

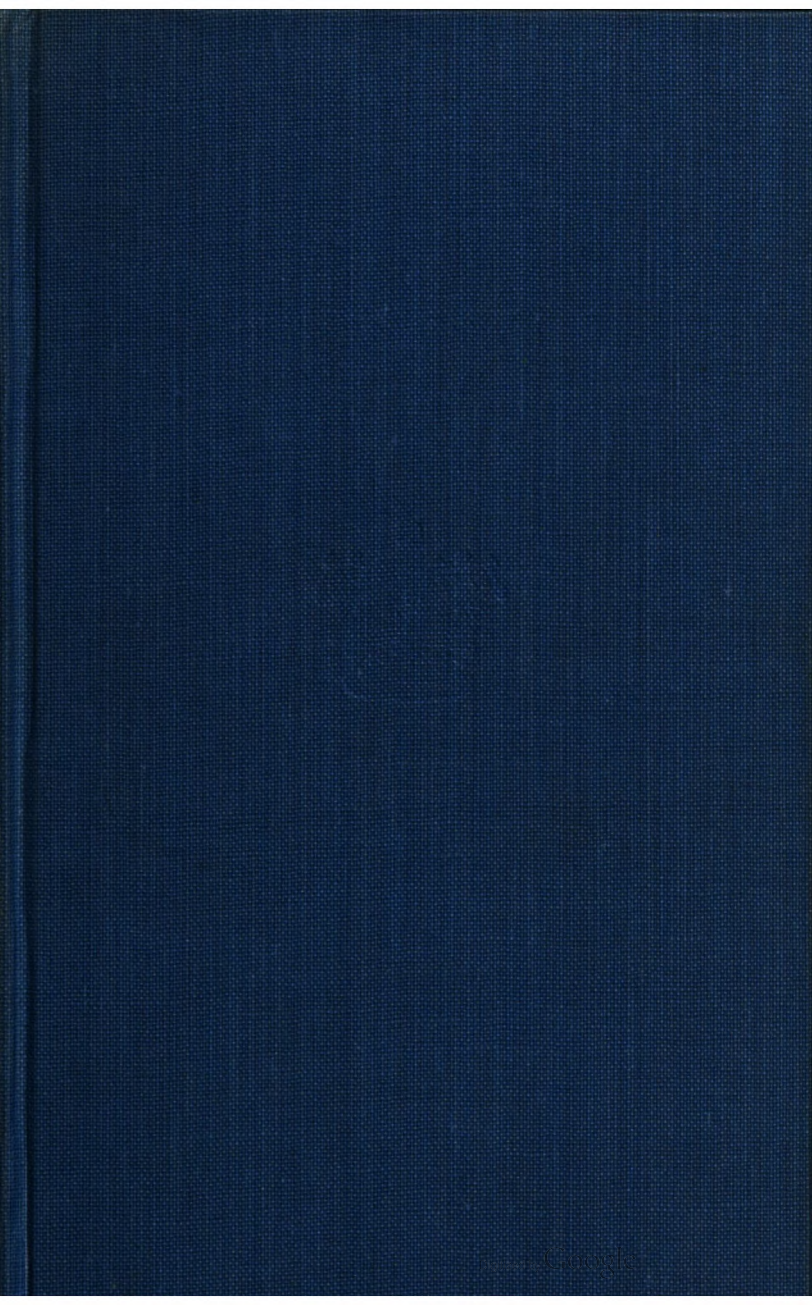
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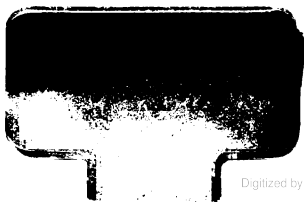
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# THOUGHTS

CONCERNING

THE ORIGIN

OF

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# T H O U G H T S

CONCERNING THE

## O R I G I N, &c.

1. **B**Y *Power*, I here mean, *Supreme Power*, the Power over Life and Death, and consequently over our Liberty and Property, and all things of an inferior nature.

2. In many nations this power has in all ages been lodged in a single person. This has been the case in almost the whole eastern world, from the earliest antiquity: As in the celebrated empires of *Affyria*, of *Babylon*, of *Media*, *Persa*, and many others. And so it remains to this day, from *Constantinople* to the farthest *India*. The same form of government obtained very early, in very many parts of *Afric*, and remains in most of them still, as well as in the empires of *Morocco* and *Abyssinia*. The first adventurers to *America* found absolute monarchy established there also: the whole power being lodged in the *Emperor* of *Mexico*, and the *Ynca's* of *Peru*. Nay, and many of the antient nations of *Europe* were governed by single persons; as *Spain*, *France*, the *Russia's*, and several other nations are at this day.

3. But in others, the power has been lodged in a few, chiefly the rich and noble. This kind of go-

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vernment,

vernment; usually stiled *Aristocracy*, obtained in *Greece*, and in *Rome*; after many struggles with the people, during the later ages of the republic. And this is the government which at present subsists in various parts of *Europe*. In *Venice* indeed, as well as in *Genoa*, the supreme power is nominally lodged in one, namely, the *Doge*: But in fact, he is only a royal shade: It is really lodged, in a few of the nobles.

4. Where the people have the supreme power, it is termed a *Democracy*. This seems to have been the antient form of government in several of the *Grecian* states. And so it was at *Rome*, for some ages, after the expulsion of the kings. From the earliest authentic records, there is reason to believe, it was for espousing the cause of the people, and defending their rights against the illegal incroachments of the nobles, that *Marcus Coriolanus* was driven into banishment, and *Manlius Capitolinus*, as well as *Tiberius* and *Caius Gracchus*, were murdered. Perhaps formerly the popular government subsisted in several states. But it is scarce now to be found, being every where swallowed up either in monarchy or aristocracy.

5. But the grand question is, not in whom this power is lodged, but from whom it is ultimately derived? What is the Origin of Power? What is its primary source? This has been long a subject of debate. And it has been debated with the utmost warmth, by a variety of disputants. But as earnest as they have been on each side of the question, they have seldom come to any good conclusion: but have left the point undecided still, to be a ball of contention to the next generation.

6. But is it impossible, in the nature of things, to throw any light on this obscure subject? Let us make the experiment: Let us (without pretending to *dictate*, but desiring every one to use his own judgment)



judgment) try to find out some ground whereon to stand, and go as far as we can toward answering the question. And let not any man be angry on the account, suppose we should not exactly agree. Let every one enjoy his own opinion, and give others the same liberty.

7. Now I cannot but acknowledge, I believe an old book, commonly called the Bible, to be true. Therefore I believe, *there is no power but from God; Rom. xiii. 1. The powers that be, are ordained of God.* There is no *subordinate power* in any nation, but what is derived from the supreme power therein. So in *England* the king, in the *United Provinces* the states are the fountain of all power. And there is no *supreme power*, no power of the sword, of life and death, but what is derived from God, the Sovereign of All.

8. But have not *the people*, in every age and nation, the right of disposing of this power? Of investing therewith whom they please, either one or more persons; and that, in what proportion they see good, and upon what conditions? Consequently, if those conditions are not observed, have they not a *right* to take away the power they gave? And does not this imply, that they are the judges, whether those conditions are observed or not? Otherwise, if the receivers were judges of their own cause, this right would fall into nothing,

9. To prove this, That *the people*, in every country, are the source of power, it is argued thus: "All men living upon earth are naturally equal; none is above another. And all are naturally free, masters of their own actions. It manifestly follows, no man can have any power over another, unless by his own consent. The power therefore which the governors in any nation enjoy, must be originally derived from *the people*, and presupposes an *original compact* between them and their first governors?"

10. This seems to be the opinion which is now generally espoused by men of understanding and education: and that (if I do not mistake) not in *England* alone, but almost in every civilized nation. And it is usually espoused with the fullest and strongest persuasion, as a truth little less than self-evident; as what is clear beyond all possibility of doubt, what commands the assent of all reasonable men. Hence if any man affected to deny it, he would in most companies be rather hooted at than argued with: it being so absurd to oppose, what is confirmed by the general suffrage of mankind.

11. But still (suppose it to need no proof) it may need a little explaining. For every one does not understand the term. Some will ask, Who are *the people*? Are they *every man, woman, and child*? Why not? Is it not allowed, is it not affirmed, is it not our fundamental principle, our incontestable, self-evident axiom, That "all persons living upon earth are naturally equal? That all human creatures are naturally free? Masters of their own actions? That none can have any power over others, but by their own consent?" Why then should not every man, woman, and child, have a voice in placing their governors? In fixing the measure of power to be intrusted with them, and the conditions on which it is intrusted? And why should not every man have a voice in displacing them too? Seeing it is undeniable, they that gave the power have a right to take it away. Do not quibble, or shuffle. Do not evade the question; but come close to the point. I ask, By what argument do you prove, that women are not naturally as free as men? And if they are, why have they not as good a right as we have to chuse their own governors? Who can have any power over free, rational creatures, but by their own consent? And are they not free by nature, as well as we? Are they not rational creatures?

12. But

12. But suppose we exclude women from using their natural right, by might overcoming right, by main strength; (for it is sure, that we are stronger than they: I mean, that we have stronger limbs, if we have not stronger reason) what pretence have we for excluding men like ourselves, yea thousands and tens of thousands, barely because they have not lived one and twenty years? "Why, they have not wisdom or experience to judge concerning the qualifications necessary for governors?" I answer, 1. Who has? How many of the voters in *Great-Britain*? One in twenty? One in an hundred? If you exclude all who have not this wisdom, you will leave few behind. But, 2. Wisdom and experience are nothing to the purpose. You have put the matter upon another issue. Are they men? That is enough. Are they human creatures? Then they have a right to chuse their own governors: An indefeisible right; a right inherent in, inseparable from human nature. "But, in *England*, at least, they are excluded by law." But did they consent to the making of that law? If not, by your original supposition, it can have no power over them. I therefore utterly deny, that we can, consistently with that supposition, debar either women or minors from chusing their own governors.

13. But suppose we exclude these by-main force; (which it is certain we are able to do, since though they have most votes, they have least strength) are all that remain, all *men of full age*, the people? Are all males then, that have lived one and twenty years, allowed to chuse their own governors? "Not at all: Not in *England*, unless they are *freeholders*, unless they have forty shillings a year." Worse and worse. After depriving half the human species of their natural right, for want of a beard; after depriving myriads more, for want of a stiff beard, for not having lived one and twenty years; you

you rob others (probably some hundred thousands) of their birthright, for want of money! Yet not altogether on this account neither: If so, it might be more tolerable. But here is an *Englishman*, who has money enough to buy the estates of fifty freeholders, and yet he must not be numbered among *the people*, because he has not two or three acres of land! How is this? By what right do you exclude a man from being one of *the people*, because he has not forty shillings a year? Yea, or not a groat? Is he not a man, whether he be rich or poor? Has he not a soul and a body? Has he not the nature of a man? Consequently all the rights of a man, all that flow from human nature? And among the rest, that of not being controlled by any, but by his own consent?

14. "But he is excluded by law." By what law? By a law of his own making? Did he consent to the making of it? Before this law was past, was his consent either obtained or asked? If not, what is that law to him? No man, you aver, has any power over another, but by his own consent. Of consequence, a law made without his consent, is with regard to him null and void. You cannot say otherwise, without destroying the supposition, that none can be governed but by his own consent.

15. See now, to what your argument comes. You affirm, All power is derived from *the people*: And presently exclude one half of the people, from having any part or lot in the matter. At another stroke, suppose *England* to contain eight millions of people, you exclude one or two millions more. At a third, suppose two millions left, you exclude three fourths of these. And the poor pittance that remains, by I know not what figure of speech, you call, *The people of England*.

16. Hitherto we have endeavoured to view this point in the mere light of reason. And even by this means it manifestly appears, that this supposition, which

which is so high in vogue, which is so generally received, nay, which has been palmed upon us with such confidence, as undeniable and self-evident, is not only false, not only contrary to reason, but contradictory to itself: the very men who are most positive, that *the people* are the source of power, being brought into an inextricable difficulty, by that single question, "Who are the people?" Reduced to a necessity of either giving up the point, or owning that by *the people* they mean scarce a tenth part of them.

17. But we need not rest the matter entirely on reasoning: Let us appeal to matter of fact. And because we cannot have so clear and certain a prospect of what is at too great a distance, whether of time or place, let us only take a view of what has been in our own country, for six or seven hundred years. I ask then, When and where did *the people of England*, (even suppose by that word, *the people*, you mean only an hundred thousand of them) chuse their own governors? Did they chuse, to go no farther, *William the Conqueror*? Did they chuse King *Stephen* or King *John*? As to those who regularly succeeded their fathers, 'tis plain *the people* are out of the question. Did they chuse *Henry the Fourth*? *Edward the Fourth*, or *Henry the Seventh*? Who will be so hardy as to affirm it? Did the *people of England*, or but fifty thousand of them, chuse Queen *Mary* or Queen *Elizabeth*? To come nearer to our own times, Did they chuse King *James the First*? Perhaps you will say, "But if the people did not give King *Charles* the supreme power, at least they took it away from him. Surely you will not deny this." Indeed I will: I deny it utterly. The *people of England* no more took away his power, than they cut off his head. "Yes, the parliament did, and they are the people." No: the parliament did not. The lower house, the house of commons, is not



not *the parliament*, any more than it is the nation. Neither were those who then sat, the house of commons: No, nor one quarter of them. But suppose they had been the whole house of commons, yea, or the whole parliament: By what rule of logick will you prove, that seven or eight hundred persons are *the people of England*? “ Why, they are the delegates of the people; they are chosen by them.” No, not by one half, not by a quarter, not by a tenth part of them. So that *the people*, in the only proper sense of the word, were innocent of the whole affair.

18. “ But you will allow, *the people* gave the supreme power to King *Charles* the Second, at the restoration.” I will allow no such thing; unless by *the people* you mean general *Monck* and fifteen thousand soldiers. “ However you will not deny, that *the people* gave the power to King *William*, at the revolution.” Nay truly, I must deny this too. I cannot possibly allow it. Although I will not say, that *William* the Third obtained the royal power, as *William* the First did: Although he did not claim it by right of conquest, which would have been an odious title: Yet certain it is, that he did not receive it by any act or deed of *the people*. Their consent was neither obtained nor asked: they were never consulted in the matter. It was not therefore *the people* that gave him the power: No, nor even the parliament. It was the *convention*, and none else. “ Who were the *convention*?” They were a few hundred lords and gentlemen, who observing the desperate state of public affairs, met together on that important occasion. So that still we have no single instance, in above seven hundred years, of *the people* of *England*'s conveying the supreme power, either to one or more persons.

19. Indeed I remember in all history, both ancient and modern, but one instance of supreme power

power conferred by *the people*; if we mean thereby, though not all the people, yet a great majority of them. This celebrated instance occurred at *Naples*, in the middle of the last century; where *the people*, properly speaking, that is, men, women, and children, claimed and exerted their natural right in favour of *Thomas Aniello*, (vulgarly called *Massanello*) a young fisherman. But will any one say, he was the only governor for these thousand years, who has had a proper right to the supreme power? I believe not: Nor, I apprehend, does any one desire, that *the people* should take the same steps in *London*.

20. So much both for reason and matter of fact. But one single consideration, if we dwell a little upon it, will bring the question to a short issue. It is allowed, no man can dispose of another's life, but by his own consent. I add, no, nor with his consent. For no man has a right to dispose of his own life. The Creator of man has the sole right to take the life which he gave. Now it is an indisputable truth, *Nihil dat quod non habet*: None gives what he has not. It plainly follows, that no man can give to another a right which he never had himself: A right which only the Governor of the World has; even the wiser heathens being judges: but which no man upon the face of the earth either has or can have. No man therefore can give the power of the sword, any such power as implies a right to take away life. Wherever it is, it must descend from God alone, the sole disposer of life and death.

21. The supposition then, that *the people* are the origin of power, is every way indefensible. It is absolutely overturned by the very principle on which it is supposed to stand, namely, That a right of chusing his governors belongs to every partaker of human nature. If this be so, then it belongs to every individual of the human species: Consequently,  
not

not to freeholders alone, but to all-men; not to men only, but to women also: Nor only to adult men and women, to those who have lived one and twenty years, but to those who have lived eighteen or twenty, as well as those who have lived three-score. But none did ever maintain this, nor probably ever will. Therefore this boasted principle falls to the ground, and the whole superstructure with it. So common sense brings us back to the grand truth, *There is no power but of God.*



F I N I S





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