequent rebellion’ I answer that ·on the contrary· this doctrine giving the people a power to provide anew for their safety by establishing a new legislature, when their legislators have acted contrary to their trust by invading their property, is the best barrier to rebellion and the best means to block it. Here is why. Rebellion is opposition not to •persons but to •authority, of which the only basis is the constitutions and laws of the government. So those who by force break through, and by force justify their violation of the constitution and laws, are truly and properly rebels. For when men by entering into society and civil-government have excluded force and introduced laws for the preservation of property, peace, and unity among themselves, those who set up force again in opposition to the laws do rebellare, that is, bring back again the state of war [bellare is Latin for ‘make war’, so that ‘rebel’ = rebellare = ‘make war again’]. Those who are most likely to rebel ·against the constitution and the laws· are those who are in power, because of their claim to authority, the temptation of the force they have at their disposal, and the flattery of those around them; and the best way to prevent this evil is to show those likely offenders the danger and injustice of it.

**227.** In both of the aforementioned cases, where the legislature is changed, and where the legislators act contrary to the purpose for which they were made legislators, those who are guilty are guilty of rebellion. [The rest of the section explains this. The explanation is very wordy, and can easily be worked out from what has gone before. In brief: someone who changes the legislature or who as a legislator acts contrary to his trust thereby introduces a state of war, he wars-again, he rebels.]

**228.** Those who say I am laying a foundation for rebellion mean that my doctrine may lead to civil wars or internal unrest. ·What do they infer from that·? I tell the people •that they are absolved from obedience when illegal attempts are made upon their liberties or properties, and •that they may oppose the unlawful violence of those who were their law-officers, when they invade their properties contrary to the trust put in them. Do my opponents hold that this doctrine of mine is not to be allowed because it is so destructive to the peace of the world? That would be like saying that honest men may not oppose robbers or pirates because this may lead to disorder or bloodshed! If any harm comes about in such a case, it is not to be charged against him who defends his own right but against him who attacks his neighbours. [The rest of the section jeeringly elaborates this comparison. A typical sample: ‘Who would not think it an admirable peace between the powerful and the weak when the lamb passively yields his throat to be torn by the imperious wolf?’]

**229.** The purpose of government is the good of mankind. Which is better for mankind: that the people be always exposed to the limitless will of tyranny, or that the rulers be sometimes liable to meet with opposition when they grow exorbitant in the use of their power and use it for the destruction and not the preservation of the properties of their people?

**230.** Don’t say: ‘Mischief can arise from that whenever it shall please a busy head or turbulent spirit [Locke’s phrase] to want to alter the government.’ Indeed, men like that may stir up trouble whenever they please, but it will be only to their own rightful ruin and perdition. That is because the people, who are more disposed to suffer than to right themselves by resistance, are not likely to rise up until the mischief has become general, and the wicked schemes of the rulers have become visible or their attempts have made themselves felt in the lives of the majority. They are not moved by individual examples of injustice, here and there an unfortunate man oppressed. But if they all become convinced on clear evidence that schemes are being launched against their liberties, and the general course and tendency of things forces them to suspect the evil intention of their governors, who is to be blamed for that? Who can help it if rulers bring themselves under this suspicion when they could have avoided it? Are the people to be blamed if they have the sense of rational creatures, and think of things as they find and feel them?. . . . I grant that the pride, ambition, and turbulence of private men have sometimes caused great disorders in commonwealths, and factions have been fatal to states and kingdoms. But whether the mischief has oftener begun in •the people’s irresponsibility and a desire to throw off the lawful authority of their rulers, or in •the rulers’ insolence and attempts to get and exercise an arbitrary power over their people, i.e. whether it has usually been •disobedience or •oppression that started the disorder, I leave to impartial history to decide. I am sure of this, though. Anyone—whether ruler or subject—who by force tries to invade the rights of either monarch or people, and lays the foundation for overturning the constitution and structure of any just government, is highly guilty of the greatest crime a man is capable of. Such a person must answer for all the mischiefs of blood, looting, and desolation that come on a country when its government is broken to pieces. And he who does it should be regarded as the common enemy and pest of mankind, and treated accordingly.

**231.** Everyone agrees that •subjects or •foreigners who bring force against the properties of any people may be resisted with force. But it has recently been denied that one may resist •law-officers who do the same thing. As if those to whom the laws give the greatest privileges and advantages automatically get also a power to break those laws, the very laws that put them in a better place than their brethren! Actually, their privileged position makes their offence even worse: in it they •show themselves as ungrateful for the bigger share that the law gives them, and they •break the trust that was put into their hands by their brethren.

**232.** Anyone who uses force without right (as everyone in society does if he uses force without law) puts himself into a •state of war with those against whom he uses it; and in •that state all former bonds are cancelled, all other rights cease, and everyone has a right to defend himself, and to resist the aggressor. This is so obvious that Barclay himself, that great assertor of the power and sacredness of kings, is forced to admit that it is sometimes lawful for the people to resist their king; and he says it, what’s more, in a chapter in which he offers to show that the divine law blocks the people from every kind of •rebellion! In fact his own doctrine makes it clear that since the people may •resist in some cases, not all resistance to monarchs is rebellion. His words are these. [Locke gives them first in Latin in this section, then in English occupying the whole of the next section.]

**233.** Someone may ask: Must the people then always lay themselves open to the cruelty and rage of tyranny? Must they see their cities pillaged and reduced to ashes, their wives and children exposed to the tyrant’s lust and fury, and themselves and their households brought by their king to ruin and to all the miseries of want and oppression—and yet sit still? The common privilege of opposing force with force, which nature allows so freely to all other creatures for their preservation from injury—must men alone be debarred from having it? I answer that self-defence is a part of the law of nature, and it can’t be denied to the community, even against the king himself; but that law doesn’t allow them to revenge themselves upon him. So if the king in hatred sets himself not merely against this or that person but against the body of the commonwealth of which he is the head, and with intolerable ill usage cruelly tyrannizes over all or many of the people, then the people have a right to resist and defend themselves from injury. But in doing this they must be careful only to •defend themselves, and not to •attack their king. They may make good the damages they have received, but must not under any provocation cross the line of appropriate reverence and respect. They may push back the present attempt but must not take revenge for past violences; for it is natural for us to •defend life and limb, but it is against nature for •an inferior to punish a superior. . . . So this is the privilege of the people in general, as compared with any private person: particular men. . . .have no other remedy but patience, whereas the body of the people may respectfully resist intolerable tyranny. ·I stress intolerable; for when the tyranny is only moderate they ought to endure it·. [End of quotation from Barclay]

**234.** That is the extent to which this great advocate of monarchical power allows for resistance.

**235.** It is true that he has put two limitations on such resistance. First, •it must be done with reverence. Secondly, •it must be without retribution or punishment because an inferior cannot punish a superior. First, it will need some skill to make clear how one is to resist force without striking back, or how to strike with reverence! Someone who opposes an assault with nothing but a shield to take the blows, or in some more respectful posture but without a sword in his hand tries to lessen the assailant’s confidence and force, will quickly come to the end of his resistance and will find that such a defence will only serve to make things worse for him. [Locke now quotes the Latin poet Juvenal to that effect. Then:] This will always be the outcome of such an imaginary ‘resistance’ in which men may not strike back. So someone who is allowed to resist must be allowed to strike. And then let our author or anyone else join a knock on the head or a cut on the face with as much reverence and respect as he thinks fit. For all I know, someone who can reconcile blows with reverence deserves to be rewarded for his ·reconciling· labours by being beaten up only in a civil and respectful manner. Secondly, An inferior cannot punish a superior. That is true, generally speaking, while he is his superior. But resisting force with force is the state of war that levels the ground and cancels all former relations of reverence, respect, and superiority. The only superior/inferior relationship that remains is this: he who opposes the unjust aggressor is his superior in that he has a right when he wins to punish the offender, both for the breach of the peace and for all the evils that followed from it. So Barclay is more consistent with himself when, in another place, he denies that it is ever lawful to resist a king. But in that place he describes two ways in which a king may un-king himself. [Again Locke gives them first in Latin, starting in this section and running on to the end of **236**, and then in English in the following two sections.]

**237.** . . . .The people can never come by a power over the king unless he does something that makes him cease to be a king. When he does that, he divests himself of his crown and dignity, and returns to the state of a private man; and then the people become free and superior, regaining the power that they had. . . .before they crowned him king. But there aren’t many ways for this to happen. After considering it thoroughly I can find only two cases in which a king ceases to be a king and loses all power and regal authority over his people. . . . The first is, •if he tries to overturn the government, that is, if he plans to ruin the kingdom and commonwealth. An example is Nero, of whom it is recorded that he resolved to cut off the senate and people of Rome, lay the city waste with fire and sword, and then go to some other place. And Caligula is reported to have openly declared that he would no longer be a head to the people or the senate, and that he was thinking of cutting off the worthiest men of both ranks and then retiring to Alexandria; and that he wished that the people had only one neck so that he could kill them all by one blow. When any king harbours in his thoughts such plans as these, and seriously promotes them, he thereby gives up all care and thought of the commonwealth, and consequently loses the power of governing his subjects—just as a master loses command over his slaves when he abandons them.

**238.** The other case is •when a king makes himself dependent on someone else, and subjects his kingdom—left to him by his ancestors and freely put into his hands by the people—to the command of that other person. Even if the king doesn’t intend to harm the people, he has alienated [here = ‘made to be foreign’] his kingdom: because he has •given up the principal part of royal dignity, namely being immediately under God supreme in his kingdom; and also •because he betrayed or forced his people, whose liberty he ought to have carefully preserved, into the power and dominion of a foreign nation. By this alienation (as it were) of his kingdom he loses the power he had in it previously, without transferring the faintest right to those to whom he wants to give the power; and so by this he act sets the people free, leaving them to behave as they see fit. [End of quotation from Barclay]

**239.** Barclay, the great champion of absolute monarchy, is forced to allow that in these cases a king may be resisted and stops being a king. Cutting a long story short: when he has no authority he is no king, and may be resisted, for where the authority ceases the king ceases too, and becomes like other men who have no authority. The two circumstances that Barclay mentions don’t differ much from the ones I cited as destructive to governments. The only difference is that he omits the principle from which his doctrine flows, namely the breach of trust involved in •not preserving the form of government that had been agreed on, and in •not aiming to achieve the purpose of government as such, which is the public good and preservation of property. When a king has dethroned himself and entered a state of war against his people, what is to hinder them from prosecuting him—no longer a king—as they would any other man who has made war against them? Barclay and those who agree with him would do well to answer that. Notice that Barclay says that the people may prevent planned harm before it occurs; so he allows resistance when tyranny is still at the design stage. He says that when any king harbours in his thoughts and seriously promotes such designs, he immediately gives up all care and thought of the commonwealth; so that according to Barclay the neglect of the public good is to be taken as an evidence of such a design, or at least as a sufficient ground for resistance. And he gives the reason for all this in these words: ‘Because he betrayed or forced his people, whose liberty he ought carefully to have preserved. . . ’ What he adds, namely ‘. . . into the power and dominion of a foreign nation’, signifies nothing; because the fault and forfeiture comes from the loss of their liberty, which he ought to have preserved, and not from any facts about which persons the power was handed over to. Whether they are made slaves to members of their own nation or a foreign one, the people’s right is invaded and their liberty lost, just the same; and this is the injury, and against only this do they have the right of defence. And there are instances to be found in all countries which show that what gives offence is not the change of nationality in their governors but the change of government. [Locke then names several writers who agree with his position and who cannot be suspected to be ignorant of our government or to be enemies to it’. And he writes scornfully of those who have endorsed Hooker’s political conclusions while denying his Lockean premises. Their work, he says, can be twisted around by ‘cunninger workmen’ to serve even worse purposes. He describes the latter as men who were willing when it suited them to ‘resolve all government into absolute tyranny, and hold that all men are born to slavery, which is what their skimpy souls fitted them for’.]

**240.** At this point you are likely to ask: Who is to be the judge of whether the monarch or legislature have acted contrary to their trust? That they have so acted is the sort of thing that can be spread around among the people by discontented and factious men, when all the king has done is to make use of his legitimate prerogative. To this I reply, The people should be judge; for who should judge whether a trustee or deputy has acted well and according to the trust reposed in him, if not the person who deputes him? Having deputed him, he must have still a power to discard him when he fails in his trust. If this is reasonable in particular cases of private men, why should it be otherwise in this most important case where the welfare of millions is concerned, and where the threatened evil is greater, and redressing it is very difficult, costly, and dangerous?

**241.** Furthermore, the question ‘Who is to be the judge?’ can’t mean that there is no judge at all; for when there is no judicature on earth to decide controversies among men, God in heaven is the judge. It is true that God alone is the judge of what is right. But every man is judge for himself, in this case as in all others, of whether another man has put himself into a state of war with him, and whether he should appeal to the supreme judge.

**242.** If a controversy arises between a king and some of the people, in a matter of great importance where the law is silent, or doubtful, I think the right umpire would be the body of the people. For in cases where the king has a trust placed in him and is dispensed from the common ordinary rules of the law, if any ·private· men are aggrieved and think that the king acts beyond that trust or contrary to it, the body of the people who first placed that trust in him are clearly the best judges of how far they meant the trust to extend. If that way of settling the matter is turned down by the king, or whoever is administering the government, the only court of appeal is in heaven. . . . ·What we have here is· properly a state of war, in which the only appeal is to heaven; and in that state the injured party must judge for himself when it is fit for him to make such an appeal.

**243.** To conclude, the power that every individual gave to the society when he entered into it can never revert to the individuals again as long as the society lasts, but will always remain in the community; because without this there can’t be a community, a commonwealth, and that would be contrary to the original agreement. So also when the society has placed the legislative power in any assembly of men, to continue in them and their successors with direction and authority for providing such successors, the legislative power can never revert to the people while that government lasts; because having provided a legislature with power to continue for ever, they have given to it their political power and cannot get it back. But •if they have set limits to the duration of their legislature, and given this supreme power to some person or assembly only temporarily, or •if it is forfeited through the misbehaviour of those in authority, •at the set time or •at the time of the forfeiture the power does revert to the society, and then the people have a right to act as supreme and to continue the legislature in themselves; or to set up a new form of government, or retain the old form while placing it in new hands, as they see fit.