

CHAPTER
6

Section 2

PRIMARY SOURCE *from Two Treatises on Government*
by John Locke

English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) attacked absolute monarchy and promoted the concept of government by the people in his most famous work, Two Treatises on Government. Published in 1690, his book influenced the ideas of the philosophes Baron de Montesquieu and Jean-Jacques Rousseau as well as the framers of the United States Constitution. At the heart of Locke’s argument was his belief that all people are born free and equal, with three natural rights: life, liberty, and property. As you read the following excerpt, think about how Locke defined one of these rights—liberty.

Of Slavery

22. The *Natural Liberty* of Man is to be free from any Superior Power on Earth, and not to be under the Will or Legislative Authority of Man, but to have only the Law of Nature for his Rule. The Liberty of Man, in Society, is to be under no other Legislative Power, but that established by consent, in the Common-wealth, nor but what the Dominion of any Will, or Restraint of any Law, but what the Legislative shall enact, according to the Trust put in it. *Freedom* then is not what Sir R. F. tells us, O.A. 55 [224]. *A Liberty for every one to do what he lists, to live as he pleases, and not to be tyed by any Laws: But Freedom of Men under Government*, is, to have a standing Rule to live by, common to every one of that Society, and made by the Legislative Power erected in it; A Liberty to follow my own Will in all things, where the Rule prescribes not; and not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, Arbitrary Will of another Man. As *Freedom of Nature* is to be under no other restraint but the Law of Nature.
23. This *Freedom* from Absolute, Arbitrary Power, is so necessary to, and closely joyned with a Man’s Preservation, that he cannot part with it, but by what forfeits his Preservation and Life together. For a Man, not having the Power of his own Life, *cannot*, by Compact, or his own Consent, *enslave himself* to any one, nor put himself under the Absolute, Arbitrary Power of another, to take away his Life, when he pleases. No body can give more Power than he has him-

self; and he that cannot take away his own Life, cannot give another power over it. Indeed having, by his fault, forfeited his own Life, by some Act that deserves Death; he, to whom he has forfeited it, may (when he has him in his Power) delay to take it, and make use of him to his own Service, and he does him no injury by it. For, whenever he finds the hardship of his Slavery out-weigh the value of his Life, ’tis in his Power, by resisting the Will of his Master, to draw on himself the Death he desires.

24. This is the perfect condition of Slavery, which is nothing else, but *the State of War continued, between a lawful Conquerour, and a Captive*. For, if once *Compact* enter between them, and make an agreement for a limited Power on the one side, and Obedience on the other, the State of War and *Slavery* ceases, as long as the Compact endures. For, as has been said, no Man can, by agreement, pass over to another that which he hath not in himself, a Power over his own Life.

Activity Options

- Writing for a Specific Purpose** Paraphrase Locke’s definition of liberty in your own words. Then share your definition with classmates.
- Recognizing Point of View** In this excerpt, Locke refers to Sir Robert Filmer, an author who promoted the royal view of the basis of governmental power. With a partner, role-play a conversation between Locke and Sir Robert Filmer about freedom and the role of government.