

Excerpts from *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine

Of the Origin and Design of Government in General, with Concise Remarks on the English Constitution

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1 Society in every state is a blessing, but Government, even in its best state, is but
2 a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one: for when we suffer, or are
3 exposed to the same miseries BY A GOVERNMENT, which we might expect in
4 a country WITHOUT GOVERNMENT, our calamity is heightened by
5 reflecting that we furnish the means by which we suffer. Government, like
6 dress, is the badge of lost innocence; the palaces of kings are built upon the
7 ruins of the bowers of paradise. // For were the impulses of conscience clear,
8 uniform and irresistibly obeyed, man would need no other lawgiver; but that
9 not being the case, he finds it necessary to surrender up a part of his property
10 to furnish means for the protection of the rest; and this he is induced to do by
11 the same prudence which in every other case advises him, out of two evils to
12 choose the least. // Wherefore, security being the true design and end of
13 government, it unanswerably follows that whatever form thereof appears
14 most likely to ensure it to us, with the least expense and greatest benefit, is
15 preferable to all others.

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I draw my idea of the form of government from a principle in nature which no art can overturn, viz. that the more simple any thing is, the less liable it is to be disordered, and the easier repaired when disordered; and with this maxim in view I offer a few remarks on the so much boasted constitution of England. That it was noble for the dark and slavish times in which it was erected, is granted. When the world was overrun with tyranny the least remove therefrom was a glorious rescue. But that it is imperfect, subject to convulsions, and incapable of producing what it seems to promise is easily demonstrated.

Absolute governments, (tho' the disgrace of human nature) have this advantage with them, they are simple; if the people suffer, they know the head from which their suffering springs; know likewise the remedy; and are not bewildered by a variety of causes and cures. But the constitution of England is so exceedingly complex, that the nation may suffer for years together without being able to discover in which part the fault lies; some will say in one and some in another, and every political physician will advise a different medicine.

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