

Second Treatise of Government



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN LOCKE

Locke was born to Agnes and John Locke, an attorney, in Wrington, Somerset, England. In 1647, Locke enrolled at Westminster School, one of the oldest public schools in London, and in 1652, he enrolled at Christ Church, Oxford, a college of the University of Oxford in England. Locke earned a bachelor's degree in 1656 and a master's degree in 1658. He developed an interest in medicine while at Oxford, and after studying independently for some time, he returned to Oxford and graduated with a Bachelor of Medicine in 1675. In 1666, Locke met Anthony Ashley Cooper, a prominent English politician, when Ashley went to Oxford to seek treatment for a liver infection. Ashley was impressed with Locke and hired him as his personal physician. In 1683, likely due to his association with Ashley, Locke was implicated in the Rye House Plot, a plot to assassinate King Charles II of England. Charles II was a Roman Catholic and Ashley was an outspoken opponent of Roman Catholics serving as king. It is unclear whether or not Locke was actually involved in the plot, but he fled to the Netherlands anyway, where he stayed until Charles II was overthrown in the Glorious Revolution and replaced by James II, a Protestant, putting an official end to Roman Catholics ruling as kings. Locke wrote prolifically during his exile, and upon his return to London in 1688, he published several works, including *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. Locke wrote *Two Treatise of Government* in 1689 at Ashley's insistence. Locke never married or had children, and in 1691, he moved in with his friend Lady Masham, a fellow writer and philosopher. In the following years, Locke grew sick with worsening asthma and died at Lady Masham's home in 1704 at the age of 72. Locke's contribution to the literary canon and Western thought is immense. He is often considered the Father of Liberalism, and his philosophical works are some of the most influential.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the preface to the *Two Treatise of Government*, Locke voices his support for King William III of England and claims that William III is a true king because he rules by consent of the people, which Locke considers the only lawful form of government. Locke wrote his *Two Treatise* in 1689, the same year William III was crowned king after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which removed James II, a Roman Catholic, from the throne. Anti-Catholic sentiment had been building in England for some time, and the bulk of the country never quite accepted James II's reign as king. Anti-Catholic sentiments, and dislike

for James II in particular, worsened in 1688 when James II blocked both the Scottish and English Parliaments from meeting—an act that Locke specifically claims is an act of war—because neither body would agree to repeal the Anti-Catholic Test Acts, which excluded Roman Catholics and nonconformists of the Church of England from serving in public office of any kind. Contempt for James II worsened after the Seven Bishops, all members of the Church of England, were arrested and tried for seditious libel, which is effectively speech that incites an insurrection against the established order. The Seven Bishops were ultimately acquitted, but the public was outraged, and neither the Scottish Parliament nor the English Parliament met again until 1689. The arrest of the Seven Bishops further stoked anti-Catholic sentiment in England, and on November 5, 1688, William III of Orange arrived in England from the Netherlands where he was de facto ruler with the intention of usurping the throne. William III arrived with some 463 ships and a large following of supporters. James II willingly went into exile in December, and William III was crowned as king in April of 1689, putting an end to Roman Catholic rulers in England forever.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Within the *Two Treatise of Government*, Locke directly references Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* and Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, both of which advocate for the power of absolute monarchies and the divine right of kings—an issue Locke vehemently opposes within his own book. Locke also draws extensively from Sir Richard Hooker's *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie*, a series of four books published between 1594 and 1597 that explore the importance of scripture and the corruption of the Church of England by the Roman Catholic Church. Hooker was particularly interested in the state of humankind in nature, an issue that Locke likewise explores in *Two Treatise*. While a student at Christ Church, Oxford, Locke was highly influenced by modern French philosopher René Descartes, whose writings *Discourse on Method* and *Principles of Philosophy* undoubtedly left a mark on Locke. Other works of philosophy that are also concerned with civil society and the private ownership of land like *Two Treatise of Government* include *Discourse on Inequality* and [The Social Contract](#) by Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Two Treatise of Government: In the Former, The False Principles, and Foundation of Sir Robert Filmer, and His Followers, Are Detected and Overthrown. The Latter Is an Essay Concerning The True Original, Extent, and End of Civil*

Government

- **When Written:** 1689
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** 1689
- **Literary Period:** The Restoration
- **Genre:** Political Philosophy
- **Antagonist:** Absolute Monarchies
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Locke and Money. During his time, Locke advocated for an international system of money based solely on gold and silver, since paper money is only accepted by the government who issues it.

Locke's Influence. Locke's theories of labor and property that are outline in the *Two Treatises of Government* was highly influential to German philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and was foundational in their own book, [The Communist Manifesto](#).



PLOT SUMMARY

Locke begins by addressing the reader directly and states that he hopes his discourse will affirm the right of King William as the ruler of England. King William rules by consent of the people, which is the only lawful government. Locke also endeavors to refute the arguments of Sir Robert Filmer, whose writing is full of “doubtful expressions” and “glib nonsense.” There is nothing more dangerous than the wrong ideas about government, Locke says, and while he will entertain any reasonable argument to the contrary, Locke reminds the reader that reasonable arguments do not give into complaining and fighting.

Locke dismisses Filmer's argument that God gave Adam dominion over the world or any innate right of fatherhood. Even if Adam was given this power, Locke argues, it does not transfer to his descendants. Furthermore, Adam lived long ago, and proving his descendants now is surely impossible. Thus, one cannot derive power from such a source. Locke describes at the outset what he means by “political power,” which is the right to make and enforce laws to regulate and preserve property, protect the common-wealth, and work for the common good of the public. This power, Locke maintains, is different from any other kind of power. To understand political power, one must also understand the state of nature. A state of nature is one outside of civilized society, and in it, everyone is in a state of complete freedom and equality. But a “*state of liberty*,” Locke claims, is not a “*state of licence*.” **Nature** is governed by the law of nature, which states no one can harm another's life,

liberty, health, or possessions. As there is no governing body in nature and everyone is equal, everyone has the right to punish transgressors, for it is only in restraint and reparation that one may lawfully do harm to another. Locke agrees that humankind is prone to partiality and violence, and one may go too far in punishing or restraining another. As such, it is in civil government that humankind seeks to restrain the tendency towards violence.

A state of war is a state of “*enmity and destruction*,” Locke says, and since everyone has the right to self-preservation, they have the right to kill anyone who makes war upon them, just as they would kill a lion or wolf. Anyone who exerts absolute power over another enters into a state of war. The difference between a state of war and a state of nature is that a state of nature is one of peace and equality, whereas a state of war is a state of violence. There is no common judge in nature, so humankind created society to escape the threat of violence and establish a common judge through which to appeal perceived wrongs.

As everyone is born with a right to self-preservation, Locke contends they are also born with a right to whatever nature affords them for subsistence. God gifted the earth to all people in common, but he also gave them the right to own private property. As one has a right to “the *labour* of his body, and the *work* of his hands,” any part of nature they harvest thereby becomes their property. For example, if one gathers acorns, which are certainly part of nature, those acorns become their property, and they have a right to protect that property. The same goes for any land. If one tills, plants, and harvests land, that land becomes their property. Of course, there are limits on how much one can reasonably take from nature. One must take only what they need, and only enough to consume or use before it spoils.

Locke next explains paternal power, which he defines as the power parents have over their children. This power is shared equally between a father and a mother, and it exists until said child reaches the age of reason. A child is not part of any society or government until they are able to reason, and until that point, all children are subject to their parents' power. The most ardent supporters of the monarchy believe kings rule by right of fatherhood, but Locke argues that to invest absolute power in a monarch is to never be free. The power parents hold over children is temporary, and it does not extend to a child's life or property. If political power is paternal, and all the power is in the prince, then his subjects can have none of it. Thus, paternal power can extend no further than parent to child, as a parent has not the authority to govern.

As all people are born free and equal, Locke asserts that no one can be placed under another's rule or power without their expressed consent. In a politic society, there must be established and known laws, an impartial judge, and a power to execute the laws and punishments handed down by the judge. Whoever leaves a state of nature to join a common-wealth

forfeits their right to self-preservation and the ability to punish transgressors and places this right with the common-wealth. The fundamental law of all common-wealths is to establish a legislative power—the supreme power of the common-wealth. The legislative preserves the common-wealth and everyone in it through the passing of laws, but the legislative may not exert arbitrary power. The executive is the power within a common-wealth that enforces the laws made by the legislative, and the federative power is concerned with matters of war and peace with outside common-wealths. The power of these bodies is imbued by the people, and each body of power must always work for the good of the people, and as always, only with their consent.

A government can be dissolved through external factors—such as conquest, usurpation, and tyranny—but it can also fall to internal factors as well. Whenever a legislative is altered, Locke contends, a government cannot stand. People are under no obligation to follow unjust laws. If a king enforces arbitrary laws on his subjects or places them under a foreign power, the legislative is altered, and the government is effectively dissolved. If a king abandons his rule and there is no way to execute power, a government is again dissolved, and the common-wealth must build a new one. If the government does not always work for the good of the common-wealth, the people have the right to resist, and Locke argues it is the people who must decide if their government is working against them. If the government has acted against the people, it forfeits its power, which goes back to the common-wealth and the people, who will reign until a new government is constructed.



CHARACTERS

John Locke – A 17th-century English philosopher. Locke published his *Second Treatise of Government*—the second part of his *Two Treatise of Government*—anonymously 1689. The *First Treatise of Government* is mostly a critique of Sir Robert Filmer’s *Patriarcha*, a 1680 book that advocates for absolute monarchies and the divine right of kings, a notion that Locke adamantly rejects. In the *Second Treatise*, Locke is concerned with civil society and the rights of the governed within a common-wealth. Locke also argues the state of humankind in **nature** and claims that everyone in a state of nature is completely free and equal. He also claims that humankind is prone to partiality and violence, which is why humankind created civilized society to protect their person and property from unjust force. When one leaves the state of nature for a common-wealth, Locke argues, they forfeit their natural right to self-preservation and to punish transgressors and give said power to the common-wealth, where a majority-elected government must always work for the good of the common-wealth, and always with the consent of the people. A government acting on behalf of the people with the expressed

consent of the people is the only lawful government, Locke argues, which is why Locke contends an absolute monarchy is *not* a civil society. An absolute monarch holds complete power over the people and their lives, and since people do not hold complete power over their own lives (the law of nature does not permit one to harm themselves or others), they cannot consent to give that power to anyone else. Locke outlines the role of the government in the common-wealth and explains the extent to which this power rules over the people. Locke argues that the legislative is the supreme power within a common-wealth; however, since the common-wealth gathers its power from the people and rules only with the consent of the people, the power of the common-wealth ultimately lies with the people and any consent to govern them can be revoked if that government acts in a way that is not for the good of the common-wealth, the people, and their property.

Sir Robert Filmer – A 17th-century English political theorist. Locke mentions Filmer in the preface to the *Second Treatise of Government* and refers to Filmer’s 1680 book, *Patriarcha*, in which Filmer advocates for absolute monarchies and the divine right of kings. Locke vehemently rejects absolute monarchies and the divine right of kings, and he claims Filmer’s book is full of “doubtful expressions” and “glib nonsense.” Locke also disagrees with Filmer’s argument that God gave Adam dominion over the world and an innate right of fatherhood, and that Adam’s descendants have a right to rule humankind. Locke considers Filmer’s argument of the descendants of Adam absurd and maintains there is no way to prove such ancestry after so many years. Furthermore, Locke argues that Adam never had such power and, even if he did, said power would not transfer to his descendants. Locke uses his *Two Treatise of Government*—the *First Treatise* more so than the *Second Treatise*—to refute Sir Robert Filmer’s ideas.

Sir Richard Hooker – A 16th-century English priest and theologian. Locke quotes Hooker and his 1594 book, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie*, extensively in the *Second Treatise of Government*, as Hooker claims all humankind is obligated to “justice and charity” in **nature**. Hooker also claims that everyone is bound by the law of nature, which states that no one can harm another’s life, liberty, health, or possessions. Hooker further asserts that everyone seeks communion and fellowship, which led to the creation of the first politic society, all of which supports Locke’s own arguments concerning the state of nature and the advent of civilized society.

Thomas Hobbes – A 17th-century English philosopher. Locke never mentions Hobbes by name, but he does refer to Hobbes’s 1651 book, *Leviathan*. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes argues that the state of nature is a savage and ruthless place, in which all humankind is “nasty, brutish, and short.” While both Hobbes and Locke assert civil society was created to protect humankind from **nature**’s violence, Locke argues that nature is a state of perfect freedom and equality, and violence only arises

because nature lacks a common judge to which people may appeal.

King James I – King of England from 1603 to 1625. In the *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke mentions James I and his speech to parliament in 1603, in which James I stated the difference between a good king and a tyrant is that a tyrant thinks his kingdom is ordained for his satisfaction, whereas a good king believes he has been ordained to protect the lives and property of his people. Locke refers to James I as an example of a good king and one who acted for the good of the common-wealth.

King William III – The King of England during Locke’s time, who reigned from 1650 to 1702. In the preface to the *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke states he hopes his discourse will reinforce King William’s place on the throne, as King William rules by consent of the people, which, according to Locke, is the only lawful government. Locke objects to absolute monarchies, not all monarchies, and he clearly supports King William.

TERMS

Common-wealth – Any independent community, such as a democracy, oligarchy, or monarchy. According to **Locke**, the fundamental power of all common-wealths is the establishment of a legislative power, which has the right to make and enact laws and punish offenders for the good of the common-wealth. Everyone living in a common-wealth is obligated to obey the legislative power. There must also exist within the common-wealth an executive power to enforce laws made by the legislative, along with a federative power to deal with matters of war and peace with outside common-wealths. The legislative power, however, is supreme, and all other bodies of power operate below it. When people leave a state of nature for a common-wealth, they forfeit to that common-wealth their natural right to self-preservation and the ability to punish transgressors, and that power remains with the common-wealth for as long as it stands. A common-wealth and the government that rules it must always operate for the good of the people, and only with the people’s consent.

Prerogative – The power of the executive of the common-wealth to act with discretion in order to preserve the good of the common-wealth. It is impossible for any legislative to foresee the need for all laws, **Locke** argues, so the executive must act with a fair amount of discretion. The power of the prerogative must remain unquestioned for the good of the common-wealth. A good king can never exercise too much prerogative, Locke contends, as a good king is always looking to improve the common-wealth. In England, the calling of parliament to assemble is a prerogative of the king.

State of Nature – A state outside of civilized society. According to **Locke**, humankind in a state of nature is in a state of

complete freedom and equality. In a state of nature, humankind is obligated to mutual love and support of one another, and they are each obligated to follow the law of **nature**, which states no one can harm another’s life, liberty, health, or possessions. There is no governing body in a state of nature, and since everyone is perfectly equal, everyone has the right to punish those who violate the law of nature. However, Locke argues, humankind is prone to partiality and violence, so nature is a dangerous place. To escape the threat of violence, preserve their person and property, and establish an impartial judge to which they may appeal, humankind created civil society and common-wealths. Locke likens an absolute monarchy to a state of nature, as neither has an impartial judge to which one may appeal.

State of War – A state of “*enmity and destruction*,” as defined by **Locke**, in which one may kill another. Anyone who attempts to exert absolute power over another—such as in an absolute monarchy—is in a state of war with that person, as being free from absolute power is essential for self-preservation. According to Locke, any use of force without authorization places one in a state of war with another, and that state of war continues until the force stops. Locke contends that a state of nature eventually leads to a state of war, because **nature** lacks an impartial judge.



THEMES

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NATURE, WAR, AND CIVIL SOCIETY

In 1689, English philosopher John Locke anonymously published his political work *Two Treatises of Government*. Broken into two separate essays, *Two Treatises* argues the illegitimate nature of patriarchy—the belief in the absolute power of the monarchy—and offers other approaches for a civilized society. In the *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke begins his argument with the state of nature, or the way of life of humankind prior to the advent of civil society. The problem, Locke admits, is that historical records of the state of nature don’t exist, so knowing exactly what that state was is impossible. Debates concerning the state of nature were a hot topic in Locke’s day, and Locke specifically refers to *Leviathan*, a 1651 book published by English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, which famously contends that humankind existing in a state of nature outside of civilized society is “nasty, brutish, and short.” Locke refutes Hobbes’s rather bleak assessment of the state of nature and instead

contends that **nature** is not completely chaotic and lawless; however, whether the law of nature is followed is another matter, and because of this, nature is a very dangerous place. While Locke maintains that the state of nature is “perfect freedom,” he effectively argues through the *Second Treatise of Government* that a state of nature inevitably leads to a state of war—which Locke defines as a state of “*enmity and destruction*”—and the creation of civil society. This civil society, he posits, is the only way to curb the “force” of the state of war and protect the law of God which imbues everyone with a fundamental right to life, liberty, and property.

According to Locke, humanity in a state of nature is in a “state of perfect freedom” and absolute liberty, which cannot be infringed upon by another and must be respected by all. Locke argues that in a natural state, every individual has the right “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.” In nature, every person has the absolute right to do as they wish upon their own body and belongings, without any kind of outside oversight. Locke also contends that there is perfect equality in nature, where “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.” In a state of nature, there is equal power and standing among all humankind. This equality, Locke maintains, leads to an added obligation in nature, and he quotes Sir Richard Hooker, a 16th-century English priest, to make his point. According to Locke, Hooker claims all people are obligated to “mutual love amongst men, on which he builds the duties they owe one another, and from whence he derives the great maxims of *justice* and *charity*.” The key for Locke’s theory of the state of nature is that each person must recognize and respect this liberty and equality, both in themselves and in other people.

However, despite the “state of perfect freedom” within nature, Locke argues that a civil society is inevitable and necessary—certain laws and rules must be maintained to keep order and civility, and to preserve and protect humankind. A “*state of liberty*” is not a “*state of licence*,” Locke argues. In other words, no one can simply do whatever they want. Just because one is free does not mean they are free to act however they please. While one has complete liberty concerning their body and possessions, “he has not liberty to destroy himself, or so much as any creature in his possession.” Plainly put, no one has the right to harm oneself or others, which Locke refers to as the law of nature. This unwritten law maintains that “no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions.” For Locke, one’s physical possessions are seen as an extension of the body, and thus they cannot be infringed upon by another, either. Locke claims that each individual is “*bound to preserve*

himself,” and he is likewise bound to “*preserve the rest of mankind*.” The only instance in which one is allowed to harm another person is “to do justice on an offender,” as “every one has a right to punish the transgressors of that law to such a degree, as may hinder its violation.” Simply put, if one’s person or property is harmed by another, they have the absolute right to punish said offender in any way they see fit, up to and including death.

Locke ultimately argues that one has the right to destroy any person who seeks to harm one’s own person or property, which effectively places humans in a state of war with one another. As the state of nature is not ruled by one common power, there is no one to appeal to for help or relief, and the state of war continues, unchecked and unregulated. Locke refers to this state of war as “force,” and he argues it has driven humanity to form civil societies, in an effort to preserve and protect one’s life, liberty, and property.



CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED AND THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

The basis of John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* is that civil society is formed to protect and preserve one’s life, liberty, and property. In order for any society—of which Locke argues there are many—to be civil, said society must offer what **nature** is lacking. First, a civil society must have written and known laws that all people follow. No one, Locke argues, can be above the law. A civil society must have an impartial judge, and lastly, it must have the power to enforce laws and judgements. To achieve this, Locke claims one must give up certain liberties, namely self-preservation and the right to punish transgressors; however, Locke also claims these liberties must be given up freely, and with consent. In freely giving up this power, a common-wealth is formed—that common-wealth, through a majority appointed government, assumes the power to protect and preserve humankind. With the *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke maintains that all civil societies must be formed by consent, and he further argues that any common-wealth or government must operate at all times for the “peace, safety, and public good of the people.”

Locke outlines a handful of different societies and considers each one’s ability to preserve and protect humankind. Preserving humankind requires a certain amount of power, which, Locke contends, can only be found in a political society. Conjugal society, according to Locke, is a “voluntary compact between man and woman,” and it leads to procreation and family. Locke ultimately argues that a successful society has as many people as possible, and thus conjugal society is exceedingly important. However, Locke contends that the power given voluntarily within a conjugal society is not complete, as offspring are only subjects of the society until they are able to care for themselves. Domestic society, Locke continues, includes one’s wife and offspring, but it also includes servants

and slaves. While a man in Locke's time had complete control over slaves, the power over one's wife and children is not absolute. A man "has no legislative power of life and death over any of them," Locke says. Thus, both conjugal and domestic society are limited in the power they are able to assume. Political society, on the other hand, *does* have the power to protect and preserve property and punish transgressors, as long as consent for such power is freely given by the people: "Those who are united into one body, and have a common established law and judicature to appeal to, with authority to decide controversies between them, and punish offenders, are in civil society one with another." Thus, Locke suggests that political society is the best way to protect and preserve humankind.

According to Locke, a successful political society must include three types of government, which, operating both independently and together, must always work for the best interest of humankind. Locke contends that the establishment of legislative government is the "*first and fundamental positive law* of all common-wealths." Legislative government has "*supreme power*" over the people; however, that power cannot be arbitrary, it cannot be used to strip one of personal property without consent, and it cannot be transferred to any other person or body. While the power of the legislative government isn't exactly limited, it is still safeguarded to ensure it works for the people. The executive government enforces laws, and it must always operate continuously. "It is necessary there should be a *power always in being*, which should see to the *execution* of the laws that are made, and remain in force," Locke writes. Without the executive government, the "supreme power" of the legislative cannot be maintained. The federative government, Locke claims, has "the power of war and peace, leagues and alliances, and all the transactions, with all persons and communities without the common-wealth." In other words, the federative government works with outside common-wealths for the betterment of their own political society.

While the power of the political society, particularly the legislative power, is absolute, Locke argues that since that power was freely given in the first place by the governed population, those people can revoke the very same consent. According to Locke, even the supreme power of the legislative is "only a fiduciary power to act for certain ends, there remains still *in the people a supreme power to remove or alter the legislative*." As such, if government of the common-wealth is found to be corrupt, their power is forfeited and returned to the common-wealth.



POWER AND ABSOLUTE MONARCHIES

While it is John Locke's *First Treatise of Government* that is primarily concerned with refuting the idea of patriarchalism, or the belief in the absolute power of monarchies, Locke does not ignore the monarchy in the

Second Treatise of Government. Locke frequently refers to Sir Robert Filmer, a 17th-century philosopher, whose 1680 publication of *Patriarcha* advocates the absolute power of kings and the monarchy, and Locke vehemently rejects Filmer's understanding of power. According to Locke, there are many different forms of power, but political power stands separate from them all. "[T]he power of a magistrate over a subject may be distinguished from that of a father over his children, a master over his servant, a husband over his wife, and a lord over his slave," Locke contends. Power is the basis of nearly all Locke's arguments, and it is central to both **nature** and society. Locke outlines these forms of power in the *Second Treatise of Government*, and in doing so, he underscores the danger of confusing political and paternal power and ultimately argues that all power, including Filmer's understanding of the monarchy, is limited.

Locke fully outlines three forms of power—paternal, political, and "despotical"—all of which are limited in their own right. Paternal power, which comes from nature, is the power of parents over children, but Locke argues it is best understood as "*parental*" power rather than paternal. Under "*parental*" power, it is better assumed that the power over children lies with one's father *and* mother. Under this form of power, "parents have a sort of rule and jurisdiction over [children], when they come into the world, and for some time after; but it is but a temporary one." Children, of course, grow, and in time they will outgrow the reach of parental power. Political power, which comes from consent, and especially legislative power as previously outlined, is absolute in a political society. However, since political power is nontransferable and cannot be arbitrary or used to strip one of personal property without consent, Locke argues that it is likewise limited. "Despotical power," according to Locke, is "an absolute, arbitrary power one man has over another, to take away his life, whenever he pleases." Yet to speak of this power as absolute is not exactly right, Locke contends, as it is effectively a "*forfeiture*" of all reason and life, which places one in a state of war with one another.

Locke spends much time outlining his understanding of paternal power—the type of power exerted by the monarchy in Locke's day—which he says should never be confused with legitimate political power. The law of nature assumes that all people are equal, yet this equality does not extend to children under paternal power. Children, Locke maintains, "are not born in this full state of equality, though they are born to it." Children are not equal until after they are grown. Thus, as paternal power assumes all people aren't equal, it should not be confused with political power, which must maintain the equality of all. Children are not considered equal under paternal power because they are ignorant and lack the ability to reason. According to Locke, "no body can be under a law, which is not promulgated to him; and this law being promulgated or made known by reason only, he that is not come to the use of his

reason, cannot be said to be under this law.” The ability to reason, of course, comes with age and maturity, and since grown people have the ability to reason, paternal power should not be confused with political power. Locke maintains that confusing paternal power for political power is especially dangerous. If political power is confused for paternal power, Locke argues, “all paternal power being in the prince, the subject could naturally have none of it.” Conflating political power with paternal strips a subject of their own agency, rights, and ability to reason, and places these things in the hands of the monarchy.

Locke warns that confusing paternal and political power inevitably leads to an absolute monarchy, in which all people are beholden to a king. Paternal power applied to a civil society is counterproductive to the betterment of that society and does nothing but dismantle progress. Thus, Locke contends, an “*absolute monarchy, which by some men is counted the only government in the world, is indeed inconsistent with civil society, and so can be no form of civil-government at all.*” To Locke, an absolute monarchy is “*the end of civil society,*” as a monarchy reverts humankind back to a state of nature, which is not a society at all.



THE DISSOLUTION OF GOVERNMENT

As Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* outlines the ways in which a civil society can be created and maintained through a formal government, he also

outlines the ways in which a government can be dissolved.

Locke is quick to point out that the dissolution of government is not the same as the dissolution of society. A society, which is created through consent and agreement into a common-wealth, can exist without government; however, government, which is in fact a part of society, cannot exist without the common-wealth. In this light, the only way for a society to be dissolved is through foreign invasion and conquest.

Government, on the other hand, can be dissolved by numerous internal and external factors, and in certain circumstances, Locke even supports such dissolution. With his examination of the dissolution of government in the *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke effectively argues that since society and government are the result of a social contract and consent, any dissolution of the government that does not come directly from the people is illegitimate.

Locke examines three separate ways in which a government can be dissolved: by conquest, by usurpation, and by tyranny. He maintains that each of these forms of dissolution are perpetrated without the consent of the people, which makes them illegitimate. Conquest, which is assuming control of a society or government by force, does not give the conqueror power over all. According to Locke, “if there were any that consented not to the war, and over the children of the captives themselves, or the possessions of either, he has no power; and

so can have, *by virtue of conquest, no lawful title himself to dominion over them.*” While the conqueror does have “despotic power” over those who agree and give consent to the conquest, the conqueror does not have power over those who dissent. As Locke claims that a conquest is often called a “foreign usurpation,” it stands to reason that a usurpation “is a kind of domestic conquest,” which makes a usurpation illegitimate as well. Locke claims that a usurper—one who tries to assume another’s power as their own—“can never have right on his side,” as one can never come “into the *possession of what another has right to.*” In short, a usurper is not given consent, thus they can have no real power. Lastly, Locke outlines tyranny, or “*the exercise of power beyond right, which no body can have a right to.*” Much like a usurper, a tyrant operates without the consent of the people, and without consent, the power exercised by a tyrant is likewise illegitimate.

While the government can be dissolved from an outside force, Locke contends that it can be dissolved from inside the government as well, which can be just as destructive. Government can be dissolved “when the *legislative is altered.*” Legislative power is altered when the governing body begins to pass arbitrary laws, the very thing the legislative is not allowed to do. Arbitrary laws do not benefit the people of the common-wealth, nor do the governed consent to these measures, and the government is thereby dissolved. Government can also be dissolved whenever laws or power is altered without the consent of the people. Unauthorized changes in government lead to an altered legislative, which again dissolves the government. The dissolution of government also occurs if the monarchy prevents the legislative from meeting and acting freely. When a king interferes with the assembly of the legislative, it is effectively altered, which, according to Locke, “*puts an end to the government.*” The legislative works directly for the people, and if that work is prohibited, government cannot stand. Lastly, Locke argues, government is dissolved whenever the common-wealth is subjected to a foreign power, by either the monarchy or the legislative. Subjecting a common-wealth to a foreign power leads to “*a change of the legislative, and so a dissolution of the government.*” As the purpose of government is to produce a free and independent society, this is automatically lost under the control of a foreign power.

Locke maintains that the power given to the common-wealth by the individual will remain with the common-wealth as long as it survives, and cannot be reverted back to the individual. Power must remain with the common-wealth, Locke contends, “because without this there can be no community, no common-wealth, which is contrary to the original agreement.” Thus, if for any reason the power of the government is dissolved or forfeited, “*it reverts to the society, and the people have a right to act as supreme, and continue the legislative in themselves; or erect a new form, or under the old form place it in new hands, as they think good.*” In other words, it is the common-wealth, or

the people, who collectively hold the power after the dissolution of government.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



NATURE

In the *Second Treatise of Government*, nature symbolizes absolute monarchies. In an absolute monarchy, a supreme power—usually a king or a queen—holds complete and total power over all people and property, and that power is not subject to law or dispute. If one is abused, enslaved, or relieved of their property within an absolute monarchy, there is no impartial judge to which they can appeal for relief, and they must instead appeal to the heavens. An absolute monarch does not rule by consent, and when they abuse their power, the force they exert on the people places them into a state of war with one another.

Like an absolute monarchy, there is no common and impartial judge within a state of nature. Thus, there is no common power for one to appeal a perceived wrong. In nature, Locke argues, everyone is completely free and equal; therefore, the right to punish transgressors for violating the law of nature—which states no one can harm another’s life, liberty, health, or possessions—belongs to everyone equally. As there is no one to settle disputes, a state of war continues unchecked, prompting humankind to create civil societies to escape the violence and establish a common judge and laws. The difference between nature and an absolute monarchy, Locke contends, is that one has the right to self-preservation in nature, but no such right exists in an absolute monarchy. Thus, Locke maintains, an absolute monarchy is even worse than a state of nature, and for this reason can never be considered a civil society.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Hackett edition of *Second Treatise of Government* published in 1980.

Preface Quotes

“I imagine, I shall have neither the time, nor inclination to repeat my pains, and fill up the wanting part of my answer, by tracing Sir Robert again, through all the windings and obscurities, which are to be met with in the several branches of his wonderful system. The king, and body of the nation, have since so thoroughly confuted his Hypothesis, that I suppose no body hereafter will have either the confidence to appear against our common safety, and be again an advocate for slavery; or the weakness to be deceived with contradictions dressed up in a popular stile, and well-turned periods: for if any one will be at the pains, himself, in those parts, which are here untouched, to strip Sir Robert’s discourses of the flourish of doubtful expressions, and endeavour to reduce his words to direct, positive, intelligible propositions, and then compare them one with another, he will quickly be satisfied, there was never so much glib nonsense put together in well-sounding English.”

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker), Sir Robert Filmer

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, which occurs in the preface of Locke’s *Second Treatise*, identifies Sir Robert Filmer as Locke’s opposition and establishes Locke’s disapproval of absolute monarchies. Locke’s *First Treatise* is dedicated to refuting Filmer’s hypothesis concerning absolute monarchies and the divine right of kings (which assumes that kings are endowed with a right to rule by God), and while the *Second Treatise* is more concerned with government specifically, Locke still takes time to directly discredit Filmer and his ideas.

Locke’s language here is quite snarky, and he speaks of Filmer’s book as if it complete drivel. Locke speaks of Filmer’s “windings and obscurities,” his “contradictions dressed up in a popular stile,” and his “glib nonsense.” Locke suggests that intelligent people would have a hard time understanding Filmer’s point, since to advocate for absolute monarchies, in Locke’s opinion, is to “advocate for slavery.” Locke implies that the King of England himself doesn’t even advocate for absolute monarchies, along with most of the nation. As absolute monarchies hold its subjects under automatic and arbitrary power, subjects are thus reduced to slaves, and Locke vehemently rejects this unjust form of power.

Chapter 1: Of Civil-Government Quotes

☛☛ To this purpose, I think it may not be amiss, to set down what I take to be political power; that the power of a *magistrate* over a subject may be distinguished from that of a *father* over his children, a *master* over his servant, a *husband* over his wife, and a *lord* over his slave. All which distinct powers happening sometimes together in the same man, if he be considered under these different relations, it may help us to distinguish these powers one from another, and shew the difference betwixt a ruler of a common-wealth, a father of a family, and a captain of a galley.

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 7-8

Explanation and Analysis

This quote illustrates Locke's primary argument that political power is completely separate and distinct from paternal power. Absolute monarchies draw their power from paternal power and the rights innate to fatherhood; however, Locke argues that paternal power should not be conflated with political power, which is something else entirely.

A magistrate is a type of judge, who has the power within society to exact punishment and settle disputes. To fill this role in society, a judge must have a certain amount of power over society, which Locke implies neither a father, master, husband, or lord has in his possession. Locke hopes to show how the same man fulfilling each of these roles has varying levels of power within each one, none of which give him the power to sit in judgement over his peers and exact punishment on them. In this way, this quote both demonstrates Locke's meaning of political power and dismisses the paternal power of absolute monarchies as a form of civil government.

Chapter 2: Of the State of Nature Quotes

☛☛ 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 [...].

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Locke explains the state of humankind in nature, before humans left nature and created civilized society, thus establishing the law of nature within the book. According to Locke, the law of nature says: "no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions," and Locke maintains that this law of nature follows humans, even after they enter civilized society and consent to live under the laws of humans. For Locke, everyone is obligated to self-preservation and the preservation of everyone else.

Locke also implies here that the perfect state of freedom that is nature does not mean that a person is free to do whatever they want. The power one has over their own person and property is limited, as Locke argues all power is. One is free in nature to do as they want with their person and property as long as it doesn't cause any damage or destruction. For Locke, it boils down to "reason." It isn't reasonable to hurt yourself or anyone else, and since most humans have the ability to reason, everyone is obligated to follow this law. All people, including monarchs, are equal in Locke's opinion, which means that no one can claim superior power over the other and infringe on their person or property.

☛ And that all men may be restrained from invading others rights, and from doing hurt to one another, and the law of nature be observed, which willeth the peace and *preservation of all mankind*, the execution of the law of nature is, in that state, put into every man's hands, whereby every one has a right to punish the transgressors of that law to such a degree, as may hinder its violation [...].

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

This quote establishes that humans have the right to punish transgressors in nature. Locke argues that there is no impartial judge in nature—no governing body—and since everyone is equal, everyone has a right to punish those who exert unjust force against them, such as violence or theft. For Locke, this is the very definition of nature: the absence of an impartial judge and the power to act on one's own behalf as an executive power.

The goal of nature is to preserve humankind, which is why the law of nature is geared toward the "*preservation of all mankind*." Specific words are often italicized in Locke's book, as if convey their importance, and the preservation of all humankind is the absolute basis of all Locke's arguments, from the law of nature to the formation of civil societies. In claiming that everyone has a right to punish transgressors "to such a degree, as may hinder its violation" gives one free reign to punish to any degree, up to and including death. In this way, punishment both keeps the transgressor from transgressing again and deters future transgressors from violating the same law.

☛ I doubt not but it will be objected, that it is unreasonable for men to be judges in their own cases, that self-love will make men partial to themselves and their friends: and on the other side, that ill nature, passion and revenge will carry them too far in punishing others; and hence nothing but confusion and disorder will follow, and that therefore God hath certainly appointed government to restrain the partiality and violence of men. I easily grant, that *civil government* is the proper remedy for the inconveniencies of the state of nature, which must certainly be great, where men may be judges in their own case, since it is easy to be imagined, that he who was so unjust as to do his brother an injury, will scarce be so just as to condemn himself for it.

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker), Thomas Hobbes

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, which occurs as Locke describes humankind in a state of nature, reflects Locke's argument that humankind invented civil society to escape the dangers of nature, but it also underscores Locke's claim that humankind has a tendency for "partiality" and violence. While Locke doesn't necessarily agree with Thomas Hobbes's hypothesis that humankind in a state of nature was completely savage and violent, Locke certainly admits that humankind is still prone to such violent behavior. For Hobbes, humans are naturally this violent, without provocation. For Locke, humans only behave this violently in nature because nature lacks an impartial judge; however, Locke also implies that when one has an excuse to behave violently, they often get carried away.

For Locke, humankind invented society to escape the violence of nature and establish an impartial judge to which they may appeal grievances. Locke argues that violence *only* arises when there is no impartial judge to settle disagreements. Locke's theory that humankind is prone to partiality and violence is revisited later in the book when Locke warns that elected representatives within a legislative power will eventually act in their own interests rather than the people's interests. Locke claims there is no remedy for such partiality as it is naturally occurring in humans, just as it is here.

Chapter 3: Of the State of War Quotes

☛ And here we have the plain *difference between the state of nature and the state of war*, which however some men have confounded, are as far distant, as a state of peace, good will, mutual assistance and preservation, and a state of enmity, malice, violence and mutual destruction, are one from another. Men living together according to reason, without a common superior on earth, with authority to judge between them, is *properly the state of nature*.

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker), Thomas Hobbes

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Locke outlines the difference between a state of nature and a state of war. Thomas Hobbes likens a state of nature to state of war, as he claims humankind in nature is savage and violent and always fighting one another with little to no provocation. For Locke, humankind in nature (even though he does admit that humans can be violent) is peaceful and full of “mutual assistance and preservation.” Instead of a foundation of violence, Locke’s idea of nature is a network of people working together to support one another.

While Locke argues that a state of nature and a state of war are two different things, he does maintain that a state of nature inevitably leads to a state of war. As humankind in nature does not have a “common superior,” they have no one to appeal their grievances to, which eventually leads to a state of war. Again, while Hobbes and Locke have opposing theories concerning the state of nature, there are certain similarities. Furthermore, just because Locke implies this is “properly the state of nature” isn’t to say that it isn’t still dangerous. Locke’s idea of nature is just as dangerous as Hobbes’s, it is simply dangerous and violent in a different way.

Chapter 4: Of Slavery Quotes

☞ This *freedom* from absolute, arbitrary power, is so necessary to, and closely joined with a man’s preservation, that he cannot part with it, but by what forfeits his preservation and life together: for a man, not having the power of his own life, *cannot*, by compact, or his own consent, *enslave himself* to any one, nor put himself under the absolute, arbitrary power of another, to take away his life, when he pleases. No body can give more power than he has himself; and he that cannot take away his own life, cannot give another power over it.

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

This quote reflects Locke’s argument that one cannot hold absolute power over another, which effectively exposes absolute monarchies as illegitimate. Locke argues that one has complete freedom from “absolute, arbitrary power,” which is to say that one cannot exert their power over another and enslave them, at least not under normal circumstances. Locke claims that one can only part with

their freedom from absolute, arbitrary power if one “forfeits his preservation and life together.” When one enters a state of war with another, one forfeits their life and reason, which, according to Locke, is the only time one can be subjected to the arbitrary and absolute power of another.

An absolute monarchy claims “absolute, arbitrary power” over its subjects, which Locke implies here is impossible to do, unless the subject willingly enters into a state of war with the monarch and loses. In this way, Locke implies that the power of an absolute monarch is illegitimate and quite useless, as it is impossible to exercise power to such an extent, even if a subject consents to it. One doesn’t even have power over their own life, so Locke argues such power can’t possibly be given away to another.

Chapter 5: Of Property Quotes

☞ 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.

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

This quote establishes Locke’s theory that anything one appropriates from nature using their own labor thereby becomes their property—which one also has an innate right to preserve, unless that right has been handed over to a common-wealth. For Locke, as one has complete control over their own person, anything that is produced by the labor of that body becomes their property, be that gathering apples, fishing, or tilling and harvesting land.

Locke concedes to the fact that God gifted nature’s bounty to all of humankind collectively, but by applying one’s labor

and appropriating part of nature's bounty, they thereby remove said bounty from the common stock. Locke uses the word "annex" to explain nature's bounty as taken through labor. The word annex implies an extension or addition—something that becomes part of the body that labored for it by way of that labor. In this way, property becomes like a physical extension of the body, and must be preserved and protected to the same extent as one's person.

Chapter 6: Of Paternal Power Quotes

☛☛ Had but this one thing been well considered, without looking any deeper into the matter, it might perhaps have kept men from running into those gross mistakes, they have made, about this power of parents; which, however it might, without any great harshness, bear the name of absolute dominion, and regal authority, when under the title of *paternal power* it seemed appropriated to the father, would yet have founded but oddly, and in the very name shewn the absurdity, if this supposed absolute power over children had been called *parental*; and thereby have discovered, that it belonged to the *mother* too: for it will but very ill serve the turn of those men, who contend so much for the absolute power and authority of the *fatherhood*, as they call it, that the mother should have any share in it; and it would have but ill supported the *monarchy* they contend for, when by the very name it appeared, that that fundamental authority, from whence they would derive their government of a single person only, was not placed in one, but two persons jointly. But to let this of names pass.

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 30-31

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Locke establishes paternal power as something that resides equally with a mother and father. Locke says society has made "gross mistakes" concerning "this power of parents," which is to say that society in Locke's time has conflated paternal power with political power and applied it to the government in the form of absolute monarchies. An absolute monarchy assumes that a king has absolute rule by way of an innate right given to him through "fatherhood." Supporters of absolute monarchies claim paternal power as the source for such power, but Locke points out that the power is not wholly patriarchal, in that it doesn't belong completely to the father.

Locke argues that the same power supporters of absolute monarchies invoke solely for the father, or king, lies with the mother as well. Locke explicitly states that absolute monarchies ignore this fact, and he says if they had instead called this power "parental" instead of "paternal," they may have at least noticed the difference. Locke is again quite snarky in this quote, and he openly calls supporters of absolute monarchies "absurd" for neglecting to note such an obvious fact. Locke's contention that the patriarchal power claimed by absolute monarchies is in fact matriarchal as well is just one more reason why Locke argues absolute monarchies are illegitimate.

☛☛ The law, that was to govern *Adam*, was the same that was to govern all his posterity, the *law of reason*. But his offspring having another way of entrance into the world, different from him, by a natural birth, that produced them ignorant and without the use of *reason*, they were not presently *under that law*; for no body can be under a law, which is not promulgated to him; and this law being promulgated or made known by *reason* only, he that is not come to the use of his *reason*, cannot be said to be *under this law*; and *Adam's* children, being not presently as soon as born *under this law of reason*, were not presently *free*: for *law*, in its true notion, is not so much the limitation as the *direction of a free and intelligent agent* to his proper interest, and prescribes no farther than is for the general good of those under that law [...].

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

This quote establishes Locke's argument that children under parental power cannot be subjects of any government. According to Locke, children are not born as free agents into any government or common-wealth because children lack the ability to "reason." A child can't be a member of any society because laws are not "promulgated" to them, meaning laws are not known and understood. Thus, children can't be members of society because they don't know and understand the laws.

Locke again uses the biblical Adam to make his point. Adam was created by God, and was brought into being a grown man with the ability to reason. Adam and Eve's children, however, were born, and they did not enjoy Adam's instant reason but rather had to grow into it. Thus, children under

paternal power are not free, as their parents must know and understand laws for them until they are old enough. Locke builds on this argument and again uses it to discredit absolute monarchies. If an absolute monarchy claims paternal power over its subjects, this effectively strips the subjects of their ability to reason and places it in the hands of the monarch. Without the ability to reason, one can never be free, as they can never have ability to know and understand laws.

☛☛ The *freedom of a man at years of discretion*, and the *subjection* of a child to his *parents*, whilst yet short of that age, are so consistent, and so distinguishable, that the most blinded contenders for monarchy, *by right of fatherhood*, cannot miss this *difference*; the most obstinate cannot but allow their consistency: for were their doctrine all true, were the right heir of *Adam* now known, and by that title settled a monarch in his throne, invested with all the absolute unlimited power Sir *Robert Filmer* talks of; if he should die as soon as his heir were born, must not the *child*, notwithstanding he were never so free, never so much sovereign, be in subjection to his mother and nurse, to tutors and governors, till age and education brought him reason and ability to govern himself and others?

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker), Sir Robert Filmer

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, which occurs in Locke's chapter on paternal power, implies that those under paternal power are not free, and it further refutes the power claimed by absolute monarchies. Here, Locke argues that the difference between an adult who has the ability to reason and a child, unable to reason, who is under the power of their parents, and he argues supporters of absolute monarchies must be blind not to see the difference. He even calls such supporters "obstinate" and implies they refuse to see the truth behind their false beliefs.

Sir Robert Filmer's book *Patriarcha* argues that kings have a divine right to the throne because they are the rightful descendants of the biblical Adam. Locke dismisses this idea as absurd earlier in the book, but here he suggest that such a claim to power strips the king's subjects of all their power. If the king rules under parental power because he is the legal and rightful descendant of Adam, this reduces all the

king's subjects to children and relieves them of their right to reason. Locke claims that a subject of an absolute monarchy should "die as soon as his heir were born," which is to say that stripping one of their freedom and ability to reason and placing it in the hands of an absolute and arbitrary king is as good as death.

Chapter 7: Of Political of Civil Society Quotes

☛☛ Let us therefore consider a *master of a family* with all these subordinate relations of *wife, children, servants, and slaves*, united under the domestic rule of a family; which, what resemblance soever it may have in its order, offices, and number too, with a little common-wealth, yet is very far from it, both in its constitution, power and end: or if it must be thought a monarchy, and the *paterfamilias* the absolute monarch in it, absolute monarchy will have but a very shattered and short power, when it is plain, by what has been said before, that the *master of the family* has a very distinct and differently limited power, both as to time and extent, over those several persons that are in it; for excepting the slave (and the family is as much a family, and his power as *paterfamilias* as great, whether there be any slaves in his family or no) he has no legislative power of life and death over any of them, and none too but what a mistress of a *family* may have as well as he.

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, which appears as Locke explains the difference between paternal power and the power of government within a civil society, illustrates Locke's argument that paternal power is too limited to serve as political power within a civil government, which again suggests that the paternal power claimed by absolute monarchies is illegitimate. Locke claims that the power of a man over his family and servants may seem like "a little common-wealth," but it most certainly is not.

Locke claims here that the power a man claims over his family is limited "both in its constitution, power and end." The power a man assumes over his children only lasts until said child has reached an age of reason, and this power does not extend to the child's life or property. The same limitation is seen in a man's power over his servants. This power only lasts as long as the servant consents to it—as long as the terms of their contract or agreement—and can never extend

to a servant's life or property. Locke argues that the power of the father, or "paterfamilias," is insufficient for a monarch to rule over his subjects—it leaves the monarch with a "very shattered and short power"—as such power follows the same rules of a man in a domestic society. Thus, paternal power cannot possibly be the absolute and arbitrary power a monarch claims over its subjects.

●● And this *puts men* out of a state of nature into that of a *common-wealth*, by setting up a judge on earth, with authority to determine all the controversies, and redress the injuries that may happen to any member of the commonwealth; which judge is the legislative, or magistrates appointed by it. And where-ever there are any number of men, however associated, that have no such decisive power to appeal to, there they are still in the *state of nature*.

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Locke underscores the importance of an impartial judge, which for Locke is the defining factor in distinguishing nature from society. When humankind joins together under a central power and judge, this is the point when Locke claims humankind moves out of a state of nature and into a state of civil society, which Locke refers to as a commonwealth. Locke argues that the desire to leave nature for civil society is rooted in the violence of nature, which erupts because there is no impartial judge to settle disputes.

Locke does not speak of a state of nature as something that existed long ago, before the advent of civil society. Instead, he maintains that a state of nature exist in his own time, and continues to exist wherever people lack a common judge to which they may appeal grievances. As an impartial judge does not exist in an absolute monarchy for subjects to bring complaints and perceived wrongs perpetrated by the king, Locke suggests that absolute monarchies are therefore a state of nature, not a state of civil society. In this way, everything an absolute monarch does and every law he imposes on the people has no actual authority. Thus, the subjects of an absolute monarchy are not obligated to follow the arbitrary laws of a monarch.

●● *No man in civil society can be exempted from the laws of it: for if any man may do what he thinks fit, and there be no appeal on earth, for redress or security against any harm he shall do; I ask, whether he be not perfectly still in the state of nature, and so can be no part or member of that civil society; unless any one will say, the state of nature and civil society are one and the same thing, which I have never yet found any one so great a patron of anarchy as to affirm.*

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

This passage underscores Locke's primary argument that absolute monarchies are not a legitimate form of civil society and government. In an absolute monarchy, the king is exempt from laws and regulation of any kind. He acts arbitrarily and according to his own will, often ignoring the needs and desires of his subjects. Locke argues that all people are born into a state of perfect equality, including monarchs who claim absolute power. Thus, even the king cannot be above the law in a civil society.

Locke again implies that there is not an impartial judge for subjects of an absolute monarchy to appeal their grievances to. As the king is above the law, a judge does not exist that has enough power to punish him, so the people have no recourse when they are wronged by the king. Locke draws a parallel between an absolute monarchy and nature in this respect. Nature also lacks an impartial judge, and since this is the defining factor of nature, an absolute monarchy is likewise a state of nature. In claiming this, Locke not only implies that absolute monarchies are savage and violent—he also implies that absolute monarchies are not a form of civil society, and the power such monarchies claim over their subjects is meaningless.

Chapter 9: Of the End of Political Society and Government Quotes

☛☛ 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.

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

This quote illustrates how one must freely give up their right to self-preservation, equality, and the ability to punish transgressors to the common-wealth to officially become part of civilized society. When leaving a state of nature for a state of civilization, one places their right to self-preservation with the laws that govern that society, and those laws must be geared toward the self-preservation of the people and their property or it cannot be considered civilized society.

The people of a common-wealth also consent to be subordinate to the legislative power and give up their natural right to equality. Finally, members of a civil society must consent to allow the government to punish those who exert unjust force unto them and give up their innate right to punishment as well. However, even though one must give up their natural rights to the government to enter society, the power of the government is still limited. As one does not have the right to do harm to their own body, they cannot give this right to the government, which means the government cannot enslave them or harm them in anyway. These stipulations are foundational to a civilized society; otherwise, civilized society would be worse than nature and humankind would have no reason to leave nature.

Chapter 11: Of the Extent of Legislative Power Quotes

☛☛ But in governments, where the *legislative* is in one lasting assembly always in being, or in one man, as in absolute monarchies, there is danger still, that they will think themselves to have a distinct interest from the rest of the community; and so will be apt to increase their own riches and power, by taking what they think fit from the people: for a man's *property* is not at all secure, tho' there be good and equitable laws to set the bounds of it between him and his fellow subjects, if he who commands those subjects have power to take from any private man, what part he pleases of his *property*, and use and dispose of it as he thinks good.

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 73-74

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears as Locke illustrates the extent of government and legislative power, and it is significant because it again implies that humans have a tendency for what Locke calls “self-love” and partiality. This “self-love” and partiality is a large part of what makes a state of nature so dangerous for humankind, and it again threatens to endanger civilized government as well. Locke argues that a legislative body (the body of power that makes the laws) should not be continuously in session, because to do so tempts them to manipulate laws for their own good rather than the good of the community.

Locke claims this abuse is in danger of happening in an absolute monarchy as well, as being constantly in power over the people leads a monarch to tailor laws to his own “distinct interests” rather than the community’s. This assertion is just one more way in which Locke dismisses absolute monarchies as an illegitimate and dangerous form of government. Whenever the laws of the community are not made specifically with the people in mind, this threatens their very freedom and property. This also suggests that whenever humankind is placed in a position where they can exert unjust force onto another, they will more than likely do so to their own advantage.

Chapter 16: Of Conquest Quotes

☞☞ That the *aggressor*, who puts himself into the state of war with another, and *unjustly invades* another man's right, *can*, by such an unjust war, *never* come to *have a right over the conquered*, will be easily agreed by all men, who will not think, that robbers and pirates have a right of empire over whomsoever they have force enough to master; or that men are bound by promises, which unlawful force extorts from them.

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Locke suggests that a conqueror can never have power over those they seek to conquer, which, by extension, also implies that an absolute monarch can never have power over those they seek to subjugate. When a conqueror “unjustly invades” another and tries to exert absolute power over them, the conqueror officially enters into a state of war with the conquered. If, according to Locke, the conquered does not consent to that state of war, the conqueror has no claim to power and does not have “a right over the conquered.”

While Locke doesn't explicitly state it here, he implies that an absolute monarchy also “unjustly invades another man's right,” and in doing so, he compares absolute monarchs to “robbers and pirates.” Furthermore, Locke implies that intelligent people have excused such an invasion, even though they would never excuse a robber or a pirate. In this way, Locke implies such supporters of absolute monarchies are hypocritical, condemning one thing for some people and excusing it in others.

Chapter 17: Of Usurpation Quotes

☞☞ As conquest may be called a foreign usurpation, so usurpation is a kind of domestic conquest, with this difference, that an usurper can never have right on his side, it being no *usurpation*, but where one is got into the *possession of what another has right to*. This, so far as it is *usurpation*, is a change only of persons, but not of the forms and rules of the government: for if the usurper extend his power beyond what of right belonged to the lawful princes, or governors of the commonwealth, it is *tyranny* added to *usurpation*.

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 100-101

Explanation and Analysis

This passage illustrates Locke's contention that a usurper cannot ever come into possession of another's power without consent. A usurper is anyone who unjustly tries to take a position of power away from someone else, which, according to Locke, is not a legitimate way to come into power. A usurper may also be a tyrant if they attempt to take more power than they have already stolen from the lawful ruler.

This quote also implies that an absolute monarch who unjustly takes a subject's power is nothing more than a usurper. That monarch is not entitled to the power over a subject's life; thus, when this power is unjustly taken, the king by definition becomes a usurper. A usurper is often thought of as someone who tries to steal the crown of a rightful king; however, Locke implies that a usurper is *anyone* who tries to unjustly take the power of another, even if that is a king unjustly taking the power of a subject.

Chapter 19: Of the Dissolution of Government Quotes

☞☞ He that will with any clearness speak of the *dissolution of government*, ought in the first place to distinguish between the *dissolution of the society* and the *dissolution of the government*. That which makes the community, and brings men out of the loose state of nature, into *one politic society*, is the agreement which every one has with the rest to incorporate, and act as one body, and so be one distinct common-wealth. The usual, and almost only way whereby *this union is dissolved*, is the inroad of foreign force making a conquest upon them: for in that case, (not being able to maintain and support themselves, as *one intire and independent body*) the union belonging to that body which consisted therein, must necessarily cease, and so every one return to the state he was in before, with a liberty to shift for himself, and provide for his own safety, as he thinks fit, in some other society. Whenever the *society is dissolved*, it is certain the government of that society cannot remain.

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

This quote illustrates Locke's argument that once a society is dissolved, the people of said failed society regain their innate rights to self-preservation and punishment and revert back to a state of nature. Locke is quick to point out the common-wealth does not necessarily dissolve with the government. In other words, the common-wealth can stand without the government, but the government cannot stand without the common-wealth. This underscores Locke's primary argument that the people are the most important part of the common-wealth, not the governing body.

Locke suggests here that one of the only ways in which a civil society can dissolve is through foreign conquest, which is a testament to the strength of a civil society that no domestic power or force can destroy it. However, the force exerted by a foreign conquest places the people in a state of war with the conqueror, and the people's innate rights to self-preservation and punishment return with this dissolution, which means the people have the right to resist and defend their life and rights with a force up to and including death.

●● To conclude, the *power that every individual gave 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 be no community, no common-wealth, which is contrary to the original agreement; so also when the society hath placed the legislative in any assembly of men, to continue in them and their successors, with direction and authority for providing such successors, *the legislative can never revert to the people* whilst that government lasts; because having provided a legislative with power to continue for ever, they have given up their political power to the legislative, and cannot resume it.

Related Characters: John Locke (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 123-124

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs at the end of Locke's *Two Treatise*, and it is significant because it reflects the supreme power of the common-wealth and underscores how that power comes from the people, not the government. The power of the government was freely given by the people, and nothing can absolve the government of the right to hold and execute the people's power. The only way this power reverts out of the hands of the government is if that government dissolves, but even then the power does not go back to the people.

According to Locke, when a government dissolves, that government's power goes back to the common-wealth, not the people individually. The power stays with the common-wealth for as long as it stands, and if the common-wealth, or society, should dissolve, only then does the power belonging to the citizens' return to them individually. The original contract and agreement between the people of a civilized society is to forfeit their individual power to a common body, and removing the power from this collective source is "contrary to the original agreement."



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PREFACE

Locke addresses the reader directly and says he hopes this discourse on government will reinforce King William's place on the throne. King William, Locke says, rules by consent of the people, and this is the only lawful government. Locke says he will not waste his time rehashing his complaints against Sir Robert Filmer, whose writing is full of "doubtful expressions" and "glib nonsense." Locke claims any reasonable and intelligent man will have a difficult time understanding Filmer's discourse, as it is inconsistent with any common sense.

Locke immediately mentions Sir Robert Filmer, whose book, Patriarcha, advocates for absolute monarchies and the divine right of kings. Locke clearly does not support Filmer's hypothesis, and he is quick to call it "doubtful" and nonsensical. Locke's support of King William—the King of England during Locke's day—suggests Locke is not against all monarchs, just those who claim absolute power and do not rule by consent of the people.



Locke knows he shouldn't speak so harshly about Sir Robert Filmer, as he has no way to defend himself; however, there are many people reading his book and promoting his ideas, so Locke figures he is excused in criticizing a dead opponent. There is nothing more dangerous than espousing the wrong ideas about government, Locke says. If there is anyone interested in truth who wishes to refute Locke's ideas, Locke is open to discussion, but he reminds them that complaining and fighting will not do any good.

Sir Robert Filmer's (1588-1653) Patriarcha was published posthumously in 1680, and at the time Locke wrote his Two Treatise in 1689, Filmer was long dead; however, Filmer's ideas about absolute monarchies were still very much espoused by English supporters of patriarchalism. Locke considers Filmer's ideas a dangerous form of government which strips people of their natural right to freedom and equality.



CHAPTER 1: OF CIVIL-GOVERNMENT

First, Locke says, God did not give Adam dominion over the world or any innate right of fatherhood, as Sir Robert Filmer maintains. And even if Adam was given this dominion by some supreme power, his heirs still don't have a right to it. Furthermore, it is impossible to determine who Adam's heirs are, and since so much time has passed, they surely must all be equal by now. It is impossible, Locke contends, for any living person to draw power from such an authority.

Through Patriarcha, Filmer argues that monarchs have a divine right to rule because they are descendants of the biblical Adam. Locke considers this theory ridiculous for many reasons, but he ultimately claims such power isn't transferable to Adam's supposed descendants. Locke's definition of power, especially political power, is not transferrable, as such power over the people must always be obtained with consent of the people. Filmer's hypothesis removes any chance for consent, as he claims royal power is divine and innate.



Locke says it is important to describe what he means by "political power," which is the right to make laws and enforce penalties—up to and including death—to regulate and preserve property, protect the common-wealth from foreign and domestic injury, and work for the good of the public. The power of a magistrate, Locke maintains, is different from other forms of power, such as the power of a father, husband, master, or lord.

Locke's definition of power lays the foundation for the rest of the book. He is particularly concerned with the tendency others have to confuse the different kinds of power. Filmer's understanding of absolute monarchies embraces paternal power, which Locke ultimately argues is not the same as political power.



CHAPTER 2: OF THE STATE OF NATURE

In order to understand political power, Locke claims one must understand the state of nature. According to Locke, all humans in a state of nature—which means they are not part of civilized society—are in a “state of perfect freedom” and equality, and they are each obligated to mutual love for one another. Locke invokes the words of Sir Richard Hooker to make his point, who claims all people are obligated to “justice and charity.”

Locke says it is important to remember that a “state of liberty” is not the same as a “state of licence.” While a one is at liberty regarding their person and possessions, they are not at liberty to destroy themselves or anyone else. **Nature** is governed by the law of nature, which states no one can harm another’s life, liberty, health, or possessions. Humankind is obligated to preserve themselves and others and respect their life, freedom, and possessions.

No one has the power to invade another’s rights; however, Locke says, everyone has a right to punish criminals of the law. There is no governing body in a state of nature to execute laws, and since humankind exists in **nature** in a perfect state of equality, everyone has an equal right to punish those who wrong them. It is only in restraint and reparation that one may do harm to another lawfully. The idea of punishment may be difficult for some, Locke supposes, but it is the same idea behind a prince or magistrate putting a foreigner to death. English law has no jurisdiction over an Indian, for example, but when English law punishes such a foreigner, they do so under the law of nature.

When a person breaks the law and becomes a criminal, they abandon the “rule of reason,” and whomever they harm has the right to reparation through a victim’s right to self-preservation. In **nature**, one may kill a murderer, both to protect future victims and deter other criminals. This belief, Locke says, is rooted in that “great law of nature, *Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed.*” By this same reason, one may also seek reparation for lesser crimes, as everyone has executive power in a state of nature.

Locke admits that humankind is prone to partiality and violence and will likely go too far in punishing offenders, which inevitably leads to confusion and disorder. It is government, Locke says, which restrains the violence of humankind. Civil government is the only remedy for the state of nature, and Locke reminds readers that absolute monarchs are only just men.

Locke quotes Sir Richard Hooker, an English priest and theologian, extensively throughout the Second Treatise. Hooker’s view of humans in nature implies humankind is innately peaceful, which is the exact opposite of Thomas Hobbes’s view of humankind in nature, which Hobbes considers to be innately savage. Hobbes’s view was well known in Locke’s day, and in speaking of the state of nature, Locke implicitly refers to Hobbes’s theory and dismisses it.



Locke returns to the law of nature again and again throughout his work, and he claims that one is always obligated to obey this law, even in civil society. Locke also uses the law of nature to refute the idea of absolute monarchies—since no one has absolute power over their own life, that power cannot be given to another.



Locke’s theory of the perfect state of human equality and freedom in nature again implies that absolute monarchies are illegitimate. While Locke doesn’t mention absolute monarchies directly here, such restrictive government is implied throughout the book. Locke claims everyone is born into a state of nature, which also implies that everyone is born perfectly equal. This again dismisses Filmer’s idea of the divine right of kings and their innate right to rule over the people.



The “rule of reason” keeps people from acting in a violent way against one another, and it allows them to follow the laws of nature, which assume one should never harm another or their property. However, nature also prescribes to an “eye for an eye” brand of justice, which makes everyone judge and executor.



Locke claims that absolute monarchs are just men because Locke believes that all people are born into a perfect state of freedom and equality. Absolute monarchies assume that one person innately holds all the power, placing one person above the law and everyone else.



Locke expects objection as it is impossible to know what it was really like in a state of nature prior to the creation of society, but he reminds readers that there are many societies governed by princes and independent governments who are currently in a state of nature. There will always be, Locke predicts, people living in a state of nature. For those who claim humankind never lived in a state of nature, Locke again offers Hooker's words. Hooker claims that everyone is bound by the laws of **nature**, and he further asserts that everyone seeks communion and fellowship, which led to the creation of the first politic society. In this vein, Locke asserts that everyone is in a state of nature until they give consent to enter a politic society.

Locke likens absolute monarchies to a state of nature because there is no central governing body in nature, which means there is no impartial judge to appeal complaints to. In an absolute monarchy, the monarch is in complete control of their subjects, and there is no impartial judge to which a subject can appeal if the monarch treats them unfairly. This lack of oversight places one back into a state of nature, since there is no one but God to appeal to. Here, Locke seems to imply that there will always be absolute monarchies. Locke ultimately disputes absolute monarchies because they do not operate based on the consent of the people, which Locke considers paramount to government—no one can submit to any power or government without their expressed consent.



CHAPTER 3: OF THE STATE OF WAR

Locke defines the state of war as a state of “enmity and destruction.” As everyone has the right to self-preservation through the law of **nature**, one therefore has the right to destroy anyone who makes war upon them just as they would kill a wolf or a lion, Locke says. For anyone who is not under the “commonlaw of reason” must be treated as if they are a beast.

While Locke doesn't explicitly say it, he implies here that absolute monarchies place subjects in a state of war with the monarch. A monarch exerts force and power over the people by unjustly stripping them of power, which, strictly speaking is a state of war and an abandonment of the “commonlaw of reason” that assumes everyone is equal and free.



Anyone who attempts to assert absolute power on another automatically enters into a state of war, Locke argues, as being free from the force of such absolute power is essential to self-preservation. One cannot have another in their absolute power, and if they try to exert this power anyway and make another their slave, they are entering into a state of war.

Again, Locke implicitly claims absolute monarchies are illegitimate because, first and foremost, monarchs claim power they can in no way have. To hold another under one's power violates the other's right to self-preservation, which, under the law of nature, means the victim is able to kill the transgressor—in this case, the monarch.



In this way, it is also lawful to kill a thief, Locke says, even if said thief has not caused any physical harm. In taking another's money or possessions, a thief takes another into their power, and it can only be reasonably assumed that they will not stop at that. As the thief has thus entered into a state of war, it is lawful to kill a thief. The difference between a state of war and a state of nature, Locke says, is that **nature** is a state of peace and preservation. A state of war, on the other hand, is a state of violence and destruction. People living in harmony under mutual assistance with a mutual understanding of preservation is a proper state of nature.

Locke's definition of the difference between a state of nature and a state of war again harkens to absolute monarchies. Absolute monarchs seize land and levy arbitrary taxes, thereby becoming a thief in Locke's eyes. In this way, absolute monarchies violate the laws of nature in more ways than one, and place subjects in a continual state of war with the monarch. Locke implies that absolute monarchies are a state of violence and destruction, and he again implies killing a monarch is justified under the law of nature.



After the force ceases during a state of war, the war is over; however, both sides have a right to reparation for their injuries. As there is not a common judge in the state of nature to preside over lawful reparations, Locke reminds the reader, the state of war continues. Violence and injury for any reason, be it in war or in reparation, are still violence and injury. In a state of nature, there is no authority to appeal to, so one must “appeal to heaven” instead. To avoid the constant threat of force and the state of war, humankind created society, Locke argues, to protect one’s person and possessions and implement an authority in which one may appeal.

As Locke argues that civil society was invented to protect people from the violence of nature, he implies here that absolute monarchies are not a form of civil society, as they place subjects into a state of nature and war. Locke later points out that there is no impartial judge in an absolute monarchy, and he again claims that under such circumstances one can only “appeal to heaven” when they are wronged by a monarch.



CHAPTER 4: OF SLAVERY

Everyone has a natural liberty, Locke says, to not be held under the will of another, but the liberty of one in society is not the same as the liberty of one in **nature**. The liberty of one in society is to not be held under the will of any legislative power other than that which has been consented to by the people. Sir Robert Filmer, Locke writes, defines liberty as the freedom to do whatever a person wants without restraint of law or authority. Yet people who live in society have agreed on a governing power, as long as that power is not arbitrary. Freedom in a state of nature, according to Locke, still requires one to live under the law of nature.

Locke’s understanding of liberty assumes one can never be free in the way Filmer imagines. One must always live under the law of nature, which assumes one does not have absolute power over their own life, since one is never permitted to do harm unto their own body. One isn’t free in society either, since they must obey laws. The point, according to Locke, is that consent is freely given to the legislative power to govern over the people, and that power does not exceed the power that one naturally has over their own body in nature.



If one holds another under their will, as is done in slavery, this is nothing but a continued state of war, Locke contends. However, if two people enter into an agreement in which one has limited power and the other is obedient, the state of war ceases for as long as the agreement lasts. According to Locke, no one can agree to enslave themselves to another because no one can give away more power than they possess, and slavery gives one power over another’s life.

Locke considers slavery a continued state of war because under slavery, one does not have freedom and a right to self-preservation. Slavery usually does not involve consent either, and even if it did, the power would be illegitimate because one can never have absolute power over their own body, thus it can never be transferred to another.



CHAPTER 5: OF PROPERTY

As everyone is born with the right to self-preservation, it stands to reason, Locke contends, they have a right to whatever **nature** affords them for subsistence. God gave the earth to all humankind in common, which makes the ownership of private property difficult for some to understand. But, Locke says, he plans to show how everyone has a right to private property, even though God did gift the earth to all humankind in common.

Locke argues the right to property and the ability to protect that property is implicit in the law of nature. One can’t survive in nature without taking from nature’s bounty, thus Locke argues nature is for everyone to take within reason. The private ownership of land was a hot topic in Locke’s day. While some maintained land could not be owned privately, Locke was a loud advocate of a person’s right to land.



God gave earth to humankind to use for convenience and advantage, and for the support and comfort of one's being. All of **nature's** fruits and beasts belong to everyone in common, as long as such resources are produced spontaneously by nature. However, fruit or a deer must be appropriated before it is of any use. Locke argues that everyone has a right to "the *labour* of his body, and the *work* of his hands." Thus any fruit one gathers or game they kill becomes their property.

If one gathers acorns, Locke argues, then that nourishment belongs to them. The acorns become their property at the moment they gather them through their labor. This person hasn't been given consent by all of humankind to gather the acorns, Locke points out, but this is not theft. If it was, humankind would have starved long ago. In **nature**, the acorns exist in common, but when one removes the acorns from nature through their own labor, the acorns officially become their property. The same applies for the deer in the forest and the fish in the sea; when they are removed from a common state, they become private property.

Some may think, Locke says, that this theory of private property gives people the right to take as much as they please, but this is not so. The same law of **nature** that gives a person the right to property limits it as well. God has richly supplied all things for humankind to enjoy, as long as they can make use of it before it spoils. Anything beyond this belongs to someone else. God did not give humankind all of nature to let it spoil and rot.

Locke argues that the same theory applies to the earth itself. God has given humankind the earth to improve—to till, cultivate, and harvest—and when one does so, the property they labor on becomes their own. God gave the world to humankind in common, for their benefit and convenience, and he meant for it be cultivated, as it is no good to anyone before it is appropriated. Of course, Locke admits, there is common land that exists in England, but such land was appropriated through agreement and consent. However, while such land is common to some, it is not common to all.

There are limits to one's ability to appropriate land, as their labor will only allow them to consume a small portion. Thus, everyone is confined by moderation. Without labor, land and property is worth very little, Locke adds. There is enough land for double the earth's inhabitants, Locke says, but the invention of money has allowed people to own more than they can use. The invention of money came from an agreement between people that a piece of yellow metal—which doesn't decay—is worth a field of corn or a piece of meat.

Again, one must take from nature's bounty if they are expected to survive, which is the cornerstone of Locke's labor theory of property. The physical labor one exerts in appropriating and harvesting nature's bounty, in Locke's view, gives one the right of ownership of whatever they harvest from nature.



Locke's theory of labor and ownership relies heavily on the law of nature, which places self-preservation as a top priority. One has an innate right to do whatever they must to preserve their life and health, including taking from nature. Locke earlier argues that God created the earth for the convenience and nourishment of humankind collectively. As everyone collectively own the earth, the only thing that sets any of nature's bounty aside from the common state is the labor one expends to appropriate it.



Here, Locke implies that taking more than one's fair share of nature's bounty makes them a thief, which effectively places them in a state of war with whomever they are depriving at the time. Depriving another of subsistence infringes on their right to self-preservation, and they in turn have a right to protect themselves with force.



Locke's labor theory of property, which again relies on natural law and one's right to self-preservation, has been instrumental in shaping modern ideas of land ownership and property rights. In addition to other things, Locke's labor theory greatly informed the homestead principle, which was followed in many places, particularly the early days of America and the settlement of the West.



Here, readers must consider the time in which Locke is writing—the late 1600s. In Locke's day, a high-end estimate of the world's population was about 580 million people. In the 21st century, the population has climbed to over 7 billion. Locke examines the advent of money quite extensively, but he emphasizes how money completely changed land ownership, inevitably leading to land shortages.



Throughout history, as family size increased and industry grew, people's possessions grew with them. They built cities, and through consent, they set boundaries for districts. From there, they settled individual properties, and their labor placed value on things. An acre of land planted with tobacco is more valuable, Locke contends, than an empty field. An example of this progression can be seen in the Americans, who have land but little wealth. The Americans have set out to improve the land through labor.

Things that are usually considered useful are of short duration, and if they are not consumed within the appropriate time, they spoil. But people have now agreed that there is value in gold, silver, and diamonds. Locke says if one is gathering apples, that person is only allowed to take what they can use before the apples spoil. If they take more than this, it is considered theft. This keeps anyone from hoarding things that others might use. If one has more apples than they can consume, they can give them away so others may have them before they spoil; or, they may barter the extra apples for some nuts that will last much longer. One may also trade their extra apples for something else that lasts, like wool, metal, or diamonds. One can keep as much of these things as they please, because such things do not spoil.

In the beginning of history, the entire world was America, Locke says, and more so, since they knew nothing of the invention of money. Now, money is the lasting thing that does not spoil, which has been assigned value through mutual consent. Money allows one to own much more than they can consume, including land, and they can hoard as much gold and silver as they please without hurting anyone.

Locke repeatedly points out the importance of consent in entering any civil society. If one does not consent to enter society, it cannot by definition be considered civil. Locke frequently employs the Americans as an example of an emerging civil society and government. In 1689 when Locke was writing, America was still an English colony and had not yet declared independence. In 1789, when America's Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution, they drew heavily from the Second Treatise of Government.



Here, Locke implies that one can't hoard apples because they may spoil, thereby robbing another of their right to self-preservation through nature's bounty; however, one can hoard money because it doesn't spoil, so it can't rob another of their right to self-preservation. Again, readers must consider the time in which Locke was writing. Locke's theory doesn't exactly fit in modernity where people are absolutely hindered in their right to self-preservation by financial inequalities, but Locke obviously had no way of knowing this in 1689 when the idea of money was in its infancy.



Again, Locke points out that money's value is assigned by mutual consent, which is the only lawful way according to Locke. Money has completely changed the value of things, since now value is not necessarily decided on one's labor or the usefulness of something. A diamond, even if someone does excavate it from the earth using their labor, isn't useful in the same way as food or wood for heat. Diamonds only have value because people decide they do.



CHAPTER 6: OF PATERNAL POWER

Paternal power, Locke explains, is the power parents have over children, and it is often assumed to reside only with the father. According to Locke, however, a mother has equal claim to paternal power, and it is thus better understood as "parental power." Had this been considered, Locke says, perhaps it would have saved people from the many mistakes made concerning parents' power. Especially as it is understood in terms of absolute monarchies. What would those people have thought, Locke asks, to discover that the absolute power they bestowed upon the father actually belonged to the mother as well?

In an absolute monarchy, the monarch is usually a king, and he assumes absolute power over his subjects under paternal power, the same power that both a mother and father have over their children. Locke sets out to refute the idea of absolute monarchies and the divine right of kings, which he claims here, if it really exists, is actually the divine right of kings and queens, since paternal power is not limited to just the father.



While Locke contends that everyone is born into a state of perfect equality, this equality does not extend to children. Children “are not born in this full state of *equality*, though they are born to it.” Parents have temporary jurisdiction over children, until they reach the age of reason. Adam was created a perfect man, but his descendants were all born infants, without knowledge or understanding. Adam and Eve were under an obligation to nourish and educate their offspring until they reached the age of reason. As people are now, Adam was governed by the “*law of reason*,” which assumes that no one can be held under a law they don’t understand.

Parents’ power over children is rooted in a duty parents have to care for their offspring, to teach and advise them until they become free. Until that time, a child is dependent on their parents to provide and understand for them. If a child’s parents should die without appointing a guardian for them, Locke says, the law must step in to care for the child. But after a child reaches the age of reason, they are just as free as their parents. If, by way of certain defects, one is never able to understand the law, they are not able to be free. As such, the mentally ill are never free from the government, Locke says.

The most ardent supporters of the monarchy, Locke proclaims, who believe the king rules by right of fatherhood, must understand that if they invest absolute power in a monarch the way Sir Robert Filmer says, one can never be free. Humankind’s freedom is rooted in reason, which is why authority is placed in the parents of children, but there is no reason to arbitrarily give that power to the father. What of paternal power in parts of the world where women are allowed multiple husbands? And what of husbands and wives in America who can part, and the children remain with their mother? A mother has power over her children as well, and she can make rules and impose obligations the same as a father.

Parents’ power over children, however, is temporary, and it does not extend to their life or property, Locke argues. Once a child arrives at the age of discretion, this power ceases. At this point, the child is free from their parents’ dominion, but they are still expected to honor them. Just as the laws of **nature** and God obligate parents to care for their children until adulthood, a child is expected to honor their parents forever. Nothing can absolve a parent from the responsibility of caring for their children, and nothing can absolve a child from honoring their parents.

One cannot freely give informed consent if they lack the ability to reason, and one can’t be expected to follow laws that they don’t have the ability to understand, so a parent’s duty is to understand for their children and guide them until they are able to reason on their own. This also harkens back to absolute monarchies claiming paternal power over subjects. Subjects aren’t children and can reason on their own, and an absolute monarchy ignores this ability to reason and make one’s own decisions.



Parents’ duty to nourish their children is also rooted in the law of nature. Self-preservation includes the preservation of all humankind, as one cannot exist independently of another. It is for the good of nature, and a civil society for that matter, that there are as many people as possible, so parents are obligated to see their children into adulthood so children can survive and in turn contribute to the population and society.



Locke explicitly supports women and their right to complete freedom and equality, which wasn’t always a popular view during Locke’s time. He even refers to divorce in America, when women part with their husbands, which was not a practice in England at the time. Women were beholden to their fathers and husbands and subjected to their power. Locke, however, argues that women enjoy the very same natural freedoms and rights as men; therefore, any power exerted onto a woman without her consent is illegitimate and places her in a state of war with the aggressor.



Parents do not have the right over their children’s lives, meaning they don’t have the authority to kill them, and they don’t have any claim to the property their children may come into possession of during their lives. As nothing can absolve a parent from honoring their child, Locke again implicitly rejects absolute monarchies as a form of paternal power. Absolute monarchies often deprive subjects of property, which a parent does not have the authority to do.



Parents are charged with educating their children, although they may put their child's tuition in another's hands. Furthermore, Locke says, if one's child serves as an apprentice to another, a great part of that child's obedience to their parents is discharged to their mentor. But, Locke claims, none of this enables a parent to make and enforce laws over a child that affect "limb and life." If political power is paternal, and all the power is in the prince, then his subjects can have none of it. Thus, paternal power can extend no further than parent to child, as a parent has not the authority to govern.

Again, Locke draws attention to the fact that parents do not have authority over their children's lives or person, as they cannot affect "life and limb." In claiming paternal power as political power and using it to enforce laws, including capital punishment, Locke implies the power of absolute monarchies is illegitimate by pointing out the stated source of their power does not authorize them the extent of power they assume.



CHAPTER 7: OF POLITICAL OF CIVIL SOCIETY

God made humankind in such a way that humans do not like to be alone. Thus, Locke maintains, humankind has a natural inclination for society. Society began between a man and woman, who together had children, and that society soon grew to include that of master and servant. These individual societies joined together to form a political society. Conjugal society arises from a compact between man and woman, and it consists mainly of the right to one another's bodies for the purpose of procreation. Conjugal society also includes mutual support and assistance, affection, and an obligation to nourish and maintain offspring.

Locke's argument that humankind has a natural inclination for society is again rooted in Sir Robert Hooker and his 1594 publication of *The Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie*, in which Hooker argues the very same thing. The key to each of the individual societies Locke outlines is that they each require consent. Here, conjugal society arises from a contract, which again implies freely given consent.



The contract between a man and woman in conjugal society lasts longer than any other conjugal relationship in **nature**, as it must last long enough to maintain and nourish offspring. However, Locke contends, since husband and wife are sure to have different wills and understanding of things, it is necessary for the determining rule to be placed in one power, usually the man. But this still leaves the wife in full possession of her rights of the contract, and her husband has no more power over her life than he has over his own. Thus, the power of the husband is very far from the power of the absolute monarch, and in some cases, a wife can even separate from her husband.

Again, men do not have dominion over women, according to Locke. In instances when a husband and wife may disagree concerning child-rearing, that decision usually defaults to the husband, but Locke is quick to point out that women still possess a natural and innate right to freedom and equality that cannot be infringed on by another—including one's own husband, as he has no more natural power or freedom than his wife.



As Locke has already explained the limited power parents have over children, he claims he will not belabor it again, expect to say that the power relationship between parents and their children is very different from political society. In the case of a master and servant, free people sell themselves as servants to another for a specified time, for a specified wage, and this gives a master limited power over his servants and only on the terms of the contract that exists between them. Slaves, Locke continues, who are captured in a just state of war, are subject to the absolute and arbitrary power of their master. In a state of slavery, Locke says, one forfeits their life and liberty to their master and are not part of civil society.

Locke pauses to argue that paternal power is not political power every chance he gets, which underscores the importance of his primary argument that absolute monarchies, which invoke paternal power, are an illegitimate form of government. This also highlights another of Locke's primary arguments, which is that power over another is always limited—unless that power is taken during a state of war, as anyone who consents to enter a state of war forfeits their right to life and reason.



Thus, a master and his family—including his wife, children, servants, and slaves—are united under domestic rule. While this may seem like a miniature common-wealth, Locke says, it isn't. Therefore, in an absolute monarchy, the monarch, or paterfamilias, can have only limited power over the people. Paternal power is limited in duration and extent, and with the exception of slaves, the paterfamilias has no power of life or death over anyone.

In **nature**, humans are born under the law of nature in a state of perfect equality, and they have the right to preserve their life, freedom, and property. One can punish those who violate laws against them, up to and including death. Thus, no political society can exist without the power to preserve life and property and punish those who break the laws, Locke maintains. In a political society, one gives up their power of self-preservation and punishment to the common-wealth, and the common-wealth becomes the “umpire” by setting basic rules to be followed by everyone. Those who have joined in one body with common laws and a common authority in which to appeal live in civil society with each other. Without an authority to appeal to, one is in a state of nature.

When people join together in a common-wealth to form a body politic, the common-wealth must make laws for them, for the common good of the people. This takes one from a state of nature and puts them into a state of a common-wealth through the establishment of a judge to reign over disputes. Thus, an absolute monarchy, Locke says, is wholly inconsistent with civil society. *Everyone* must be subject to the authority, and if not, they are in a state of nature. No one can be safe or at rest, or think themselves part of civil society, under an absolute monarchy. Therefore, Locke argues, no one can be exempt from the law of a civil society. If one person believes they can do as they please without consequence or appeal, this is a state of nature, and not a civil society.

CHAPTER 8: OF THE BEGINNING OF POLITICAL SOCIETIES

As all people are born free and equal, Locke argues, no one can be placed under another's political rule or relieved of their property without their expressed consent. The only way in which one is relieved of such natural liberty is by agreeing to unite in a common-wealth with others. When people assemble and consent to a government under one body politic, the majority has the right to rule the rest.

This again points to Locke's belief that absolute monarchies are an illegitimate form of government, and the power they claim to invoke is insufficient for the extent to which they use it. Furthermore, any power relationship within domestic rule, save for the master/slave relationship, is based on consent, which an absolute monarch does not have.



Locke later repeats the idea of the common-wealth as “umpires” for the common good, which suggests the common-wealth is responsible for making sure the people are taken care of in the best way possible. Thus, they are “umpires” for deciding when their government—in England, the king—has acted against the common good, which can't happen in an absolute monarchy. Implied within a state of nature is a state of war, since there is no one to settle disputes, and one must resort to force to receive reparations for transgressions against them.



In an absolute monarchy, the king cannot be held to any law or power, and he can arbitrarily exert his power onto the people as he sees fit. An absolute monarch who rules according to their own will and desire is not acting in the common good of the people. The law of nature, which everyone is obligated to follow according to Locke, says one must always preserve their own life and the lives of others. A king abusing his subjects under arbitrary rule does not preserve the lives of his subjects. There is no recourse for a subject harmed by the king; thus, this is a state of nature.



Locke's idea of consent again applies to his argument against absolute monarchies. Subjects do not consent to the rule of the absolute monarch; that power is exerted on them against their will. If a subject did not willingly consent to unite with such a society, it cannot be considered civil society and the subject cannot be expected to obey.



Thus, everyone who consents to a body politic puts themselves under an obligation to submit to the rule of the majority. If one refuses to submit to the rule of the majority, the original compact is meaningless. If consent is not received by a majority act of the whole, individual consent must be obtained, which is surely impossible. This understanding might have made *Leviathan* quite a bit shorter, Locke says. For if the majority cannot conclude the rest, there cannot be a body politic.

Of course, Locke says, there aren't any examples in history where independent and equal people leave nature and set up a government, and people already under a government do not have the right to start a new one. However, Rome and Venice began by the uniting of many free and independent people. Many parts of America were also without official government, and in each of these places, politic society began with the agreement of free people.

Locke acknowledges that in many historical instances, original common-wealths were ruled by one man, usually a king. These kings, however, were empowered by consent of the people with the following words: "And the people made him head and captain over them." If a king was found to be weak, the people could name a more capable king. In Israel, the main duty of the first kings were to lead armies in war. After Saul, the kings were chosen by the people and anointed in oil. Thus, Locke says, it is possible to be born free and place rule into one man's hands, but those who have historically done this never thought their monarch would be "Jure Divino." Indeed, the peaceful beginning of government lies with the consent of the people.

Governments must understand that they claim no power over the child, simply because they claim power over the parents, Locke argues. A child is born no subject of any government, until they reach the age of reason and consent to join a common-wealth freely. Thus, the most important aspect of a political society is that it is made with the consent of its members.

CHAPTER 9: OF THE END OF POLITICAL SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT

If one is perfectly free in a state of nature, Locke asks, why would one ever part with such freedom? For Locke, the answer is simple: to preserve one's life and property. A state of nature is dangerous and very uncertain, and since it is so unsafe, one freely gives up such liberties for protection. The single greatest reason for humankind to leave a state of nature and join society is the preservation of property.

Here, Locke references Thomas Hobbes directly by mentioning Hobbes's book, *Leviathan*, a work of political theory that argues the power of absolute monarchies and the divine right of kings. Hobbes's book is long—over 600 pages compared to Locke's much shorter book at just over 100—and Locke suggests *Leviathan* could have been much shorter if Hobbes would have just accepted that absolute monarchies can't stand because they don't involve consent or consider the majority.



There obviously are no surviving records from the very first civil societies, but since civil societies exist, Locke points out that such societies had to start sometime. Civil societies clearly began with the consent of the people and an agreement to live together under common rule for the common good.



Jure Divino is Latin for "by divine law," by which Locke argues that even biblical people didn't believe their king was ordered by God's divine right. Saul was Israel's first king, and he was anointed by God; however, kings after Saul were anointed by the people, which means the people freely picked their king and imbued him willingly with the power to rule. Locke is quick to point out that one can still be free under a monarchy, as long as that monarchy is not absolute. After all, Locke does support King William, who he claims rules by consent of the people.



This again underscores Locke's argument of consent and the fact that everyone is born free from any outside power or force. In order to be part of an absolute monarchy, a child would have to consent to join after the age of reason, and even then they can never give away the right to rule over their life.



While Locke doesn't exactly agree with Hobbes's definition of the state of nature as "nasty, brutish, and short," Locke does concede that nature can be an exceedingly dangerous place, in which one is often forced into a state of war. Thus, the desire for the protection of society.



In any politic society, Locke says, there must be established and known laws, enacted and followed by common consent, and there must be an indifferent judge to punish those who violate the law. In a politic society, there must also be a power to execute the laws and punishments handed down by the judge.

Laws in absolute monarchies are arbitrary and executed on a whim. In absolute monarchies, the king is the supreme power and makes and executes laws.



When one leaves a state of nature to join a common-wealth, one forfeits their power of self-preservation and the right to punish transgressors and places such power in the hands of the common-wealth. However, Locke contends, this power can never extend past the common good of the people. For any government must always operate “to no other *end*, but the *peace, safety, and public good* of the people.”

Words are frequently italicized in the Second Treatise, which seems to imply their importance. Here, Locke drives home the fundamental importance of peace, safety, and the public good in society, the very things that an absolute monarchy traditionally ignores.



CHAPTER 10: OF THE FORMS OF A COMMON-WEALTH

According to Locke, the majority of society has the power of the entire community within it, and the majority has the power to make laws for the community. If the majority has the power to execute those laws through a few select people of their own choosing, a perfect democracy is formed. When power is placed not in the majority but with a few select people, this is an oligarchy. If power is placed in the hands of a single person, a monarchy is born, and if this power extends to the monarch's heirs, this is a hereditary monarchy. If a monarch rules for life and upon their death a new ruler is selected by the people, this is considered an elective monarchy.

Here, Locke lists possible forms of common-wealths, and even though he offers several types of monarchies, he doesn't specifically mention absolute monarchies. Locke's neglect to mention absolute monarchies implies such monarchies are not common-wealths. In every other example, the people of a common-wealth freely consent to join said society; however, in an absolute monarchy, there is no consent, as a king's rule is considered automatic.



Each form of government depends upon the placement of supreme power, or the legislative, because one cannot expect an inferior power to rule over one that is superior. This forms a common-wealth. By common-wealth, Locke does not mean a democracy but “*any independent community*.” In Latin, this is known by the word *civitas*, and the closest English word to such a term is common-wealth. To simply call such independent societies cities or communities is not exactly right, Locke says, as there can be subordinate communities in government.

Locke does not maintain that power and freedom are equal within a common-wealth (above he even mentions oligarchies, which are notoriously oppressive), but he does insist that subjects of a common-wealth of any kind consent freely to whatever established power relationship that community adopts, provided that power does not extend beyond the power humans have in a state of nature.



CHAPTER 11: OF THE EXTENT OF LEGISLATIVE POWER

As the very reason one enters into a society is to benefit from the established laws, Locke contends the fundamental law of all common-wealths is the establishment of the legislative power. The main goal of the legislative power is the preservation of society and everyone in it. The legislative power is supreme, and once it is decided upon by the people, it cannot be altered by the hands in which is placed. No one within a common-wealth can force a law that has not been sanctioned by the legislative power, as all laws must exist with the consent of the people. Everyone living in a common-wealth has the obligation to obey the supreme legislative power, and no foreign or domestic oath can release them from that obligation.

However, Locke argues, the legislative power is limited and may not rule arbitrarily over the people. The legislative power can have no more power than that which was imbued in them by the people, as no one can transfer to another more power than they have themselves. Since no one has arbitrary power to take their own life, or the life or property of another, neither does the legislative power. A common-wealth imbues the legislative with enough power to preserve the life and property of humankind—nothing more and nothing less.

The power of the legislative is limited to “*the public good* of the society,” which means this power does not have the right to destroy, enslave, or impoverish the people. The legislative power may not rule by arbitrary decree, and it must dispense justice using known and understood laws and authorized judges. To submit to absolute and arbitrary power without established laws, Locke contends, is worse than a state of nature, where one at least has the right to defend their person and property. The legislative power is also not permitted to take anyone’s property without consent, as the legislative’s true aim is to preserve one’s property. This, Locke argues, also assumes that one has a basic right to property in the first place.

In governments where the legislative is in one continuous assembly that is always in session, or in the hands of an absolute monarch, said government is in danger of thinking itself above those it rules over, and it will eventually be inclined to increase its own power and wealth by taking it from the people. People in a common-wealth have the right to secure and regulate their property through legislative laws. To submit to absolute power is to risk being left without property. However, Locke says, it is worth noting that absolute power, when it is necessary, is not arbitrary just by nature of being absolute.

Here, Locke specifically outlines the limitations of the power of government over the people. Just because power is handed by the people to the legislative does not give that body of power free reign, as in an absolute monarchy. The fact that no one can be exempt from the law of a common-wealth again excludes absolute monarchies from civilized society. An absolute monarch is not subject to any law or regulation, and they are the supreme power and executor of the law.



This again speaks to the illegitimacy of absolute monarchies, which is one of Locke’s chief arguments. In absolute monarchies, the king is the legislative power, and he is not limited in his power. Locke says such power over another isn’t free to have under any circumstances, save for a state of war. Unless a king’s subjects consent to enter into a state of war with the king, he has no claim to rule over their lives.



Locke implies here that an absolute monarchy is worse than a state of nature, as subjects of an absolute monarchy are not permitted to resist in any way. In that vein, when someone’s property is unjustly seized by the king to add money to the king’s coffers, there is no impartial judge to which the subject can appeal, and they have no right to resist or protect their own property, which effectively makes an absolute monarchy even worse than nature. Subjects of absolute monarchies are often stripped of land, thus Locke’s remark about one’s right to land in the first place.



Locke seems to imply here that absolute power is at times necessary. In cases where marital law must be enacted to ensure the preservation of the common-wealth against some force would be an example for Locke’s argument. Again, the United States government greatly draws from Locke’s theories. In the US, the Constitution demands that Congress meet at least once a year, and representatives are elected for two-year terms.



Locke admits that running a government is expensive, so he argues that everyone in a common-wealth is responsible for paying their share of taxes in proportion to their estate; however, even this cannot be done without consent. Without the consent of the majority, the legislative power cannot increase taxes or levy new taxes. The legislative power is also not permitted to transfer the power of the common-wealth to any other body. Since the legislative power gathers its strength from the people, this power cannot be transferred without consent.

Locke again argues that even the supreme power of the legislative is limited. Locke is not against paying one's fair share of taxes—he sees this as an obligation to the common-wealth—but one still must consent to such taxes. All of Locke's theories boil down to consent and the fact that no one can consent to give away more power than they have.



CHAPTER 12: OF THE LEGISLATIVE, EXECUTIVE, AND FEDERATIVE POWER OF THE COMMON-WEALTH

The legislative power has the right to direct the force that preserves the common-wealth, and those laws must be constantly enforced. It takes very little time to make a law, Locke states, so there is no need for the legislative power to always be in session. The same power that makes the laws should not be the same power that enforces the laws, Locke argues. If the same body makes and enforces the laws, they may believe this exempts them from obedience. Thus, it is best for the good of the common-wealth if the power to execute laws is placed in another body entirely—the executive power. As laws must continually be enforced, the executive power must always be in session, unlike the legislative power.

This again points to absolute monarchies, in which the king is both the legislative power and the executive power. Not only can the king pick and choose which laws to enact based on his own desires, he can also pick and choose which law he follows or enforces, since he is charge of punishment. There is absolutely no oversight in such a monarchy, which is automatically created when the power to make and enforce laws is placed in two separate bodies of power.



A third power must also exist within the common-wealth, Locke maintains. There must be a power concerned with war and peace with other common-wealths. This power may be called the federative, Locke says, although it should be understood that he cares very little what it is called. The key to this body of power, as in the executive and legislative, is that the power it possesses is given to it by the people of the common-wealth.

Even though Locke's book is a work of political theory, he still infuses it with irony and sarcasm, as he does here in claiming he doesn't care what the reader calls the federative power. This also implies that he does care what people call the legislative and executive powers, which implies issues intrinsic to the common-wealth take priority over foreign issues outside the common-wealth.



CHAPTER 13: OF THE SUBORDINATION OF THE POWERS OF THE COMMON-WEALTH

In a successful common-wealth there can be only one supreme power: the legislative. All others are subordinate to the legislative, but this power is only “fiduciary” and ultimately lies with the people. As such, the people of a common-wealth have the power to alter or remove a legislative power if it fails to act in their best interest, Locke argues. Thus, it can be said the common-wealth is the supreme power; however, this power may only be exerted once the legislative power is dissolved. In all other instances, the legislative power reigns supreme.

In calling the power of the legislative “fiduciary,” Locke implies that the legislative's power is entrusted to it by the common-wealth, and that trust can be revoked if it is violated. While the legislative has supreme power, it gets its power by way of the people, which thereby limits how much power it can exert on the people of that common-wealth.



In some common-wealths, Locke says, the legislative power is not always in session, and the executive is entrusted to a single person. That single person also has a share in the legislative, which, in a very limited sense, makes this single person the supreme power. However, this one person does not have *all* the power, such as in lawmaking, without the rest of the legislative. Thus, instead of a “supreme legislator,” this person is the “supreme executor of the law.” It is important to note, Locke claims, that this single person has no right to obedience other than that which the common-wealth has entrusted them with.

This harkens to the monarchy during Locke’s day, which Locke did, in fact, support. King William was the executive power, and he was also part of the legislative; however, in order to enact any new laws, King William would have had to call parliament to order—the rest of the legislative—before he had any legislative power. In this way, King William was the “supreme executor of the law,” which automatically kept his power in check because any law he enforced had to be passed by the legislative, or parliament.



In common-wealths where the executive power is placed in one who does not have a share in the legislative, the executive power is subordinate and accountable to the legislative. In such cases, Locke says, the legislative may replace the executive as it sees fit. The federative power is likewise subordinate to the legislative. Lastly, if a legislative is made up of representatives of the people, when they return to the people, they do not retain their power.

Locke’s theories pay special attention to equality and power, as he does here in confirming representatives returning to society do not retain any power. No one can have any more power than anyone else, according to Locke. When a representative serves in the legislative they represent the people, not themselves. Thus, they cannot retain their power.



If there comes a time when the executive power blocks the legislative power from meeting as scheduled without the authority of the people, the executive power places itself in a state of war with the common-wealth, who has the right to reinstate and exercise the power of the legislative by any means necessary. According to Locke, use of force without authorization always places one in a state of war with another. The power of assembling and dismissing the legislative may be placed with the executive, but this does not give the executive power over the legislative.

What Locke implies here but doesn’t explicitly state is that when an executive power places itself in a state of war with the common-wealth, who has a right to exercise their power by any means necessary, can kill whomever serves as the executive. In an absolute monarchy, the executive is the king. Thus, Locke is suggesting people have the right to rebel against such kings, which was quite controversial for Locke’s day.



Things are constantly changing in society, Locke says, and as long as the legislative is made of up representatives chosen by the people, it is possible this representation will become “unequal and disproportionate to the reasons it was first established upon.” Unfortunately, there is little to remedy this reality. As such, Locke claims those who prescribe to the maxim, “*Salus populi suprema lex*” (translation: The health of the people should be the supreme law), will not seriously err.

Locke’s argument that representatives will become “unequal and disproportionate” harkens to his argument that humankind is naturally inclined to partiality and violence. As humans are naturally this way, there is no remedy. Locke’s Latin maxim mirrors that of the law of nature—the good of one’s self and of others must always be observed.



CHAPTER 14: OF PREROGATIVE

In common-wealths where the legislative and executive are in separate hands, Locke argues, it is necessary for the good of the common-wealth that a good many things are left up to the discretion of the executive. The legislative cannot possibly foresee the need for all laws, and they are not always in session; thus, the executive must have the power to deal with transgressions as they arise. The power of the executive to act according to discretion is known as prerogative. The power of prerogative must remain unquestioned for the good of the common-wealth, Locke contends, and if it is questionable that one's prerogative is beneficial to the people, that answer will become evident.

The power of the prerogative gives the executive, in a way, the right to do whatever they want, as long as what they want is for the good of the common-wealth. Just because Locke says the power of the prerogative should remain unquestioned does not mean to say that misuse of prerogative should remain unquestioned. As the people have a right to self-preservation and the right to prerogative could impede this right, they should question misuse; however, as long as the power of prerogative is used for good, it should remain unquestioned.



CHAPTER 15: OF PATERNAL, POLITICAL, AND DESPOTICAL POWER, CONSIDERED TOGETHER

Although Locke speaks of power earlier, he revisits the issue due to “the great mistakes of late about government” that arises from confusing the separate and distinct powers. Paternal power is nothing more than the power of parents over children, to nourish and support them until an age of reason is reached. This power is not intended to serve as a form of government, Locke says, and it does not extend over the life and death of children. Paternal power also does not extend to the child's property.

Locke again points to absolute monarchies and the divine right of kings, which was an issue that had much support in Locke's day. Locke considers such support one of “the great mistakes of late about government,” so he specifically stops to reaffirm his point that paternal power—the power invoked in absolute monarchies—is not political power.



Political power, Locke says, is power given freely to a common-wealth after one leaves a state of nature, which enables the common-wealth to preserve the life and property of its subjects and punish transgressors. Political power involves only the power one has in a state of nature. Despotical power is the absolute and arbitrary power over another to end their life. This power is not given by the law of nature, as no one in **nature** can have arbitrary power over another; thus, it is effectively a forfeiture of life when the aggressor puts themselves in a state of war with another. Despotical power does not arise from any sort of agreement or contract, so it can be nothing else than a state of war, Locke argues.

Locke again implies here that subjects of absolute monarchies have the right to resist the absolute and arbitrary rule of the king. Supporters of absolute monarchy like Filmer argue the paternal power of absolute monarchies is a natural and innate power, which Locke disputes here. According to Locke, no one in nature could ever have such a claim to power. Thus, the power of the absolute monarchy does not come from nature and puts the subject in a state of war with the king.



Paternal power is given by way of nature, and political power through voluntary consent and agreement, Locke says. Despotical power arises from forfeiture, such as in a lord who strips a subject of land. In this way, it is easy to see that paternal power falls short of political power, and despotical power far exceeds it. Thus, neither parental power nor despotical power can be any part of civil society, Locke argues, outside the bonds of parent and child, of course.

Even if the power of the absolute monarchy were naturally paternal, it still wouldn't give the monarch the level of power it presumes to take. In this way, Locke implies here that an absolute monarchy is in fact derived from despotical power and the complete forfeiture of reason and life, which immediately dissolves any government or society.



CHAPTER 16: OF CONQUEST

As a government can only arise through the consent of the people, a conquest is far from setting up a civil government, Locke argues. Any aggressor who puts themselves in a state of war with another and invades another's rights unjustly can never have dominion over the conquered. To do so places the conquered into a state in which their only choice is to appeal to the heavens, which can never be a civil government. Thus, Locke claims, any attempt to conquer another by unauthorized force is illegitimate and does not obligate the conquered to obedience.

Next, Locke considers what power the conqueror does have over the conquered. First and foremost, the conquest does not entitle the conqueror to power over those who conquered with them. And the conquered people are not, Locke hopes, to be enslaved by the conqueror. Any power that the conqueror does hold over the conquered is only despotic. The conqueror has absolute power over those lives forfeited through the state of war; however, the conqueror does not have power over those not engaged in a state of war, nor does the conqueror have power over the possessions of those who did engage in war.

So, Locke claims, a conquest may give a conqueror power over the life of another, but this power does not transfer to property or possessions. The conqueror has no right to seize another's property, and even in the case of reparations cannot take the property or possessions of one's spouse or children. Even if damages are owed to a conqueror for whatever reason, and their children are left to starve and die, this does not entitle the conqueror to land, as land is much more valuable than any damage due to war. No state of war can give the conqueror power to dispossess one of their inheritance, which is to remain in one's possession and their descendants for all generations.

If a common-wealth's former government is destroyed during a conquest, the people have an absolute right to build another one, Locke contends. Every human being is born with two rights—the freedom of their person and the right to inherit their parents' property and possessions. Thus, the members of any common-wealth have an innate right to retain the possessions of their ancestors, including property. However, even if the common-wealth consents to the absolute power of the conqueror, that power is still not absolute. As one in a state of nature cannot destroy their own life or possessions, they cannot consent to give such power away. Locke does not argue whether kings are exempt from laws, but he is convinced they are still subjects of the laws of **nature** and God, as no power can exempt them from such obligation.

This again implies that subjects of absolute monarchies are not obligated to obey the king. Just as a conquest is not undertaken with consent, neither is an absolute monarchy, which can never be considered a civil society. Locke has already specifically stated an absolute monarchy places subjects in a state of war, which he says here more directly is an illegitimate form of government.



A conquest obviously does not give the conqueror power over any allies, and the power they assume over the conquered is likewise limited, as it does not allow power over one's life as is implied in slavery. In order for a conqueror to have any power over the conquered, the conquered would have to consent to a state of war, enter said state, and lose to the conqueror. The conqueror may not just arbitrarily arrive and claim power over everyone.



Locke frequently uses America as an example when explaining his theories of government, and it is interesting here to apply the same lens. According to Locke's theories, American colonists, who were essentially conquerors, never had any right to Indigenous lands, even if the Native Americans did consent to and enter into a state of war with them. Thus, the American government never had any innate right to relieve the indigenous people of their lands, which future generations of indigenous people were rightfully entitled to.



The power of the common-wealth to put a government in place for the people cannot be absolved or taken away once it is freely given by the people. In Locke's view, power is always limited, as no one can have absolute power over themselves or others, which again mirrors Locke's argument that absolute monarchies are not legitimate forms of government and subjects are not obligated to follow such laws. Everyone is obligated to follow the rules of God and nature, Locke suggests, even absolute monarchs.



CHAPTER 17: OF USURPATION

Conquest is a form of foreign usurpation, Locke says, thus domestic usurpation is a form of conquest and is likewise illegitimate. A usurpation is the unlawful possession of another's rights, and when this is applied to governors or lawful kings of a common-wealth, it is tyranny. Lawful governments must rule as consented by the people of the common-wealth, but anarchy is to have no government at all. Therefore, Locke contends, a usurper can have no power that is not authorized by the people.

King William technically usurped the English throne in 1689, the same year Locke wrote his Two Treatise. King James II had the throne prior to King William, but James II was overthrown during the Glorious Revolution because he was Roman Catholic, and William III was made king. However, a majority of English people at the time did not want a Roman Catholic to serve as king, so William did serve with their consent.



CHAPTER 18: OF TYRANNY

Usurpation is the exercise of power that one does not have the right to, Locke explains, so tyranny is exercising power that no one can have the right to. This includes using one's power of prerogative for anything other than the good of the common-wealth. When a ruler makes the law to satisfy their own will and ambition, not the good of the people, that ruler is a tyrant. Locke offers King James I and his speech to parliament in 1603 to prove his point. King James says that the difference between a good king and a tyrant is that the tyrant thinks his kingdom is ordained for his satisfaction, whereas a good king believes he has been ordained to protect the lives and property of his people.

Locke's use of King James I as an example of the difference between a good king and a tyrant again suggests Locke is not against all monarchies, just absolute monarchies. No one can have absolute and arbitrary power over another's life and property, unless they have consented to a state of war. Thus, monarchs in absolute monarchies are nothing more than tyrants, Locke implies.



Locke warns that it is a mistake to assume that tyranny can only occur in a monarchy, as other forms of government can act in tyrannical ways as well. Whenever the government is used to "impoverish, harass, or subdue" the people of a common-wealth, this is considered tyranny. "Where-ever the law ends," Locke says, "tyranny begins." This begs the question if a prince or a king can be opposed or resisted if they behave in a tyrannical way. Locke answers by saying force is forbidden, except in cases of unjust or unlawful force.

The laws of a common-wealth must always be made and enforced for the preservation of the common-wealth and everyone in it. Thus, if a ruler who sets out to "impoverish, harass, or subdue" the people, said ruler infringes on the common-wealth's right to self-preservation. For Locke, unjust laws in any way are examples of tyranny.



In common-wealths where the prince and law are sacred, so that everything the prince does is free from question or opposition, opposition may be applied to illegal acts made by any of the prince's inferior officers. Unless, of course, the prince dissolves the contract of government by placing himself into a state of war with the people. There must be limitations put upon the law, Locke says. For example, if the king issues a legal writ for someone's arrest, the executor cannot break into one's house to arrest them, arrest them on certain days, or in certain places. There may be no exception to the king's commission, but there are limitations, Locke argues. The king cannot, under any circumstances, order anyone to act against the law.

This again underscores Locke's main argument that all power is limited. So, while the king may have the power to issue a warrant for someone's arrest, there are limits to that power. In Locke's day, an arrest warrant could not be served on a Sunday while the subject sat in church. In addition to limiting when such a warrant could be executed, churches were seen as sanctuaries in which everyone was safe from any power or force.



In a government in which the chief magistrate is not sacred, it does not threaten the magistrate's power if subjects resist unlawful exercises, Locke maintains. Whenever an injured party can be relieved of damage through appeal, there is no need for force. Force is only necessary when one has no right to appeal a perceived wrong. Lastly, if unlawful acts of the magistrate are maintained and appeal is obstructed, resisting such tyranny does not threaten the government either. It is impossible, Locke claims, for a few oppressed people to threaten the government. However, if illegal acts threaten the majority, the majority cannot be kept from resisting such force.

Locke again implies it always within someone's rights to resist unjust force, even if there is no central authority to appeal to. However, just as in nature, force against any power is a last resort, and is only allowed if there is not a common judge to appeal to. Force infringes on one's right to self-preservation, which is only allowed within the law of nature during a state of war.



CHAPTER 19: OF THE DISSOLUTION OF GOVERNMENT

Whoever speaks of the dissolution of government, should know the difference between the dissolution of society and the dissolution of government, Locke says. The only way in which a society—that being the union people consent to in order to exit the state of nature—can be dissolved is through foreign conquest. Whenever a society is dissolved, a government cannot stand. However, Locke argues, governments can also be dissolved from within, and one way is when the legislative is altered. When the legislative is broken or dissolved, the government cannot stand.

Locke implies here that a society can stand without a government, as the power of said government goes back to the common-wealth, and the people can collectively rule until they build a new government. Societies, however, can be destroyed if a foreign power takes over and exerts unjust force. Once the people of a common-wealth resist said force, they forfeit their reason and lives, and their former power contract with the common-wealth.



Whenever unjust laws are imposed on a common-wealth, the people are under no obligation to obey them, Locke claims. If a prince or king applies arbitrary rule to his people, the legislative is thereby altered, effectively dissolving the government. If a prince or king prohibits the legislative from assembling as scheduled, the legislative is altered and government dissolved. When the arbitrary power of the king or prince is altered without consent or common interest of the people, the legislative is altered, and the government is dissolved. Lastly, if the prince, king, or magistrate subjects the people to a foreign power, the legislative is altered, and the government is once again dissolved.

Here, Locke effectively names all the reasons why an absolute monarchy can never be a form of government and is nothing more than tyranny. The very definition of an absolute monarchy dissolves the agreement existing between a common-wealth and its government, which again underscores the illegitimacy of absolute monarchies. In saying this, Locke again implies that subjects of an absolute monarchy are not obligated to follow the arbitrary laws of the king.



A government may also be dissolved when a supreme executive abandons their rule and laws cannot be put into action. This reduces a common-wealth to anarchy and effectively dissolves the government, Locke contends. In any case when the government is dissolved, the people have the right to build a new government, as a society can never lose the right to preserve itself. A government is again dissolved when the legislative or prince acts in a way that is contrary to the common-wealth's interest, such as invading personal property or infringing on the people's lives. When this happens, the legislative puts themselves in a state of war with the common-wealth, and the people have a right to resist as they see fit.

A society can never lose the right to preserve itself because the people of said society imbue that society with their own innate right to self-preservation, which stands as long as the common-wealth does. Locke again harkens to absolute monarchies when he claims a government is dissolved when the prince acts contrary to the people. Locke not only implies absolute monarchies are not a form of civil society, he also implies absolute monarchies are not a form of government whatsoever.



While some may surely say that no government can exist if the people are able to resist, Locke says this isn't necessarily true. People are set in their ways and hesitant to adopt new forms of government. Others say the right to resist leads to general rebellion, but Locke again disagrees. Rebellions and revolutions don't occur for "every little mismanagement in public affairs." The right to resist is the best defense against rebellion, as it is legislators who act contrary to the people that are guilty of rebellion, Locke says.

The common question, Locke says, is who is the judge of deciding if the legislative has acted against the people? Locke claims the people are the best judges in such circumstances. In conclusion, Locke states the power that each individual gave to the common-wealth cannot revert back to the people as long as the society stands but must always remains with the community, as without this power there can be no common-wealth. Whenever power is forfeited by the government, the people have the right to reign supreme and govern themselves until they build a new government to replace the old.

Locke takes the idea of rebellion here and tips it on its head by claiming that it is those who perpetrate unjust law who are guilty of rebelling against a government and common-wealth. Rebellions and revolutions are reserved for serious mishaps, Locke contends, not every little thing considered unjust by individual people.



Again, Locke reinforces that it is the people who are the most important members of a common-wealth, not the monarch or legislative power. All of the power a common-wealth has to reign over its people is given to the common-wealth and government through the informed consent of the people, and that consent can be revoked when a government fails to act in the best interest of those it has been charged with protecting.





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