

The Second Treatise of Civil Government

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Political power, then, I take to be *a right* of making Laws with Penalties of Death, and consequently all less Penalties, for the Regulating and Preserving of Property, and of employing the force of the Community, in the Execution of such Laws, and in the defense of the Commonwealth from Foreign Injury, and all this only for the Public Good . . .

To understand Political Power right, and derive it from the Original, we must consider what State all Men are naturally in, and that is, a *state of perfect Freedom* to order their Actions, and dispose of their Possessions, and Persons as they think fit . . . [and] A State of Equality, wherein the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another . . .

The *State of Nature* has a Law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: And Reason, which is that Law [of nature], teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions. For Men being all the Workmanship of one Omnipotent [God created people]... they are his Property. . .

The *Natural Liberty* of Man is to be free from any Superior Power on Earth, and not to be under the Will or Legislative¹ Authority of Man, but to have only the Law of nature for his Rule. The *Liberty of Man, in Society*, is to be under no other Legislative Power but that established by consent . . .

Men being, as has been said, by nature, all free, equal and independent, no one can be put out of this Estate², and subjected to the Political Power of another, without his own *Consent*. The only way whereby any one divests himself of his Natural Liberty, and *puts on the bonds of Civil Society* is by agreeing with other Men to join and unite into a Community, for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure Enjoyment of their Properties, and a greater Security against any that are not of it. . . .

And thus every Man, by consenting with others to make one Body Politic under one Government, puts himself under an Obligation to every one of that Society, to submit to the determination of the *majority*, and to be concluded by it; or else this *original Compact*, whereby he with others incorporates into *one Society*, would signify nothing, and be no Compact, if he be left free, and under no other ties, than he was in before in the State of Nature. . . .

If Man in the State of Nature be so free . . . why will he part with his freedom? . . . To which . . . [it is] obvious to Answer, that though in the state of Nature he hath such a right, yet the Enjoyment of it is very uncertain, and constantly exposed to the Invasion of others . . . this state is very unsafe, very insecure. This makes him willing to quit this Condition, which however free, is full of fears and continual dangers: And 'tis not without reason, that he seeks out, and is

¹ Legislative authority means the people who make the laws

² Estate means class, such as upper, lower and middle class.

willing to join in Society with others who are already united, or have a mind to unite for the mutual *Preservation* of their Lives, Liberties and Estates, which I call by the general Name, *Property*. . . .

The great and *chief end* therefore, of Men's uniting into Commonwealths, and putting themselves under Government, *is the Preservation of their Property*. . . [for] which many things are [lacking] . . . *First*, . . . [the state of nature lacks] an established, settled, known law, received and allowed by common consent to be the standard of right and wrong, and the common measure to decide all controversies between them . . . *Secondly*, . . . [the state of nature lacks] *a known and indifferent judge*, with authority to determine all differences according to the established law: for everyone in that [natural] state [act as] both judge and executioner . . . [and] being partial to themselves, passion and revenge is very apt to carry them too far . . . and . . . negligence . . . make them too remiss in other men's. *Thirdly*, In the state of nature there often wants *power* to back and support the sentence when right, and to *give* it due *execution*.

But though Men when they enter into Society, give up the equality, Liberty, and Executive Power they had in the State of Nature, into the hands of the Society . . . yet it be being only with an intention in every one the better to preserve himself his Liberty and Property; (For no rational Creature can be supposed to change his condition with an intention to be worse) the power of the Society, or *Legislative* constituted by them, *can never be supposed to extend farther than the common good*; but is obliged to secure every ones Property by providing against those . . . defects . . . that made the State of Nature so unsafe and uneasy . . .

Though in a Constituted Commonwealth . . . there can be but *one Supreme Power*, which is *the Legislative*, to which all the rest are and must be subordinate, yet . . . there remains still *in the People a Supreme Power* to remove or *alter the Legislative*, when they find the *Legislative* act contrary to the trust reposed in them . . .

To this perhaps it will be said, that the People being ignorant, and always discontented, to lay the Foundation of Government in the unsteady Opinion, and uncertain Humor of the People, is to expose it to certain ruin; And *no Government will be able long to subsist*, if the People may set up a new Legislative whenever they take offence at the old one. To this, I Answer: Quite the contrary. People are not so easily got out of their old Forms, as some are apt to suggest. They are hardly to be prevailed with to amend the acknowledged Faults, in the Frame they have been accustomed to. . .

The end of Government is the good of Mankind, and which is *best for Mankind*, that the People should always be exposed to the boundless will of Tyranny, or that the rulers should be sometimes liable to be opposed, when they grow exorbitant in the use of their Power, and employ it for the destruction, and not the preservation of the Properties of their People?