

Two Treatises of Government

- Date** ■ 1689
- Place** ■ London, England
- Type of Source** ■ Treatise on government (original in English)
- Author** ■ John Locke
- Historical Context** ■ John Locke is one of the Enlightenment philosophers. Born in England, he went into exile in the Netherlands because of his political associations. This book was written around the time of the Glorious Revolution (see the English Bill of Rights). At first, the book was published anonymously. Locke's ideas influenced Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence, as well as the French Revolution.
- Internal Context** ■ *Two Treatises of Government* is divided into two books. The first book attacks Robert Filmer's political theories on the divine rights of kings. The second book outlines Locke's theories on social contract. This excerpt is from the second book.

Chapter IX—Of the Ends of Political Society and Government

Sec. 123. IF man in the **state of nature** be so free, as has been said; if he be absolute lord of his own person and possessions, equal to the greatest, and subject to no body, why will he part with his freedom? why will he give up this empire, and subject himself to the dominion and controul [sic] of any other power? 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: for all being kings as much as he, every man his equal, and the greater part no strict observers of equity and justice, the enjoyment of the property he has in this state is very unsafe, very insecure. This makes him willing to quit a condition, which, however free, is full of fears and continual dangers: and it is not without reason, that he seeks out, and is 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.

Sec. 124. The great and chief end, therefore, of men's uniting into **common-wealths**, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property. To which in the state of nature there are many things wanting.

First, There wants 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: for though the law of nature be plain and intelligible to all rational creatures; yet men being biassed by their interest, as well as ignorant for want of study of it, are not apt to allow of it as a law binding to them in the application of it to their particular cases.

state of nature
people living without society or government. This was a popular Enlightenment concept.

lives, liberties, and estates
This phrase may have inspired Thomas Jefferson to list the unalienable rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" in the Declaration of Independence.

common-wealths
a state or nation governed by its people

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Sec. 125. Secondly, In the state of nature there wants a known and **indifferent** judge, with authority to determine all differences according to the established law: for every one in that state being both judge and **executioner** of the law of nature, men being partial to themselves, passion and revenge is very apt to carry them too far, and with too much heat, in their own cases; as well as negligence, and unconcernedness, to make them too remiss in other men's.

Sec. 126. Thirdly, In the state of nature there often wants power to back and support the sentence when right, and to give it due execution. They who by any injustice offended, will seldom fail, where they are able, by force to make good their injustice; such resistance many times makes the punishment dangerous, and frequently destructive, to those who attempt it.

Sec. 127. Thus mankind, notwithstanding all the privileges of the state of nature, being but in an ill condition, while they remain in it, are quickly driven into society. Hence it comes to pass, that we seldom find any number of men live any time together in this state. The inconveniencies that they are therein exposed to, by the irregular and uncertain exercise of the power every man has of punishing the transgressions of others, make them take sanctuary under the established laws of government, and therein seek the preservation of their property. It is this makes them so willingly give up every one his single power of punishing, to be exercised by such alone, as shall be appointed to it amongst them; and by such rules as the community, or those authorized by them to that purpose, shall agree on. And in this we have the original right and rise of both the legislative and executive power, as well as of the governments and societies themselves.

Sec. 128. For in the state of nature, to **omit** the liberty he has of innocent delights, a man has two powers.

The first is to do whatsoever he thinks fit for the preservation of himself, and others within the permission of the law of nature: by which law, common to them all, he and all the rest of mankind are one community, make up one society, distinct from all other creatures. And were it not for the corruption and **vitiousness** of degenerate men, there would be no need of any other; no necessity that men should separate from this great and natural community, and by positive agreements combine into smaller and divided associations.

The other power a man has in the state of nature, is the power to punish the crimes committed against that law. Both these he gives up, when he joins in a private, if I may so call it, or particular politic society, and incorporates into any common-wealth, separate from the rest of mankind.

Sec. 129. The first power, **viz.** of doing whatsoever he thought for the preservation of himself, and the rest of mankind, he gives up to be regulated by laws made by the society, so far forth as the preservation of himself, and the rest of that society shall require; which laws of the society in many things confine the liberty he had by the law of nature.

indifferent
unbiased

executioner
an officer who enforces a legal judgment.

omit
send away

vitiousness
wickedness, defectiveness

viz.
that is, namely

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Sec. 130. Secondly, The power of punishing he wholly gives up, and engages his **natural force**, (which he might before employ in the execution of the law of nature, by his own single authority, as he thought fit) to assist the executive power of the society, as the law thereof shall require: for being now in a new state, wherein he is to enjoy many conveniencies, from the labour, assistance, and society of others in the same community, as well as protection from its whole strength; he is to part also with as much of his natural liberty, in providing for himself, as the good, prosperity, and safety of the society shall require; which is not only necessary, but just, since the other members of the society do the like.

Sec. 131. 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, to be so far disposed of by the legislative, as the good of the society shall require; yet it 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 one's property, by providing against those three defects above mentioned, that made the state of nature so unsafe and uneasy. And so whoever has the legislative or supreme power of any common-wealth, is bound to govern by established standing laws, promulgated and known to the people, and not by extemporary decrees; by indifferent and upright judges, who are to decide controversies by those laws; and to employ the force of the community at home, only in the execution of such laws, or abroad to prevent or **redress** foreign injuries, and secure the community from inroads and invasion. And all this to be directed to no other end, but the peace, safety, and public good of the people.

natural force

power a person would have on his or her own, without the aid of society

redress

correct, make up for

Source: John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, May 27, 2002, <<http://constitution.org/jl/2ndtr09.htm>> (May 20, 2011).