

Rights-Based Government

DOCUMENT 5.1 | JOHN LOCKE, *Two Treatises of Government* 1690

English political philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) first articulated the political theory of republican government and civil society that influenced many European Enlightenment thinkers and prominent American revolutionaries, like Thomas Jefferson. In his *Second Treatise on Civil Government* (1690), Locke articulated his social contract theory, which viewed society as an agreement among citizens. Below, Locke calls this “civil society.”

89. Wherever therefore any number of Men are so united into one Society, as to quit every one his executive power of the Law of Nature, and to resign it to the publick, there and there only is a *political, or civil Society*. And this is done, wherever any number of Men, in the state of Nature, enter into Society to make one People, one Body politick, under one supream Government; or else when any one joyns himself to, and incorporates with any Government already made. For hereby he authorizes the Society, or which is all one, the Legislative thereof, to make Laws for him, as the publick good of the Society shall require; to the Execution whereof, his own Assistance (as to his own Decrees) is due. And this *puts Men* out of a state of Nature into that of a *Commonwealth*, by setting up a Judge on Earth, with Authority to determine all the Controversies, and redress [correct] the Injuries, that may happen to any Member of the Commonwealth; which Judge is the Legislative, or Magistrates appointed by it. And wherever there are any number of Men, however associated, that have no such decisive Power to appeal to, there they are still in *the state of Nature*.

90. Hence it is evident, that *absolute Monarchy*, which by some Men is counted the only Government in the World, is indeed *inconsistent with civil Society*, and so can be no form of Civil-Government at all. . . .

John Locke, *The Works of John Locke*, vol. V (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1801), 389–390.

PRACTICING Historical Thinking

Identify: When you **paraphrase**, you restate another idea in your own words. Paraphrase the first full sentence of this document.

Analyze: According to Locke, what is the relationship between a “state of Nature” and “civil Society”?

Evaluate: Why, according to Locke, is absolute monarchy “inconsistent with civil Society”?