

# Thomas paine: common sense



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## Thomas Paine's Common Sense: Of Common Sense and Good Reason

Thomas Paine's Common Sense speaks of the political aspect of life prominent in 18th-century America. A scholar from the Enlightenment tradition, Paine attempts to trace the origin of the rise of the society and government. In *Of the Origin and Design of Government in General*, the unknown author makes clear about the sharp distinction between society and government. In doing this, he is able to criticize the latter without criticizing the former. In fact, Paine generally views the government in a negative fashion: "restraining our vices." As we shall see, Paine has a reason why he distinguishes these two entities (i. e., government and society). The Common Sense pamphlet as a whole has largely contributed to, if not shaped, the logos and ethos characterized in the Western Civilization, particularly in the spheres of politics and democracy. To put the pamphlet (i. e., its propagated ideas) in its historical context, it was written in the time-period in which America, as we know it today, was a colony of the British Monarchy. In such geopolitical setting, the American people was greatly governed by the British royal government. In that era prior to the American Revolution, America as a colony had no political, economic, and military power on its own. Moreover, America was perceived as an extension of the British society -- the latter is the so-called "Mother Country" of the former. In the pamphlet, the first thing that it does is to expose the wrong reason of failing to distinguish between society and government. Paine illustrates the contradistinction of the two institutions through immigration theory. In *Of the Origin and Design*, Paine argues that immigrants -- these immigrating people are not connected or related to each other by blood or kin -- to a specific land territory eventually establish their own society in order to remain "

perfectly just to each other.” Paine uses this illustration or analogy as a way of eradicating the prevalent myth of absolute power inherent in a monarchical king: that a king is God’s chosen individual in governing His people. By and large, the fundamental ideas or theory marked in Paine’s Common Sense has greatly contributed to the rise of the Western Civilization, especially the American type of civilization: democracy. To my mind, the ideas contained in the said pamphlet are provocative, at least to its historical setting. In today’s world, the political theory prominent in Common Sense is generally a “ common sense.” Present-day people, including myself, no longer think that such ideas are necessary to be argued or reasoned out. Of course, Paine’s work made this possible. However, there are suggestions or recommendations presented in the pamphlet that appear vague, if not unreasonable: lottery. In Thoughts on the Present State of American Affairs, Paine seems to adhere to the use of lottery as a method of selecting or electing the persons to the seats in Congress: “ let a colony be taken from the whole thirteen colonies by lot” (emphasis mine). This is unreasonable primarily because it involves chance. Representation in Congress, I believe, is very crucial in insuring the interest or welfare of certain group of people in a particular society. Chance or probably fate is not something that rational people will accept without question. Perhaps Paine has “ good reason” why he supports the use of lottery in electing public officials. Nonetheless, time has change since the American Revolution; and this “ time” is embedded in reason, not “[t]ime makes more converts than reason.” Reference Paine, T. (1776). Common sense. Available from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/147/147-h/147-h.htm#thoughts>

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