

The Social Compact

The First Principle of the Social Compact recognizes that governments are instituted by the people and derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.

The Declaration of Independence recognizes as a self-evident truth that

“Governments of right are instituted among men, deriving their just powers are only from the consent of the governed”

There are two aspects to this First Principles of the Social Compact. First, that legitimate rightful governments are instituted among the People; second, that the just powers of rightful government are derived from the consent of the People. The Founding Fathers derived much of their understanding of this First Principle from John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and other like-minded philosophers.

The Founding Fathers concluded that because conflict is inevitable in a state of nature, individuals united in civil societies and established Governments to “secure the peace”.

James Madison reflected that;

“If men were angels, no government would be necessary.” But men are not angels.

Alexander Hamilton noted,

Government becomes necessary to restrain “the passions of men.” Thus, paradoxically, legal restraints are necessary to preserve liberty.

The alternative is vigilantism – which Hobbes aptly termed a

“war of every one against every one.”

The second aspect of the Social Compact is that the people must consent to give the government its authority. Robert Bates, explained that “In every free government, the People must give their assent to the laws by which they are governed. This is the true criterion between a “Free Government” and an Arbitrary one.”

Indeed, the American Revolution was strongly motivated by a defense of this First Principle. The cry of “no taxation without representation” was directly derived from the Social Compact.

The Social Compact is the indispensable First Principle of American freedom