

Writings of Enlightenment Philosophers

John Locke's Second Treatise on Government

Chapter 2: "Of the State of Nature":

Sect. 4: TO understand political power right, and derive it from its 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, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man.

A state also of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another; there being nothing more evident, than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without subordination or subjection, unless the lord and master of them all should, by any manifest declaration of his will, set one above another, and confer on him, by an evident and clear appointment, an undoubted right to dominion and sovereignty. . . .

Sect. 6. But though this be a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of licence: though man in that state have an uncontrollable liberty to dispose of his person or possessions, yet he has not liberty to destroy himself, or so much as any creature in his possession, but where some nobler use than its bare preservation calls for it. The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, 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, and infinitely wise maker; all the servants of one sovereign master, sent into the world by his order, and about his business; they are his property, whose workmanship they are, made to last during his, not one another's pleasure: and being furnished with like faculties, sharing all in one community of nature, there cannot be supposed any such subordination among us, that may authorize us to destroy one another, as if we were made for one another's uses, as the inferior ranks of creatures are for our's. Every one, as he is bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his station wilfully, so by the like reason, when his own preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, to preserve the rest of mankind, and may not, unless it be to do justice on an offender, take away, or impair the life, or what tends to the preservation of the life, the liberty, health, limb, or goods of another. . . .

Chapter 5, "Of Property":

Sect. 26: God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life, and convenience. The earth, and all that is therein, is given to men for the support and comfort of their being. And tho' all the fruits it naturally produces, and beasts it feeds, belong to mankind in common, as they are produced by the spontaneous hand of nature; and no body has originally a private dominion, exclusive of the rest of mankind, in any of them, as they are thus in their natural state: yet being given for the use of men, there must of necessity be a means to appropriate them some way or other, before they can be of any use, or at all beneficial to any particular man. . . .

Sect. 27. Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person: this no body has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state nature hath placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other men: for this labour being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to, at least where there is enough, and as good, left in common for others. . . .

Chapter 8, "Of the Beginning of Political Societies":

Sect. 95: MEN being, as has been said, by nature, all free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of this estate, 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. This any number of men may do, because it injures not the freedom of the rest; they are left as they were in the liberty of the state of nature. When any number of men have so consented to make one community or government, they are thereby presently incorporated, and make one body politic, wherein the majority have a right to act and conclude the rest.

Sect. 96. For when any number of men have, by the consent of every individual, made a community, they have thereby made that community one body, with a power to act as one body, which is only by the will and determination of the majority: for that which acts any community, being only the consent of the individuals of it, and it being necessary to that which is one body to move one way; it is necessary the

body should move that way whither the greater force carries it, which is the consent of the majority: or else it is impossible it should act or continue one body, one community, which the consent of every individual that united into it, agreed that it should; and so every one is bound by that consent to be concluded by the majority. And therefore we see, that in assemblies, impowered to act by positive laws, where no number is set by that positive law which impowers them, the act of the majority passes for the act of the whole, and of course determines, as having, by the law of nature and reason, the power of the whole.

Sect. 97. 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. For what appearance would there be of any compact? what new engagement if he were no farther tied by any decrees of the society, than he himself thought fit, and did actually consent to? This would be still as great a liberty, as he himself had before his compact, or any one else in the state of nature hath, who may submit himself, and consent to any acts of it if he thinks fit. .

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Chapter 19, "Of the Dissolution of Government":

Sect. 222: The reason why men enter into society, is the preservation of their property; and the end why they chuse and authorize a legislative, is, that there may be laws made, and rules set, as guards and fences to the properties of all the members of the society, to limit the power, and moderate the dominion, of every part and member of the society: for since it can never be supposed to be the will of the society, that the legislative should have a power to destroy that which every one designs to secure, by entering into society, and for which the people submitted themselves to legislators of their own making; whenever the legislators endeavour to take away, and destroy the property of the people, or to reduce them to slavery under arbitrary power, they put themselves into a state of war with the people, who are thereupon absolved from any farther obedience, and are left to the common refuge, which God hath provided for all men, against force and violence. Whensoever therefore the legislative shall transgress this fundamental rule of society; and either by ambition, fear, folly or corruption, endeavour to grasp themselves, or put into the hands of any other, 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 contrary ends, and it devolves to the people, who have a right to resume their original liberty, and, by the establishment of a new legislative, (such as they shall think fit) provide for their own safety and security, which is the end for

which they are in society. What I have said here, concerning the legislative in general, holds true also concerning the supreme executor, who having a double trust put in him, both to have a part in the legislative, and the supreme execution of the law, acts against both, when he goes about to set up his own arbitrary will as the law of the society. He acts also contrary to his trust, when he either employs the force, treasure, and offices of the society, to corrupt the representatives, and gain them to his purposes; or openly preengages the electors, and prescribes to their choice, such, whom he has, by solicitations, threats, promises, or otherwise, won to his designs; and employs them to bring in such, who have promised before-hand what to vote, and what to enact. Thus to regulate candidates and electors, and new-model the ways of election, what is it but to cut up the government by the roots, and poison the very fountain of public security? for the people having reserved to themselves the choice of their representatives, as the fence to their properties, could do it for no other end, but that they might always be freely chosen, and so chosen, freely act, and advise, as the necessity of the commonwealth, and the public good should, upon examination, and mature debate, be judged to require. This, those who give their votes before they hear the debate, and have weighed the reasons on all sides, are not capable of doing. To prepare such an assembly as this, and endeavour to set up the declared abettors of his own will, for the true representatives of the people, and the law-makers of the society, is certainly as great a breach of trust, and as perfect a declaration of a design to subvert the government, as is possible to be met with. . .

Sect. 223. 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 humour 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. And if there be any original defects, or adventitious ones introduced by time, or corruption; it is not an easy thing to get them changed, even when all the world sees there is an opportunity for it. This slowness and aversion in the people to quit their old constitutions, has, in the many revolutions which have been seen in this kingdom, in this and former ages, still kept us to, or, after some interval of fruitless attempts, still brought us back again to our old legislative of king, lords and commons: and whatever provocations have made the crown be taken from some of our princes heads, they never carried the people so far as to place it in another line.

Sect. 224. But it will be said, this hypothesis lays a ferment for frequent rebellion. To which I answer, . . . No more than any other hypothesis: for when the people are made miserable, and find themselves exposed to the ill usage of arbitrary power, cry up their governors, as much as you will, for sons of Jupiter; let them be sacred and divine, descended, or authorized from heaven; give them out for whom or what you please, the same will happen. The people generally ill treated, and contrary to right, will be ready upon any occasion to ease themselves of a burden that sits heavy upon them. They will wish, and seek for the opportunity, which in the change, weakness and accidents of human affairs, seldom delays long to offer itself. . . .

Sources: <https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/locke-the-works-vol-5-four-letters-concerning-toleration>, <https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/hollis-the-two-treatises-of-civil-government-hollis-ed>

<https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/historic-document-library/detail/john-locke-a-letter-concerning-toleration-1689-and-two-treatises-on-government-1690>

Baron de Montesquieu's Spirit of the Laws

(Montesquieu was French, so this is from a translation)

4.1 Forms of Government

Montesquieu holds that there are three types of governments: republican governments, which can take either democratic or aristocratic forms; monarchies; and despotisms. Unlike, for instance, Aristotle, Montesquieu does not distinguish forms of government on the basis of the virtue of the sovereign. The distinction between monarchy and despotism, for instance, depends not on the virtue of the monarch, but on whether or not he governs "by fixed and established laws" (SL 2.1). Each form of government has a principle, a set of "human passions which set it in motion" (SL 3.1); and each can be corrupted if its principle is undermined or destroyed.

In a democracy, the people are sovereign. They may govern through ministers, or be advised by a senate, but they must have the power of choosing their ministers and senators for themselves. The principle of democracy is political virtue, by which Montesquieu means "the love of the laws and of our country" (SL 4.5), including its democratic constitution. The form of a democratic government makes the laws governing suffrage and voting fundamental. The need to protect its principle, however, imposes far more

extensive requirements. On Montesquieu's view, the virtue required by a functioning democracy is not natural. It requires "a constant preference of public to private interest" (SL 4.5); it "limits ambition to the sole desire, to the sole happiness, of doing greater services to our country than the rest of our fellow citizens" (SL 5.3); and it "is a self-renunciation, which is ever arduous and painful" (SL 4.5). Montesquieu compares it to monks' love for their order: "their rule debars them from all those things by which the ordinary passions are fed; there remains therefore only this passion for the very rule that torments them. ... the more it curbs their inclinations, the more force it gives to the only passion left them" (SL 5.2). To produce this unnatural self-renunciation, "the whole power of education is required" (SL 4.5). A democracy must educate its citizens to identify their interests with the interests of their country, and should have censors to preserve its mores. It should seek to establish frugality by law, so as to prevent its citizens from being tempted to advance their own private interests at the expense of the public good; for the same reason, the laws by which property is transferred should aim to preserve an equal distribution of property among citizens. Its territory should be small, so that it is easy for citizens to identify with it, and more difficult for extensive private interests to emerge.

Democracies can be corrupted in two ways: by what Montesquieu calls "the spirit of inequality" and "the spirit of extreme equality" (SL 8.2). The spirit of inequality arises when citizens no longer identify their interests with the interests of their country, and therefore seek both to advance their own private interests at the expense of their fellow citizens, and to acquire political power over them. The spirit of extreme equality arises when the people are no longer content to be equal as citizens, but want to be equal in every respect. In a functioning democracy, the people choose magistrates to exercise executive power, and they respect and obey the magistrates they have chosen. If those magistrates forfeit their respect, they replace them. When the spirit of extreme equality takes root, however, the citizens neither respect nor obey any magistrate. They "want to manage everything themselves, to debate for the senate, to execute for the magistrate, and to decide for the judges" (SL 8.2). Eventually the government will cease to function, the last remnants of virtue will disappear, and democracy will be replaced by despotism.

In an aristocracy, one part of the people governs the rest. The principle of an aristocratic government is moderation, the virtue which leads those who govern in an aristocracy to restrain themselves both from oppressing the people and from trying to acquire excessive power over one another. In an aristocracy, the

laws should be designed to instill and protect this spirit of moderation. To do so, they must do three things. First, the laws must prevent the nobility from abusing the people. The power of the nobility makes such abuse a standing temptation in an aristocracy; to avoid it, the laws should deny the nobility some powers, like the power to tax, which would make this temptation all but irresistible, and should try to foster responsible and moderate administration. Second, the laws should disguise as much as possible the difference between the nobility and the people, so that the people feel their lack of power as little as possible. Thus the nobility should have modest and simple manners, since if they do not attempt to distinguish themselves from the people "the people are apt to forget their subjection and weakness" (SL 5.8). Finally, the laws should try to ensure equality among the nobles themselves, and among noble families. When they fail to do so, the nobility will lose its spirit of moderation, and the government will be corrupted.

In a monarchy, one person governs "by fixed and established laws" (SL 2.1). According to Montesquieu, these laws "necessarily suppose the intermediate channels through which (the monarch's) power flows: for if there be only the momentary and capricious will of a single person to govern the state, nothing can be fixed, and, of course, there is no fundamental law" (SL 2.4). These 'intermediate channels' are such subordinate institutions as the nobility and an independent judiciary; and the laws of a monarchy should therefore be designed to preserve their power. The principle of monarchical government is honor. Unlike the virtue required by republican governments, the desire to win honor and distinction comes naturally to us. For this reason education has a less difficult task in a monarchy than in a republic: it need only heighten our ambitions and our sense of our own worth, provide us with an ideal of honor worth aspiring to, and cultivate in us the politeness needed to live with others whose sense of their worth matches our own. The chief task of the laws in a monarchy is to protect the subordinate institutions that distinguish monarchy from despotism. To this end, they should make it easy to preserve large estates undivided, protect the rights and privileges of the nobility, and promote the rule of law. They should also encourage the proliferation of distinctions and of rewards for honorable conduct, including luxuries.

A monarchy is corrupted when the monarch either destroys the subordinate institutions that constrain his will, or decides to rule arbitrarily, without regard to the basic laws of his country, or debases the honors at which his citizens might aim, so that "men are capable of being loaded at the very same time with infamy

and with dignities" (SL 8.7). The first two forms of corruption destroy the checks on the sovereign's will that separate monarchy from despotism; the third severs the connection between honorable conduct and its proper rewards. In a functioning monarchy, personal ambition and a sense of honor work together. This is monarchy's great strength and the source of its extraordinary stability: whether its citizens act from genuine virtue, a sense of their own worth, a desire to serve their king, or personal ambition, they will be led to act in ways that serve their country. A monarch who rules arbitrarily, or who rewards servility and ignoble conduct instead of genuine honor, severs this connection and corrupts his government.

In despotic states "a single person directs everything by his own will and caprice" (SL 2.1). Without laws to check him, and with no need to attend to anyone who does not agree with him, a despot can do whatever he likes, however ill-advised or reprehensible. His subjects are no better than slaves, and he can dispose of them as he sees fit. The principle of despotism is fear. This fear is easily maintained, since the situation of a despot's subjects is genuinely terrifying. Education is unnecessary in a despotism; if it exists at all, it should be designed to debase the mind and break the spirit. Such ideas as honor and virtue should not occur to a despot's subjects, since "persons capable of setting a value on themselves would be likely to create disturbances. Fear must therefore depress their spirits, and extinguish even the least sense of ambition" (SL 3.9). Their "portion here, like that of beasts, is instinct, compliance, and punishment" (SL 3.10), and any higher aspirations should be brutally discouraged.

Montesquieu writes that "the principle of despotic government is subject to a continual corruption, because it is even in its nature corrupt" (SL 8.10). This is true in several senses. First, despotic governments undermine themselves. Because property is not secure in a despotic state, commerce will not flourish, and the state will be poor. The people must be kept in a state of fear by the threat of punishment; however, over time the punishments needed to keep them in line will tend to become more and more severe, until further threats lose their force. Most importantly, however, the despot's character is likely to prevent him from ruling effectively. Since a despot's every whim is granted, he "has no occasion to deliberate, to doubt, to reason; he has only to will" (SL 4.3). For this reason he is never forced to develop anything like intelligence, character, or resolution. Instead, he is "naturally lazy, voluptuous, and ignorant" (SL 2.5), and has no interest in actually governing his people. He will therefore choose a vizier to govern for him, and retire to his seraglio to pursue pleasure. In his absence, however, intrigues against

him will multiply, especially since his rule is necessarily odious to his subjects, and since they have so little to lose if their plots against him fail. He cannot rely on his army to protect him, since the more power they have, the greater the likelihood that his generals will themselves try to seize power. For this reason the ruler in a despotic state has no more security than his people.

Second, monarchical and republican governments involve specific governmental structures, and require that their citizens have specific sorts of motivation. When these structures crumble, or these motivations fail, monarchical and republican governments are corrupted, and the result of their corruption is that they fall into despotism. But when a particular despotic government falls, it is not generally replaced by a monarchy or a republic. The creation of a stable monarchy or republic is extremely difficult: "a masterpiece of legislation, rarely produced by hazard, and seldom attained by prudence" (SL 5.14). It is particularly difficult when those who would have both to frame the laws of such a government and to live by them have previously been brutalized and degraded by despotism. Producing a despotic government, by contrast, is relatively straightforward. A despotism requires no powers to be carefully balanced against one another, no institutions to be created and maintained in existence, no complicated motivations to be fostered, and no restraints on power to be kept in place. One need only terrify one's fellow citizens enough to allow one to impose one's will on them; and this, Montesquieu claims, "is what every capacity may reach" (SL 5.14). For these reasons despotism necessarily stands in a different relation to corruption than other forms of government: while they are liable to corruption, despotism is its embodiment.

4.2 Liberty

Montesquieu is among the greatest philosophers of liberalism, but his is what Shklar has called "a liberalism of fear" (Shklar, Montesquieu, p. 89). According to Montesquieu, political liberty is "a tranquillity of mind arising from the opinion each person has of his safety" (SL 11.6). Liberty is not the freedom to do whatever we want: if we have the freedom to harm others, for instance, others will also have the freedom to harm us, and we will have no confidence in our own safety. Liberty involves living under laws that protect us from harm while leaving us free to do as much as possible, and that enable us to feel the greatest possible confidence that if we obey those laws, the power of the state will not be directed against us.

If it is to provide its citizens with the greatest possible liberty, a government must have certain features. First, since "constant experience shows us that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it ... it is necessary from the very nature of things that power should be a check to power" (SL 11.4). This is achieved through the separation of the executive, legislative, and judicial powers of government. If different persons or bodies exercise these powers, then each can check the others if they try to abuse their powers. But if one person or body holds several or all of these powers, then nothing prevents that person or body from acting tyrannically; and the people will have no confidence in their own security.

Certain arrangements make it easier for the three powers to check one another. Montesquieu argues that the legislative power alone should have the power to tax, since it can then deprive the executive of funding if the latter attempts to impose its will arbitrarily. Likewise, the executive power should have the right to veto acts of the legislature, and the legislature should be composed of two houses, each of which can prevent acts of the other from becoming law. The judiciary should be independent of both the legislature and the executive, and should restrict itself to applying the laws to particular cases in a fixed and consistent manner, so that "the judicial power, so terrible to mankind, ... becomes, as it were, invisible", and people "fear the office, but not the magistrate" (SL 11.6).

Liberty also requires that the laws concern only threats to public order and security, since such laws will protect us from harm while leaving us free to do as many other things as possible. Thus, for instance, the laws should not concern offenses against God, since He does not require their protection. They should not prohibit what they do not need to prohibit: "all punishment which is not derived from necessity is tyrannical. The law is not a mere act of power; things in their own nature indifferent are not within its province" (SL 19.14). The laws should be constructed to make it as easy as possible for citizens to protect themselves from punishment by not committing crimes. They should not be vague, since if they were, we might never be sure whether or not some particular action was a crime. Nor should they prohibit things we might do inadvertently, like bumping into a statue of the emperor, or involuntarily, like doubting the wisdom of one of his decrees; if such actions were crimes, no amount of effort to abide by the laws of our country would justify confidence that we would succeed, and therefore we could never feel safe from criminal prosecution. Finally, the laws should make it as easy as possible for an innocent person to prove his or

her innocence. They should concern outward conduct, not (for instance) our thoughts and dreams, since while we can try to prove that we did not perform some action, we cannot prove that we never had some thought. The laws should not criminalize conduct that is inherently hard to prove, like witchcraft; and lawmakers should be cautious when dealing with crimes like sodomy, which are typically not carried out in the presence of several witnesses, lest they "open a very wide door to calumny" (SL 12.6).

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/montesquieu/#4.1>

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Discourse on The Social Contract

(This document is also from a translation)

4. The Social Contract

a. Background

The Social Contract is, like the Discourse on Political Economy, a work that is more philosophically constructive than either of the first two Discourses. Furthermore, the language used in the first and second Discourses is crafted in such a way as to make them appealing to the public, whereas the tone of the Social Contract is not nearly as eloquent and romantic. Another more obvious difference is that the Social Contract was not nearly as well-received; it was immediately banned by Paris authorities. And although the first two Discourses were, at the time of their publication, very popular, they are not philosophically systematic. The Social Contract, by contrast, is quite systematic and outlines how a government could exist in such a way that it protects the equality and character of its citizens. But although Rousseau's project is different in scope in the Social Contract than it was in the first two Discourses, it would be a mistake to say that there is no philosophical connection between them. For the earlier works discuss the problems in civil society as well as the historical progression that has led to them. The Discourse on the Sciences and Arts claims that society has become such that no emphasis is put on the importance of virtue and morality. The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality traces the history of human beings from the pure state of nature through the institution of a specious social contract that results in present day civil society. The Social Contract does not deny any of these criticisms. In fact, chapter one begins with one of Rousseau's most famous quotes, which echoes the claims of his earlier works: "Man was/is born free; and everywhere he is in chains." (Social Contract, Vol. IV, p. 131). But unlike the

first two Discourses, the Social Contract looks forward, and explores the potential for moving from the specious social contract to a legitimate one.

b. The General Will

The concept of the general will, first introduced in the Discourse on Political Economy, is further developed in the Social Contract although it remains ambiguous and difficult to interpret. The most pressing difficulty that arises is in the tension that seems to exist between liberalism and communitarianism. On one hand, Rousseau argues that following the general will allows for individual diversity and freedom. But at the same time, the general will also encourages the well-being of the whole, and therefore can conflict with the particular interests of individuals. This tension has led some to claim that Rousseau's political thought is hopelessly inconsistent, although others have attempted to resolve the tension in order to find some type of middle ground between the two positions. Despite these difficulties, however, there are some aspects of the general will that Rousseau clearly articulates. First, the general will is directly tied to Sovereignty: but not Sovereignty merely in the sense of whomever holds power. Simply having power, for Rousseau, is not sufficient for that power to be morally legitimate. True Sovereignty is directed always at the public good, and the general will, therefore, speaks always infallibly to the benefit of the people. Second, the object of the general will is always abstract, or for lack of a better term, general. It can set up rules, social classes, or even a monarchical government, but it can never specify the particular individuals who are subject to the rules, members of the classes, or the rulers in the government. This is in keeping with the idea that the general will speaks to the good of the society as a whole. It is not to be confused with the collection of individual wills which would put their own needs, or the needs of particular factions, above those of the general public. This leads to a related point. Rousseau argues that there is an important distinction to be made between the general will and the collection of individual wills: "There is often a great deal of difference between the will of all and the general will. The latter looks only to the common interest; the former considers private interest and is only a sum of private wills. But take away from these same wills the pluses and minuses that cancel each other out, and the remaining sum of the differences is the general will." (Social Contract, Vol. IV, p. 146). This point can be understood in an almost Rawlsian sense, namely that if the citizens were ignorant of the groups to which they would belong, they would inevitably make

decisions that would be to the advantage of the society as a whole, and thus be in accordance with the general will.

c. Equality, Freedom, and Sovereignty

One problem that arises in Rousseau's political theory is that the Social Contract purports to be a legitimate state in one sense because it frees human beings from their chains. But if the state is to protect individual freedom, how can this be reconciled with the notion of the general will, which looks always to the welfare of the whole and not to the will of the individual? This criticism, although not unfounded, is also not devastating. To answer it, one must return to the concepts of Sovereignty and the general will. True Sovereignty, again, is not simply the will of those in power, but rather the general will. Sovereignty does have the proper authority to override the particular will of an individual or even the collective will of a particular group of individuals. However, as the general will is infallible, it can only do so when intervening will be to the benefit of the society. To understand this, one must take note of Rousseau's emphasis on the equality and freedom of the citizens. Proper intervention on the part of the Sovereign is therefore best understood as that which secures the freedom and equality of citizens rather than that which limits them. Ultimately, the delicate balance between the supreme authority of the state and the rights of individual citizens is based on a social contract that protects society against factions and gross differences in wealth and privilege among its members.

<https://iep.utm.edu/rousseau/#:~:text=The%20Discourse%20on%20the%20Origin%20of%20Inequality%20remains%20one%20of,Political%20Economy%20and%20Social%20Contract.>