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TKC Founders Scholarship

Besides the Bible, which work of literature or art has most influenced Western Civilization for good or for ill?

John Rhys-Davies once said, "Many do not understand how precarious Western civilization is and what a joy it is. From it, we get real democracy." To coin a significant player in Western Civilization would be to acknowledge two things. The first, that there are similar themes in all Western nations; the second, that said themes are substantial and play a pivotal role whenever found. With this precursor to thought and analysis, it is safe to say that democracy is the most distinct feature of western culture. It acts in the capacity of a golden thread of western civilization. From its roots in Athens to modern parliamentary derivatives democracy has created an unstoppable empire based entirely off of one thing. Belief.

Imagine if people never believed they had any power; democracy would never have been this successful. What keeps it alive is not rules, institutions, or tradition, but sheer will. In this sense democracy is an extraordinary force. Where Plato and Aristotle planted the seeds for our modern understanding of democracy, John Locke watered them. The Second Treatise of Government paved a framework of western society by forever redefining the application of democracy. His political pamphlet laid the foundation for a cultural shift in Europe and a new country in the Americas. What would western civilization be without democracy, and what would democracy be without John Locke? His contributions surpass more than simply justifying rebellion. Locke solidified the necessity of popular sovereignty. He opened the eyes of man to a power they had long neglected, disobedience. Many of the greatest thinkers on freedom, liberty, and democracy would follow Locke in his belief that the ruler must rely upon the consent of the governed.

The Second Treatise hard lines core beliefs that now define the West. It follows the first Treatise in the recognition of a divide between the masses and ruling elite. This mass has a social contract with the ruling elite. Without interference from government, the mass could live in a reasonable harmony. Locke argue a Hellenistic perspective that man would be inherently good natured. Everyman would be equal and none the ruler of another. This "state of nature" as Locke would call it would however, be subject to inconvenience and eventually chaos. To avoid chaos and provide order, the mass voluntarily gives up some of their natural freedoms to a governing force for security. These are the conditions of the contract between the government and the people. The emphasis is on the choice that people make, thus government is not guaranteed a constituency, it is given one. The impacts of such a belief in a contract revolutionized the west. In justifying the need for rebellion the Second Treatise bettered civilization by introducing accountability into government. The ruling elite were now seen as trustees and responsible for maintaining the trust of the people. Whenever they failed to cater to the people the ruling elite effectively terminated the contract and a revolt would be perfectly legitimate. The people could return to the state of nature, or align themselves with a new governing force. Outlining terms for the termination of the social contract empowered the everyday man in ways the west had never conceived before and the idea was well received.

Another idea the Second Treatise introduced to the benefit of Western Civilization is the need for restraint of arbitrary power. Again, an idea explored by earlier Grecian attempts at democracy but better defined in the deliberate words of John Locke. Although the people have to agree to an infringement of their right in order to have a government, they by no means must agree to the removal of them. Natural rights when limited by a government must be protected. He instills a fear of the effects of a monarch or governing force that can openly take from the people's natural rights. The only rights that need be infringed upon are those that directly correlate with the need to secure the peace. Many western governments feature branches or different faculties whose jobs overlap to ensure the

protection of natural rights for the people. From Book 2 Chapter 11 of the Treatise, the arguments of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and countless other American constitution framers were birthed. Following the precedence set in the Declaration of Independence (Another founding document heavily based upon both Treatises of government) the founding fathers placed an emphasis on the protection of individual liberties. All western countries have a reverence for freedom and the rights to life, liberty, and property.

The Second Treatise of government gave a new power to the people; the power of numbers. Locke placed a significant emphasis on the will of the people. From his writings came the inspiration for Jean Jacques Rousseau's words, "the sovereign, being formed wholly of the individuals who compose it, neither has nor can have any interest contrary to theirs." This seedling would sprout Jacksonian Democracy, the idea that the more people participating in government, the better a country becomes. The Second Treatise would produce governments who do more to cater to the needs and wants of their constituents. Rulers and representatives alike would become subject to the sanctity that was the general public opinion. Thus the institution of a cycle that characterizes all western governments today, the governed subject themselves to a governing class that governs according to the will of the governed; never before had popular sovereignty been spelled out in this manner. So strong was the influence of the idea, that it lead Thomas Jefferson to say that "No government can continue good, but under the control of the people." An unmistakable reverence is associated with that which people will band together to do or proclaim. There is no better example of the acknowledgement of popular sovereignty than the first words of the United States Constitution, "We the people..."

The Second Treatise of Government revolutionized Western Civilization. It completely overturned the way people interpreted democracy. Governments from thenceforth would be accountable for their treatment of their constituents. Those who ruled were at the mercy of those they

ruled. Because of the Second Treatise, people would cease to place government before natural rights. Government infringements would be limited to that of security and security alone. People were placed back in the driving seats of their lives. Finally, all of Western Civilization now benefits from the understanding that the will of the people must be revered and is essential for a government to rule with consent. These principles found the bases of modern western culture and government. Without The Second Treatise, much of what we know to be western, freedom, liberty, and democracy, would still be an abstract idea.

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