

The Inalienable Rights of Man

John Locke was the apostle of liberty and constitutional government against tyranny and arbitrary rule.

After spending years in exile, Locke came back to England during the Glorious Revolution. It is not surprising, therefore, that he upheld the principles of the Revolution in his writings. By imagining primitive man in a happy state of nature, Locke argued that the right of life, liberty, and property preceded any government whatsoever. According to Locke, government came into existence by means of a social contract which was made by men of their own free will to protect these rights. The rulers of society received their authority solely from the people and thus could not exercise unlimited power. In the event that a ruler failed in his trust or infringed upon the basic inalienable rights of man, he could legitimately be overthrown. Locke inspired revolutionary thinking in both America and France in the eighteenth century.

Locke published his *Two Treatises of Government* in 1690. The following selection is from the *Second Treatise*.

The State of Nature

To understand political power aright, and derive it from its original, we must consider what state all men are naturally in, and that is a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave or depending upon the will of any other man.

The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone; 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. . . . And that all men may be restrained from invading others' rights,

Source: John Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government* . . . , edited by Charles L. Sherman, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1937, pp. 5 *passim*. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

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 hand, whereby everyone has a right to punish the transgressors of that law to such a degree as may hinder its violation. . . .

To this strange doctrine — viz., That in the state of nature everyone has the executive power of the law of nature — 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 inconveniences of the state of nature, which must certainly be great where men may be judges in their own case, since 'tis 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. But I shall desire those who make this objection to remember that absolute monarchs are but men, and if government is to be the remedy of those evils which necessarily follow from men's being judges in their own cases, and the state of nature is therefore not to be endured, I desire to know what kind of government that is, and how much better it is than the state of nature.

Property

God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life and convenience. . . .

Though the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person; this nobody has any right to but himself. The labor 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 labor with and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. . . . For this labor being the unquestionable property of the laborer, 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. . . .

And as different degrees of industry were apt to give men posses-