

QUOTES BY JOHN LOCKE

You will notice that in a few instances, a portion of a quotation will appear as a separate item. I have not tried to eliminate these “duplications,” because the longer quote often will provide a context that enhances understanding, even as the shorter portion can, at the same time, drive home the point of the statement with a more concentrated emphasis.

This list is available online <https://www.discoverbedrocktruth.org/meetjohnlocke/>.

Children and Parenting

1. As children’s inquiries are not to be slighted, so also great care is to be taken, that they never receive deceitful and illuding answers. They easily perceive when they are slighted or deceived, and quickly learn the trick of neglect, dissimulation, and falsehood, which they observe others to make use of. We are not to intrench upon truth in any conversation, but least of all with children; since, if we play false with them, we not only deceive their expectation, and hinder their knowledge, but corrupt their innocence, and teach them the worst of vices.
2. Curiosity should be as carefully cherish’d in children, as other appetites suppress’d.
3. There is frequently more to be learned from the unexpected questions of a child than the discourses of men.
4. Parents wonder why the streams are bitter, when they themselves have poisoned the fountain.

Christianity / Religion

- 5 When I had gone through the whole, and saw what a plain, simple, reasonable thing Christianity was, suited to all conditions and capacities; and in the morality of it now, with divine authority, established into a legible law, so far surpassing all that philosophy and human reason had attained to, or could possibly make effectual to all degrees of man kind; I was flattered to think it might be of some use in the world.
- 6 He that denies any of the doctrines that Christ has delivered, to be true, denies him to be sent from God, and consequently to be the Messiah; and so ceases to be a Christian.
- 7 Whosoever will list himself under the banner of Christ, must, in the first place and above all things, make war upon his own lusts and vices. It is in vain for any man to usurp the name of Christian, without holiness of life, purity of manners, benignity and meekness of spirit.
- 8 To give a man full knowledge of morality, I would send him to no other book than the New Testament.
- 9 The greatest part cannot know, and therefore they must believe.

Education

- 10 The only fence against the world is a thorough knowledge of it, into which a young gentleman should be enter’d by degrees, as he can bear it; and the earlier the better, so he be in safe and skillful hands to guide him.

- 11 The business of education is not to make the young perfect in any one of the sciences, but so to open and dispose their minds as may best make them – capable of any, when they shall apply themselves to it.
- 12 The improvement of the understanding is for two ends; first, for our own increase of knowledge; secondly, to enable us to deliver and make out that knowledge to others.
- 13 Knowledge is grateful to the understanding, as light to the eyes.
- 14 The chief art of learning is to attempt but a little at a time.

General Revelation / Natural Law

- 15 Reason is natural revelation, whereby the eternal father of light, and fountain of all knowledge, communicates to mankind that portion of truth which he has laid within the reach of their natural faculties: revelation is natural reason enlarged by a new set of discoveries communicated by God. . . .
- 16 Untruth being unacceptable to the mind of man, there is no other defence left for absurdity but obscurity.
- 17 Those are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all.
- 18 The works of nature and the works of revelation display religion to mankind in characters so large and visible that those who are not quite blind may in them see and read the first principles and most necessary parts of it and from thence penet into those infinite depths filled with the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
- 19 Thus the law of nature stands as an eternal rule to all men, legislators as well as others. The rules that they make for other mens actions, must, as well as their own and other mens actions, be conformable to the law of nature, i.e. to the will of God, of which that is a declaration, and the fundamental law of nature being the preservation of mankind, no human sanction can be good, or valid against it.
- 20 The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it.
- 21 Merit and good works is the end of man’s motion; and conscience of the same is the accomplishment of man’s rest; for if a man can be partaker of God’s theatre, he shall likewise be partaker of God’s rest.
- 22 In transgressing the law of nature, the offender declares himself to live by another rule than that of reason and common equity.

Law and Liberty

- 23 To love our neighbor as ourselves is such a truth for regulating human society, that by that alone one might determine all the cases in social morality.
- 24 Moral laws are set as a curb and restraint to these exorbitant desires, which they cannot be but by rewards and punishments, that will over-balance the satisfaction any one shall propose to himself in the breach of the law.
- 25 The end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom. For in all the states of created beings capable of law, where there is no law, there is no freedom.
- 26 The people cannot delegate to government the power to do anything which would be unlawful for them to do themselves.
- 27 Who are we to tell anyone what they can or can’t do?

- 28 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 vested in it and not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, arbitrary will of another man.
- 29 Good and evil, reward and punishment, are the only motives to a rational creature
- 30 Where there is no law there is no freedom.
- 31 Liberty is to be free from restraint and violence from others.

Observations and Insights About People and Life

- 32 It is of great use to the sailor to know the length of his line, though he cannot with it fathom all the depths of the ocean.
- 33 Who lies for you will lie against you.
- 34 Success in fighting means not coming at your opponent the way he wants to fight you.
- 35 Action is the great business of mankind, and the whole matter about which all laws are conversant.
- 36 Struggle is nature's way of strengthening it
- 37 The rising unto place is laborious, and by pains men come to greater pains; and it is sometimes base, and by indignities men come to dignities.
- 38 When Fashion hath once Established, what Folly or craft began, Custom makes it Sacred, and 'twill be thought impudence or madness, to contradict or question it.
- 39 Whosoever is found variable, and changeth manifestly without manifest cause, giveth suspicion of corruption: therefore, always, when thou changest thine opinion or course, profess it plainly, and declare it, together with the reasons that move thee to change.
- 40 It is hard to know what other way men can come to truth, to lay hold of it, if they do not dig and search for it as for gold and hid treasure; but he that does so, must have much earth and rubbish, before he gets the pure metal; sand, and pebbles, and dross usually lie blended with it, but the gold is nevertheless gold, and will enrich the man that employs his pains to seek and separate it.
- 41 The dread of evil is a much more forcible principle of human actions than the prospect of good.
- 42 Habits wear more constantly and with greatest force than reason, which, when we have most need of it, is seldom fairly consulted, and more rarely obeyed
- 43 That which is static and repetitive is boring. That which is dynamic and random is confusing. In between lies art.
- 44 The discipline of desire is the background of character.
- 45 It is one thing to persuade, another to command; one thing to press with arguments, another with penalties.
- 46 Firmness or stiffness of the mind is not from adherence to truth, but submission to prejudice.

Property Rights

- 47 [E]very Man has a Property in his own Person. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The Labour of his Body, and the Work of his Hands, we may say, are properly his. The great and chief end therefore, of Mens uniting into Commonwealths, and putting themselves under Government, is the Preservation of their Property.
- 48 The most precious of all possessions is power over ourselves.
- 49 The reason why men enter into society is the preservation of their property.

- 50 For a man's property is not at all secure, though there be good and equitable laws to set the bounds of it, between him and his fellow subjects, if he who commands those subjects, have power to take from any private man, what part he pleases of his property, and use and dispose of it as he thinks good.
- 51 As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivated, and can use the product of, so much is his property. He by his labour does, as it were, enclose it from the common.

Role of Government

- 52 A king is a mortal god on earth, unto whom the living God hath lent his own name as a great honour; but withal told him, he should die like a man, lest he should be proud, and flatter himself that God hath with his name imparted unto him his nature also.
- 53 The care of souls cannot belong to the civil magistrate.
- 54 Government has no other end, but the preservation of property.

Tyranny

- 55 As usurpation is the exercise of power which another has a right to, so tyranny is the exercise of power beyond right, which nobody can have a right to
- 56 If any one shall claim a power to lay and levy taxes on the people by his own authority and without such consent of the people, he thereby invades the fundamental law of property, and subverts the end of government.
- 57 I have no reason to suppose that he, who would take away my Liberty, would not when he had me in his Power, take away everything else.
- 58 Whenever legislators endeavor to take away and destroy the property of the people, or to reduce them to slavery under arbitrary power, they put themselves into a state of war with the people, who are thereupon absolved from any further obedience.
- 59 Wherever Law ends, Tyranny begins.
- 60 Whoever uses force without Right ... puts himself into a state of War with those, against whom he uses it, and in that state all former Ties are canceled, all other Rights cease, and every one has a Right to defend himself, and to resist the Aggressor.
- 61 'Tis a Mistake to think this Fault [tyranny] is proper only to Monarchies; other Forms of Government are liable to it, as well as that. For where-ever the Power that is put in any hands for the Government of the People, and the Preservation of their Properties, is applied to other ends, and made use of to impoverish, harass, or subdue them to the Arbitrary and Irregular Commands of those that have it: There it presently becomes Tyranny, whether those that thus use it are one or many.

Unalienable Rights

- 62 The body of People may with Respect resist intolerable Tyranny.
- 63 MEN being, as has been said, by nature, all free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of this estate, and subjected to the political power of another, without his own consent.
- 64 [Individuals] have a right to defend themselves and recover by force what by unlawful force is taken from them.

- 65 To understand political power right, and derive it from its original, we must consider, what state all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man.
- 66 All men by nature are equal in that equal right that every man hath to his natural freedom, without being subjected to the will or authority of any other man; being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions.
- 67 Any single man must judge for himself whether circumstances warrant obedience or resistance to the commands of the civil magistrate; we are all qualified, entitled, and morally obliged to evaluate the conduct of our rulers. This political judgment, moreover, is not simply or primarily a right, but like self-preservation, a duty to God. As such it is a judgment that men cannot part with according to the God of Nature. It is the first and foremost of our inalienable rights without which we can preserve no other.
- 68 [I]t being reasonable and just, I should have a right to destroy that which threatens me with destruction: for by the fundamental law of nature, man being to be preserved as much as possible, when all cannot be preserved, the safety of the innocent is to be preferred: and one may destroy a man who makes war upon him, or has discovered an enmity to his being, for the same reason that he may kill a Wolf or a lion.
- 69 To be rational is so glorious a thing, that two-legged creatures generally content themselves with the title.
- 70 Revolt is the right of the people
- 71 All mankind ... being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions.

Work and Initiative

- 72 Though the water running in the fountain be every ones, yet who can doubt, but that in the pitcher is his only who drew it out?
- 73 All wealth is the product of labor.
- 74 He that has his chains knocked off, and the prison doors set open to him, is perfectly at liberty, because he may either go or stay, as he best likes; though his preference be determined to stay, by the darkness of the night, or illness of the weather, or want of other lodging.
- 75 Nature never makes excellent things, for mean or no uses: and it is hardly to be conceived, that our infinitely wise Creator, should make so admirable a Faculty, as the power of Thinking, that Faculty which comes nearest the Excellency of his own incomprehensible Being, to be so idly and uselessly employ'd, at least 1/4 part of its time here, as to think constantly, without remembering any of those Thoughts, without doing any good to it self or others, or being anyway useful to any other part of Creation.
- 76 Where there is no desire, there will be no industry.