Cato's Letters

Cato's Letters, or Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, and Other Important Subjects
(Selections)

By John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon

1720-1723


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Of Liberty and Necessity

(No. 110, Saturday, January 5, 1723; by John Trenchard)

I have already said, that I could consider good and evil only as in relation to men’s actions to one another, or to the Supreme Being; in which actions they can have for their end their own interest alone, in present or futurity. But when I consider these ideas in regard to God, I must consider them as objects of his will, which can alone constitute right or wrong, though they may sometimes not quadrate with the notions that we form of justice amongst one another, and which are only prudent rules for our own separate convenience, and take in no part of the creation but ourselves. We cannot enter into the rationale of God’s punishing all mankind for the sin of their first parents, which they could not help; nor for his punishing all Israel with a pestilence for the private sin of David, which, without doubt, many of
them condemned; nor for his bringing plagues upon the Egyptians, because he had hardened Pharaoh’s heart; no more than for his destroying all mankind at the Deluge, for crimes which he could have prevented; and multitudes of the like instances in Holy Writ besides, which we cannot account for by our weak reasonings (which have for their object only our own advantage). But we are very sure that these things were done, and rightly done; and all conducd to some superior, wise, and just end. Almighty God judges of the whole of things, and we only of them as they regard ourselves: The whole system of the universe is his care; and all other inferior beings must be subordinate to the interests of this great one, must all contribute, in their several stations and actions, to bring about at last the grand purposes of his providence. . . . All nature is in perpetual rotation, and working through a thousand revolutions to its last period, and the consummation of all things, when its great author will know how to make all individuals recompence for the evils which they have suffered here, and perhaps give us faculties to know, admire, and glorify his conduct, in those instances which may seem most mysterious to our narrow capacities in this frail state.

But this general and comprehensive system of the universe, this honourable conception of the deity, acquiescence in, and submission to his will, will not square with the interests of particular societies of men, who think themselves concerned to find out a system for themselves alone; and therefore, to avoid those consequences (which I can see no purposes of religion served in avoiding) they compliment away his power, prescience and general providence, to do respect to the notions which they have pleased to conceive of his justice, which they have thought fit to measure by their own interests, or what they think best for themselves. They first determine what they desire to have; then call it just, and immediately interest heaven to bring it about; and finding that it contradicts the experience of mankind, and all the notions that they can conceive of the workings of providence, and the nature of things themselves (which always operate from cause to effect) they set themselves to work to form a new scheme at the expence of denying all that they see or can know.

In order to this, they have made man the primum mobile, and his mind the first principle or spring of all his actions, independent of the author of his being, and of all the second causes which evidently influence and concur to determine his resolutions and his actions. They say, that Almighty God (who has infinite justice and power) having given to mankind a rule to act by, and annexed rewards or menaces to the observance or non-observance of this rule, has given a free uncontrolled, and impartial liberty to him to determine, without being coerced or restrained by any other power to do, or not to do an action, or to choose good or evil to himself: His justice, they say, obliges him to this conduct, and his power enables him to execute and bring it to pass; and so by affecting to do right to one attribute of his, which they cannot understand, and which they may possibly mistake, by supposing it to be different from his will (which alone, as has been said, can constitute right or wrong) they take away and rob him of all or most of the rest.

His prescience or knowledge (from all eternity) of every event which does or can happen in the universe, is denied at once; for whatever is contingent in its own nature, and may or may not happen, cannot be foreseen: for when any being sees that a thing will be, it must be; for it is impossible to know that any event will come to pass, that may not come to pass; and it is equally impossible to foresee an effect, without knowing the causes which produce it. It is no irreverence to the Supreme Being, to say, that he cannot do impossibilities, and know things which cannot be known; and it is certain he must know all things that can be known, because they depend upon his will.

It reflects upon his wisdom or power: Upon the first, as supposing that he desires or intends to bring any designs or purposes to pass, and yet that he has not chosen the proper methods to attain them; or upon the latter, that he cannot attain them if he would: It entrenches upon his providence and government of the universe, by giving part of his power out of his own hands, and by leaving it to the discretion of inferior and weak beings, to contradict himself, and disappoint his intentions: And even his justice itself, to which all the rest are so freely sacrificed, is attacked upon such reasons, in charging Almighty God with severity in punishing crimes committed through weakness, want, or predominant appetites, and which he could have prevented by giving others. I do not see what has been, or can be said to these objections more, than that we are not to reason upon the proceedings of providence, which acts upon
motives and maxims far above us, and which are not to be scanned by our little rules and scanty capacities; and if these gentlemen could but be persuaded to reason thus at first, they would save themselves the trouble of solving perpetual contradictions.

For what can be more evident, than that the actions of man, which seem most spontaneous and free, depend upon his will to do them; and that that will is directed by his reasoning faculties, which depend again upon the good or ill organizations of his body, upon his complexion, the nature of his education, imbibed prejudices, state of health, predominant passions, manner of life, fortuitous reasonings with others, different kinds of diet, and upon the thousands of events, seeming accidents, and the perpetual objects which encompass him, and which every day vary and offer themselves differently to him; all or most of which causes, and many more which probably determine him, must be confessed to be out of his power? Constant experience shews us, that men differently constituted, or differently educated, will reason differently, and the same men in different circumstances. A man will have different sentiments about the same things, in youth, in middle age, and in dotage, in sickness and in health, in liquor and sobriety, in wealth and in poverty, in power and out of it; and the faculties of the mind are visibly altered by physick, exercise, or diet.

The same reason which is convincing to one man, appears ridiculous to another, and to the same man at different times; and consequently, his or their actions, which are results of those reasonings, will be different: And we not only all confess this, by endeavouring to work upon one another by these mediums, but heaven thinks fit to choose the same; for what else can be meant by offering rewards and denouncing punishments, but as causes to produce the effects designed, that is, to save those whom Almighty God in his deep wisdom has preordained to bliss, and to be influenced by those motives? We all confess, that no man can do his duty without the grace of God, and whoever has the grace of God will do his duty. It is undoubtedly to be obtained by prayer, but we must have grace to pray for it; and I am not insensible that Almighty God does any other way give his grace, but by offering to us, or by laying in our way sufficient inducements to obey his will: I am sure that I can find none else in myself, or discover them in others, whatever the enthusiastick and visionary gentlemen may do. I doubt much, that what they call grace, is what I call enthusiasm, or a strong conceit or persuasion of their own godliness and communication with the deity.

What sort of reasoning then is this, to say, that heaven gives every man sufficient power and motives to choose the best, which yet prove insufficient; that he has made every man free to act or not to act by a rule, and yet has placed him in such a situation as to find a thousand obstacles in his way to that freedom; and that he has given him a judgment capable to determine right, and opportunities rightly to exercise that judgment; yet by making use of that judgment and those opportunities, he often judges directly contrary: And all this is to make good a system, as yet owned but by a very small part of mankind, and for which I can find no foundation in reason and scripture?

I must beg leave to think it very audacious in a small number of men, to determine the workings of providence by their own narrow schemes, at the expence too of the opinions and reasonings of the greatest part of the world in all ages. All or most of the sects of philosophers in Greece and Rome, held fate or necessity, as the several sects among the Jews did, except the Essenes, a very small sect indeed, not exceeding some few thousands. The Mahometans, thro’ the world, hold predestination: The Calvinists, and some other Protestant sects, hold it now; and I do not understand the articles of the Church of England, if it be not the orthodox opinion amongst us; and it certainly was held to be so, till a few doctors in King James’ and Charles I’s time advanced the contrary system, and who, in the addresses of Parliament, were always, in those reigns, ranked with the papists for doing so; and it is yet undoubtedly the opinion of the common people through the world. However, I do not condemn any one who may think that this is derogatory to the attributes of God, for offering in a modest manner, his reasons against any dogma ever so well established (which I think is the right of all mankind); yet I could wish that he would shew the same modesty, in giving other people their liberty of defending the contrary opinion with the same good intentions.

The most pregnant and usual objection against this doctrine is, that if men are predestinated to eternal
bliss or misery, their own endeavours are useless, and they can have no motives to prefer good before evil; which I confess, will always be the reasonings of men who are predestinated to the latter (if it be possible to suppose that there can be any such); but those who are determined to the first, will always believe, that God takes proper means to attain his ends, and that he designs to save men by the medium of good works, and of obeying his will; and this conviction will be an adequate cause to produce such obedience in those who are destined to happiness. If the end be predestinated, the means must be predestinated too. If a man [is] to die in war, he must meet an enemy; if he [is] to be drowned, he must come within the reach of water; or if he [is] to be starved, he must not know how to come at any victuals, or have no mind to eat them, or stomach to digest them.

For my own part, I dare not believe, that the all-good, all-wise, and most merciful God, has determined any of his creatures to endless misery, by creating and forming them with such appetites and passions as naturally and necessarily produce it; though I think it to be fully consistent with his power, goodness, and justice, to give inclinations which may lead and entitle us to happiness. And, as I conceive that there is nothing in the holy scriptures which expressly decides this difficulty, as I may possibly shew hereafter; so I shall not presume to search too narrowly into the secret dispensations of providence, or to pronounce any thing dogmatically concerning his manner of governing the universe, more than that he cannot make his creatures miserable without just and adequate reasons. And therefore, since we find in fact, that many of them are so in this state, we must account for this, but mediums agreeable to his indisputed attributes, or own that we cannot account for it at all, though it be unquestionably just in itself. All means will probably conduce in the end to impartial and universal good; and whatever, or how many states soever of probation we may pass through, yet I hope, that the mercies of God, and the merits of Jesus Christ, will at last exceed and preponderate the frailties, mistakes, and temporary transgressions of weak and mortal men; all which I shall endeavour, in time, to shew from scripture and reason: The former of which, in my opinion, is too generally mistaken or perverted, to signify what it does not intend; by straining some passages beyond their literal and genuine signification, by explaining others too literally, and by not making due allowances to the manner of speaking used amongst the eastern nations, which was very often, if not most commonly, in hyperboles, and other figures and allegories. But more of this hereafter; when I dare promise to deserve the pardon of every candid person, whom I cannot convince.

Considerations on the Weakness and Inconsistences of Human Nature

(No. 31, Saturday, May 27, 1721; by Thomas Gordon)

The study of human nature has, ever since I could study any thing, been a principal pleasure and employment of mine; a study as useful, as the discoveries made by it are for the most part melancholy. It cannot but be irksome to a good-natured man, to find that there is nothing so terrible or mischievous, but human nature is capable of it; and yet he who knows little of human nature, will never know much of the affairs of the world, which every where derive their motion and situation from the humours and passions of men.

It shews the violent bent of human nature to evil, that even the Christian religion has not been able to tame the restless appetites of men, always pushing them into enormities and violence, in direct opposition to the spirit and declarations of the gospel, which commands us to do unto all men what we would have all men do unto us. The general practice of the world is an open contradiction and contempt of this excellent, this divine rule; which alone, were it observed, would restore honesty and happiness to mankind, who, in their present state of corruption, are for ever dealing treacherously or outrageously with one another, out of an ill-judging fondness for themselves.
The truth is, and it is a melancholy truth, that where human laws do not tie men’s hands from wickedness, religion too seldom does; and the most certain security which we have against violence, is the security of the laws. Hence it is, that the making of laws supposes all men naturally wicked; and the surest mark of virtue is, the observation of laws that are virtuous: If therefore we would look for virtue in a nation, we must look for it in the nature of government; the name and model of their religion being no certain symptom nor cause of their virtue.

Of all the passions which belong to human nature, self-love is the strongest, and the root of all the rest; or, rather, all the different passions are only several names for the several operations of self-love. Self-love, says the Duke of Rochefoucauld, is the love of one’s self, and of every thing else for one’s own sake: It makes a man the idolater of himself, and the tyrant of others. He observes, that man is a mixture of contrarieties; imperious and supple, sincere and false, fearful and bold, merciful and cruel: He can sacrifice every pleasure to the getting of riches, and all his riches to a pleasure: He is fond of his preservation, and yet sometimes eager after his own destruction: He can flatter those whom he hates, destroy those whom he loves.

This is a picture of mankind; and they who say it is a false one, ought to shew that they deserve a better. I have sometimes thought, that it was scarce possible to assert any thing concerning mankind, be it ever so good, or ever so evil, but it will prove true. They are naturally innocent, yet fall naturally into the practice of vice; the greatest instances of virtue and villainy are to be found in one and the same person; and perhaps one and the same motive produces both. The observance or non-observance of a few frivolous customs shall unite them in strict friendship and confederacy, or set them a-cutting one another’s throats.

They never regard one another as men and rational beings, and upon the foot of their common humanity; but are cemented or divided by the force of words and habits. Considerations that are a disgrace to reason! The not being born in the same climate, or on this side such a river, or such a mountain, or the not wearing the like garments, or uttering the like sounds, or having the same thoughts or taste, are all so many causes of intense hatred, sometimes of mortal war. Whatever men think or do, especially if they have found a good name for it, be it ever so foolish or bad, is wisest and best in their own eyes: But this is not all; we will needs be plaguing our neighbours, if they do not quit upon our authority their own thoughts and practices for ours.

It fills me with concern, when I consider how men use one another; and how wretchedly their passions are employed: They scarce ever have proper objects for their passions; they will hate a man for what he cannot help, and what does them no harm; yet bless and pray for villains, that kill and oppress them.

Every thing is so perverted and abused, and the best things most, that a very wise man had but too much reason to say, that truth did not so much good in the world, as the appearance and pretence of it did evil. Thus the saving of men’s souls is so universally understood to be a great and glorious blessing, that for the sake of it men have suffered, and do suffer, the highest misery and bondage from the impostors who pretend to bestow it, in the dark parts of the world, which are by far the greatest parts of the world. And thus civil government is the defence and security of human society.

Upon the whole, we must not judge of one another by our fair pretensions and best actions; since the worst men do some good, and all men make fine professions: But we must judge of men by the whole of their conduct, and the effects of it. Thorough honesty requires great and long proof; since many a man, long thought honest, has at length proved a knave. And it is from judging without proof, or too little, of false proof, that mankind continue unhappy.
Of the Passions: That They Are All Alike Good or All Alike Evil, According As They Are Applied

(No. 39, Saturday, July 29, 1721; by Thomas Gordon)

Nothing is more provoking than to hear men talk magisterially, and with an air of teaching, about things which they do not understand, or which they have an interest to have understood wrong. We have, all of us, heard much of the duty of subduing our appetites, and extingushing our passions, from men, who by these phrases shewed at once their ignorance of human nature, and yet that they aimed at an absolute dominion over it.

Wrong heads and knavish designs are frequently found together; and creatures that you would not trust with laying out ten shillings for you in an instance where you trust to your own understanding, shall sometimes, by the mere sound of their voice, and an unmeaning distinction, make themselves masters of your mind and your fortune. It is by trusting to these that men come to know so little of themselves, and to be so much the prey of others as ignorant and more dishonest. I know no man so fit as himself to rule himself, in things which purely concern himself. How happy would this plain rule make the world, if they could be brought to observe it, and to remember that brown is as virtuous a colour as black; that the Almighty possesses alike every quarter of the world; and that in his sight fish and flesh in point of merit and innocence are the same! These things are self-evident, and yet the misery of mankind is in a great measure owing to their ignorance of them.

The ancient Stoicks had many admirable and virtuous precepts, but their philosophy was too rigid to be very popular; they taught men an absolute indifference for sensual pain and pleasure; but in this their doctrine was neither useful nor practicable. Men were not to be thus dealt with; they could not cease to be men, nor change nature for philosophy. Besides, these teachers being pagans, and arguing only from the topicks of wisdom strained too high, had no equivalent to offer to their disciples for parting with their appetites and their senses. But when some of their Sophists came into Christianity, and brought along with them the severe notions of their sect, they spread and recommended the same with more success, by tacking to these their opinions the rewards and terrors of the world to come, which had nothing to do with them: However, they said that it had, and quickly found credit enough to make it dangerous to contradict them.

These favourite dreams of theirs, added to some sayings and passages of the gospel, ill understood, were vehemently urged, as if they had been so many certain passports to paradise; and soon turned men's brains, and made them really fond of poverty, hardships, and misery, and even of death itself: Enthusiasm conquered reason, and inflamed nature; and men, to be devout, grew distracted.

This came of stifling the passions, and subduing nature, as the phrase was. But the folly and mischief of this doctrine thus extravagantly pushed, were not greater than its falsehood: For, as there is no such thing as departing from nature, without departing from life, it is certain that they who were remarkable for restraining some of their appetites, were as remarkable for indulging others; so that their boasted mortification was no more than the exchange of one passion for another, and often of a better for a worse. . . .

It is the weakness and misfortune of the human race, that a man, by the means of one virtue, or the appearance of it, is often able to do a thousand mischiefs; and it is the quality of human nature, that when any one of its appetites is violently restrained, others break out into proportionable excesses. Thus men grow rash and precipitate, by trampling upon caution and fear; and thus they become cowards, by stifling the love of glory: Whereas, if the appetite for danger were checked by the appetite of self-preservation, and the lazy love of safety by the love of fame, rashness and cowardice would be no more.
It is the highest stupidity to talk of subduing the passions, in the common acceptation of that phrase; and to rail at them in gross, is as foolish. The greatest evils often proceed from the best things abused, or ill applied; and this is particularly true of the passions, which are the constituent parts of a man, and are good or ill as they are managed.

The exercise therefore of reason is nothing else, but the indulging or controlling of the passions, with an impartial hand, and giving them all fair play; it is an equal administration of the appetites, by which they are restrained from outrunning one another: Thus, for example, if men's fears were always as powerful as their hopes, they would rarely run into danger; or, if their hopes balanced their fears, they would never despair.

Every one of the leading passions is as necessary as another; all the difficulty is to keep them well marshalled: They are only terrible by breaking out of their ranks, and when they do, they are all alike terrible, though the world generally thinks otherwise. But it is certain, that those passions to which the kindest ideas are annexed, do as much mischief when they get out of their bounds, as do those to which we annex the harshest ideas; and love and hope, which bear soft and mild names, are in their excesses as active and as formidable passions, as are anger and revenge, the names of which are apt to shock us; and anger and revenge are, in their proper limits, more desirable passions than are love and hope out of their proper limits; that is, they are all equally good, or all equally evil, just as they are let loose or restrained. A man who cuts another’s throat out of love to his wife, commits the same wickedness as if he did it out of revenge.

The only way therefore of dealing with mankind, is to deal with their passions; and the founders of all states, and of all religions, have ever done so: The first elements, or knowledge of politicks, is the knowledge of the passions; and the art of governing, is chiefly the art of applying to the passions. When the publick passions (by which I mean every man’s particular warmth and concern about publick transactions and events) are well regulated and honestly employed, this is called government, or the art of governing; and when they are knavishly raised and ill employed, it is called faction, which is the gratifying of private passion by publick means.

And because passion and opinion are so nearly related, and have such force upon each other, arbitrary courts and crafty churchmen have ever endeavoured to force, or frighten, or deceive the people into a uniformity of thoughts, especially of religious thoughts. A thing tyrannical and impossible! And yet a whole people do often, through ignorance or fear, seem of one mind; and but seem: For, if they come to explain, they would find their ideas differ widely, though their words agree. Whereas in a well-governed free state, diversity of speculations is so far from clogging the publick good, that it evidently promotes the same; all men being equally engaged in the defence of that, by which all men are indifferently protected. So that to attempt to reduce all men to one standard of thinking, is absurd in philosophy, impious in religion, and faction in the state. And though the mortifying of the appetites be a very plausible phrase, and, in a restrained sense, a laudable thing; yet he who recommends it to you does often mean nothing but this, *Make your passions tame, that I may ride them.*

There is scarce any one of the passions but what is truly laudable when it centers in the publick, and makes that its object. Ambition, avarice, revenge, are all so many virtues, when they aim at the general welfare. I know that it is exceeding hard and rare, for any man to separate his passions from his own person and interest; but it is certain that there have been such men. Brutus, Cato, Regulus, Timoleon, Dion, and Epaminondas, were such, as were many more ancient Greeks and Romans; and, I hope, England has still some such. And though, in pursuing publick views, men regard themselves and their own advantages; yet if they regard the publick more, or their own in subserviency to the publick, they may justly be esteemed virtuous and good.

No man can be too ambitious of the glory and security of his country, nor too angry at its misfortunes and ill usage; nor too revengeful against those that abuse and betray it; nor too avaricious to enrich it, provided that in doing it he violates not the rights of others.
Considerations on the Restless and Selfish Spirit of Man

(No. 40, Saturday, August 5, 1721; by Thomas Gordon)

It is melancholy to consider how every thing in the world is abused: The reason is, that men having themselves chiefly in view, consider all things with an eye to themselves only; and thus it is that general blessings cease to be so by being converted into private property, as is always done where it is safe or possible to be done.

Enquiring how it comes to pass that the best things in the world, such as religion, property, and power, are made to do so much hurt; I find it to proceed principally from hence, that men are never satisfied with their present condition, which is never perfectly happy; and perfect happiness being their chief aim, and always out of their reach, they are restlessly grasping at what they never can attain.

So chimerical is the nature of man! his greatest pleasures are always to come, and therefore never come. His content cannot possibly be perfect, because its highest objects are constantly future; and yet it is the more perfect for their being future. Our highest enjoyment is of that which is not: Our pleasure is deceit; and the only real happiness that we have is derived from non-entities. We are never satisfied with being just what we are; and therefore, though you give us all that we desire, or can conceive, yet we shall not have done desiring. The present possessions give but little joy, let them be ever so great; even as great as can be grasped: It is the enjoyment to come that is only or most valued. When we say, that if such a thing happened, we would be easy; we can only mean, or ought only to mean, that we would be more easy than we are: And in that too we are often mistaken; for new acquisitions bring new wants; and imaginary wants are as pungent as real ones. So that there is the same end of wishing as of living, and death only can still the appetites.

Publick blessings would really be so to every man, if every man would be content with his share: But every man would have more; nor would more satisfy him, whatever he may think; but his desires would rise with his possessions or his power, and his last wish would be to have all: Nor would the possession of all quiet the mind of man, which the whole world cannot fill. Indeed, he who has most, wants most; and care, anxious care, as it is the close companion of greatness, so it is furthest from him who has least to care for.

I own, that many have seemed to despise riches and power, and really declined the means of acquiring them: But they deceived themselves, if they thought that this conduct of theirs was owing to a real contempt for the things themselves; when in truth it was only a dislike of the terms upon which they were to be had. Disinterestedness is often created by laziness, pride, or fear; and then it is no virtue. There is not, perhaps, a man living but would be glad of wealth and grandeur, if he could acquire them with speed, and possess them with ease; and almost all men would risk, and do daily risk, ease, reputation, life, and all, to come at them. Do we not see that men venture being beggars to be rich, lose their rest for the sake of quiet, and acquire infamy to earn honour? We live in a hurry, in order to come at the resting-place; and in crowds to purchase solitude. Nor are we the nearer to our end, though the means succeed: Human life is a life of expectation and care; and he who rejects the conditions, must quit it.

Every passion, every view that men have, is selfish in some degree; but when it does good to the publick in its operation and consequence, it may be justly called disinterested in the usual meaning of that word. So that when we call any man disinterested, we should intend no more by it, than that the
turn of his mind is towards the publick, and that he has placed his own personal glory and pleasure in serving it. To serve his country is his private pleasure, mankind is his mistress; and he does good to them by gratifying himself.

Disinterestedness, in any other sense than this, there is none. For men to act independently of their passions, is a contradiction! since their passions enter into all that they do, and are the source of it: And the best actions which men perform, often arise from fear, vanity, shame, and the like causes. When the passions of men do good to others, it is called virtue and publick spirit; and when they do hurt to others, it is called selfishness, dishonesty, lust, and other names of infamy. The motive of every man’s conduct is fetched from within, and has a good or an ill name according to its effect upon others; and sometimes the great difference between an honest man and a knave, is no other than a piece of humour, or a piece of chance. As the passions of men, which are only the motions raised within us by the motion of things without us, are soothed or animated by external causes, it is hard to determine, whether there be a man in the world who might not be corrupted by some means and applications; the nicety is, to choose those that are proper.

All these discoveries and complaints of the crookedness and corruption of human nature are made with no malignant intention to break the bonds of society; but they are made to shew, that as selfishness is the strongest bias of men, every man ought to be upon his guard against another, that he become not the prey of another. The too great confidence which many men have placed in one, has often ruined millions. How many sorrowful experiences have we, that men will be rogues where they dare; and that the greatest opportunities always make the greatest! Give them what you can, they will still want more than you give; and therefore the highest trusts are the most apt to be broken.

Those who have talked most of the dignity of human nature, seem to have understood it but little. Men are so far from having any views purely publick and disinterested, that government first arose from every man’s taking care of himself; and government is never abused and perverted, but from the same cause. Do we not know that one man has slaughtered a million, and overturned nations, for the gaining of one point to himself? and that almost all men would follow evil, if they found their greatest advantage or pleasure in it.

Here therefore lies the source of all the evil which men suffer from men, that every man loves himself better than he loves his whole species, and more or less consults himself in all that he does. He naturally pursues what is pleasant or profitable in his own eyes, though in doing it he entail misery upon multitudes. So that we have no other security against the malice and rapine of each other, but the security of laws or our own force. By laws societies subsist within themselves; and by force they defend themselves against each other. And as in the business of faith and leagues between nation and nation, treaties are made by consent, but kept by fear and power; and observed or violated just as interest, advantage, and opportunities invite, without regard to faith and good conscience, which are only words of good-breeding, with which courts compliment one another and themselves; so between subject and subject, and between magistrates and subjects, concord and security are preserved by the terror of laws, and the ties of mutual interest; and both interest and terror derive their strength from the impulses of self-love.

Thus one man is only safe, while it is the interest of another to let him alone; and men are knaves or honest men, according to the judgment which they make of their own interest and ease, and of the terms upon which they choose to live in the world. Many men are honest, without any virtue, or indeed a thought of honesty; as many others are rogues, without any malice: And both sorts mean only their own personal advantage; but take different roads to arrive at it. This is their great aim; and that constitution which trusts more than it needs to any man, or body of men, has a terrible flaw in it, and is big with the seeds of its own destruction. Hence arose tyrants, and tyranny, and standing armies: Marius, and Caesar, and Oliver Cromwell. How preposterously do men act! By too great confidence in one man, or a few men, they become slaves; and by a general distrust of each other, they continue so!

It may be objected, that since men are such a wretched race, made so by the apostasy of Adam, they
are not worth serving; that the most unhappy of them are but what they themselves would make others, and therefore their fate is just upon them.

In answer to this, I readily own what I have been proving, that men are very bad where they dare, and that all men would be tyrants, and do what they please. But still let us preserve justice and equality in the world. Why should he, who is bad himself, oppress others who are no worse than him? Besides, the lot of humanity being an unhappy one, it is an honest ambition, that of endeavouring to mend it, to improve nature by virtue, and to mend mankind by obliging them to observe rules that are good. We do not expect philosophical virtue from them; but only that they follow virtue as their interest, and find it penal and dangerous to depart from it. And this is the only virtue that the world wants, and the only virtue that it can trust to.

Of the Weakness of the Human Mind; How Easily It Is Misled

(No. 105, Saturday, December 1, 1722; by John Trenchard)

Things of the greatest seeming difficulty appear the easiest to us when found out. There was no wit necessary to set an egg on one end, when Columbus had shewn the way. Jugglers do many things by sleight of hand, which to a gaping beholder appear to be witchcraft; and when he knows how they are done, he wonders at himself for wondering at them. A ship as big as a castle is sailed by a rudder and a puff of wind; and a weight, which a thousand men cannot move, may be easily managed by one, by the help of wheels and pulleys. The same is true in the direction of mankind, who will be always caught by a skillful application to their passions and weaknesses, and be easily drawn into what they will be very difficultly driven. The fiercest horses are subdued by the right management of the bit; the most furious wild beasts tamed by gratifying their appetites, or working upon their fears; and the most savage tempers are made tractable by soothing their foibles, or knowing how to manage their panicks.

This is what is called the knowledge of mankind, which very few of them know any thing of. Pedants hope to govern them by distinctions and grave faces; tyrants by force and terror; philosophers by solemn lectures of morality and virtue. And all these have certainly a share in influencing their minds, and determining their actions; but, all together, not half so much as applying to their reigning appetites, appearing interests, and predominant foibles, and taking artful advantages of favourable opportunities, and catching at lucky conjectures, to effect at once what a long series of wise counsels, and the best concerted measures, cannot bring about.

Wise statesmen will understand this foible in human nature, and often take advantage from a plot discovered, or a rebellion quelled; from the transports of a restoration, or a victory obtained; or during the terrors of a pestilential distemper, or the rage of a prevailing faction, or the fears of a desponding one, to accomplish what neither threats nor armies could extort, nor bribes nor allurements persuade.

The same advantages have been as luckily taken by the leaders of popular parties, upon sudden discontents and unsuccessful acts of power, to obtain concessions and privileges which they durst not think of, much less hope for, at other times. My Lord Clarendon furnishes us with many instances of such concessions, which neither the crown would have granted, nor the people been prevailed upon to ask, nor perhaps accept, before, or possibly after.

Whereas a preposterous and ill-timed attempt, on either side, would have increased the power which they designed to lessen, or take away. The greatest secret in politicks is, to drive the nail that will go.

If a solemn soothsayer, a poet, or philosopher, talk of the dignity of human nature, man is lifted up to a resemblance with his great Creator: He is lord of the universe; all things are made for his use, even such
as are of no use to him, but do him mischief. The sun is placed in the firmament to ripen his cabbage, and dry his linen; and infinite millions of stars are stuck there, many thousand times bigger than the earth, to supply the want of farthing candles, though vastly many of them are not to be seen but by glasses, and, without doubt, infinite others not to be seen with them. He is made wise, discerning, formed for virtue, mutual help and assistance; and probably it was all true before the fall: But as he is now degenerated, I fear that the reverse of all this is true. It is plain that he is foolish, helpless, perfidious, impotent, easily misled and trepanned, and, for the most part, caught by as thin snares and little wiles as his fellow-creatures, which, we are told, are made for his use; and his boasted faculty of reason betrays him to some from which the others are exempt.

True reason has little to do in his speculations or his actions. Enthusiasm or panic fear often supplies the place of religion in him: Obstinciety is called constancy; and indifference, moderation: His passions, which direct and govern all the motions of his mind, seem to me to be purely mechanical; which perhaps I may shew more at large hereafter: and whoever would govern him, and lead him, must apply to those passions; that is, pull the proper ropes, and turn the wheels which will put the machine in motion. . . .

. . . We rarely see a wise man, who does not carry a half-fool about him; one who, by soothing his vanities, flattering his passions, and taking advantages of his other weaknesses, can do more with him than all the world besides. Indeed most men are governed by those who have less wit than themselves, or by what ought least to influence them. Men, like other animals, are caught by springs, wires, or subtilities: Foxes are trepanned by traces, pheasants by a red rag, and other birds by a whistle; and the same is true of mankind.

A lucky thought, a jest, a fortunate accident, or a jovial debauch, shall bring about designs and revolutions in human affairs, which twenty legions in the field could not bring about. A filthy strumpet made Alexander, for a kiss, burn Persepolis, the august seat of the Persian empire. . . . How often hath a merry story in our days turned a debate, when the most grave and solemn arguments, and the most obvious representations of publick advantage, could not prevail? And how many a fair and accomplished lady has been won by bribing her chambermaid, when perhaps all the solicitations of her parents and relations, and all the motives of self-interest, would have proved ineffectual?

The lucky adjusting of times and seasons, taking advantage of prevailing prejudices and panicks, and knowing how to humour and lay hold of the predominant enthusiasm of human nature, has given birth to most of the revolutions in religion and politics which ever happened in the world. A juggler swallowing bibles and hour-glasses, shall do more with a modern mob than a philosopher; and a scarecrow prater, with distorted limbs and understanding, shall make thousands of them weep and wring their hands, when the oratory of Demosthenes, or the reasonings of Mr. Locke, would make them laugh or hoot. There is a certain assimilation of passions and faculties in men, which attract one another when they meet, and always strike together. As when two fiddles are tuned up to the same pitch, if you hit the one, the other sounds; so men are easiest operated upon by those of like understandings with their own, or those who the best know how to dally and play with their foibles, and can do the same thing with design as the others do naturally.

I doubt not but I shall be censured for making thus bold with the Lord of the Creation, by those who make much more bold with Him on other occasions, and who would have the monopoly of enjoying all the scandal to themselves. But, by the leave of those solemn gentlemen, I shall take the liberty of considering man as he is, since it is out of our power to give a model to have him new made by.

Since then, by the sins of our first parents, we are fallen into this unhappy and forlorn condition, all wise and honest men are obliged, in prudence and duty, not only by lectures of philosophy, religion, and morals, to fashion this sovereign of the universe into his true interest, but to make use of his weaknesses to render him happy, as wicked men do to make him miserable; in which I shall be more particular hereafter.
Inquiry into the Source of Moral Virtues

(No. 108, Saturday, December 22, 1722; by John Trenchard)

Morality, or moral virtues, are certain rules of mutual convenience or indulgence, conducive or necessary to the well-being of society. Most of these are obvious; for every man knows what he desires himself; which is, to be free from oppression, and the insults of others, and to enjoy the fruits of his own acquisitions, arising from his labour or invention. And since he can have no reason to expect this indulgence to himself, unless he allow it to others, who have equal reason to expect it from him, it is the common interest of all, who unite together in the same society, to establish such rules and maxims for their mutual preservation, that no man can oppress or injure another, without suffering by it himself. As far as these rules are discoverable by the light of reason, or that portion of understanding, which most, or all men have, they are called morality: But when they are the productions of deeper thought, or the inventions only of men of greater sagacity, they are called political knowledge. But as men are often in such a situation in respect of one another, that the stronger can oppress the weaker, without any fear of having the injury returned; and most men will pursue their own personal advantage independently of all other men; therefore Almighty God, in compassion to mankind has annexed rewards and punishments to the observance or non-observance of these rules: The belief of which, and a practice pursuant to it, is called religion.

I have often read, with pleasure, pretty speculative discourses upon the intrinsick excellence of virtue, and of its having a real existence independent of human considerations, or worldly relations: But when I have been able to forget, or lay aside the dalliances and amusements of fancy, and the beautiful turns of expression, I could consider it philosophically, only as an empty sound, when detached and separated from natural, national, or religious politicks; unless in some few instances, where constitution, and innate tenderness, engage men to pity others in ease to themselves, which is called humanity.

All cardinal and private virtues are branches of these general politicks. Fortitude enables us to defend ourselves and others. Compassion is a fellow feeling of calamities which we may suffer ourselves; and it is evident that people feel them in proportion, as they are likely to suffer the same or the like calamities. Charity obliges us to give that relief to others, which we, our friends, or relations, may want for ourselves. And temperance and frugality are necessary to the preservation of our bodies and estates, and being useful members of society. I freely confess, that for my part I can find out no other motives in myself, or others, for these affections, or actions, except constitution, ostentation, or temporal or religious politicks, which are, in other words, our present or eternal interests; and I shall own myself beholden to any else who can find out any other; for there cannot be too many motives for a virtuous life.

How far the systematical gentlemen will agree with me in this speculative philosophy, I do not know, nor shall think myself much concerned to enquire; but it is certain that their practice, and many of the doctrines which they teach, confirm what I have said. I think that all mankind, except the Brahmins, and transmigrators of souls in the East, agree, that we may destroy other animals for food and convenience, and sometimes for pleasure, or to prevent but any trifling prejudice, to ourselves; though they have the same, or very near the same, organizations as we have, equal or greater sensations of pleasure and pain, and many of them sagacity and reasoning enough to over-reach and circumvent us; nor are they guilty of any other crime, than that of acting according to their natures, and preserving their beings by such food as is necessary to their existence.

Indeed, as things stand at present, though we had not revelation for it, we may be very sure that God Almighty has given us dominion over other creatures, because he has actually given us the power, in a good measure, to destroy and preserve them, as far as they may be hurtful or useless to us; and
therefore we think them not objects of moral duties, because we can hurt them and they cannot make reprisals, or equal reprisals, upon us; But if Almighty God had thought fit to have given to lions and tigers the use of speech, length of life to have gained more experience, and had formed their claws and hands to write and communicate that experience, and by such means had enabled them to have formed themselves into societies for mutual defence against mankind (whom they could quickly have destroyed, though only by confining and starving them in enclosures and fortifications) I say, in such a circumstance of affairs, will any man affirm, that it would not have been our interest and duty to have treated them with morality and social offices? I doubt, in such a case, they would have told us, and have made us feel too, that they were not made only for our use.

I will suppose, for once, a dialogue between his Holiness and a lion, since poets and some others have informed us, that beasts have spoken formerly; and I am sure that they were never more concerned to speak than upon the present occasion.

_Pope._ Thou art an ugly four-footed monster, and thou livest upon the destruction of thy fellow-animals.

_Lion._ I am as nature has made me, which has given me many faculties beyond yourself. I have more courage, more strength, more activity, and better senses of seeing, hearing, &c. than you have: Nor do I destroy the hundredth part of my fellow-animals in comparison with those that you destroy. I never destroy my own species, unless I am provoked; but you destroy yours for pride, vanity, luxury, envy, covetousness, and ambition.

_Pope._ But thou art a great gormandizer, and eatest up all our victuals, which was designed for the use of men only; and therefore thou oughtest to be exterminated.

_Lion._ Nature, which gave me life, designed me the means of living; and she has given me claws and teeth for that purpose, namely, to defend myself against some animals, and to kill and eat others for my sustenance; and, amongst the rest, your reverence, if I cannot get younger and better food. You men, indeed, may eat and live comfortably upon the fruits of trees, and the herbs and corn of the field; but we are so formed, as to receive support and nourishment only from the flesh of other animals.

. . .

I have said, that all, or most of mankind, act upon the former principles, and, without the motives of religion, can find out no reason to hope that they should ever act otherwise; and I am sorry to say, that religion itself has yet wanted power enough to influence them (for the most part) to contrary sentiments or actions. What nation or society does not oppress another, when they can do it with security, without fear of retaliation, or of being affected by it in their own interests, and their correspondence with other states? It is plain that all social duties are here at an end; for what is called the law of nations, are only rules of mutual intercourse with one another, without which they could have no intercourse at all, but must be in constant course of war and depredation; and therefore whenever any state is in no condition to repel injuries, nor can have protection from any other, who are concerned to preserve them, constant experience shews us, that they become the prey of a greater, who think themselves obliged to keep no measures with them, nor want pretences from religion or their own interests to oppress them. . . .

Since therefore men ever have, and, I doubt, ever will act upon these motives, they ought not to be amused by the play of words, and the sallies of imagination, whilst designing men pick their pockets; but ought to establish their happiness, by wise precautions, and upon solid maxims, and, by prudent and fixed laws, make it all men’s interest to be honest; without which, I doubt, few men will be so.
(No. 59, Saturday, December 30, 1721; by John Trenchard)

I intend to entertain my readers with dissertations upon liberty, in some of my succeeding letters; and shall, as a preface to that design, endeavour to prove in this, that liberty is the unalienable right of all mankind.

All governments, under whatsoever form they are administered, ought to be administered for the good of the society; when they are otherwise administered, they cease to be government, and become usurpation. This being the end of all government, even the most despotick have this limitation to their authority: In this respect, the only difference between the most absolute princes and limited magistrates, is, that in free governments there are checks and restraints appointed and expressed in the constitution itself: In despotick governments, the people submit themselves to the prudence and discretion of the prince alone: But there is still this tacit condition annexed to his power, that he must act by the unwritten laws of discretion and prudence, and employ it for the sole interest of the people, who give it to him, or suffer him to enjoy it, which they ever do for their own sakes.

Even in the most free governments, single men are often trusted with discretionary power: But they must answer for that discretion to those that trust them. Generals of armies and admirals of fleets have often unlimited commissions; and yet are they not answerable for the prudent execution of those commissions? The Council of Ten, in Venice, have absolute power over the liberty and life of every man in the state: But if they should make use of that power to slaughter, abolish, or enslave the senate; and, like the Decemviri of Rome, to set up themselves; would it not be lawful for those, who gave them that authority for other ends, to put those ten unlimited traitors to death, any way that they could? The crown of England has been for the most part entrusted with the sole disposal of the money given for the Civil List, often with the application of great sums raised for other publick uses; yet, if the lord-treasurer had applied this money to the dishonour of the King, and ruin of the people (though by the private direction of the crown itself) will any man say that he ought not to have compensated for his crime, by the loss of his head and his estate?

I have said thus much, to shew that no government can be absolute in the sense, or rather nonsense, of our modern dogmatizers, and indeed in the sense too commonly practised. No barbarous conquest; no extorted consent of miserable people, submitting to the chain to escape the sword; no repeated and hereditary acts of cruelty, though called succession, no continuance of violence, though named prescription; can alter, much less abrogate, these fundamental principles of government itself, or make the means of preservation the means of destruction, and render the condition of mankind infinitely more miserable than that of the beasts of the field, by the sole privilege of that reason which distinguishes them from the brute creation.

Force can give no title but to revenge, and to the use of force again; nor could it ever enter into the heart of any man, to give to another power over him, for any other end but to be exercised for his own advantage: And if there are any men mad or foolish enough to pretend to do otherwise, they ought to be treated as idiots or lunaticks; and the reason of their conduct must be derived from their folly and frenzy.

All men are born free; liberty is a gift which they receive from God himself; nor can they alienate the same by consent, though possibly they may forfeit it by crimes. No man has power over his own life, or to dispose of his own religion; and cannot consequently transfer the power of either to any body else: Much less can he give away the lives and liberties, religion or acquired property of his posterity, who will be born as free as he himself was born, and can never be bound by his wicked and ridiculous bargain.

The right of the magistrate arises only from the right of private men to defend themselves, to repel injuries, and to punish those who commit them: That right being conveyed by the society to their publick representative, he can execute the same no further than the benefit and security of that society requires he should. When he exceeds his commission, his acts are as extrajudicial as are those of any
private officer usurping an unlawful authority, that is, they are void; and every man is answerable for
the wrong which he does. A power to do good can never become a warrant for doing evil.

But here arises a grand question, which has perplexed and puzzled the greatest part of mankind: Yet, I
think, the answer to it easy and obvious. The question is, who shall be judge whether the magistrate
acts justly, and pursues his trust? To this it is justly said, that if those who complain of him are to judge
him, then there is a settled authority above the chief magistrate, which authority must be itself the chief
magistrate; which is contrary to the supposition; and the same question and difficulty will recur again
upon this new magistracy. All this I own to be absurd; and I aver it to be at least as absurd to affirm,
that the person accused is to be the decisive judge of his own actions, when it is certain that he will
always judge and determine in his own favour; and thus the whole race of mankind will be left helpless
under the heaviest injustice, oppression, and misery, that can afflict human nature.

But if neither magistrates, nor they who complain of magistrates, and are aggrieved by them, have a
right to determine decisively, the one for the other; and if there be no common established power, to
which both are subject; then every man interested in the success of the contest, must act according to
the light and dictates of his own conscience, and inform it as well as he can. Where no judge is nor can
be appointed, every man must be his own; that is, when there is no stated judge upon earth, we must
have recourse to heaven, and obey the will of heaven, by declaring ourselves on that which we think the
juster side.

If the Senate and people of Rome had differed irreconcilably, there could have been no common judge
in the world between them; and consequently no remedy but the last: For that government consisting in
the union of the nobles and the people, when they differed, no man could determine between them; and
therefore every man must have been at liberty to provide for his own security, and the general good, in
the best manner he was able. In that case the common judge ceasing, every one was his own: The
government becoming incapable of acting, suffered a political demise: The constitution was dissolved;
and there being no government in being, the people were in the state of nature again.

The same must be true, where two absolute princes, governing a country, come to quarrel, as
sometimes two Caesars in partnership did, especially towards the latter end of the Roman empire; or
where a sovereign council govern a country, and their votes come equally to be divided. In such a
circumstance, every man must take that side which he thinks most for the publick good, or choose any
proper measures for his own security: For, if I owe my allegiance to two princes agreeing, or to the
majority of a council; when between these princes there is no longer any union, nor in that council any
majority, no submission can be due to that which is not; and the laws of nature and self-preservation
must take place, where there are no other.

The case is still the same, when there is any dispute about the titles of absolute princes, who govern
independently on the states of a country, and call none. Here too every man must judge for himself
what party he will take, to which of the titles he will adhere; and the like private judgment must guide
him, whenever a question arises whether the said prince be an idiot or a lunatick, and consequently
whether he be capable or incapable of government. Where there are no states, there can be no other
way of judging; but by the judgment of private men the capacity of the prince must be judged, and his
fate determined. Lunacy and idiotism are, I think, allowed by all to be certain disqualifications for
government; indeed they are as much so, as if he were deaf, blind, and dumb, or even dead. He who
can neither execute an office, nor appoint a deputy, is not fit for one.

Now I would fain know, why private men may not as well use their judgment in an instance that
concerns them more; I mean that of a tyrannical government, of which they hourly feel the sad effects,
and sorrowful proofs; whereas they have not by far the equal means of coming to a certainty about the
natural incapacity of their governor. The persons of great princes are known but to few of their subjects,
and their parts to much fewer; and several princes have, by the management of their wives, or
ministers, or murderers, reigned a good while after they were dead. In truth, I think it is as much the
business and right of the people to judge whether their prince be good or bad, whether a father or an
enemy, as to judge whether he be dead or alive; unless it be said (as many such wise things have been said) that they may judge whether he can govern them, but not whether he does; and that it behooves them to put the administration in wiser hands, if he be a harmless fool, but it is impious to do it, if he be only a destructive tyrant; that want of speech is a disqualification, but want of humanity, none.

That subjects were not to judge of their governors, or rather for themselves in the business of government, which of all human things concerns them most, was an absurdity that never entered into the imagination of the wise and honest ancients: Who, following for their guide that everlasting reason, which is the best and only guide in human affairs, carried liberty, and human happiness, the legitimate offspring and work of liberty, to the highest pitch that they were capable of arriving at. But the above absurdity, with many others as monstrous and mischievous, were reserved for the discovery of a few wretched and dreaming Mahometan and Christian monks, who, ignorant of all things, were made, or made themselves, the directors of all things; and bewitching the world with holy lies and unaccountable ravings, dressed up in barbarous words and uncouth phrases, bent all their fairy force against common sense and common liberty and truth, and founded a pernicious, absurd, and visionary empire upon their ruins. Systems without sense, propositions without truth, religion without reason, a rampant church without charity, severity without justice, and government without liberty or mercy, were all the blessed handy-works of these religious mad-men, and godly pedants; who, by pretending to know the other world, cheated and confounded this. Their enmity to common sense, and want of it, were their warrants for governing the sense of all mankind: By lying, they were thought the champions of the truth; and by their fooleries, impieties, and cruelty, were esteemed the favourites and confidents of the God of wisdom, mercy, and peace.

These were the men, who, having demolished all sense and human judgment, first made it a principle, that people were not to judge of their governor and government, nor to meddle with it; nor to preserve themselves from publick destroyers, falsely calling themselves governors: Yet these men, who thus set up for the support and defenders of government, without the common honesty of distinguishing the good from the bad, and protection from murder and depredation, were at the same time themselves the constant and avowed troublers of every government which they could not direct and command; and every government, however excellent, which did not make their reveries its own rules, and themselves alone its peculiar care, has been honoured with their professed hatred; whilst tyrants and publick butchers, who flattered them, have been deified. This was the poor state of Christendom before the Reformation; and I wish I could say, of no parts of it since.

This barbarous anarchy in reasoning and politicks, has made it necessary to prove propositions which the light of nature had demonstrated. And, as the apostles were forced to prove to the misled Gentiles, that they were no gods which were made with hands; I am put to prove, that the people have a right to judge, whether their governors were made for them, or they for their governors? Whether their governors have necessary and natural qualifications? Whether they have any governors or no? And whether, when they have none, every man must not be his own? I therefore return to instances and illustrations from facts which cannot be denied; though propositions as true as facts may, by those especially who are defective in point of modesty or discernment.

In Poland, according to the constitution of that country, it is necessary, we are told, that, in their diets, the consent of every man present must be had to make a resolve effectual: And therefore, to prevent the cutting of people’s throats, they have no remedy but to cut the throats of one another; that is, they must pull out their sabres, and force the refractory members (who are always the minority) to submit. And amongst us in England, where a jury cannot agree, there can be no verdict; and so they must fast till they do, or till one of them is dead, and then the jury is dissolved.

This, from the nature of things themselves, must be the constant case in all disputes between dominion and property. Where the interest of the governors and that of the governed clash, there can be no stated judge between them: To appeal to a foreign power, is to give up the sovereignty; for either side to submit, is to give up the question: And therefore, if they themselves do not amicably determine the dispute between themselves, heaven alone must. In such case, recourse must be had to the first
principles of government itself; which being a departure from the state of nature, and a union of many families forming themselves into a political machine for mutual protection and defence, it is evident, that this formed relation can continue no longer than the machine subsists and can act; and when it does not, the individuals must return to their former state again. No constitution can provide against what will happen, when that constitution is dissolved. Government is only an appointment of one or more persons, to do certain actions for the good and emolument of the society; and if the persons thus interested will not act at all, or act contrary to their trust, their power must return of course to those who gave it.

... It is foolish to say, that this doctrine can be mischievous to society, at least in any proportion to the wild ruin and fatal calamities which must befall, and do befall the world, where the contrary doctrine is maintained: For, all bodies of men subsisting upon their own substance, or upon the profits of their trade and industry, find their account so much in ease and peace, and have justly such terrible apprehensions of civil disorders, which destroy every thing that they enjoy; that they always bear a thousand injuries before they return one, and stand under the burdens as long as they can bear them; as I have in another letter observed.

What with the force of education, and the reverence which people are taught, and have been always used to pay to princes; what with the perpetual harangues of flatterers, the gaudy pageantry and outside of power, and its gilded ensigns, always glittering in their eyes; what with the execution of the laws in the sole power of the prince; what with all the regular magistrates, pompous guards and standing troops, with the fortified towns, the artillery, and all the magazines of war, at his disposal; besides large revenues, and multitudes of followers and dependents, to support and abet all that he does: Obedience to authority is so well secured, that it is wild to imagine, that any number of men, formidable enough to disturb a settled state, can unite together and hope to overturn it, till the publick grievances are so enormous, the oppression so great, and the disaffection so universal, that there can be no question remaining, whether their calamities be real or imaginary, and whether the magistrate has protected or endeavoured to destroy his people.

... No society of men will groan under oppressions longer than they know how to throw them off; whatever unnatural whimsies and fairy notions idle and sedentary babblers may utter from colleges and cloisters; and teach to others, for vile self-ends, doctrines, which they themselves are famous for not practising.

Upon this principle of people's judging for themselves, and resisting lawless force, stands our late happy Revolution, and with it the just and rightful title of our most excellent sovereign King George, to the scepter of these realms; a scepter which he has, and I doubt not will ever sway, to his own honour, and the honour, protection, and prosperity of us his people.

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All Government Proved to Be Instituted by Men, and Only to Intend the General Good of Men

(No. 60, Saturday, January 6, 1722; by John Trenchard)

There is no government now upon earth, which owes its formation or beginning to the immediate revelation of God, or can derive its existence from such revelation: It is certain, on the contrary, that the rise and institution or variation of government, from time to time, is within the memory of men or of histories; and that every government, which we know at this day in the world, was established by the wisdom and force of mere men, and by the concurrence of means and causes evidently human. Government therefore can have no power, but such as men can give, and such as they actually did give,
or permit for their own sakes: Nor can any government be in fact framed but by consent, if not of every subject, yet of as many as can compel the rest; since no man, or council of men, can have personal strength enough to govern multitudes by force, or can claim to themselves and their families any superiority, or natural sovereignty over their fellow-creatures naturally as good as them. Such strength, therefore, where-ever it is, is civil and accumulative strength, derived from the laws and constitutions of the society, of which the governors themselves are but members.

So that to know the jurisdiction of governors, and its limits, we must have recourse to the institution of government, and ascertain those limits by the measure of power, which men in the state of nature have over themselves and one another: And as no man can take from many, who are stronger than him, what they have no mind to give him; and he who has not consent must have force, which is itself the consent of the stronger; so no man can give to another either what is none of his own, or what in its own nature is inseparable from himself; as his religion particularly is.

Every man's religion is his own; nor can the religion of any man, of what nature or figure soever, be the religion of another man, unless he also chooses it; which action utterly excludes all force, power, or government. Religion can never come without conviction, nor can conviction come from civil authority; religion, which is the fear of God, cannot be subject to power, which is the fear of man. It is a relation between God and our own souls only, and consists in a disposition of mind to obey the will of our great Creator, in the manner which we think most acceptable to him. It is independent upon all human directions, and superior to them; and consequently uncontrollable by external force, which cannot reach the free faculties of the mind, or inform the understanding, much less convince it. Religion therefore, which can never be subject to the jurisdiction of another, can never be alienated to another, or put in his power.

Nor has any man in the state of nature power over his own life, or to take away the life of another, unless to defend his own, or what is as much his own, namely, his property. This power therefore, which no man has, no man can transfer to another.

Nor could any man in the state of nature, have a right to violate the property of another; that is, what another had acquired by his art or labour; or to interrupt him in his industry and enjoyments, as long as he himself was not injured by that industry and those enjoyments. No man therefore could transfer to the magistrate that right which he had not himself.

No man in his senses was ever so wild as to give an unlimited power to another to take away his life, or the means of living, according to the caprice, passion, and unreasonable pleasure of that other: But if any man restrained himself from any part of his pleasures, or parted with any portion of his acquisitions, he did it with the honest purpose of enjoying the rest with the greater security, and always in subserviency to his own happiness, which no man will or can willingly and intentionally give away to any other whatsoever.

And if any one, through his own inadvertence, or by the fraud or violence of another, can be drawn into so foolish a contract, he is relievable by the eternal laws of God and reason. No engagement that is wicked and unjust can be executed without injustice and wickedness: This is so true, that I question whether there be a constitution in the world which does not afford, or pretend to afford, a remedy for relieving ignorant, distressed, and unwary men, trepanned into such engagements by artful knaves, or frightened into them by imperious ones. So that here the laws of nature and general reason supersede the municipal and positive laws of nations; and no where oftener than in England. What else was the design, and ought to be the business, of our courts of equity? And I hope whole countries and societies are no more exempted from the privileges and protection of reason and equity, than are private particulars.

Here then is the natural limitation of the magistrate's authority: He ought not to take what no man ought to give; nor exact what no man ought to perform: All he has is given him, and those that gave it must judge of the application. In government there is no such relation as lord and slave, lawless will and
blind submission; nor ought to be amongst men: But the only relation is that of father and children, patron and client, protection and allegiance, benefaction and gratitude, mutual affection and mutual assistance.

So that the nature of government does not alter the natural right of men to liberty, which in all political societies is alike their due: But some governments provide better than others for the security and impartial distribution of that right. There has been always such a constant and certain fund of corruption and malignity in human nature, that it has been rare to find that man, whose views and happiness did not center in the gratification of his appetites, and worst appetites, his luxury, his pride, his avarice, and lust of power; and who considered any publick trust reposed in him, with any other view, than as the means to satiate such unruly and dangerous desires! And this has been most eminently true of great men, and those who aspired to dominion. They were first made great for the sake of the publick, and afterwards at its expence. And if they had been content to have been moderate traitors, mankind would have been still moderately happy; but their ambition and treason observing no degrees, there was no degree of vileness and misery which the poor people did not often feel.

The appetites therefore of men, especially of great men, are carefully to be observed and stayed, or else they will never stay themselves. The experience of every age convinces us, that we must not judge of men by what they ought to do, but by what they will do; and all history affords but few instances of men trusted with great power without abusing it, when with security they could. The servants of society, that is to say, its magistrates, did almost universally serve it by seizing it, selling it, or plundering it; especially when they were left by the society unlimited as to their duty and wages. In that case these faithful stewards generally took all; and, being servants, made slaves of their masters.

For these reasons, and convinced by woeful and eternal experience, societies found it necessary to lay restraints upon their magistrates or publick servants, and to put checks upon those who would otherwise put chains upon them; and therefore these societies set themselves to model and form national constitutions with such wisdom and art, that the publick interest should be consulted and carried at the same time, when those entrusted with the administration of it were consulting and pursuing their own.

Hence grew the distinction between arbitrary and free governments: Not that more or less power was vested in the one than in the other; nor that either of them lay under less or more obligations, in justice, to protect their subjects, and study their ease, prosperity, and security, and to watch for the same. But the power and sovereignty of magistrates in free countries was so qualified, and so divided into different channels, and committed to the direction of so many different men, with different interests and views, that the majority of them could seldom or never find their account in betraying their trust in fundamental instances. Their emulation, envy, fear, or interest, always made them spies and checks upon one another. By all which means the people have often come at the heads of those who forfeited their heads, by betraying the people.

In despotick governments things went far otherwise, those governments having been framed otherwise; if the same could be called governments, where the rules of publick power were dictated by private and lawless lust; where folly and madness often swayed the scepter, and blind rage wielded the sword. The whole wealth of the state, with its civil or military power, being in the prince, the people could have no remedy but death and patience, while he oppressed them by the lump, and butchered them by thousands: Unless perhaps the ambition or personal resentments of some of the instruments of his tyranny procured a revolt, which rarely mended their condition.

The only secret therefore in forming a free government, is to make the interests of the governors and of the governed the same, as far as human policy can contrive. Liberty cannot be preserved any other way. Men have long found, from the weakness and depravity of themselves and one another, that most men will act for interest against duty, as often as they dare. So that to engage them to their duty, interest must be linked to the observance of it, and danger to the breach of it. Personal advantages and security, must be the rewards of duty and obedience; and disgrace, torture, and death, the punishment
of treachery and corruption.

Human wisdom has yet found out but one certain expedient to effect this; and that is, to have the concerns of all directed by all, as far as possibly can be: And where the persons interested are too numerous, or live too distant to meet together on all emergencies, they must moderate necessity by prudence, and act by deputies, whose interest is the same with their own, and whose property is so intermingled with theirs, and so engaged upon the same bottom, that principals and deputies must stand and fall together. When the deputies thus act for their own interest, by acting for the interest of their principals; when they can make no law but what they themselves, and their posterity, must be subject to; when they can give no money, but what they must pay their share of; when they can do no mischief, but what must fall upon their own heads in common with their countrymen; their principals may then expect good laws, little mischief, and much frugality.

Here therefore lies the great point of nicety and care in forming the constitution, that the persons entrusted and representing, shall either never have any interest detached from the persons entrusting and represented, or never the means to pursue it. Now to compass this great point effectually, no other way is left, but one of these two, or rather both; namely, to make the deputies so numerous, that there may be no possibility of corrupting the majority; or, by changing them so often, that there is no sufficient time to corrupt them, and to carry the ends of that corruption. The people may be very sure, that the major part of their deputies being honest, will keep the rest so; and that they will all be honest, when they have no temptations to be knaves.

...
themselves; all his actions, as a publick person, being for the sake of society, must refer to it, and answer the ends of it.

It is a mistaken notion in government, that the interest of the majority is only to be consulted, since in society every man has a right to every man’s assistance in the enjoyment and defence of his private property; otherwise the greater number may sell the lesser, and divide their estates amongst themselves; and so, instead of a society, where all peaceable men are protected, become a conspiracy of the many against the minority. With as much equity may one man wantonly dispose of all, and violence may be sanctified by mere power.

And it is as foolish to say, that government is concerned to meddle with the private thoughts and actions of men, while they injure neither the society, nor any of its members. Every man is, in nature and reason, the judge and disposer of his own domestick affairs; and, according to the rules of religion and equity, every man must carry his own conscience. So that neither has the magistrate a right to direct the private behaviour of men; nor has the magistrate, or any body else, any manner of power to model people’s speculations, no more than their dreams. Government being intended to protect men from the injuries of one another, and not to direct them in their own affairs, in which no one is interested but themselves; it is plain, that their thoughts and domestick concerns are exempted entirely from its jurisdiction: In truth, men’s thoughts are not subject to their own jurisdiction.

Idiots and lunaticks indeed, who cannot take care of themselves, must be taken care of by others: But whilst men have their five senses, I cannot see what the magistrate has to do with actions by which the society cannot be affected; and where he meddles with such, he meddles impertinently or tyrannically. Must the magistrate tie up every man’s legs, because some men fall into ditches? Or, must he put out their eyes, because with them they see lying vanities? Or, would it become the wisdom and care of governors to establish a travelling society, to prevent people, by a proper confinement, from throwing themselves into wells, or over precipices; or to endow a fraternity of physicians and surgeons all over the nation, to take care of their subjects’ health, without being consulted; and to vomit, bleed, purge, and scarify them at pleasure, whether they would or no, just as these established judges of health should think fit? If this were the case, what a stir and hubbub should we soon see kept about the established potions and lancets? Every man, woman, or child, though ever so healthy, must be a patient, or woe be to them! The best diet and medicines would soon grow pernicious from any other hand; and their pills alone, however ridiculous, insufficient, or distasteful, would be attended with a blessing.

Let people alone, and they will take care of themselves, and do it best; and if they do not, a sufficient punishment will follow their neglect, without the magistrate’s interposition and penalties. It is plain, that such busy care and officious intrusion into the personal affairs, or private actions, thoughts, and imaginations of men, has in it more craft than kindness; and is only a device to mislead people, and pick their pockets, under the false pretence of the publick and their private good. To quarrel with any man for his opinions, humours, or the fashion of his clothes, is an offence taken without being given. What is it to a magistrate how I wash my hands, or cut my corns; what fashion or colours I wear, or what notions I entertain, or what gestures I use, or what words I pronounce, when they please me, and do him and my neighbour no hurt? As well may he determine the colour of my hair, and control my shape and features.

True and impartial liberty is therefore the right of every man to pursue the natural, reasonable, and religious dictates of his own mind; to think what he will, and act as he thinks, provided he acts not to the prejudice of another; to spend his own money himself, and lay out the produce of his labour his own way; and to labour for his own pleasure and profit, and not for others who are idle, and would live and riot by pillaging and oppressing him, and those that are like him.

So that civil government is only a partial restraint put by the laws of agreement and society upon natural and absolute liberty, which might otherwise grow licentious: And tyranny is an unlimited restraint put upon natural liberty, by the will of one or a few. Magistracy, amongst a free people, is the
exercise of power for the sake of the people; and tyrants abuse the people, for the sake of power. Free
government is the protecting the people in their liberties by stated rules: Tyranny is a brutish struggle
for unlimited liberty to one or a few, who would rob all others of their liberty, and act by no rule but
lawless lust.

So much for an idea of civil liberty. I will now add a word or two, to shew how much it is the delight and
passion of mankind; and then shew its advantages.

The love of liberty is an appetite so strongly implanted in the nature of all living creatures, that even the
appetite of self-preservation, which is allowed to be the strongest, seems to be contained in it; since by
the means of liberty they enjoy the means of preserving themselves, and of satisfying their desires in
the manner which they themselves choose and like best. Many animals can never be tamed, but feel
the bitterness of restraint in the midst of the kindest usage; and rather than bear it, grieve and starve
themselves to death; and some beat out their brains against their prisons.

Where liberty is lost, life grows precarious, always miserable, often intolerable. Liberty is, to live upon
one's own terms; slavery is, to live at the mere mercy of another; and a life of slavery is, to those who
can bear it, a continual state of uncertainty and wretchedness, often an apprehension of violence, often
the lingering dread of a violent death: But by others, when no other remedy is to be had, death is
reckoned a good one. And thus, to many men, and to many other creatures, as well as men, the love of
liberty is beyond the love of life.

This passion for liberty in men, and their possession of it, is of that efficacy and importance, that it
seems the parent of all the virtues: And therefore in free countries there seems to be another species of
mankind, than is to be found under tyrants. Small armies of Greeks and Romans despised the greatest
hosts of slaves; and a million of slaves have been sometimes beaten and conquered by a few thousand
freemen. Insomuch that the difference seemed greater between them than between men and sheep. It
was therefore well said by Lucullus, when, being about to engage the great King Tigranes's army, he
was told by some of his officers, how prodigious great the same was, consisting of between three and
four hundred thousand men: “No matter,” said that brave Roman, drawing up his little army of fourteen
thousand, but fourteen thousand Romans: “No matter; the lion never enquires into the number of the
sheep.” And these royal troops proved no better; for the Romans had little else to do but to kill and
pursue; which yet they could scarce do for laughing; so much more were they diverted than animated
by the ridiculous dread and sudden flight of these imperial slaves and royal cowards.

Men eternally cowed and oppressed by haughty and insolent governors, made base themselves by the
baseness of that sort of government, and become slaves by ruling over slaves, want spirit and souls to
meet in the field freemen, who scorn oppressors, and are their own governors, or at least measure and
direct the power of their governors.

Education alters nature, and becomes stronger. Slavery, while it continues, being a perpetual awe upon
the spirits, depresses them, and sinks natural courage; and want and fear, the concomitants of
bondage, always produce despondency and baseness; nor will men in bonds ever fight bravely, but to
be free. Indeed, what else should they fight for; since every victory that they gain for a tyrant, makes
them poorer and fewer; and, increasing his pride, increases his cruelty, with their own misery and
chains?

Those, who, from terror and delusion, the frequent causes and certain effects of servitude, come to
think their governors greater than men, as they find them worse, will be as apt to think themselves less:
And when the head and the heart are thus both gone, the hands will signify little. They who are used
like beasts, will be apt to degenerate into beasts. But those, on the contrary, who, by the freedom of
their government and education, are taught and accustomed to think freely of men and things, find, by
comparing one man with another, that all men are naturally alike; and that their governors, as they
have the same face, constitution, and shape with themselves, and are subject to the same sickness,
accidents, and death, with the meanest of their people; so they possess the same passions and faculties
of the mind which their subjects possess, and not better. They therefore scorn to degrade and prostrate themselves, to adore those of their own species, however covered with titles, and disguised by power: They consider them as their own creatures; and, as far as they surmount themselves, the work of their own hands, and only the chief servants of the state, who have no more power to do evil than one of themselves, and are void of every privilege and superiority, but to serve them and the state. They know it to be a contradiction in religion and reason, for any man to have a right to do evil; that not to resist any man’s wickedness, is to encourage it; and that they have the least reason to bear evil and oppression from their governors, who of all men are the most obliged to do them good. They therefore detest slavery, and despise or pity slaves; and, adoring liberty alone, as they who see its beauty and feel its advantages always will, it is no wonder that they are brave for it.

Indeed liberty is the divine source of all human happiness. To possess, in security, the effects of our industry, is the most powerful and reasonable incitement to be industrious: And to be able to provide for our children, and to leave them all that we have, is the best motive to beget them. But where property is precarious, labour will languish. The privileges of thinking, saying, and doing what we please, and of growing as rich as we can, without any other restriction, than that by all this we hurt not the publick, nor one another, are the glorious privileges of liberty; and its effects, to live in freedom, plenty, and safety.

These are privileges that increase mankind, and the happiness of mankind. And therefore countries are generally peopled in proportion as they are free, and are certainly happy in that proportion: And upon the same tract of land that would maintain a hundred thousand freemen in plenty, five thousand slaves would starve. In Italy, fertile Italy, men die sometimes of hunger amongst the sheaves, and in a plentiful harvest; for what they sow and reap is none of their own; and their cruel and greedy governors, who live by the labour of their wretched vassals, do not suffer them to eat the bread of their own earning, nor to sustain their lives with their own hands.

Liberty naturally draws new people to it, as well as increases the old stock; and men as naturally run when they dare from slavery and wretchedness, whithersoever they can help themselves. Hence great cities losing their liberty become deserts, and little towns by liberty grow great cities; as will be fully proved before I have gone through this argument. I will not deny, but that there are some great cities of slaves: But such are only imperial cities, and the seats of great princes, who draw the wealth of a continent to their capital, the center of their treasure and luxury. Babylon, Antioch, Seleucia, and Alexandria, were great cities peopled by tyrants; but peopled partly by force, partly by the above reason, and partly by grants and indulgencies. Their power, great and boundless as it was, could not alone people their cities; but they were forced to soften authority by kindness; and having brought the inhabitants together by force, and by driving them captive like cattle, could not keep them together, without bestowing on them many privileges, to encourage the first inhabitants to stay, and to invite more to come.

This was a confession in those tyrants, that their power was mischievous and unjust; since they could not erect one great city, and make it flourish, without renouncing in a great measure their power over it; which, by granting it these privileges, in effect they did. These privileges were fixed laws, by which the trade and industry of the citizens were encouraged, and their lives and properties ascertained and protected, and no longer subjected to the laws of mere will and pleasure: And therefore, while these free cities, enjoying their own liberties and laws, flourished under them, the provinces were miserably harrassed, pillaged, dispeopled, and impoverished, and the inhabitants exhausted, starved, butchered, and carried away captive.

This shews that all civil happiness and prosperity is inseparable from liberty; and that tyranny cannot make men, or societies of men, happy, without departing from its nature, and giving them privileges inconsistent with tyranny. And here is an unanswerable argument, amongst a thousand others, against absolute power in a single man. Nor is there one way in the world to give happiness to communities, but by sheltering them under certain and express laws, irrevocable at any man’s pleasure.

There is not, nor can be, any security for a people to trust to the mere will of one, who, while his will is
his law, cannot protect them if he would. The number of sycophants and wicked counsellors, that he will always and necessarily have about him, will defeat all his good intentions, by representing things falsely, and persons maliciously; by suggesting danger where it is not, and urging necessity where there is none; by filling their own coffers, under colour of filling his, and by raising money for themselves, pretending the publick exigencies of the state; by sacrificing particular men to their own revenge, under pretence of publick security; and by engaging him and his people in dangerous and destructive wars, for their own profit or fame; by throwing publick affairs into perpetual confusion, to prevent an enquiry into their own behaviour; and by making him jealous of his people, and his people of him, on purpose to manage and mislead both sides.

By all these, and many more wicked arts, they will be constantly leading him into cruel and oppressive measures, destructive to his people, scandalous and dangerous to himself; but entirely agreeable to their own spirit and designs. Thus will they commit all wickedness by their master’s authority, against his inclinations, and grow rich by the people’s poverty, without his knowledge; and the royal authority will be first a warrant for oppression, afterwards a protection from the punishment due to it. For, in short, the power of princes is often little else but a stalking-horse to the intrigues and ambition of their minister.

But if the disposition of such a prince be evil, what must be the forlorn condition of his people, and what door of hope can remain for common protection! The best princes have often evil counsellors, the bad will have no other: And in such a case, what bounds can be set to their fury, and to the havoc they will make? The instruments and advisers of tyranny and depredation always thrive best and are nearest their ends, when depredation and tyranny run highest: When most is plundered from the people, their share is greatest; we may therefore suppose every evil will befall such a people, without supposing extravagantly. No happiness, no security, but certain misery, and a vile and precarious life, are the blessed terms of such a government—a government which necessarily introduces all evils, and from the same necessity neither must nor can redress any.

The nature of his education, bred up as he ever is in perpetual flattery, makes him haughty and ignorant; and the nature of his government, which subsists by brutish severity and oppression, makes him cruel. He is inaccessible, but by his ministers, whose study and interest will be to keep him from knowing or helping the state of his miserable people. Their master’s knowledge in his own affairs, would break in upon their scheme and power; they are not likely to lay before him representations of grievances caused by themselves; nor, if they be the effects of his own barbarity and command, will he hear them.

Even where absolute princes are not tyrants, there ministers will be tyrants. But it is indeed impossible for an arbitrary prince to be otherwise, since oppression is absolutely necessary to his being so. Without giving his people liberty, he cannot make them happy; and by giving them liberty, he gives up his own power. So that to be and continue arbitrary, he is doomed to be a tyrant in his own defence. The oppression of the people, corruption, wicked counsellors, and pernicious maxims in the court, and every where baseness, ignorance, and chains, must support tyranny, or it cannot be supported. So that in such governments there are inevitable grievances, without possible redress; misery, without mitigation or remedy; whatever is good for the people, is bad for their governors; and what is good for the governors, is pernicious to the people.

Of Freedom of Speech: That the Same Is Inseparable from Publick Liberty

(No. 15, Saturday, February 4, 1721; by Thomas Gordon)

Without freedom of thought, there can be no such thing as wisdom; and no such thing as publick liberty,
without freedom of speech: Which is the right of every man, as far as by it he does not hurt and control
the right of another; and this is the only check which it ought to suffer, the only bounds which it ought to
know.

This sacred privilege is so essential to free government, that the security of property; and the freedom
of speech, always go together; and in those wretched countries where a man cannot call his tongue his
own, he can scarce call any thing else his own. Whoever would overthrow the liberty of the nation, must
begin by subduing the freedom of speech; a thing terrible to publick traitors.

. . .

That men ought to speak well of their governors, is true, while their governors deserve to be well
spoken of; but to do publick mischief, without hearing of it, is only the prerogative and felicity of
 tyranny: A free people will be shewing that they are so, by their freedom of speech.

The administration of government is nothing else, but the attendance of the trustees of the people upon
the interest and affairs of the people. And as it is the part and business of the people, for whose sake
alone all publick matters are, or ought to be, transacted, to see whether they be well or ill transacted; so
it is the interest, and ought to be the ambition, of all honest magistrates, to have their deeds openly
examined, and publicly scanned: Only the wicked governors of men dread what is said of them. . . .

Freedom of speech is ever the symptom, as well as the effect, of good government. . . .

Guilt only dreads liberty of speech, which drags it out of its lurking holes, and exposes its deformity and
horror to day-light. . . .

The best princes have ever encouraged and promoted freedom of speech; they knew that upright
measures would defend themselves, and that all upright men would defend them. . . .

. . .

Freedom of speech is the great bulwark of liberty; they prosper and die together: And it is the terror of
traitors and oppressors, and a barrier against them. It produces excellent writers, and encourages men
of fine genius. . . .

. . .

All ministers, therefore, who were oppressors, or intended to be oppressors, have been loud in their
complaints against freedom of speech, and the licence of the press; and always restrained, or
endeavoured to restrain, both. In consequence of this, they have brow-beaten writers, punished them
violently, and against law, and burnt their works. By all which they shewed how much truth alarmed
them, and how much they were at enmity with truth.

. . .

Freedom of speech, therefore, being of such infinite importance to the preservation of liberty, every one
who loves liberty ought to encourage freedom of speech. Hence it is that I, living in a country of liberty,
and under the best prince upon earth, shall take this very favourable opportunity of serving mankind, by
warning them of the hideous mischiefs that they will suffer, if ever corrupt and wicked men shall
hereafter get possession of any state, and the power of betraying their master. . . .

God be thanked, we Englishmen have neither lost our liberties, nor are in danger of losing them. Let us
always cherish this matchless blessing, almost peculiar to ourselves; that our posterity may, many ages
hence, ascribe their freedom to our zeal. The defence of liberty is a noble, a heavenly office; which can
only be performed where liberty is. . . .
The Rights and Capacity of the People to Judge of Government

(No. 38, Saturday, July 22, 1721; by Thomas Gordon)

... Of all the sciences that I know in the world, that of government concerns us most, and is the easiest to be known, and yet is the least understood. Most of those who manage it would make the lower world believe that there is I know not what difficulty and mystery in it, far above vulgar understandings; which proceeding of theirs is direct craft and imposture: Every ploughman knows a good government from a bad one, from the effects of it: he knows whether the fruits of his labour be his own, and whether he enjoy them in peace and security: And if he do not know the principles of government, it is for want of thinking and enquiry, for they lie open to common sense; but people are generally taught not to think of them at all, or to think wrong of them.

What is government, but a trust committed by all, or the most, to one, or a few, who are to attend upon the affairs of all, that every one may, with the more security, attend upon his own? A great and honourable trust; but too seldom honourably executed; those who possess it having it often more at heart to increase their power, than to make it useful; and to be terrible, rather than beneficent. It is therefore a trust, which ought to be bounded with many and strong restraints, because power renders men wanton, insolent to others, and fond of themselves. Every violation therefore of this trust, where such violation is considerable, ought to meet with proportionable punishment; and the smallest violation of it ought to meet with some, because indulgence to the least faults of magistrates may be cruelty to a whole people.

Honesty, diligence, and plain sense, are the only talents necessary for the executing of this trust; and the public good is its only end: As to refinements and finesses, they are often only the false appearances of wisdom and parts, and oftener tricks to hide guilt and emptiness; and they are generally mean and dishonest: they are the arts of jobbers in politicks, who, playing their own game under the publick cover, subsist upon poor shifts and expedients; starved politicians, who live from hand to mouth, from day to day, and following the little views of ambition, avarice, revenge, and the like personal passions, are ashamed to avow them, yet want souls great enough to forsake them; small wicked statesmen, who make a private market of the publick, and deceive it, in order to sell it.

These are the poor parts which great and good governors scorn to play, and cannot play; their designs, like their stations, being purely publick, are open and undisguised. They do not consider their people as their prey, nor lie in ambush for their subjects; nor dread, and treat and surprize them like enemies, as all ill magistrates do; who are not governors, but jailers and sponges, who chain them and squeeze them, and yet take it very ill if they do but murmur; which is yet much less than a people so abused ought to do. There have been times and countries, when publick ministers and publick enemies have been the same individual men. What a melancholy reflection is this, that the most terrible and mischievous foes to a nation should be its own magistrates! And yet in every enslaved country, which is almost every country, this is their woeful case.

Honesty and plainness go always together, and the makers and multipliers of mysteries, in the political way, are shrewdly to be suspected of dark designs. Cincinnatus was taken from the plough to save and defend the Roman state; an office which he executed honestly and successfully, without the grimace and gains of a statesman. Nor did he afterwards continue obstinately at the head of affairs, to form a party, raise a fortune, and settle himself in power: As he came into it with universal consent, he resigned it with universal applause.
It seems that government was not in those days become a trade, at least a gainful trade. Honest Cincinnatus was but a farmer: And happy had it been for the Romans, if, when they were enslaved, they could have taken the administration out of the hands of the emperors, and their refined politicians, and committed it to such farmers, or any farmers. It is certain, that many of their imperial governors acted more ridiculously than a board of ploughmen would have done, and more barbarously than a club of butchers could have done.

But some have said, It is not the business of private man to meddle with government. A bold, false, and dishonest saying; and whoever says it, either knows not what he says, or cares not, or slavishly speaks the sense of others. It is a cant now almost forgot in England, and which never prevailed but when liberty and the constitution were attacked, and never can prevail but upon the like occasion.

It is a vexation to be obliged to answer nonsense, and confute absurdities: But since it is and has been the great design of this paper to maintain and explain the glorious principles of liberty, and to expose the arts of those who would darken or destroy them; I shall here particularly shew the wickedness and stupidity of the above saying; which is fit to come from no mouth but that of a tyrant or a slave, and can never be heard by any man of an honest and free soul, without horror and indignation: It is, in short, a saying, which ought to render the man who utters it for ever incapable of place or credit in a free country, as it shews the malignity of his heart, and the baseness of his nature, and as it is the pronouncing of a doom upon our constitution. A crime, or rather a complication of crimes, for which a lasting infamy ought to be but part of the punishment.

But to the falsehood of the thing: Publick truths ought never to be kept secrets; and they who do it, are guilty of a solecism, and a contradiction: Every man ought to know what it concerns all to know. Now, nothing upon earth is of a more universal nature than government; and every private man upon earth has a concern in it, because in it is concerned, and nearly and immediately concerned, his virtue, his property, and the security of his person: And where all these are best preserved and advanced, the government is best administered; and where they are not, the government is impotent, wicked, or unfortunate; and where the government is so, the people will be so, there being always and every where a certain sympathy and analogy between the nature of the government and the nature of the people. This holds true in every instance. Public men are the patterns of private; and the virtues and vices of the governors become quickly the virtues and vices of the governed.

Nor is it example alone that does it. Ill governments, subsisting by vice and rapine, are jealous of private virtue, and enemies to private property. . . . They must be wicked and mischievous to be what they are; nor are they secure while any thing good or valuable is secure. Hence it is, that to drain, worry, and debauch their subjects, are the steady maxims of their politicks, their favourite arts of reigning. In this wretched situation the people, to be safe, must be poor and lewd: There will be but little industry where property is precarious; small honesty where virtue is dangerous.

Profuseness or frugality, and the like virtues or vices, which affect the publick, will be practised in the City, if they be practised in the court; and in the country, if they be in the City. Even Nero (that royal monster in man’s shape) was adored by the common herd at Rome, as much as he was flattered by the great; and both the little and the great admired, or pretended to admire, his manners, and many to imitate them. Tacitus tells us, that those sort of people long lamented him, and rejoiced in the choice of a successor that resembled him, even the profligate Otho.

Good government does, on the contrary, produce great virtue, much happiness, and many people. Greece and Italy, while they continued free, were each of them, for the number of inhabitants, like one continued city; for virtue, knowledge, and great men, they were the standards of the world; and that age and country that could come nearest to them, has ever since been reckoned the happiest. Their government, their free government, was the root of all these advantages, and of all this felicity and
renown; and in these great and fortunate states the people were the principals in the government; laws were made by their judgment and authority, and by their voice and commands were magistrates created and condemned. The city of Rome could conquer the world; nor could the great Persian monarch, the greatest then upon earth, stand before the face of one Greek city.

But what are Greece and Italy now? Rome has in it a herd of pampered monks, and a few starving lay inhabitants; the Campania of Rome, the finest spot of earth in Europe, is a desert. And for the modern Greeks, they are a few abject contemptible slaves, kept under ignorance, chains, and vileness, by the Turkish monarch, who keeps a great part of the globe intensely miserable, that he may seem great without being so.

Such is the difference between one government and another, and of such important concernment is the nature and administration of government to a people. And to say that private men have nothing to do with government, is to say that private men have nothing to do with their own happiness and misery.

What is the publick, but the collective body of private men, as every private man is a member of the publick? And as the whole ought to be concerned for the preservation of every private individual, it is the duty of every individual to be concerned for the whole, in which himself is included.

One man, or a few men, have often pretended the publick, and meant themselves, and consulted their own personal interest, in instances essential to its well-being; but the whole people, by consulting their own interest, consult the publick, and act for the publick by acting for themselves: This is particularly the spirit of our constitution, in which the whole nation is represented; and our records afford instances, where the House of Commons have declined entering upon a question of importance, till they had gone into the country, and consulted their principals, the people: So far were they from thinking that private men had no right to meddle with government. In truth, our whole worldly happiness and misery (abating for accidents and diseases) are owing to the order or mismanagement of government; and he who says that private men have no concern with government, does wisely and modestly tell us, that men have no concern in that which concerns them most; it is saying that people ought not to concern themselves whether they be naked or clothed, fed or starved, deceived or instructed, and whether they be protected or destroyed: What nonsense and servitude in a free and wise nation!

For myself, who have thought pretty much of these matters, I am of opinion, that a whole nation are like to be as much attached to themselves, as one man or a few men are like to be, who may by many means be detached from the interest of a nation. It is certain that one man, and several men, may be bribed into an interest opposite to that of the publick; but it is as certain that a whole country can never find an equivalent for itself, and consequently a whole country can never be bribed. It is the eternal interest of every nation, that their government should be good; but they who direct it frequently reason a contrary way and find their own account in plunder and oppression; and while the publick voice is pretended to be declared, by one or a few, for vile and private ends, the publick know nothing of what is done, till they feel the terrible effects of it.

By the Bill of Rights, and the Act of Settlement, at the Revolution; a right is asserted to the people applying to the King and to the Parliament, by petition and address, for a redress of publick grievances and mismanagements, when such there are, of which they are left to judge; and the difference between free and enslaved countries lies principally here, that in the former, their magistrates must consult the voice and interest of the people; but in the latter, the private will, interest, and pleasure of the governors, are the sole end and motives of their administration.

Such is the difference between England and Turkey; which difference they who say that private men have no right to concern themselves with government, would absolutely destroy; they would convert magistrates into bashaws, and introduce popery into politicks. The late Revolution stands upon the very opposite maxim; and that any man dares to contradict it since the Revolution, would be amazing, did we not know that there are, in every country, hirelings who would betray it for a sop.