

Godwin, William. *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Bioren and Madan, 1796.

William Godwin (1756-1836) worked in England as a journalist and political philosopher. Godwin also wrote novels under the pseudonym Edward Baldwin, one of which (*Things as They Are*) is the first mystery novel. Godwin revived anarchism as a political theory, and advocated utilitarian principles as well. Godwin married Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote early feminist works, including *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Their daughter, Mary, wed poet Percy Bysshe Shelly, and wrote *Frankenstein*. Godwin penned children's books, among them *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Godwin's unorthodox political theory landed him in difficulty with British conservatism, and made his life as a radical difficult. The epitome below summarizes Godwin's second of three editions (1793, 1796, 1798) of *Political Justice*, the 1796 version.

Preface. As science progresses, so too political theory. Godwin offers a new political theory. Godwin finds monarchies universally corrupt. He follows ideas emerging from the American and French revolutions. He wrote this book in sixteen months. Godwin anticipates censorship from the British government as to his work (1793).

VOLUME I

BOOK I. OF THE IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

- 1. Introduction.** Men dispute what political arrangements best promote human happiness. Some welcome any government in preference to anarchy; others think governments a matter of indifference. Godwin asks whether governments do not have greater influence than imagined. They can remove temptations, excise error, thereby increasing the likelihood of virtue in the populace.
- 2. History of Political Society.** In ancient times, war predominated human enterprise. Modern France and England wage constant wars for reasons persuasive only to themselves. Domestically, persons deprived of a means of living turn to crime, and are met with horrid instruments of punishment. Despotisms abound globally. Godwin tells us all this to emphasize that the question of governments is critical. One can hope that, as in science or mathematics, disputes get resolved, and political theory may progress. Mankind may one day agree about their common nature and share equitably all things. Man is, politically, progressing.
- 3. The Moral Character of Men Originate in their Perceptions.** Men are born without ideas or principles. Virtue consists in desire to undertake actions rationally calculated to bring benefit. Even reflexes are learned behaviors, not innate tendencies. All claims of innate action on the part of humans actually reflect deliberations on survival; those that make survival more likely we call good. Men lack virtue or vice at birth. Such are instilled by parental action and inaction. To coddle a child is to create a despotic monster. Man lacks a bent toward evil. Children become what we make them. Man can make the children of future generations better than he has made those of the past.
- 4. Three Principal Causes of Moral Improvement Considered.** Minds improve under the influence of literature, education, and political justice. Political justice emerges when a true moral scheme governs community life.

Literature leads society toward truths, which leap from the clash of mind with mind. When nothing is so sacred as to escape inspection, then true science rushes forward. A fine education at the hands of a well-educated mentor may rid a person of the ill-ideas of society. Godwin speaks not of education as then practiced, but of mentorship, where one great mind shapes another, or at most a few minds. Political justice strongly influences all minds. Lack of it induces erroneous opinion and character. Widespread error seldom perseveres except by government support. Where people question things, errors are relatively short-lived. Vice is error become habitual and hardened into vile principles. The injury such views cause hastens detection of the

errors. Governments teach us to look backwards to the decisions of long-dead persons for perfection. Perfection lies ahead, in innovation and improvement.

5. **Influence of Political Institutions Exemplified.** Robbery and fraud are the great local abuses. Both may be alleviated by stanching poverty, quashing exhibitions of luxury, and suppressing the insolence of rich people in publicly demeaning the poor. Where poverty stands beside wealth baldly, robbery and fraud ensue. Men pursue wealth for praise, to induce envy. Money-mongering becomes an obsession. Governments support this passion. First, laws favor the rich, often in the structure of taxation. Criminal law crushes the poor for behaviors to which the rich have no temptation. Second, the administration of laws favors the rich. Courts are irrevocably slanted toward people of means, so much so that poor people should walk away from contested property rather than fight for it. What could help more than a cheap and rapid decision of disputes? Third, wealth is arranged to demean the poor. Meaningful citizenship and equality before the law could remediate this engine of robbery and fraud.
6. **Human Inventions Capable of Perpetual Improvement.** Man is perfectible, due to language, abstraction, and comparison. The alphabet indicates the progressive nature of human perfectibility. All science admits progression. So too morals and social institutions. They can move forward and improve. This is the critical attitude to adopt when studying politics.
7. **Of the Objection to these Principles from the Influence of Climate.** Men are moved by ideas and animal motives. These latter count for little. For the mind's attitudes shape physical discomforts, so much so that discomfort is primarily a moral event. What distinguishes one man from another is the complex of ideas each entertains. Physical impairments wane before the primacy of reflective science. Peoples too have characters. Truth spreads quite naturally, and people of similar social position tend to don similar characters, despite cultural deviations. Is climate determinative of social structures? No, moral sentiment, especially the desire to adopt truths as one's own for its personal benefit, determines society and government. One may have to tolerate ill-government for a time, while slowly better opinions spread through a people. The danger lies in believing that what government exists is the last word and unchangeable. We may be patient, but should not acquiesce.
8. **Of the Objection to these Principles from the Influence of Luxury.** Some argue that luxury renders men so inert that good government has no effect upon them. Ideas spread and generations pass. The next generation may be less hidebound than its parents. Luxury may lead some to decadence. But that decadence is a state of mind. Prove to those men that their weal lies in some different idea, and they will adopt it. Men do what they deem preferable. None chooses evil knowingly. And men who have abandoned long practice as an evil refuse to return to that practice.

BOOK II. PRINCIPLES OF SOCIETY

1. **Introduction.** Men associate naturally in society. Governments arise from the perversity of a few among men.
2. **Of Justice.** Justice consists in contributing to society everything in one's power. Justice presupposes all to be equal. Nevertheless, men are not equal. That life is best which does the most for the general good. Most we should value intentions toward the general good. Men are not all-knowing, nor are they able to treat other men exactly according to their merit. Justice demands a man do the good in his power, unless such action greatly injure himself or society. Wealth inequality is justified if the wealthy view their riches as trust funds held to benefit all men. None remains for luxuries or caprice. As the wealthy are obliged by justice to give, so the poor are obliged to receive. So, no giving is a grace; all is obligation. Governments can only get out of the way of just society by making no irrational rules or arbitrary distinctions among men. Individual virtue will make an improving society.

Appendix 1: Of Suicide. Suicide lacks warrant in pain or disgrace. Living, a man in pain or disgrace may yet do enormous good.

Appendix 2: Of Duelling. One can never justify ending the possibly useful life of another for the sake of insult or revenge. Courage lies not in murdering opponents, but in speaking truth to them, regardless of consequences.

3. **Of Duty.** Justice may differ from our perceptions of justice. We are often wrong. But morality is fixed and unchanging. Humans reason well in justifying unjustified acts; such is hypocrisy. Often, those who commit evils are driven by conviction. Calvin, in good conscience, burned Michael Servetus. Calvin knew nothing of toleration; we cannot hold him to truths of which he knew nothing. We have no duty to be divine in our omniscience. We owe a duty to be employed in the general good. But our duty is diminished by our incapacities, of which ignorance or stupidity or deformity are some. Our mistaken acts may not be blameworthy. This however does not make them virtuous either. Since one cannot know if one acts virtuously, one should make his character, as nearly as possible, disposed to good acts in conformity with an ever-reviewed and improving conscience.
4. **Of the Equality of Mankind.** Men are less physically equal in modern society than in pristine times, but are still largely so. Morally, men are equal in that the same rules apply to every man. We share common sense, ideas, pleasures and pains. There are no facts that support intolerance and prejudice. Hence, we should, to the extent possible, remove all arbitrary distinctions among men and give each the same opportunities.
5. **Rights of Man.** When men associate, some mode of behavior becomes normal for them. All associates imagine that their union will benefit all, and for this purpose they join. The question of human rights has grown muddled. Men have no rights, since their duties impinge on every aspect of life. Men have no right to a free press, but such is nevertheless necessary to human moral and technical progress. Society has no right to impede men's free thinking.
6. **On the Exercise of Private Judgment.** Life holds pleasure and misery. One must conduct himself to obtain the former and flee the latter. Societies create rules that may help induce virtue. One should look only to results, doing well regardless of personal gain or loss. Societal rules may inform and encourage members. But more likely they will coerce an unthinking uniformity among men, with the effect of quashing all enquiries. Genuine human society lacks such coercions, resting rather in every member hearing soberly the voice of reason. This latter is the "universal exercise of private judgment." The wise politicians keeps his hands off it, except in cases of extremity (such as multiple murders), though even here, all crimes have individual flavors. Laws lop off those differences. Legal punishments teach men little; they rather incite them to unending anger. Punishments are nothing more than abusive coercions by the stronger upon the weaker. Nor does punishment deter others. It remains unjust to punish one to educate others. The education delivered makes its students tremble and cower and dissemble. Still, all punishments cannot be foregone. Some humans behave wildly, injuring or killing others, and appear immune to reason. One cannot be rid of punishments until one rids man of ill-behaviors. Punishments are always an evil, and their use should occur only in extremity. Private judgment may also be over-ruled by the attacks of internal or external enemies. Governments must tax, for no war could be won on the voluntary contributions of supporters of that war alone.

BOOK III. PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT

1. **Systems of Political Writers.** When and under what conditions may society coerce individuals? Political writers differ. One group says that political coercion is ever necessary and belongs to those who can muster it. A second group asserts gods appoint kings. A third group argues for that a social contract underlies government. Force, however, is no argument for government. Neither is divine intervention, since none can prove which governments have divine appointment. The third option requires careful examination.

2. **Of the Social Contract.** Of the social contract, who are its parties? What are its terms? Can ancestors bind the living? Justification of the contract is dubious. Subsequent generations do not consent, but inherit whatever government they are born into. They do not consent, and only sometimes acquiesce. Practically, consent is impossible. How long would consent last? How would the request for consent be stated? Certainly, government can have no authority over those who dissent when the time for consenting arrives. Nor may a man delegate his moral capacity to another, even a majority.
3. **Of Promises.** Promises to perform under a contract are superfluous. Either the promised behavior is just in itself, and so should be performed, or it is unjust, and should not be performed. Promises add scant force among honest men, and are of no import to dishonest men. Some object that such a world could exist, but does not. Men promise without intention to perform; these must be compelled. Godwin does not address such a world, but rather a world in which men seek to do what benefits, and avoid what harms, as reason dictates. Such men promise seldom, and perform justice often. The social contract provides no reliable rationale for the existence of the state.
4. **Of Political Authority.** Just government benefits all and is administered by all. Nothing makes one man more likely to rule well than others, one never knows until one rules how that person will rule, all men share reason and truth, and every man should participate in defending himself. One should delegate as needed, depending on the circumstances. Some argue, with Rousseau, that no man can justly delegate his affairs to another. This is answered by the fact that consensus is unworkable in large groups, and minorities must leave or acquiesce in the view of majorities. Just delegation aims at the common good. Coercion must wait until every lesser persuasion has been exhausted. Men should deliberate in common on all matters, to the extent that is feasible. This is no social contract. Deliberation pertains to what lies ahead, and deliberation improves both a man and his government. Reasons implies that private concerns must yield to the common good.
5. **Of Legislation.** To legislate exceeds human competence. Only reason can guide groups of men. Societies interpret basic justice, which is the same for all men. Legislatures interpret, not decree. Executives administer universal justice. No man creates justice.
6. **Of Obedience.** No man owes his support to government acts, except when those acts coincide with truth and justice. When government errs, one resists. We may obey wrong acts and commands, but we must do so with dissent, as one might submit to a wild animal. Morality precludes one man controlling the acts of another, except by express agreement (as in commerce). We benefit from communicating, for the views of others sometimes enlighten me and deflect my conduct. And we benefit from the expertise of others. It is best, however, that one delegate as little as possible and perform his own duties himself. It is only when men surrender their decision-making to others that mischief ensues, but the delegator has ceased moral learning.

Appendix. Godwin cites a few literary passages that also stand for the proposition that one should attend to one's own decision-making in most matters, relinquishing none to the State.

7. **Of Forms of Government.** Some believe that different populations are suited to different forms of government, just as in religious diversity. Godwin dissents. Truth is one, and so too the best form of government is one. One progresses in increments from the current state toward a better one. Men change constantly, either improving or worsening their habits. Governments tend to make men static. Government is an evil of which we should have as little as maintaining the peace requires. Citizens should discuss all matters, which conversation guides them from errors toward truth. Government must stay out of this public conversation; one requires neutrality from the State.

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BOOK IV. MISCELLANEOUS PRINCIPLES

- 1. Of Resistance.** People must resist governmental acts that, in their private judgment, fail of justice. Governments exist for exigent circumstances, when men must cooperate to evade dire outcomes. A good government never interferes with private judgment except in such extremity. One resists by action or words. Martyrs act, giving their lives for a cause. Their sacrifices often include innocent others. Godwin prefers speech, but opposes acts of violence that might arise from the speech. Force can be employed only where every other alternative has been exhausted. Where events injure human best interests, one is obligated to speak the truth in censuring the bad actors.
- 2. Of Revolutions.** How can revolutions best be effected? Political truth boils down to utility. Revolutions consist in the change of the ideas and values of the citizenry. The best means for changing public opinion is persuasive argument, which itself occurs best when no restrictions are placed upon discussion. Leave no justifications for violence, which commits outcomes to chance and barbarism. Reasoned discussion avoids inflaming peoples, and proceeds at a slow, but inexorable, pace. Godwin speculates that had the American and French Revolutions occurred in the 19th century, when reason had better grip on mankind, perhaps no blood would have been shed at all. One should seek to improve every hour, but willingly wait years to see application of the insights gained. One must preserve the tranquility of the population.

Revolutions commence in the mind of some studious person, and from there spread to nations. The theorists are few; the people many. Wisdom born from study spreads to the people slowly but regularly. Sinister persons may seek precipitous change, and to whip up crowds. All political associations must carefully avoid enthusiasms and riots. Mobs are cruel and violent. Truth has its own weight and motion, and requires no mob zeal to press its agenda. There is no need to act precipitately; truth is omnipotent. Men in their conversations at present keep a distance and reveal little of themselves. The wise and kind man leaps forward, seeking political opinions, and making of every conversation a chance that society might be improved. Books have their place, but conversation is more important. One sees that great minds cluster, largely as a result of their interactions. With some economic leveling and removing a few teeth from governmental oppression, one may well create an explosion of political conversation. Two people talk, then a few. The changes they effect persuade many of the benefit awaiting. Do not let the halls of discussion degenerate into noisy assemblies of rowdies. Never obey authorities. Seek truth in political matters. Governments erected upon ignorance are the bane of mankind.

Truth is a whole. Its parts cannot be usefully sundered. When we do so, we render plausible the views that the human mind cannot reach truth or that truth has little value in the rough and tumble world. Social improvement progresses by changing public opinion. True reforms find public support. In politics, as in personal progress, our changes are incremental and become habitual. We should proceed with political change only when we have become unanimous, or virtually so. This political revolution Godwin proposes is not necessarily in the distant future. Often, seeds lie dormant and then spring to life. True change will come without sword or effort, when people share a view of the world that has grown common.
- 3. Of Tyrannicide.** Some argue that tyrants, being above the law, should be killed for their injustices. Godwin dissents. Except when the tyrant seeks to injure one directly, in which case a person may justly defend himself, tyrants should be constrained by the usual course of administration. Such prosecutions should be public. Where the public administration is too weak for such undertakings, individuals sometimes kill tyrants. But if renewed tyranny follows the murder, the successor will be yet more cruel, knowing his peril. And assassinations rend the moral fabric. Mutual confidence collapses where assassination is applauded. One must act with sincerity, a sincerity quite at odds with solo assassination.
- 4. Of the Cultivation of Truth.** Truth is the most important factor in political change. Truth, theoretically, improves people and institutions continually. Truth teaches men the results of action, and identifies a path toward improvement. This is virtue. Human happiness consists in

virtue. Unbridled passions ebb and flow with the availability of their object. Virtue, blooming from truth, is inexhaustible. Virtue improves men and their institutions. Since truth is one, there exists some one best approach for inculcating virtue in our persons and institutions. Sincerity is the key. One must speak the truths one knows frankly and without an eye to personal gain or loss. One cannot know how far the effects of a single sincere man might reach. The opposite of sincerity is cowardice. One hides the truths he knows for fear of the loss he might incur by speaking and acting. Confronting others is converted by one's sincerity from a challenge to a kindness. One need not be cruel or hasty in speaking truths. The right time arises. If one may die for speaking truth, let him die. Otherwise, one commits one crime to hide another. The virtuous man behaves as though always watched. Some (Voltaire) wrongly argue that we should put forth truth in increments, so each truth prepares the way for the next. Godwin will have none of this. Voltaire spent all his time fleeing governments. Truth is imperious. Only our cowardice impedes its effects. No man can guess how to present truth piecemeal in a manner that helps.

Appendix No. 1: Of the Connexion Between Understanding and Virtue. Virtue aims to benefit all sentient beings. That at which virtue aims must be a matter of value. The desire to act virtuously creates, by hard practice, a capacity for virtue. So the weak may have virtue. The converse is also true. Great talent may lack virtue altogether. Though the skills of great talent may predispose such persons to virtue, they may nevertheless lack it. Instead of seeking truth, the talented mind may create diversions and sophistries. The core of virtue consists in one's sense of justice. Still, talent predisposes one to virtue, even if it also inspires them to jealousies and simmering wars with colleagues.

Appendix No. 2: Of the Mode of Excluding Visitors. Some ask servants to tell visitors that the person sought is not at home, when it is the case that the person sought is present but does not wish to be disturbed. Such prevarication is unwarranted; it deceives the visitor and bids the servant to deliver a message he knows to be false. One may wish to be rid of visitors one does not prefer. If only one had been frank in dealings with them generally, these pests would not come visiting.

Appendix No 3: Subject of Sincerity Resumed. If one resides in a culture where speaking the truth bluntly will bring martyrdom, one should move. Hiding one's opinions injures oneself and fellows as well. Insincerity erodes character. Failing frankness, one loses ardor for inquiring and understanding. Sincerity does not require that one discuss mysteries with idiots, nor intimacies with strangers. When questioned, be frank and direct. There are no temporal concerns that should overrule sincerity.

5. **Of Free Will and Necessity.** All moral actions are necessary; free will cannot serve as an adequate alternative. Godwin calls this the doctrine of moral necessity. By necessity, Godwin means that, given a just and comprehensive view of the circumstances of a situation, all persons must act as they act. All physical events are determined. The uniformity of cause and result that men observe demands necessity. All human knowledge is empirical. We observe perpetual conjunction of events, and surmise cause and effect from that conjunction. The mind has conjunctions of events similar to that of the physical universe. Even in moral questions, there exist correlations tantamount to cause and effect. By long observation of a man, one can predict his conduct. This is what is meant by habit and character. Some, despite these considerations, still argue that some freedom remains in human choosing. But, no, whatever seems to be freedom is merely a cause not yet understood. Those who believe in free will despair of explanation of mental events. The voluntary acts of neighbors become a part of the calculus of the observant person. Voluntary actions show foresight, intention, and design. But trace as one might, one never finds the free act, disjointed from its predecessor state, but always necessity leading to necessity. Will is the last act of understanding. Godwin argues that free will destroys the basis of morality by introducing mere chance and caprice into the equation.
6. **Inferences from the Doctrine of Necessity.** The doctrine of moral necessity, which asserts that in every instance no man may have acted otherwise than as he has acted, destroys, so some say,

virtue, it no longer being attributable to a person, but rather to a string of causal events which were unavoidable. All talk of making elections among courses of action is illusive. We do not choose. Man is essentially passive, swept along in the course of his history, not an actor. Some worry moral necessity might lead people to indolence or neglect of moral rigor in punishments. But, in fact, it changes none of this. Rigor and punishment are truth being discovered. They persevere. The goodness of acts does not urge choosing them, nor the badness. There is no blame, only necessity. This leaves the observer with a placid mind. The language of choice is deeply embedded in our culture, and exists side by side with necessity in the ill-tutored mind.

7. **Of the Mechanisms of the Human Mind.** The human mind is a mechanism. Some debate the sort of mental mechanism: on the one hand, a few prefer to believe the mind a physical machine, others that it is a separate order of existence, a mental machine, though still a mechanism. Thought creates animal motion in man. Not all thought is conscious. The mind attends only one thing at a time, though this object of attention need not be simple. Comparison places a preceding idea alongside an oncoming idea. Sentences appear complex, but are in fact simple. Their lines and whorls pass with incredible rapidity across the mind. Our thoughts are many; we remember few of them. Time varies according to the mood of the person experiencing it. Of our many sense impressions, we experience in consciousness only those that win the competition for attention among the many. Conscious action seems to devolve into unconscious action, as in the case of walking. Involuntary metabolic, cardiac, or pulmonary functions also begin in thought, but its origin is hidden from us. So too dreaming.
8. **Of the Principle of Virtue.** In what thoughts does moral conduct emerge? Some argue that we are sometimes acting for self and sometimes for others. Others argue that we act only for self in all instances. Godwin opts for the former. Man becomes specifically moral by developing the habit of associating two ideas together and thereby predicting outcomes of acts. The predictions tend toward action. The advocates of self-love alone cannot account adequately for altruistic endeavors among men. Godwin expands on the deficiencies of the “all acts are self-love” theory at some length. If self-love be all, then virtue lacks substance. It is not so. We regard with praise men in whom selfishness declines and concern for the common good waxes. We rejoice in all benevolent acts.
9. **Of the Tendency of Virtue.** Virtue brings enduring joy. Pain, poverty, disgrace: all lose their pain if received by a “cheerful, composed, and determined” spirit. Virtue induces the love of others. We are able to perceive and appreciate the excellences of others. Frankness in truth is irresistible. Men induce envy by overstating their accomplishments. Virtue also tends toward material success. It is unfortunate that viciousness also can bring wealth. Virtue, as knowledge of it spreads to all mankind, gains ground against perfidy. The man of virtue may wish to avoid certain jobs, which necessarily make action morally equivocal: lawyer, senator, minister. We should seek to gain honors only by scrupulous means.

VOLUME II

BOOK V. OF LEGISLATIVE AND EXECUTIVE POWER.

1. **Introduction.** The considerations of Volume I permit a deliberation upon specific matters conducing to the gradual benefit of mankind. Moral social conduct generates persons of virtue. Good institutions make justice their hallmark and apply their rules to all men equally. All government is a presently necessary evil. We should have as little of it as possible at present, and constantly be seeking ways to reduce its effects as human individuals improve. Four topics need attention: a) legislative and executive powers (general administration), b) mental and moral improvement of men, c) criminal justice, and d) property.

Men make no laws, but rather translate into language what eternal justice teaches. In administration of executive power, monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy require consideration. Each is undesirable, since the need for government in any form arises from the imperfections and folly of individuals.

2. **Of Education, The Education of a Prince.** Hereditary monarchy is an unnatural expansion of the powers of an individual, since a man's powers hardly extend to controlling himself, much less millions of strangers. Consider a king's education. His wealth distorts all, making him shut off from virtue. Real education involves experience of all things human. But princes are sheltered and coddled. They grow arrogant, vain, and presumptuous. He hears no truth, but only sycophant lackies. Their situation drives princes toward vice.
3. **Private Life of a Prince.** Conditions that prevail in a prince's youth persist into adulthood. All kings are hidden despots, and hence enemies of mankind. Kings are flaccid persons stripped of real virtue by the persistent lies of their minions. It is a great cruelty to make of a man a king.
4. **Of a Virtuous Despotism.** Some argue that under a virtuous prince, monarchy is the best of governments. Godwin counters that this proposition is false; no man can administer for millions. All matters are best decided by the individual himself, and if he fails, then by his friends and peers, who know the facts of the case and live with the individual. Kings are, by definition, far from everyday concerns and intentionally segregated from the commoner. Even good kings are likely served by vice-ridden ministers. The well-being of the land rests wholly on the virtue of one man. Such an arrangement limits the possibility of justice spreading widely.
5. **Of Courts and Ministers.** In monarchies, courts are corrupt. Ministers are legion, and tend toward corruption as well. They oppose all blunt, just men. With their king, they create a government of corruption, and virtue is considered either folly or romance.
6. **Of Subjects.** Monarchy damages the morality of its citizens. Monarchy is based in the lie that its kings are due their eminence. No king can do his job of running millions of lives. Kings hide their mere mortality behind expensive palaces and fancy talk. All this flies in the face of truth. All men are equal unless one is wiser or morally better. None ignores truth with impunity. The lie of monarchy lets in many others; a life becomes riddled with these prevarications. Soon it seems that truth is a trifle, even perhaps the weakness of the addled, since the king presents himself cloaked in lies. Kings teach that men do not and should not prosper according to their merit, but rather because of their blood lines. Finally, kings teach men to quail before them, urging subjects to be cowardly in the regal presence. No country prospers by teaching its men to cower. All our possessions and skills aim, morally, at the common good. When any diverts his labor or money to luxury, he is thereby infected. But before kings, poverty is the great sin. Monarchy teaches its public to get money by any means available.
7. **Of Elective Monarchy.** If a people elected its kings, would that improve matters? The mode of electing a king might prove difficult to fashion. One might seek to elect geniuses as kings, or at least to prevent idiots from becoming kings. The first act of any truly virtuous monarch would be to abolish the monarchy.
8. **Of Limited Monarchy.** Limited monarchy commits a population to many of the same moral dilemmas as does unlimited monarchy. A limited monarch not only may, but must, have ministers and judges. And these can be bought and otherwise corrupted. Ministers, granted constitutional authority, either fail their duty or subjugate the king, making him a cipher of a man. Limited monarchs appoint to offices, but are singularly ill-equipped to find such genius unless it be at court. Any bad government will eventually be found out by its people. Justice prevails, in the end.
9. **Of a President with Regal Powers.** Would matters be better if society elected a king for a life term, or shorter term? Godwin finds granting any one man substantial power problematical. The role of king is so very injurious to mankind. Why try to fix it?
10. **Of Hereditary Distinction.** Aristocracies presume that privilege can be inherited. Nothing about the sons of aristocrats distinguishes them from the sons of laborers. Aristocrats demean

working people, and aristocrats write books. An education is necessary, but an opulent one should be foregone. Seizing for oneself goods in excess damages the whole people, and injures the taker morally. To make a man a noble is to deprive him and his progeny of the very forces that instill virtue in a man.

- 11. Moral Effects of Aristocracy.** Justice makes mankind well. As a virtue, justice leads a man to calculate the future, and to so calculate as to promote the general good of mankind. First among the dictates of justice is the rule that men should be distinguished only according to their merit. A society built on such just principles would breed fearless, courageous men who lack hatred, speak truth, and live in a world governed by true morality and unstoppable science. Aristocracy condemns whole classes to misery in life and stupidity and vice for lack of education. Aristocracy injures both the noble and his serf.
- 12. Of Titles.** Aristocratic titles carry feudal miseries into the present age with pointless effect. Titles are often ill-gotten, rewards for doing dirty business for another. They add nothing to the good deeds of a man, and subtract nothing.
- 13. Of the Aristocratical Character.** Aristocracy makes human inequality visible and more enduring. The aristocrat is harsher than his king. Aristocrats promote illiteracy, since their world depends on the ignorance of the many. Godwin describes Roman aristocracy, which he deems superior to the English system. But even the Roman system was corrupt. Material inequality is the stuff of aristocracy. Where men should be employed to the common good and share with moderated equality its produce, aristocracies divert vast sums to the rich and titled, leaving normal people destitute, despite their good labor.
- 14. Of the General Features of Democracy.** Democracy makes of every man a man and nothing more. Democracy is subject to characteristic errors: inconstancy, fragility, envy. Yet, democracy remains preferable to monarchy or aristocracy. Athens, for all its failures, nevertheless produced a great flowering of thought and arts. If the mind is allowed to roam unfettered, mankind proves perfectible. Error persists because social institutions demand it. Were we to abandon coercion, except in grave emergencies, men would rapidly cling to truth as it is learned. When men err, the falsity generates a series of consequent errors and poor outcomes. Men learn.
- 15. Of Political Imposture.** Some argue that the defect of democracy lies in the supposedly necessary deception employed to restrain passions. Their argument continues that with normal people's passions unleashed, they would sin irreparably and be damned forever. The Greeks and Romans lacked such an argument. Their religion was more political than personal. Heaven and hell make men no more virtuous by belief in them than disbelief. Rousseau argues that all governments rely upon religious sanction for their force. People adopt or change their governmental systems only when convinced of the need. Edmund Burke argues that men are either persuaded or coerced into obedience. Since he doubts the power of reason for normal men, he urges severe punishments for all. We would do better with no deceptions at all. Let the truth of circumstances impress men. Men are not of two sorts, one that thinks, the other that obeys. We must rely on men's reason. If once we encourage them to abandon reason, we know not when, if ever, they will take her up again.
- 16. Of the Causes of War.** Wars begin at the instance of monarchies or aristocracies. Democracies provide for all, and so, lacking want, there exists no motive to war. But, if democracies do not commence wars, they may still have to fight them because of their warlike neighbors. Are democracies at a disadvantage under these circumstances? No. Society exists to benefit its members. None owe the state glory or sacrifice for purposes that benefit no individuals. "Love of country" was invented to induce some to sacrifice for others. One finds "his country" wherever in the company of thinking men he finds common cause. Men war when they can find no umpire for their disputes. Are wars ever justified? Expedience, insult, or fear of a neighbor's

capabilities are insufficient reasons. National honor does not suffice. Two reasons for war suffice: defense of one's own liberty, and defense of another's liberty.

- 17. Of the Objects of War.** War is justified only to the extent of repelling an invading force from a nation's territorial borders. Once removed, hostilities must cease. One cannot, and it is morally irresponsible to consider, changing a nation's fundamental principles by means of war. Nor are nations justified in seeking reparations from another for the cost of war. Wars to maintain the "balance of power" are wholly unjustified. No hostility against another nation except for evil plans already commenced are justified.
- 18. Of the Conduct of War.** One may never enter the territory of another nation, except to assist its oppressed citizens. There lies grave danger of pretense in this exception, by which a country might invade to assist, when in fact it invades for its own purposes. In defending the homeland, one should avoid fixed encampments, since these, when they fall to an invader, assist him. Mobile forces seeking to cut the invader's supply lines are most effective. We should abandon deceit and strategic lies in our wars. Show enemies what we have, and use those forces intelligently. Our real strength lies in the justice of our souls. In any war, one must destroy nothing that defense of the homeland does not strictly require. Great benevolence should be shown enemies, and none killed pointlessly. Punishment of wrongdoers is no end of war. Harsh actions in war enflame retributory harsh responses. In fighting, we should make our plans simple and tell them to the enemy. Our soldiers will no longer need strict obedience to a chain of command. We can rely on their good sense and agreement with the policies being defended. England should cease having dependencies. They are acquired unjustly, and are most often injured by their association with Britain. No government should undertake actions that fail to benefit the great mass of its citizens. In the end, dependencies become a needless source of wars.
- 19. Of Military Establishments and Treaties.** To the extent militaries are necessary, their manpower needs should be filled by universal draft. Standing armies find their mischiefs. If required to defend a country, the army should keep to the hills and protract the conflict, to wear out the invader. Alliances with other nations by treaty are wrong because they consist in absolute promises none can reasonably keep. When broken, as they necessarily will be on occasion, they serve as an excuse for impugning the breacher. War is killing of strangers. Doing such is murder. All who recognize this make a deep commitment to peace.
- 20. Of Democracy as Connected with the Transactions of War.** Individuals are everything; society is nothing. Some worry that democracies cannot war so well as other forms of government. If people, free from dribbling credulity, find rational calm, their attitudes will be a better defense than all military preparations. Such can defend themselves. They would be ill-prepared for offensive wars. That is an argument for democracy. Some argue democracies leak their secrets. Godwin counters that such openness to all is a great strength in democracy. All, including the enemy, know the people's intentions. Wherever government exists, given human imperfections, some act on behalf of the whole. To some degree, the individual is eclipsed. Some argue that democracies cannot proceed by mature deliberations. It may be so, but we must grant to men their errors. When men fall into anarchic self-immolations, it is never so bad as the replaced despotism. Left to itself, anarchy would right its ship and proceed reasonably. For reason itself is progressive; it acts to make men free.
- 21. Of the Composition of Government.** Some fear imprudent action from legislatures, and so seek to balance two houses against one another to prevent ill-decisions. One can never effectually govern by the approval of the citizens. Their views are not truth, but one can do no better in matters of government. To improve government, one must improve the opinions of the populace. Any who uses force to govern inflicts sore injury. Multiple houses of legislative power serve only to divide a people. Rather, the assembly should define its decision-making by a slow deliberative process, modeled on the process employed by wise individuals. Government itself is an evil; its legislative dictates should be undertaken only with caution and unwillingness.

Assemblies must have plenary powers, not delimited ones. The executive power should grow, while legislation diminishes, as people improve.

22. **Of the Future History of Political Societies.** The sole object of political government is to benefit individuals in a society. All men are brothers. Peace surpasses all other values, because we all aim to prosper, and can do so only when our neighbor's capacity to buy matches our increased capacity to produce. It is in our interest to desire that our neighbors be wise, free, and independent. All men should talk freely and often, but have no obligation to change their societies except when error or violence intrude. A people's territory should be small. All the errors of government grow worse as territory expands. In this manner, all people would be one great republic, while yet dealing primarily with a number of people that can be known in a local area. Speaking to all mankind, minds would be highly stimulated. Governments exist to suppress violence; it responds with its own violence of a delimited sort. But all constraint comes at a price. Vice is merely errors in judgment. No responsive violence is warranted except when the instance of vice presents extreme dangers. Small communities exercise restraints other than whips and chains. Their opinions affect their members. When communities come into conflict, several districts must cooperate to restrain violence. One does not need standing armies for such purposes. The need being occasional, the response can also be mustered to the circumstance.
23. **Of National Assemblies.** National assemblies foist false unanimities upon a people. Whenever a minority is compelled to support what they consider the ill-deliberated outcome of the majority, such assistance erodes the minority's moral standing. Further, national assemblies create standards for thought other than those of an individual responding to truth. So, these standards corrupt. National assemblies also cut off debate unnaturally by recurrence to the vote. Voting truncates deliberations, making of debate a rush to judgment, followed by parsing of commas. When one votes, he ignores justice to reach a result. A group of men remains of diverse opinions, and governmental pretense to the contrary changes none of that. All assemblies stand inferior to the individuals who comprise them. Assemblies should be joined only for extreme purposes in times of dire need. Godwin suggests that a legislature sitting one day per year might suffice. Such small, seldom governed communities will be immune to demagogues and power grabs, which depend for their success upon the incomprehensible complexity of the social system.
24. **Of the Dissolution of Government.** The need of government wanes as social complexity simplifies. In the end, when men are governed by their own enlightened rationality, no State will be necessary or possible. People will dismantle political structures.

BOOK VI. OF OPINION CONSIDERED AS A SUBJECT OF POLITICAL INSTITUTION.

1. **General Effects of the Political Superintendence of Opinion.** Some imagine government exists to check the bad faith of bad actors. Can we not invite compliance beforehand, rather than compel repentance after the fact? Better to prevent and educate than to punish and censure. Every group is but the tool of some motivating man of the group. Telling men to be virtuous is ineffectual. It is well that neighbors observe one another. It is also right that a neighbor might report my activities widely, if the report is accurate. What is objectionable is using coercion to correct my reputed errors. This sort of power play happens only in larger societies. Where small, the lesser, more personal, forms of influence suffice. The opinion of friends has irresistible force. To induce virtue by a law code is as fruitless as commanding a storm to be still. Truth and virtue self-propagate, if only the ministers will stop legislating. Governments need not defend religious or practical truth. They have force of their own, and are ultimately unstoppable. If one desires political change, the only effective and legitimate tool for working such change is truth exposed by talking and discussing and educating. Government interference upon this conversation tends to lock in errors, giving them longevity. Institutions cannot compel men to an opinion, but they can prevent a man from forming one. Where governments or religions choose men's opinions, those men grow imbecilic. They grasp truth feebly, and

exhibit no virtue. A man's first duty is to take nothing upon trust, but to inquire until he reaches individual conviction. But the man who goes along with the party line suppresses his own questions, in order to conform himself to the required standard. As soon as a thinking public is prepared to adopt political change, such change should be made. Minds improve, but institutions persevere unchanged. Real change is constant, moderate, and mostly invisible. Governments cannot manage such change, but are rather inimical to it. Moral progress lies, not in issuing new regulations, but in revoking old ones. Government should wither.

2. **Of Religious Establishments.** Religious conformity injures believers. It asks of adherents blind submission and a promise not to improve the insights of ancients. These agreements make of adherents hypocrites, asking most to assent to what they disbelieve. When the state offers financial support to religious institutions, matters worsen. Some are taxed in support of what they detest. Other, mostly adherents and priests, are pressured to keep their opinions in check in order to receive their stipend.
3. **Of the Suppression of Erroneous Opinions in Religion and Government.** Those who approve government support of truth also approve government suppression of heresy. Proponents of such suppression argue that, since opinion leads to action, ought not the state shape behavior by rooting out error before it blossoms into disorder and violence? Attempting to know and learning of one's errors leads to virtue, not vice. Diverse opinions do not lead to conflict except where the state offers support of one or another. Punishing errant opinion-holders oversteps. Coercion should be undertaken only in emergent necessity. Some argue that men may think as they please, but can be punished for seeking to propagate their erroneous views. This view makes of government a skulker who aims to ferret our secret thoughts and most private conversations. Governments err, perhaps more often than thinkers in their closets. Political suppression of thought is no better than ecclesiastical. Governments, so long as they exist, should stand mild and equitable as to citizen opinions. Where once the government seeks to suppress error, there follows excess and violence.
4. **Of Tests.** Oaths of allegiance injure the people who make them. Oaths encourage people to reject those who think and question, and embrace those who lie about their sentiments. We should watch those we suspect, not require them to lie to us. What good is an oath sworn under the threat of punishment? Only adherents and liars will assent, one never knowing which is which. No oath can be constructed that sorts human opinions in a way that is not objectionable. Governments have no just authority to guide my opinions. Their powers are exhausted when they have required of me that I not injure the community, and contribute to certain projects of general interest. If only institutions would stop telling men what they must think, perhaps men would rapidly become frank and sincere. An universal sincerity would grant untold benefits.
5. **Of Oaths.** Oaths of office, as oaths of allegiance, create no good for men. Oaths make of men liars. The witness oath has some lesser difficulty, but still says to the swearer that we will not trust you to tell us the truth without the oath. The oath proclaims to all that men lack integrity, except when sworn.
6. **Of Libels.** Dissenting as to religious or political orthodoxy cannot be justly punished. When, however, dissent aims at riot, the state may intervene forcibly, though in a better world punishments would be banned altogether. Some argue that though public libels should be overlooked, private libels must be punished. Godwin disagrees. Though the injury caused by falsehoods' damage to a reputation is great, still, men's errors must be made public, for vice hates scrutiny. Men's characters must be published, just as useful ideas should be announced. Discussion is the rule. From it, truth ultimately emerges. In such a world, the libelers lies would meet public scrutiny and be rejected. Further, men must learn sincerity. Laws against libel restrain people from telling the truth about one another. So, contrary rules breed uncertainty and laxity in the public. Tell the truth, but not about other people. It demands courage to speak when that talk may lead to good. All men must learn to rely on truth-telling in all sincerity as the way to change society.

- 7. Of Constitutions.** Some argue that laws of constitution are more sacred and unchangeable than those created by the constituted authorities. It is not so. All laws are undesirable accommodations to our present state of knowledge; we learn and so law should change easily. When people have reached a deeper level of understanding, then society should change to accommodate that deeper understanding. In truth, all laws should be submitted to the consent of the governed, district by district. Acquiring such consent will tend to the abolition of government altogether, which is a great good. Constitutions would shrink. Laws would grow few and simple. Nations would become federations of small communities united in general assembly only occasionally for extraordinary purposes. Slowly, law itself will vanish. Some hamlets might opt out. But they will soon see their error.
- 8. Of National Education.** Some argue that national education is necessary to national virtue, to insure the education of all, and to apprise all of acts forbidden by laws. Godwin dissents. All systems of education deem themselves permanent. They make education dated, and drill students in errors long exploded by the best thinkers. Real education rapidly brings students to the edge of knowledge as it exists, and launches them in discovering the unknown. Current public education devotes itself to maintaining the status quo, and teaching children superstitions and submission to spurious authorities. One must grapple with truth. One must know the reasons for propositions. Where one does not, the proposition is mere prejudice. The worst of vice is to teach anyone that there exist judgments that are not open to review and revision. Current schools seem to believe that their support is necessary for truth to have its way. National education is the dull handmaiden of the state, and so suspect on that charge as well. National education perpetuates error. All real crimes are known innately and reasonably. The rest of laws are unjust impositions of government. There is no crime in ignoring them. National education destroys a sense of justice in children by dimming their discernment.
- 9. Of Pensions and Salaries.** Men may work without shame to feed themselves. Even when one works to benefit both oneself and others, there is little shame, since we cannot always be other-directed. The more expansive the goals of our labor, the less we should seek compensation. Hence, we diminish public office by paying its holder a salary. If a society acquires funds to pay public officials by taxation, that is unfair, for all taxation is unfair. The poor are crushed, and the rich barely notice. Most people who seek public office are already rich. If poor men find office, let them send their children and mothers to willing friends. Abolishing public salaries would encourage all to make government simpler. That is a great benefit. For public office, there should be no property requirements. Such degrade the poor unreasonably.
- 10. Of the Modes of Deciding a Question on the Part of the Community.** Elections are made by lot, by secret ballot, or by voting. There is no such thing as contingency, since the world is a deterministic mechanism. So election by fortune expresses cowardice. Balloting encourages secrecy and hiding. Voting in public, ready to defend one's choices, is the only reasonable mode of deciding questions.

BOOK VII. OF CRIMES AND PUNISHMENTS.

- 1. Limitations of the Doctrine of Punishment which Result from Principles of Morality.** Punishment is fundamental to politics. One punishes not merely for public utility, but because punishment is a morally necessary response to vicious humans. Godwin recapitulates his conviction that all matters, both moral and amoral, are materials and deterministic in nature. The purpose of punishment is reforming the vicious character. If that is not possible, no punishment is appropriate. Given determinism, no just desert exists. We can inflict pain if it tends toward good under the circumstances, but punishment for other reasons has no merit. To create goodness, one might punish the innocent as well as the wicked. The past is gone. Present torture in no way improves the past. To think it does is barbaric. When society deliberates inflicting pain on another, it should view its victims, one and all, as innocent.

2. **General Disadvantages of Coercion.** One cannot compel religious reformation. Where religion is forced on lips, it corrupts the heart. As with religion, so too with moral duties. Justice guides moral duty, not local culture. And it lies in the heart of a man, not in statutes and impositions, all of which are tyranny. Statutes are irrelevant to the virtuous, defied by the wicked, and mold like soft wax the flaccid minds of the many, leaving them lives of tedious imbecility. No criminal gets a fair trial. It is the king's prosecutor and the king's judge who run the court. To pretend otherwise injures our integrity. This argument against criminal punishments applies equally to the relations of master and slave and parent and child. People punish because they lack good arguments for their views. They then resort to blows.
3. **Of the Purposes of Coercion.** Some argue that coercion is necessary for purposes of restraining bad actors, for reforming those same bad actors, and for making an example of those bad actors to those who might otherwise be tempted to become bad actors themselves. Godwin believes that each of these purposes fails to convince, and questions the propriety of using coercion at all. Coercion may be warranted where imminent threat of harm prohibits discussion, though even in such cases it may be better to suffer an onslaught than to respond in kind. But in judicial coercion, or that of the lynch mob, the person attacked is doing no present evil. He is *restrained* preemptively. Such injuries are inflicted as punishment upon suspicion of what a person might do in the future. No such impersonal affliction would be needed if men lived humbly in small communities where all knew all. Social censure would suffice to amend or drive out perpetrators. Coercion also cannot *reform* the criminal. Only reason is all powerful and leads to virtue. Since coercion is contrary to reason, it cannot reform. Rather, coercion sours minds. Coercion teaches a man to fear pain, not cherish wisdom and reason. Society should devote itself to unrelenting education; its energies would be better expended than in the most extravagant coercive spasms. Last, some seek to make of coercion an *example* to others. Men are not inherently evil. Some are driven to evil acts by our perverse institutions to which we cling long after their utility has vanished. We drive men to ill acts, and then punish them for the acts to which we drove them. Perhaps, were we to reasonably revise our institutions, civil misbehavior might disappear. Making an example of one neglects that person's moral sensitivities and justice.
4. **Of the Application of Coercion.** No one can see delinquency and determine its degrees. This lies within men, where none but themselves perceive. Since the delinquencies are invisible, they cannot possibly be classed. When we group together crimes, we ignore their individual uniqueness. When we mete punishments by classes, we act unjustly and unreasonably. None sees another's intention, and yet in punishing crime we suppose we do just that. These considerations tend toward the abolition of all coercion. Criminal law, then, falls in the same collapse. In criminal punishments, we first imagine that we see into another's mind, and then we become soothsayers predicting the likelihood of that person's re-offense. Further, all evidence is imperfect. Eyewitness testimony is dubious. Juries condemn half upon the heinousness of the crime alleged, rather than the imperfect evidence before them. In criminal prosecution, the whole weight of a community aggregates to crush an individual. None can face such coercion with equanimity.
5. **Of Coercion Considered as a Temporary Expedient.** Some argue that society in its present state requires coercion, though when men become more reasonable, society may dispense with coercion. The need of coercion emerges from the act of governing. Were there no government, temptations and vice would vanish and truth would be grasped by all. One cannot prepare for a state involving no coercion by coercing people toward it. We should dispense with government at the first opportunity. Communities need no coercion; they are free to alter their structures to prevent need for coercion. Nevertheless, so long as coercion proves necessary to peace, all citizens must participate in coercion. When invasion of national borders occurs, when ruffians seek to take one's own or another's life, we indulge a small degree of coercion to prevent such. We must be able to maintain security as well as abolish coercion. We cannot merely abolish government and expect all to go well. A long period of training in rational self-restraint, public inspection and comment on neighbors' behaviors, and reciprocal forbearance will be required

before anarchy can become a reasonable societal alternative. Anarchy, without this preparation, subjects all to dangers: the reprisals of foes, the depredations of small ambitious men, and the envy of the jealous. Anarchy is undesirable, unless the populace has become ready for it. Before its time has come, anarchy may degenerate and make despotism a welcome respite from disorder. But where the people are ready for it, anarchy is the best possible form of human society. A helpful anarchy can arise, not in the form of revolutions, but from patient instruction of the mass of mankind. In the interim, we should support the best form of government we can imagine, and tolerate the amount of coercion necessary to maintain that government. So, of the three possible purposes of coercion (reformation, example, and restraint), only restraint has some moral traction. It may prove long indeed before mankind stands prepared to shuck off political institutions for a world without coercion. Until such time, every man is obligated to participate in what penultimate institutions exist, and to do what lies within his power under those blighted circumstances to promote the general good of mankind.

- 6. Of the Scale of Coercion.** First, coercion is an unfortunate necessity created by corruption and failed education. Recourse to coercion is warranted only in dire emergency. Second, restraint remains the only acceptable goal of coercion. The death penalty is never warranted, since lesser restraint contains the potential evil. Those in need of punishment are most in need of our kindness and patient education. Such kindness tends to diminish crimes, not increase them. It is the possibility of evading punishment altogether that increases crime. Men abandon their ill behaviors only with substantial pain. In simple governments, the death penalty is seldom employed and corporal punishments of all sorts wane. Men naturally cherish the minds of others. Brutal punishments invert things, making brutes lust for dominion. They coerce wrongly. A community may restrain wrongdoers, but only to the extent of their wrongs upon the community. These instances of restraint must not take place in jails; jails teach vice. Solitary confinement too injures men greatly. To teach a man justice, he must live in a simple and reasonable society. None should be punished by hard labor. Men are mental creatures; virtue derives not from labor but from intellect, except when the labor is self-motivated for self-preservation. Banishment and transportation to unoccupied territories has been used by Britain to remove evil actors. But it is wrong to impose our vice-ridden problems on others. In the end, one must recall that all coercions are wrong, and we must strive for a world in which none is required.
- 7. Of Evidence.** In restraining others, one should seek to restrain future wrongs, since the past cannot be changed. And yet, we know nothing of future wrongs except statements made by a potential perpetrator of those wrongs. Words are difficult to interpret, remember, and require a vast complex of information to set in context. Governments are ill-equipped to punish people on the basis of their words.
- 8. Of Law.** All countries rely on laws to set the standard by which criminality is judged. Law, however, has problems. Laws pile one upon the next. They do so because every human action is unique. Law exists to shoehorn unlike cases into like categories. To pursue this approach with persistence promises to fill the world with tedious books. All this serves to make law uncertain, which cuts against the very purpose for which laws were first created. Law presumes, wrongly, to predict what men should do under circumstances that have not yet occurred. So, law tends to mental stagnation, and presumes permanence where there is none and uniformity in a world of uniquenesses. Law, as an institution, is pernicious. Lawyers, as men of their circumstance, are driven toward dishonesty. All societies should abandon law in favor of right reason determining a course of action in the light of existing circumstances. Some object that when men decide matters, rather than law, we become subject to those deciders' passions. Law offers no refuge from this problem. The only remedy lies in unshackling men, bidding them to reason and decide for themselves. We must trust men to care for themselves. Their judges will rise to what is required of them. So too juries. They will apportion according to the actual merits of circumstances and persons. Ultimately, law is the minion of coercion. Law perishes as coercion vanishes.

9. **Of Pardons.** No pardons would be necessary or permissible, except for the irrational arbitrariness of the criminal punishment system. He who grants clemency should rather direct his efforts to making the system just in the first place. Were punishments reasonable, then no pardons would be permitted. With pardons, some condemned suffer nothing; others die. The difference is mere whimsy. Pardons encourage the condemned to beg. We owe to every man what justice demands, and nothing more or less.

BOOK VIII. OF PROPERTY

1. **Preliminary Observations.** In completing a picture of simple society without government, the issue of property is critical. The institution of property has been corrupted by several sorts of abuses. The rule of justice should determine who has property; justice gives to a man a right to use. Justice says that a man should possess that which in his hands gives more pleasure or benefit than it would in any other hands. All property is common stock from which each draws as he will, bounded only by the needs and desires of his neighbors. Property has four classes: a) subsistence, b) means of personal improvement, c) everyday pleasures, and d) expensive luxuries. Only the last presents an obstacle to equal distribution of property. Luxuries offer two gratifications: simple pleasure and social distinction. Pleasure is inherently good, and should be denied only to acquire a greater deferred pleasure. The pleasures, while meaningful, would never induce any man to attain them at the expense of hundreds of sufferers. For distinction, for the good opinion of others, men exert themselves and achieve beyond their own needs. They lust for more than they need, to show off, thereby taking from others the barest means of subsistence. To accumulate property is a means to subjugate others by giving back to them for their labors what was rightfully theirs in the first place.
2. **Principles of Property.** Who should make decisions about protecting and distributing wealth justly? This is the essential question of property. There exist three degrees of property. First, some tools and objects belong to me because I am best able to make use of them (my clothing, food, apartment, and so forth). This possession extends to a certain psychic space in which I alone exercise my judgment. Second, some property evolves from a man's industry, even that which surpasses his own strict needs. Of the surplus, a man is steward, not actual owner. Nothing and no one should interfere with a man's disposal of this stewardship property. Man is great only when thinking and choosing what to do with what is his. Particularly, governments should stay away from such property. Third, some property is acquired by using another's labor. To the extent this system of employment results in one man enjoying benefits that are unavailable to all, it is wrong. The quantum of labor required of members of society should be reduced to its minimum. Luxury, employment, and taxes all enslave the poor to the rich. If the poor work more, the rich capture the surplus products. All property should be equally distributed. But, without a change in men's values, this equalization cannot be achieved merely by redistribution. No sooner is property equalized than human industry makes it unequal. All government action is pernicious in its root. None should coerce another into distributing his property or working more or less. Coercion is the bane of communities. Wealth must be distributed in accord with the views of each community. Communities may view property accumulation as a vice. They may root from themselves fawning over the rich, and rather view them with disdain. If communities remain small, then the good sense of the community and their mutual restraint of one another would suffice to prevent massive accumulations of property. Grasping after excess property is one of the sources of government. To keep society from degenerating into anarchy, some coercion will prove necessary, in exigent circumstances, to prevent yet worse outcomes. It will ever be so until people abandon the ideas of complicated government and extensive national territories. All coercion is a stop-gap, and much to be regretted.

One may doubt the wisdom of protecting inheritance practices. But, Godwin argues, we should allow men to distribute their excess property as they see fit, even if wrong. So too with inheritance. However, all of the feudal system should fall before the disapproval of communities. It is all a system of setting in stone the inequities of prior generations. But much in the feudal system of ranks and emblems should be left alone, subjected only to ridicule and

counter-arguments. All must exercise caution in changing feudal rights and privileges, so that in attempting improvements we do not create great suffering. Governments are warranted only to the extent they preserve public wisdom or prevent men from usurping the private judgment of others. Property is a child of private judgment of individuals; governments should, to the extent they exist, defend the right of private judgment. None has the right to take the property of another. Every owner must ask if he has more than he needs, and if so, why? Where a man errs in this regard, argument is the appropriate tool to amend matters. Violence is never warranted, except where no alternatives exist in an exigent matter. For the poor, it is their right to have needful possessions. For the rich, it is their duty to give such possessions.

- 3. Benefits Attendant on a System of Equality.** The institution of property creates more evils than all the other depredations of despotisms, criminal law, and religions combined. Property as we now practice it, creates dependency, inures us to injustice, generates endless selfishness, and rampant fraud. Hereditary wealth is worst, since it pays a person to be idle. Were our property regime replaced with something better, most labor would be unnecessary, most people would become frugal, eat better, and get some exercise. All would lose their fatigue and take time to develop themselves into better people. Benumbed by endless labor, most people spend no time at all being curious or educating themselves. Were work otherwise, perhaps the condition of humanity would rapidly advance. All men love justice, recognize they share a common humanity with every other, and long to assist one another. The criminal invents an excuse to behave otherwise, and convinces himself of it. Crime derives from necessity. One man has much of what another lacks. One should cure this dire circumstance by conversation, not violence, but our present system convinces men that talking is impotent. So they take matters into their own hands. Were we to abandon the system of inequality, none would be enemies, having nothing to contend about. All would learn to think and benefit others. Of all character flaws, ambition is worst. In the end, it leads to war. Peace is not possible so long as economic inequality perseveres. Property inequality also tends to overpopulation and its subsequent drone of death for poor infants. Eighty percent of potential happiness vanishes into our present system of property.
- 4. Objection to this System from the Frailty of the Human Mind.** Godwin summarizes his argument to this point in the discussion of property, before considering objections. Men are equal, but property is unequal. Men should help one another freely, but never be coerced to do so. Justice demands that all persons have equal access to resources for self-improvement and the possibility of happiness. Whatever permits society to remain unequal should be disparaged. None should be compelled to demand equality for all. Such conditions must be voluntary. Many object that the human mind is wholly too frail for this task. It cannot voluntarily give up its excess resources to benefit others. Godwin answers that one must not rely on solitary spasms of good will, but rather lean upon the force of truth and a long program of education. Certain conditions make it more likely that a rich man might live as a poor one. Such a man might think of those condemned to poverty by his luxuries. He might live in a society attuned to remediating the ills of wealth. As the grip of wealth waned, societies would improve their inequalities, leaving behind childish obsessions. People would see wealth as the possession of a moral idiot in the grip of depraved habits that savage his community. So, possession of wealth would become a matter beckoning ignominy, not praise. Many men would abandon their wealth for this reason alone. Wealth would grow as rare if it were to become despicable in most eyes.
- 5. Objection to this System from the Question of Permanence.** Godwin's system asks people who possess something better used by another to relinquish it. This would tend toward an equality of means among people. Some object that such a state would be shattered immediately, as men are by no means equal, nor are their capabilities equal. One would work ambitiously, another would scrap and hoard. All that would ultimately result is confusion and chaos, leading inevitably to new stability not significantly different than the one we now experience. Godwin replies that since men can conceive equality, they will eventually attempt it. The equality of means of which Godwin speaks is not a coerced equality, gained by alienating laws and forcible

institutions. It is an equality gained by serious public deliberation. Men have a claim when they have a need. When this proposition gains widespread acceptance, equality stands in the wings. Further, wealth insults one's neighbors. When one wishes true happiness, he will be satisfied with health, simple pleasures, and the well-being of his neighbors.

- 6. Objection to this System from the Allurements of Sloth.** Some object that making sustenance free to all would extinguish industry among men. Why work when one does not need to? Men produce for money, these allege. The equality to which Godwin refers relies upon a great improvement in the minds of men. All will find mutual justice a compelling motive. Any less a transformation will leave attempts at equality a path to chaos and confusion. Such intellectual improvements will bring great enthusiasm and optimism, every man free to follow his own inclinations at his leisure. But enthusiasm tends not to indolence, but to fervent effort. Perhaps a people may seem lazy when they have no wars to fight, no luxuries to produce for others, no serfdom to suffer, no governments to support, no taxes to pay. That is a blessed indolence. The simplicity of such a state would be rigid. Godwin opines that only five percent of the current labor expended would be necessary if it produced only needful things, perhaps one-half hour per person per day. It is aggregating distinction, not money, that moves men. But distinction for petty causes is a delusion. Men are not so different as these objectors imagine. Any is capable who is not oppressed. When one recognizes that all good rushes forward to future goods, long after the good actor has died, one wishes to undertake such acts.
- 7. Objection to this System from the Benefits of Luxury.** Some object that inequality and luxury give rise to the finest attributes of mankind, to cultivation, elegance, refinement, scientific insight, and so forth. Equality would banish all such excellences; all barbarians are equal, these argue. Godwin answers such objectors underestimate the evils of inequality. Many confuse luxury with ample supply. Having enough to prosper is not luxury; it is every man's right and leads to great happiness. The vice of luxury is usurping what belongs to all to one's sole use. Godwin repeats his claim that one-half hour per diem would suffice to produce life's strict necessities. He contemplates that, despite this bare minimum, most communities would probably choose to produce things beyond the barest minimum, to enrich their lives. They might choose superfluous labor because they want to, not because, as now, hard labor is imposed as a condition for mere existence. And so, life in a just society might come to have some splendor and breadth in its culture.
- 8. Objection to this System from the Inflexibility of its Restrictions.** Some object that such a system as Godwin's makes of men slaves to one another. None can act but at the behest of the group, and so all become wholly enslaved. Godwin replies that one must distinguish natural independence from moral independence. Natural independence is a man's intrinsic ability to improve his mind and the freedom to do so, and so is both necessary and desirable. Moral independence is always injurious, consisting as it does in the necessity that every person inquire into and interpose upon the moral actions of others. Worthwhile men will welcome such input, since it tends to improve them. Justice prescribes but one path; it is to be followed by all. But many small men, withered by the vanities in which they grew, will reject this concept. Recall, this regime requires no regulations. All agree to it. All support it with conviction. Still, we need not live together, eat at the same time, or tolerate other regimentations. We have and shall continue to have our associations, preferences, and personal circumstances. No system should gainsay these essential differences. Every man must learn to think for himself. We seek equality to free ourselves to pursue our individualities. We need not accommodate our schedule to all others. We are not clocks to be synchronized. Yes, there are tasks that require much coordination and labor: building canals, cutting down trees, and so forth. Yet machines have begun to take the brunt of this labor; will this trend not continue? Manual labor may cease altogether. Cooperation itself may be ceasing. Men will do original work; why cooperate to reproduce the labors of others? We should seek independence of one another, and never let our thoughts melt into a common pot. If forced to live together, one finds ideas diverging; bickering and distress ensue. We should converse only to the extent we can do so with good humor and a welcoming spirit toward the diversity of men. *Marriage.* Marriage is ill-practiced in our

cultures. Two youths see each other, grow deluded together, and promise eternal bonding. Marriage is a regime of fraud, best dismissed as soon as it is recognized. As monopolies go (all monopolies are bad), marriage is the worst. Any reasonable society would abolish marriage. How relations between sexual partners should proceed remains to be determined. Entire promiscuity or divorce on one party's demand may come to play. Friendship between sexual partners should be the rule. It makes the pairing sublime. Infidelity's bane lies not in its sexuality, but in its clandestine misrepresentations. Lying makes of a person a moral cretin. All of sexuality should be ruled by mutual consent. **Children.** In a right-thinking society, none will know or much care who is the parent of any given child. What distinguishes people is not their origins but their characters. **Education.** In such a world, education as we know it would change. Children's minds would be allowed to proceed at their own pace and according to their own interests. Coercive indoctrinations would cease; these are incongruent with the free mind. Some object that men are social, and must be shaped to the social need. Godwin objects that every man is independent, subject to justice and reason, and should accommodate himself to such a state without indoctrination. Society encourages us to improvement, and gives us the means to improve. **Economy.** In a reasonable society, every man will make what he is skilled at making and give it freely to others in need. There should be no medium of monetary exchange. There are more important values than economic efficiency.

9. Objection to this System from the Principle of Population. Some object that Godwin's scheme is unworkable because overpopulation is inexorable. Godwin answers that none can see so far as to know how overpopulation will turn out. The earth is sufficient for its current population [estimated in 1800 to be slightly in excess of one billion]. Godwin conjectures (he emphasizes that the following thoughts are mere conjecture) that men may well control their bodies as they do their surroundings. Bodies are responsive to minds. Death comes to bodies due to abandonment of youthful activeness and to general listlessness. Peaceful, imaginative people grow active and live long. Bewilderment generates disease, and boredom with novelty betrays the apathy that precedes death. Pondering the public good keeps a man young. Vibrant life belongs to those who are most conscious, most voluntary, in their deeds. With practice, some men are able to control involuntary processes by force of will. We do not know the limits of the human mind. We do not know the maximum length of human life. Mankind will grow past the habit of sleeping, which is torpor and unconsciousness itself. The goal is to live while one lives, to maximize conscious activity. We sicken and die only because we fail to engage these foes and defeat them. For population, these thoughts mean that wise people in the new regime may cease to breed. They may also cease to die, have misery, suffer government, and fear war. All will cherish the common good, and engage one another in achieving it.

10. Reflections. Some object that proposals that create social leveling will generate nothing but chaos and massacres. Godwin answers that one must not forget the less-sensational but no less deadly organized massacres of the criminal justice system and wars among governments. Others defend reform by arguing that the excesses of revolutionaries cannot be imputed to the reforming innovator, but rather should be laid to the culture that made the revolutionaries' coercions seem so natural to them. Wise men self-correct; they prove great skeptics, and never more than when examining their own past behaviors. All who seek societal change should meditate on the wisdom of abrupt interventions. Never advocate or tolerate violence. But act, as must we all, upon preponderance of the evidence, even though you know you will occasionally be wrong and the dupe of evils. None can dam the tide of inquiry. Governments and religions long to suppress, or at a minimum tame, inquiry about change. Rather, government should promote discussion and remain neutral as to the outcomes. And the remainder of the community should each shoulder their own tasks. First, philosophers should see truth and speak it plainly without inflammation or bitterness, and with specificity and sincerity. Political parties mangle truth. Avoid them. Each community must govern itself by its perception of justice. Each should change its form by consensus, not revolution. All are called to wait peacefully while truth wins out. Truth progresses slowly, preparing next steps during the present one. It may be the case that the philosopher must do his waiting alone. Second, the wealthy and famous should resign their stations. This is not so unlikely as most

presume. Aristocrats are not immune to magnanimity. And, where wise, the aristocrat sees that his time is limited. Reason surpasses him. He should surrender happily, to avoid worse outcomes necessitated by his stubbornness. No aristocrat wishes to be known to posterity as the opponent of brotherly love and truth. Third, the masses must not seize today what truth will hand them freely and without bloodshed tomorrow. Nor should they be bitter. Justice will benefit all men, not just the downtrodden. All must give themselves over to reason, and remain tranquil. The process of equalization of conditions begins in the individual heart, with men moved to change their own status. Current governments injure all, even those who prosper by them. Where reason convinces a man, his practices soon follow. Lower class people rise by commerce and education, and wealth is no longer the sole means of judging a man worthy. Great intellect now rivals wealth in making a man noteworthy. Though these changes have only begun, they run deep. Morality progresses as the stuff of mankind's mind improves. Men take less advantage. They also give more willingly. Where once men sought wealth only, they will in the future seek liberty, knowledge, equality, and arts. We speak of these changes because the engine of transformation is the knowledge of truth. Justice makes men disinterested. Its progress comes incrementally and inexorably.