

Excerpts from *The Rights of Man* (1792)

Thomas Paine

Part Two

from the Introduction

“The revolutions which formerly took place in the world had nothing in them that interested the bulk of mankind. They extended only to a change of persons and measures, but not of **principles**, and rose or fell among the common transactions of the moment. What we now behold may not improperly be called a “counter-revolution.” Conquest and tyranny, at some earlier period, dispossessed man of his rights, and he is now recovering them. And as the tide of all human affairs has its ebb and flow in directions contrary to each other, so also is it in this. **Government founded on a moral theory, on a system of universal peace**, on the indefeasible hereditary Rights of Man, is now revolving from west to east by a stronger impulse than the government of the sword revolved from east to west. It interests not particular individuals, but nations in its progress, and promises **a new era to the human race.**”

Opening of Chapter 1

“Great part of that order which reigns among mankind is not the effect of government. It has its origin in **the principles of society and the natural constitution of man**. It existed prior to government, and would exist if the formality of government was abolished. The mutual dependence and reciprocal interest which man has upon man, and all the parts of civilised community upon each other, create that **great chain of connection** which holds it together. The landholder, the farmer, the manufacturer, the merchant, the tradesman, and every occupation, prospers by the aid which each receives from the other, and from the whole. Common interest regulates their concerns, and forms their law; and the laws which common usage ordains, have a greater influence than the laws of government. In fine, society performs for itself almost everything which is ascribed to government.”

“All the great laws of society are laws of nature.”

“If there is a country in the world where concord, according to common calculation, would be least expected, it is America. **Made up as it is of people from different nations, accustomed to different forms and habits of government, speaking different languages, and more different in their modes of worship, it would appear that the union of such a people was impracticable; but by the simple operation of constructing government on the principles of society and the rights of man, every difficulty retires, and all the parts are brought into cordial union. There the poor are not oppressed, the rich are not privileged.** Industry is not mortified by the splendid extravagance of a court rioting at its expense. Their taxes are few, because their government is just: and as there is nothing to render them wretched, there is nothing to engender riots and tumults.”

“Though it might be proved that the system of government now called the new, is **the most ancient in principle of all that have existed, being founded on the original, inherent Rights of Man:** yet, as tyranny and the sword have suspended the exercise of those rights for many centuries past, it serves better the purpose of distinction to call it the new, than to claim the right of calling it the old.”

“Hereditary succession is a burlesque upon **monarchy**. It puts it in the most ridiculous light, by presenting it as an office which any child or idiot may fill. It requires some talents to be a common mechanic; but to be a king requires only the animal figure of man- a sort of breathing automaton. **This sort of superstition may last a few years more, but it cannot long resist the awakened reason and interest of man.**”

“A constitution is the property of a nation, and not of those who exercise the government. All the constitutions of America are declared to be established on the **authority of the people.**”

“Throughout this work, various and numerous as the subjects are, which I have taken up and investigated, there is only a single paragraph upon religion, viz. **“that every religion is good that teaches man to be good.”** I have carefully avoided to enlarge upon the subject, because I am inclined to believe that what is called the present ministry, wish to see contentions about religion kept up, to prevent the nation turning its attention to subjects of government. It is as if they were to say, “Look that way, or any way, but this.”

“But as religion is very improperly made a political machine, and the reality of it is thereby destroyed, I will conclude this work with stating in what light religion appears to me.”

“Why may we not suppose, that the great Father of all is pleased with variety of devotion; and that the greatest offence we can act, is that by which we seek to torment and render each other miserable? For my own part, I am fully satisfied that what I am now doing, with an endeavour to conciliate mankind, to render their condition happy, to unite nations that have hitherto been enemies, and to extirpate the horrid practice of war, and break the chains of slavery and oppression is acceptable in his sight, and being the best service I can perform, I act it cheerfully.”

“As to what are called national religions, we may, with as much propriety, talk of **national Gods**. It is either political craft or the remains of the Pagan system, when every nation had its separate and particular deity.”

“It is now towards the middle of February. Were I to take a turn into the country, the trees would present a leafless, wintery appearance. As people

are apt to pluck twigs as they walk along, I perhaps might do the same, and by chance might observe, that **a single bud on that twig** had begun to swell. I should reason very unnaturally, or rather not reason at all, to suppose this was the only bud in England which had this appearance. Instead of deciding thus, I should instantly conclude, that the same appearance was beginning, or about to begin, every where; and though the vegetable sleep will continue longer on some trees and plants than on others, and though some of them may not blossom for two or three years, all will be in leaf in the summer, except those which are rotten. What pace the political summer may keep with the natural, no human foresight can determine. It is, however, not difficult to perceive that the **spring is begun.**- Thus wishing, as I sincerely do, freedom and happiness to all nations, I close the second part.”

Chapter 5

“In stating these matters, I speak an open and disinterested language, dictated by no passion but that of humanity. To me, who have not only refused offers, because I thought them improper, but have declined rewards I might with reputation have accepted, it is no wonder that meanness and imposition appear disgusting. **Independence is my happiness, and I view things as they are, without regard to place or person; my country is the world, and my religion is to do good.**”