# From: J. Locke, *The second treatise of civil government, 1690*

## Chapter IX. Of the ends of political society and government.

123. If man in the **state of nature** be so free, as has been said; if he be absolute lord of his own person and possessions, equal to the greatest, and subject to nobody, why will he part with his freedom, why will he give up this empire and subject himself to the dominion and control of any other power? To which it is obvious to answer, that though in the state of nature he has such a right, yet the enjoyment of it is very uncertain and constantly exposed to the invasion of others; for all being kings as much as he, every man his equal, and the greater part no strict observers of equity and justice, the enjoyment of the property he has in this state is very unsafe, very insecure. This makes him willing to quit a condition, which, however free, is full of fears and continual dangers; and it is not without reason that he seeks out and is willing to join in society with others who are already united, or have a mind to unite, for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and estates, which I call by the general name ‘**property’**.

124. The great and chief end, therefore, of men’s uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government is the preservation of their property. To which in the state of nature there are many things wanting:

First, there wants an established, settled, known law, received and allowed by common consent to be the standard of right and wrong, and the common measure to decide all controversies between them; for though the law of nature be plain and intelligible to all rational creatures; yet men being biased by their interest, as well as ignorant for want of studying it, are not apt to allow it as a law binding to them in the application of it to their particular cases.

125. Secondly, in the state of nature there wants a known and indifferent **judge** with authority to determine all differences according to the established law.

126. Thirdly, in the state of nature there often wants power to back and support the sentence when right, and to give it due execution. [...]

127. [...] It is this makes them so willingly give up every one his single power of punishing, to be exercised by such alone as shall be appointed to it amongst them; and by such rules as the community, or those authorized by them to that purpose, shall agree on. And in this we have the original right of both the **legislative and executive power**, as well as of the governments and societies themselves. […]

131. But though men, when they enter into society, give up the equality, liberty and executive power they had in the state of nature, into the hands of the society, to be so far disposed of by the legislative as the good of the society shall require; yet it being only with an intention in every one the better to preserve himself, his liberty and property (for no rational creature can be supposed to change his condition with an intention to be worse); the power of the society, or legislative constituted by them, can never be supposed to extend farther than the common good; but is obliged to secure every one’s property, by providing against those three defects above-mentioned, that made the state of nature so unsafe and uneasy.

# Exercises

## Vocabulary

Using dictionaries

**1. Use a monolingual dictionary to find a definition of the following words:**

1. State of nature…………………………..
2. Property…………………………..
3. Judge…………………………..

## Reading

Interpreting primary sources

**2. Choose the best answer to the following questions.**

1. **What does Locke mean by “law of nature”?**
2. A system of law that is determined by nature, therefore universal.
3. A system of law that is determined by God, therefore universal.
4. A special law written by nature in the 16th century.
5. **What is the difference between Hobbes’s and Locke’s conceptions of the law of nature?**
6. They are the same.
7. Hobbes’s view is “bellum omnium contra omnes”, Locke’s view is positive.
8. Hobbes’s view underlines the importance of being free.
9. **And why according to Locke is it not enough for this law to be “plain and intelligible to all rational creatures”?**
10. Because men are not apt to allow of it as a law binding to them in the application.
11. Because men are not able to study it and to submit to it.
12. Because there is no judge to determine all differences according to the established law.

## Writing

Expressing point of view

**3. Choose one of the questions and write a short essay (400-500 words) expressing your own view about the topic.**

1. An anthropological view is held by both Hobbes’s and Locke’s works. Which one do you think is better at describing mankind? Why?

2. Reflect on the separation of power according to Locke.

## Speaking

Discussing in groups

**4. In groups, and with the help of your teacher, discuss the following question.**

Compare the way Locke and Hobbes use words such as safe (unsafe), power, etc.