

Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1741)

... This that you have heard is the case of every one of you that are out of Christ. That world of misery, that lake of burning brimstone, is extended abroad under you. There is the dreadful pit of the glowing flames of the wrath of God; there is hell's wide gaping mouth open; and you have nothing to stand upon, nor any thing to take hold of; there is nothing between you and hell but the air, 'tis only the power and mere pleasure of God that holds you up.

You probably are not sensible of this; you find you are kept out of hell, but don't see the hand of God in it, but look at other things, as the good state of your bodily constitution, your care of your own life, and the means you use for your own preservation. But indeed these things are nothing; if God should withdraw his hand, they would avail no more to keep you from falling, than the thin air to hold up a person that is suspended in it.

Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell, and, if God should let you go, you would immediately sink, and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf; and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock....

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked. His wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire. He is of purer eyes than to bear you in his sight; you are ten thousand times as abominable in his eyes as the most hateful, venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince, and yet 'tis nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment....

O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in! 'Tis a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of fire and of wrath that you are held over in the hand of that God whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of Divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it and burn it asunder....

It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God one moment; but you must suffer it to all eternity. There will be no end to this exquisite, horrible, misery....

How dreadful is the state of those that are daily and hourly in danger of this great wrath and infinite misery! But this is the dismal case of every soul in this congregation that has not been born again, however moral and strict, sober and religious, they may otherwise be. Oh! that you would consider it, whether you be young or old!

Philosophers of the Enlightenment:

Voltaire



Voltaire (1694-1778)

As a poet and writer, in Paris, Francois Marie Arouet (1694-1778), known as Voltaire, encountered the new ideas that were being discussed in the salons of Paris. Individuals had been imprisoned for writing and publishing or owning books that were critical of the Catholic church and the monarchy. Through his travels to England, Voltaire the poet became Voltaire the philosophe.

While in England, Voltaire became acquainted with the ideas of John Locke and Isaac Newton. From Newton, Voltaire learned the mathematical laws that govern the universe. From Locke, he learned that people should believe only those ideas that can be received from the senses. Voltaire was the first among many philosophes to champion Locke's ideas. The implications for religion are serious: if people believe only those things they can experience, how can they accept mysteries and religious teachings simply because they were taught by the churches and the clergy? Voltaire encountered a new and self-confident scientific culture in England and also experienced freedom of thought and religion. This was in complete contrast to the absolutism of the French Kings and the power of the French church.

Voltaire was a fierce supporter of the enlightenment and a bitter critic of churches and the Inquisition. Although his books were banned in France, he did more than any other person to popularize the Enlightenment and mock the power of the clergy. He offered the new science,

constitutional monarchy, and religious toleration of England as the models to be followed in Europe.

Voltaire never ended his mocking of the supporters of superstition and blind obedience to religious authority. In works such as *Candide* and *Micromegas*, Voltaire attacked the clergy as well as those who believed that this was the best of all possible worlds. In his ideal society, greed, war and the church were to be eliminated. By the 1750s, Voltaire had become internationally famous, with his ideas being spread from Paris to St. Petersburg.

Montesquieu

Baron de la Brede et de Montesquieu (1689-1755) was a French aristocrat who visited England in the late 1720s and knew the writings of Locke. He had little use for revolutions but did support the idea of a constitutional monarchy. His major concern was to check the unlimited power of the French kings. Montesquieu proposed a balanced system of government where an executive branch was balanced by a legislature whose members were drawn from the wealthy and educated in society. He believed that the aristocracy possessed a natural and sacred obligation to rule. Montesquieu also wanted to create a government that utilized the energies and talents of its people, not a government that was bogged down with corruption and inefficiency like that of the Old Regime in France.



Montesquieu (1689-1755)

His writings, including the *Spirit of the Laws*, established Montesquieu as a major philosophe and critic of the French system of government. He highlighted the failures of absolutism and pointed to the need of some kind of representative assembly in every European country.

Rousseau



Rousseau (1712-1778)

Democracy found its champion in Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Rousseau based his politics on the contract theory of Locke, that is, where the people choose their government and, in doing so, they effectively create civil society. Rousseau went farther than any thinker of his day and demanded that government be made directly responsible to the will of the people. His major work *The Social Contract*, opens with the lines "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains," and it went on to ask, how can that be changed?

Rousseau argued that true freedom could only be found in small city-states, such as ancient Athens, but his supporters would eventually apply his ideas to France. No philosopher was more dangerous to the Old Regime than Rousseau. His ideas, like those of Locke before him, were seen as a direct revolutionary challenge to the power of kings, churches and aristocrats. During the French revolution, his name would be used to justify democracy and representative government.

Rousseau viewed society as a corrupter of human beings, who left on their own were naturally good and freedom loving. Those who tended to agree with Rousseau tended to view society as in constant need of reform. Some believed reform could be achieved through working with those in power. Other philosophes believed the key to reform was in a change in people's mentality through education and propaganda. Finally, there were those who thought change could be achieved by the workings of a free economy.

The Social Contract, 1762

I assume, for the sake of argument, that mankind at some time reached a point when the disadvantages of remaining in a state of nature outweighed the advantages. Under these conditions, the original state of nature could no longer endure. The human race would have perished if it had not changed its way.

Men, being human, cannot develop new powers. But they can unite and control the powers they already have. Men in the state of nature could get together, pooling their strength in a way that would permit them to meet any challenge. They had to learn to work together under central direction.

A real concentration of human powers could be brought about only as the result of an agreement among individual men. But each individual man relies on his own strength and his own freedom of action to protect and preserve himself. How can he limit his strength and his freedom of action without injuring himself . . . ?

Some form of association must be found which can rally the whole community for the protection of the person and property of each of its citizens in such a way that each man, because he is a voluntary member of the association, renders obedience to his own will and hence remains as free as he was before. That is the basic problem solved by the social contract.

The provisions of the social contract are determined by the nature of the act [of association] in such a way that the least modification

will make them invalid. Even though the terms of association may never have been formally accepted in open meeting, they are everywhere the same and universally recognized. If the social contract were in any way broken by anyone, then each individual could at once resume all the rights which were his in the state of nature. He would regain his natural liberty by losing the liberty of the social contract for which he originally gave up his freedom of action.

The essence of the social contract can be stated simply: Each individual surrenders all his rights to the community. Since each man surrenders his rights without reservation, all are equal. And because all are equal, it is to everyone's interest to make life pleasant for his fellows.

Since all rights have been surrendered to the community without reservation, no one has any claim against the group. If any rights were left to individuals and no one was given authority to decide between individual rights and the public good, then each man would try to extend the scope of those rights he had reserved for himself. This situation would mean that a state of nature still existed. All rights must be surrendered; none may be reserved. . . .

The heart of the idea of the social contract may be stated simply: Each of us places his person and authority under the supreme direction of the general will; and the group receives each individual as an indivisible part of the whole. . . .

In order that the social contract may not be a mere empty formula, everyone must understand that any individual who refuses to obey the general will must be forced by his fellows to do so. This is a way of saying that it may be necessary to force a man to be free; freedom in this case being obedience to the will of all.

Jean Jacques Rousseau. *The Social Contract*, as quoted in Edwin Fenton, *32 Problems in World History* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1964), pp. 126-128. copyright © 1964 by Scott, Foresman and Company. Reprinted by permission.

John Locke:
Two Treatises of Government



John Locke (1632-1704), the great English philosopher, had lived through most of the English struggles between king and parliament. Although not completely satisfied with the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89, he wrote widely in justification of it. His *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) was a classical statement of the contract theory of government. Locke's first treatise is given entirely to a denial of the divine origin of government; the second is "concerning the true, original, extent and purpose of government."

From Locke: *Two Treatises of Government* (1689)

To understand political power, we must understand the condition in which nature puts all men. It is a state of perfect freedom to do as they wish and dispose of themselves and their possessions as they think fit, within the bounds of the laws of nature. They need not ask permission or the consent of any other man.

The state of nature is also a state of equality. No one has more power or authority than another, since all creatures of the same species and rank have the same advantages and the use of the same skills, they should be equal to each other without subordination or subjection. The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it. Reason is that law. It teaches all mankind that, since all men are equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions. All men are made by one omnipotent (all-powerful) and infinitely wise Maker. They are all servants of one

sovereign Master who sent them into the world to do His business. They are His property, made to live during His, not one another's, pleasure. He has put men naturally into a state of independence, and they remain in it until, by their own consent, they choose to become members of a political society.

If man in a state of nature is free, if he is absolute lord of his own person and possessions, why will he part with his freedom? Why will he subject himself to the dominion and control of any person or institution? The obvious answer is that rights in the state of nature are very uncertain for they are constantly exposed to the attacks of others. Since every man is his equal and since most men do not concern themselves with equity and justice, the enjoyment of the rights in the state of nature is unsafe and insecure. Hence each man joins in society with others for the mutual preservation of his life, liberty and estates, which I call by the general name of property.

Since men hope to secure their property by establishing a government, they will not want that government to destroy the objective they sought to attain. When legislators try to destroy or take away the property of the people, or to reduce them to slavery under arbitrary power, they put themselves into a state of war with the populace who can then refuse to obey the laws. When legislators, motivated by ambition, fear, folly or corruption, try to gain or give someone else absolute power over the lives, liberties and estates of the people, they abuse the power which the people put in their hands. It is then the privilege of the people to establish a new legislature to provide for their safety and security. These principles hold true for the executive, who helps to make laws and carry them out....

Perhaps some will say that, since the people are ignorant and discontented, a government based on their unsteady opinion and uncertain humor will be unstable. They might argue that no government can exist for long if the people may set up a new legislature whenever they do not like the old one. But people do not so easily give up their old forms of government as some are apt to suggest. In England, for example, the unwillingness of the people to throw out their old constitution has kept us to, or brought us back again to, our old legislature of king, lords, and commons.

However, it will be said that this philosophy may lead to frequent rebellion. To which I answer, such revolutions are not caused by every little mismanagement of public affairs. But if a long train of abuses, lies, and tricks, all tending the same way,

make a government's bad intentions visible to the people, they cannot help seeing where they are going. It is no wonder that they will then rouse themselves, and try to put the rule into hands which will secure to them the purpose for which government was originally organized.

Thomas Hobbes: *Leviathan*



The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), lived through the English Civil War (1642-49) and was disturbed by the chaos it created. Probably the most original political philosopher of the 17th century, Hobbes believed in a pessimistic view of human nature and embraced the idea of a commonwealth based on the divine-right theory of absolute monarchy. His most famous work, *Leviathan*, analyzed human nature and established Hobbes as a major European thinker.

The key to Hobbes philosophy can be found in his belief regarding the original state of mankind. According to this account, people in their natural state tend to have "perpetual and restless" desire for power. Because all people want and, in their natural state, possess a natural right to everything, this equality leads to bitterness, competition, and constant warfare—"a way of every man against every

man." As Hobbes stated in *Leviathan*:

"In such condition there is no place for industry, because the rewards are uncertain, and as a result no culture of the earth; no navigation nor use of the products that may be imported by sea... no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and, which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."

Hobbes believed that man in his original state was corrupt and only society could deliver people from this evil. People escaped this state of nature by entering into a social contract, a society tightly ruled by a recognized sovereign.

The unprecedented feature of the contract is that it is not between the ruler and the ruled; it is binding only on the ruled. They agree among themselves to submit to the sovereign; the sovereign is thus not a party to the contract and is not limited in any way. A government that is totally free to do whatever it wishes to keep the peace, and peace is always better than turmoil.

Because words and promises are not god enough to guarantee safety, the social contract also utilizes force to compel people's compliance with the law. This form takes the form of absolute and unlimited power in the hands of the sovereign. There is no room in Hobbes's philosophy for individual liberties nor legitimate rights by private individuals.

The power of Hobbes's logic, and the endorsement he seemed to give absolutism, made his views enormously influential.

Two Treatises of Government, 1690

John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (London: 1690). Language simplified by John M. Good.

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24. THE ENGLISH BILL OF RIGHTS

1689

Whereas the said late King James II having abdicated the government, and the throne being thereby vacant, his highness the Prince of Orange (whom it hath pleased Almighty God to make the glorious instrument of delivering this kingdom from popery and arbitrary power) did (by the advice of the Lords spiritual and temporal, and divers principal persons of the Commons) cause letters to be written to the Lords spiritual and temporal, being Protestants; . . . for the choosing of such persons to represent them, as were of right to be sent to Parliament, to meet and sit at Westminster upon the two-and-twentieth day of January, in this year 1688, in order to such an establishment, as that their religion, laws, and liberties might not again be in danger of being subverted: upon which letters, elections have been accordingly made:

And thereupon the said Lords spiritual and temporal, and Commons, pursuant to their respective letters and elections, being now assembled in a full and free representative of this nation, taking into their most serious consideration the best means for attaining the ends aforesaid, do in the first place (as their ancestors in like case have usually done), for the vindicating and asserting their ancient rights and liberties, declare:

1. That the pretended power of suspending of laws, or the execution of laws, by regal authority, without consent of Parliament, is illegal.

2. That the pretended power of dispensing with laws, or the execution of laws, by regal authority, as it has been assumed and exercised of late, is illegal.

3. That the commission for erecting the late Court of Commissioners for Ecclesiastical Causes, and all other commissions and courts of like nature, are illegal and pernicious.

4. That levying money for or to the use of the crown, by pretense of prerogative, without grant of Parliament, for longer time, or in other manner than the same is or shall be granted, is illegal.

5. That it is the right of the subjects to petition the king, and all commitments and prosecutions for such petitioning are illegal.

6. That the raising or keeping a standing army within the kingdom in time of peace, unless it be with consent of Parliament, is against law.

7. That the subjects which are Protestants may have arms for their defence suitable to their conditions, and as allowed by law.

8. That election of members of Parliament ought to be free.

9. That the freedom of speech, and debates or proceedings in Parliament, ought not to be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament.

10. That excessive bail ought not to be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

11. That jurors ought to be duly empanelled and returned, and jurors which pass upon men in trials for high treason ought to be freeholders.

12. That all grants and promises of fines and forfeitures of particular persons before conviction are illegal and void.

13. And that for redress of all grievances, and for the amending, strengthening, and preserving of the laws, Parliaments ought to be held frequently.

And they do claim, demand, and insist upon all and singular the premises, as their undoubted rights and liberties; and that no declarations, judgments, doings, or proceedings to the prejudice of the people in any of the said premises, ought in any wise to be drawn hereafter into consequence or example. . . .

Having therefore an entire confidence, that his said highness the Prince of Orange will perfect the deliverance so far advanced by him, and will still preserve them from the violation of their rights, which they have here asserted, and from all other attempts upon their religion, rights, and liberties:

The said Lords spiritual and temporal, and Commons, assembled at Westminster, do resolve that William and Mary, prince and princess of Orange, be, and be declared, King and Queen of England, France, and Ireland, and the dominions thereunto belonging, to hold the crown and royal dignity of the said kingdoms and dominions to them the said prince and princess during their lives, and the life of the survivor of them . . . and for default of such issue to the Princess Anne of Denmark, and the heirs of her body; and for default of such issue to the heirs of the body of the said Prince of Orange. And the Lords spiritual and temporal, and Commons, do pray the said prince and princess to accept the same accordingly. . . .

Upon which their said majesties did accept the crown and royal dignity of the kingdoms of England, France, and Ireland, and the dominions thereunto belonging, according to the resolution and desire of the said Lords and Commons contained in the said declaration.

26. MONTESQUIEU'S VIEWS ON GOVERNMENT

1748

Political liberty does not consist in an unlimited freedom. In governments, that is, in societies directed by laws, liberty can consist only in the power of doing what we ought to will, and in not being constrained from doing what we ought to will.

We must have continually present in our minds the difference between independence and liberty. Liberty is a right of doing whatever the laws permit, and if a citizen could do what they forbid he would be no longer possessed of liberty, because all his fellow-citizens would have the same power. . . .

Political liberty is to be found only in moderate governments; and even in these it is not always found. It is there only when there is no abuse of power. But constant experience shows us that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it. . . . To prevent this abuse, it is necessary from the very nature of things that power should be a check to power. A government may be so constituted, as no man shall be compelled to do things to which the law does not oblige him, nor forced to abstain from things which the law permits. . . .

In every government there are three sorts of power: the legislative; the executive in respect to things dependent on the law of nations; and the executive in regard to matters that depend on the civil law.

By virtue of the first, the prince or magistrate enacts temporary or perpetual laws, and amends or abrogates those that have been already enacted. By the second, he makes peace or war, sends or receives embassies, establishes the public security, and provides against invasions. By the third, he punishes criminals, or determines disputes that arise between individuals. The latter we shall call the judiciary power, and the other simply the executive power of the state.

The political liberty of the subject is a tranquillity of mind arising from the opinion each person has of his safety. In order to have this liberty, it is requisite the government be so constituted as one man need not be afraid of another.

When the legislative and executive powers are united in the same person, or in the same body of magistrates, there can be no liberty; because apprehensions may arise lest the same monarch or senate should enact tyrannical laws, to execute them in a tyrannical manner.

Again, there is no liberty if the judiciary power be not separated from the legislative and executive. Were it joined with the legislative, the life and liberty of the

subject would be exposed to arbitrary control; for the judge would be then the legislator. Were it joined to the executive power, the judge might behave with violence and oppression. . . .

As in a country of liberty every man who is supposed a free agent ought to be his own governor, the legislative power should reside in the whole body of the people. But since this is impossible in large states, and in small ones is subject to many inconveniences, it is fit the people should transact by their representatives what they cannot transact by themselves. . . .

All the inhabitants of the several districts ought to have a right of voting at the election of a representative, except such as are in so mean a situation as to be deemed to have no will of their own. . . .

In such a state there are always persons distinguished by their birth, riches, or honours; but were they to be confounded with the common people, and to have only the weight of a single vote like the rest, the common liberty would be their slavery, and they would have no interest in supporting it, as most of the popular resolutions would be against them. The share they have, therefore, in the legislature ought to be proportioned to their other advantages in the state; which happens only when they form a body that has a right to check the licentiousness of the people, as the people have a right to oppose any encroachment of theirs.

The legislative power is therefore committed to the body of the nobles, and to that which represents the people, each having their assemblies and deliberations apart. . . .

The executive power ought to be in the hands of a monarch, because this branch of government, having need of despatch, is better administered by one than by many: on the other hand, whatever depends on the legislative power is oftentimes better regulated by many than by a single person. . . .

It is fit . . . that the executive power should regulate the time of meeting [of the legislature], as well as the duration of those assemblies, according to the circumstances and exigencies of a state known to itself.

Were the executive power not to have a right of restraining the encroachments of the legislative body, the latter would become despotic. . . .

But it is not proper, on the other hand, that the legislative power should have a right to stay the executive. . . . But if the legislative power in a free state has

no right to stay the executive, it has a right and ought to have the means of examining in what manner its laws have been executed. . . .

The armies . . . should consist of the people, and have the same spirit as the people. . . . When once an army is established, it ought not to depend immediately on the legislative, but on the executive, power; and this from the very nature of the thing, its business consisting more in action than in deliberation. . . . As soon as the troops depend entirely on the legislative body, it becomes a military government. . . .

It is not sufficient to have treated of political liberty in relation to the constitution; we must examine it likewise in the relation it bears to the subject. . . .

The constitution may happen to be free, and the subject not. The subject may be free, and not the constitution. . . .

It is the disposition only of the laws, and even of the fundamental laws, that constitutes liberty in rela-

tion to the constitution. But as regards the subject: manners, customs, or received examples may give rise to it, and particular civil laws may encourage it. . . .

Political liberty consists in security, or, at least, in the opinion that we enjoy security.

This security is never more dangerously attacked than in public or private accusations. It is, therefore, on the goodness of criminal laws that the liberty of the subject principally depends. . . . When the subject has no fence to secure his innocence, he has none for his liberty.

Those laws which condemn a man to death on the deposition of a single witness are fatal to liberty. . . . Liberty is in perfection when criminal laws derive each punishment from the particular nature of the crime. There are then no arbitrary decisions; the punishment does not flow from the capriciousness of the legislator, but from the very nature of the thing; and man uses no violence to man.

SOURCE: Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws*.