



## The Rights Of Man

*Thomas Paine*

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## **The Rights Of Man** Thomas Paine

Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* argues that human rights are inherent. As such, they cannot be conferred on citizens by their governments because to do so would mean that these rights can be revoked by that same government. Paine further suggests that government is responsible for protecting the rights of men, and therefore, the interests of governments and citizens are united. Within this context, Paine argues that revolution is acceptable when the rights of men are not respected or defended by their governments.

Originally published in two volumes in 1791 and 1792, Paine's discourse reflected on the French Revolution, and positioned the uprising as an attack against a corrupt governing system, rather than a personal attack on the king himself. As a result of his arguments in favour of revolution and social welfare, Thomas Paine was tried and convicted of seditious libel against the Crown of England, and sentenced, in absentia, to hanging. Resident in France at the time of his British trial, Paine never returned to England.

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## **The Rights Of Man Details**

Date : Published March 3rd 2015 by HarperTorch (first published 1791)

ISBN :

Author : Thomas Paine

Format : Kindle Edition 215 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Politics, Nonfiction, Classics, History

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## From Reader Review The Rights Of Man for online ebook

### Jeff says

Written in response to Edmund Burke's "Reflections on the French Revolution," Paine obliterates the ideology of monarchical government. I probably should have read Burke's piece first to get a better understanding of Paine's counter-arguments, but this still provides a solid philosophical analysis of the role of government and the origin of sovereignty. He even goes to the length that countries start wars to increase their coffers from taxes, an interesting position I had not considered before. Paine unfortunately did not have the benefit of hindsight to see the horrors of the French Revolution before writing this piece, but I suppose a new country and constitution throwing off monarchical servitude and based on an American model would be exhilarating. Even if you do not believe in "natural rights," this pamphlet breaks down the major arguments for natural rights advocates in a simple and succinct way. Not quite as good as "Common Sense" in my opinion, but a pamphlet nonetheless that should be read by any freedom loving citizen. My favorite quotes:

"Wrongs cannot have a legal descent."

"Government is arbitrary."

"The Government should reform the system, not reform the people."

"'A' cannot take away from 'B' to give to 'C'."

"What started as 'plunder' assumed the softer name of 'revenue.'"

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### Nandini Goel says

"Rights of Man by Thomas Paine" is an excellent piece of work where Paine focuses on the flaws and ascendancies of one type of government over the other.

In the first part, Paine discusses about the various rights of man where he says that men are all of one degree and consequently all men are born equal with equal natural right and every child born into the world must be considered as deriving its existence from god.

After that Paine put forwards his inputs by condemning Mr Burke with whose writings he completely disagree. He calls his writings more of a kind of Shakespearean Drama than of truth, which is a necessity of historical works.

Paine supports the American Revolution and the French Revolution and praises America by describing it as a country being governed peacefully even after having an amalgamation of religions, customs, languages etc. This also gives brief introduction of Paine's understanding towards society in general. How he visions Bourgeois to be part of his politics and governance.

He believes that as long as there will be an abuse of monarchy, such revolutions will persist in the future. He condemns hereditary monarchical system of government and says that it is like putting an idiot on the throne with no qualifications. He says that even if Homer or Euclid had sons, they would not have been able to finish their fathers' incomplete work as sons are not equally capable as their fathers.

He then shares how a leader becomes a leader. He describes three ways through which a leader comes to power. Firstly, superstition, Secondly, power and thirdly, by upholding the common rights of the man. In the

first case like an oracle makes a prophecy and people follow it, so as long as this kind of superstition exists, people will accept the leader. In the second case, till the time, the king is able to keep control of the territory, he will be the king. In the third case, however, till the time the leader is able to uphold the common rights of man, the leader shall maintain as the ruler. (Which is an interesting explanation \*\*smile\*\*)

Paine describes government as a national association and meant only and only for the welfare of the people. When the government is unable to do so, the people revolt. Then Paine discusses an instance when there was an abuse of government. In France, a government had been developed but only the people who pay tax of more than sixty sous per annum were allowed to vote or elect their leaders. So, in an area consisting of thirty thousand people, only two people voted.

After that, Thomas Paine discusses the importance of constitution. He describes constitution as an antecedent for the government. He discusses that the constitution should consist of values that uphold the rights of the man. Also, he describes that constitution is valid only till the time it is enforced. He says that the government shall follow what is laid down in the constitution and the people and the people only have the right to amend it, not those who exercise power in the government. He describes the government only as a creature of the constitution.

Best Regards

Nandini

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## Robert Owen says

In an age of brilliant political writers, Paine, a naturalized American citizen and inspired propagandist for the American Revolutionary cause, represents perhaps the era's most radical and unfiltered ideological voice. Written in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution and the somewhat removed aftermath of the American, "The Rights of Man", published in two parts (1791 and 1792) is one of Thomas Paine's most influential treatises on the nature and form of just government. In it, Paine articulates the then-revolutionary view that government's purpose was to serve the will of the people and, to the extent that it didn't, the people had the right to rebel against it.

Despite having been written in the 18th century, the form and language of "The Rights of Man" is clear and comprehensible to modern readers. As has been commented elsewhere, owing to the fact Paine wrote the book in haste, he occasionally wanders; starting with one point, only to meander off on fascinating yet incongruous tangents. Notwithstanding this, Paine's arguments are clear, eloquent and utterly compelling and the tangents, while sometimes odd, inevitably contribute to strengthening the force of the whole.

For those inclined to cite the "Founding Fathers" in support of whatever particular view they happen to espouse, Paine's ideological purity makes him an interesting touchstone. Having never held public office himself, Paine was an ideologue whose views were untempered by the necessity of compromise. As a result, his ideas represent the embodiment of radical Enlightenment theory regarding a new form government that rejected hereditary monarchy in favor of representative democracy.

While Paine serves up some tasty out-of-context sound bites for the tri-cornered hat crowd, there is actually little comfort for neoconservative ideas in a thoughtful reading of his work. Yes, he railed against government and taxes, but what is often lost when summoning him as an authority on modern liberty is the context in which he expressed his views. By "government", Paine meant a hereditary monarchy and an attending court of aristocrats whose power originated from the Norman Conquest and perpetuated itself in succeeding generations by fraud, force, oppression and patronage. His objection to "government" was not that they exist, but that, except for in America and France, the "governments" of Europe were illegitimate in that they were not of and subject to the will of the people. His objection to taxes was not necessarily that they

be levied, but rather, in who they were levied against and in how they were used. In Paine's time taxes were nothing more than a conduit through which money was taken from the poor and siphoned into the pockets of the rich. Certainly shocking for anyone inclined to adorn their arguments with the presumed conservative aura of "the Founders", Paine advocated, in addition to the establishment of representative democracy for progressive taxes, cutting military spending and (get this) using the money educate the poor, provide public housing, provide support for the indigent, provide universal employment in urban centers and care for the aged. In short, "When it shall be said in any country in the world, my poor are happy; neither ignorance nor distress is to be found among them; my jails are empty of prisoners, my streets of beggars; the aged are not in want, the taxes are not oppressive; the rational world is my friend, because I am the friend of its happiness: when these things can be said, then may that country boast its constitution and its government."

If one didn't know better, one might suspect the man had been born in Kenya.

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### **Sidharth says**

A great polemic on the inherent rights of human beings, and the difference between a nation and government. Besides being a very enlightening little book that clearly explains much of the philosophical basis of the United States, Paine's witty attacks on Edmund Burke's defense of British and French aristocracy make it an entertaining read as well. It is, of course, slightly chilling in retrospect to read Paine's endless praises of the French Revolution, knowing now that in just a few years it would all be undone by Napoleon. Not to mention the many more years of horror that Europe would have to endure before the Spring he envisioned would come to be.

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### **Ian Ayris says**

Years ahead of his time, the all too unknown Englishman, Thomas Paine - from Thetford, Norfolk - had a large hand in setting out the constitutions for both the French Revolution and the newly formed country of America. Rights of Man is Paine's political treatise - a reply to the insanely monarchical English philosopher, Edmund Burke - wherein he sets out his view for a new politics - basically inventing the idea of a fair tax system, pensions, welfare benefits for the poor and needy, and blasting the idea of primogeniture (heredity) every chance he gets.

Of unelected government (the House of Lords, for example), Paine says: 'A body of men accountable to nobody, ought not to be trusted by anybody.'

Brilliant :)

Of a country's right to preen itself (think here of the United Kingdom and the USA today) he says:

'When it shall be said by any country in the world my poor are happy; neither ignorance nor distress is to be found among them; my jails are empty of prisoners, my streets of beggars, the aged not in want, the taxes are not oppressive; the rational world is my friend, because I am the friend of its happiness: When these things can be said, then may that country boast its constitution and its government.'

For anyone with the slightest interest in Brexit, and all that malarky, Paine is essential reading. He should be taught in schools. Everywhere.

In Rights of Man, Paine says, 'My country is the world, my religion is to do good.'

Forward thinking, without being self-righteous. He'd scare the life out of all these so-called politicians of today.

That is why Thomas Paine is incredible. A man of courage and brilliance, a true voice of the common man.

And sorely missed.

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### **Darwin8u says**

Thomas Paine is one of those writers who seemed to have been dropped by a deist God 200 years before the world was really ready for him. His energy, honesty and political bravery was intense. By his voice alone he helped to transform the West. Common Sense, the Rights of Man, and finally the Age of Reason have all thrown the political and social gauntlet down and caused people to either cheer him (Common Sense) or hiss his name (Age of Reason).

The Rights of Man was visionary in its call for intellectual republicanism and social justice. Paine was and is a prophetic voice for individual freedom and moral equality. He is my favorite founder to quote whenever I find myself in a debate where someone wants to lump the 'Founders' together in some giant Libertarian Christianity pudding. He was a true radical and a true American.

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### **John Doyle says**

The Rights of Man is a political masterwork that lays bare the bankruptcy of governments and political systems that derive their authority from any other source than the People. In his time, Paine was specifically eviscerating monarchies (i.e. 18th century Britain) that established themselves through military conquest and then claimed legitimacy over generations based on biology. By contrast, the revolutions in America and France had established the primacy of the nation (i.e. the People) to define a country and establish rules to govern it based on the choices of citizens over time. Reflecting more than 200 years after Paine wrote this book I think much of our Country's political history and its foreseeable future is about whether and when the fundamental rights of "man" will apply to all of us equally regardless of race, wealth, gender, etc etc.

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### **Bookdragon Sean says**

*“The World is my country, all mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion.”*

The ruling governments have no special rights; they have no privileges and they have no entitlements. At least, they ought not to have according to Paine. For him the government exists to serve; it has a duty to its nation the same way a soldier or a peacekeeper may have. And if they break that duty, if they become corrupt, then it is our moral right to call for revolution.

*“Whatever is my right as a man is also the right of another; and it becomes my duty to guarantee as well as to possess.”*





I often found myself, in reading Part One, stopping to put down the book and raise my hand in salute to Mr. Paine, who decimated the monarchist arguments of the conservative Mr. Burke. Then in Part Two, I found myself stopping to put down the book and *marvel* at the forward-thinking economic ideas of our rabble-rousing Founding Father. Burke gets all the credit for precognition for a brief passage that foretells the rise of a military dictator in France, but it seems Paine was recommending measures that sound an awful lot like Social Security, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and a progressive tax system well before the turn of the 19th Century.

Everyone should read this book. A good dose of *Rights of Man* would do much to temper the current hard-hearted anti-tax fervor of supposed "patriots" and remind supposed "Christians" that this freethinking revolutionary never lost his compassion for the aged, infirm and poor. I wonder what would happen if people substituted references to "monarch" with "corporation."

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### **Jon(athan) Nakapalau says**

Under what circumstances is political revolution permissible? What should the people do when a government no longer safeguards the rights of all classes? I look at the turmoil that is going on in America right now and wish that our elected officials would read this book; perhaps this old ideological 'midwife' could help our country now - as it labors to give birth to our future.

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### **Ben Lever says**

This book has patches of brilliance buried in amongst many pages of Paine picking a fight with Edmund Burke. This is somewhat typical of "classics" of political theory like this - they were designed only as pamphlets to deal with the issues of the day, and were not meant to be timeless.

While there is indeed timeless wisdom in here, a modern reader must sift through a lot of dirt to get to it - hence the two-star rating

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### **Dannii Elle says**

Paine's political manifesto details how governments and hierarchies are, in his opinion, corrupt, as they rely on the power of a few rather than of everyone equally. He devises a plan where the elite few, who often gain power through birth rights, to have their control abolished and a democratic, representative and equal community created in its place, where every person has an equal say and an equal part in the running of the community. Power to all or power to none!

The latter part of this reformist agenda includes particulars concerning liberal taxation and the redistribution of wealth, much of which still holds political interest and relevance today.

Radical and revolutionary, this has serious weight behind its arguments and yet it is in actuality no more than a retort to the alternative philosophy of the French Revolution as proposed by British politician Edmund Burke. For that reason, this is brilliant and yet flawed.

The prose, in respect to language alone, is understandable, more so than the political and philosophical tags

would have had me think, and yet the central message was buried under argument and criticism that muddied my understanding in some areas. It is answering questions raised in Burke's writing in a disjointed fashion that leaves me turning to Google for further understanding in more than one area. I felt that this was delivered in a somewhat confusing manner, leading my attention to stray numerous times and me to skim some areas in the latter parts of this. The central message is of great interest and importance, and yet the delivery is lacking for me.

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