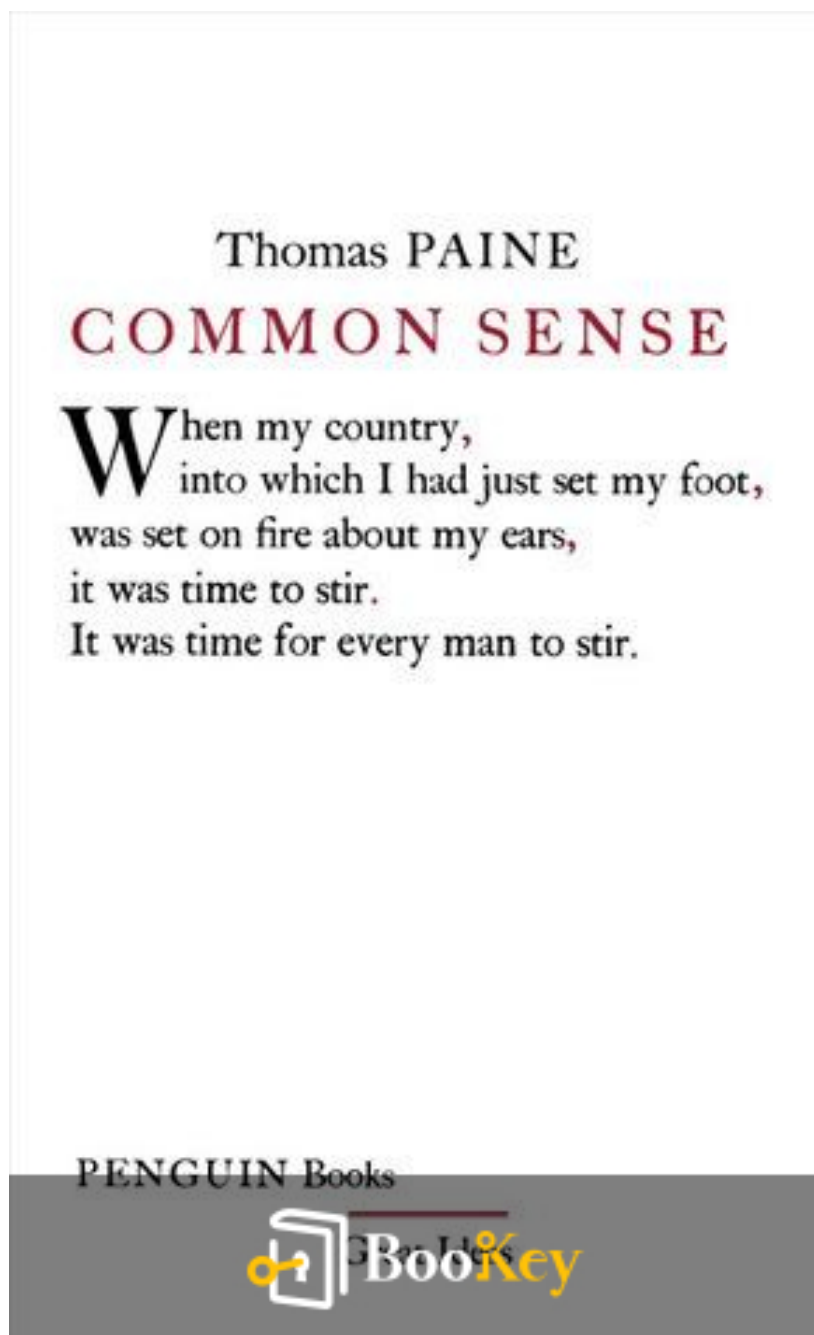


# Common Sense PDF (Limited Copy)

Thomas Paine



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# **Common Sense Summary**

A Call for Independence and Rational Governance.

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## About the book

In the tumultuous era of the American Revolution, Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" emerges as a clarion call for independence, advocating for the virtues of self-governance and the inherent rights of individuals to shape their destinies. This powerful pamphlet dismantles the shackles of monarchy and aristocracy, urging ordinary citizens to embrace the radical idea that government should be a product of the people's consent, not a tool of oppression. Paine's passionate arguments are steeped in clarity and conviction, igniting a sense of purpose among the colonies and inspiring them to rise against tyranny. Dive into this revolutionary text to explore how Paine's compelling vision not only shaped a nation but continues to resonate with the ideals of freedom and democracy in our modern world.

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## About the author

Thomas Paine was a provocative political philosopher and pamphleteer, born on January 29, 1737, in England. Emigrating to America in 1774, he quickly became a significant figure in the American Revolution, advocating for independence from British rule through his impassioned writings. His seminal work, "Common Sense," published in 1776, played a pivotal role in galvanizing public opinion for independence, articulating the principles of liberty and self-governance with clarity and fervor. Paine's contributions extended beyond the American context; he also wrote influential texts during the French Revolution and championed enlightenment ideals of reason and human rights. With his bold ideas and assertive style, Paine remains a towering figure in the history of political thought, inspiring generations to advocate for freedom and equality.

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# Chapter 1 Summary: OF THE ORIGIN AND DESIGN OF GOVERNMENT IN GENERAL, WITH CONCISE REMARKS ON THE ENGLISH CONSTITUTION

In "Common Sense," Thomas Paine delineates the distinct roles and origins of society and government, emphasizing that while society arises from our needs and facilitates happiness, government is born out of mankind's vices and serves primarily to restrain them. He argues that society is inherently a blessing, whereas government, even in its best form, is a necessary evil, often becoming intolerable when it fails to protect its citizens from the very miseries it is meant to deter. Government symbolizes a loss of innocence, as its structures and laws often emerge from the ruins of freedom, necessitated by the need to protect against moral failings inherent in humankind.

**1. The Necessity of Government:** Paine posits that in a mythical state of natural liberty, individuals would form societies to address their needs collaboratively. However, as society grows, it becomes apparent that governance is required to manage collective interests and obligations. This government should emerge as a mechanism to uphold justice among individuals, distributing powers that derive from the consent of the governed. Such governance is vital to ensure security and freedom, which he identifies as the true purposes of government.

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**2. The Nature of Representation and Law:** As communities expand, the practicalities of governance necessitate a system where a select few representatives act on behalf of the many. With proper intervals for elections, representatives remain interconnected with their constituents, thus reducing the risk of them developing self-serving interests. Effective governance thrives on the exchange of ideas and mutual support among the populace, emphasizing that happiness and authority derive not from monarchy, but from representation of the people's collective interest.

**3. Critique of the English Constitution:** Paine offers a scathing critique of the English Constitution, noting its convoluted structure that complicates governance and obscures accountability. He identifies an unfortunate blend of hereditary monarchy and aristocracy, arguing that these elements, rather than providing balance, create inefficiencies and injustices. The monarchy—deemed by Paine to be incompatible with rational governance—derives power from its ability to influence and control without sufficient accountability, leading to a situation where the system itself becomes a hindrance to justice.

**4. Misplaced National Pride:** Addressing the pride that many Englishmen feel towards their government, Paine contends that this sentiment is often based on misconception rather than reason. While individuals might enjoy relative safety, the king's will essentially serves as the law, mirroring the totalitarian nature of other governments. The



difference lies less in the system and more in the people's persistent struggle against oppression. He argues that the lack of oppression is a testament not to the government but to the overall virtue and constitution of the people themselves.

**5. The Imperative for Reform:** Paine calls for a critical analysis of government structures to identify inherent flaws, which inhibit societal progress. He warns against the dangers of sentimentality attached to an imperfect system, using the analogy of a man misled by transient desires. He urges that true understanding of governance necessitates overcoming biases fostered by tradition and pride. Just as a person must be clear-headed in choosing a partner, society must remain vigilant and discerning in choosing its form of government.

In conclusion, Paine asserts that the essence of good governance lies in its simplicity and its capability to secure freedom and happiness, which are ultimately rooted in the community's collective moral virtue and awareness. His passionate appeals resonate with the call for reform, urging a movement away from traditional oppressive structures toward a more just and representative form of government that genuinely embodies the will of the people.

Key Concepts	Description
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Key Concepts	Description
The Necessity of Government	Paine argues that government is essential in managing collective interests in society, upholding justice, and ensuring security and freedom derived from the consent of the governed.
The Nature of Representation and Law	A system of representatives acting on behalf of the people is vital for governance, emphasizing connection between elected officials and citizens to serve collective interests effectively.
Critique of the English Constitution	Paine critiques the English Constitution as convoluted, inefficient, and unjust due to its blend of hereditary monarchy and aristocracy, which obstructs accountability and rational governance.
Misplaced National Pride	Paine challenges the notion of national pride in the English government, suggesting that perceived safety is not due to governmental virtue, but rather the people's struggle against oppression.
The Imperative for Reform	A critical analysis of government structures is necessary to identify flaws, avoiding bias from tradition and sentimentality to ensure proper governance that serves society's needs.
Conclusion	Paine advocates for a simpler, more just form of governance that prioritizes freedom and happiness, rooted in the moral virtue and awareness of the community.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** The Necessity of Government

**Critical Interpretation:** Imagine a world where your voice matters, where the government represents not the powerful elite but the collective needs of you and your community. Thomas Paine's assertion about the necessity of government resonates deeply, inspiring you to actively participate in shaping a society that reflects your values and aspirations. By understanding that government is not a distant authority but a structure intended to uphold justice and ensure your happiness, you can become empowered to advocate for reforms that resonate with your needs. This awareness transforms governance from a mere necessity into a vital partnership where your input shapes policies that protect your freedom, fostering a collaborative spirit that ultimately cultivates a more just and vibrant community.

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## Chapter 2 Summary: OF M O N A R C H Y A N D H E R E D I T A R Y S U C C E S S I O N

In "Common Sense," Thomas Paine discusses the issues surrounding monarchy and hereditary succession, presenting a compelling argument against their legitimacy and value. He begins by asserting that all humans are fundamentally equal by nature, and any societal distinctions—such as wealth—can be explained without resorting to concepts like oppression. Instead, he challenges the notion that some individuals possess an inherent right to rule over others simply because of their birthright. He questions how it is that a class of kings emerged, and whether their existence truly brings happiness or only suffering to humanity.

**1. Historical Context of Kingship:** Paine notes that in the earliest societal forms, as described in religious texts, there were no kings, suggesting that the absence of monarchy contributed to the absence of wars. He cites Holland's prolonged peace as evidence against the need for royal governance, contrasting it with the turmoil often caused by kings.

**2. Scriptural Disapproval:** He references scripture to argue against monarchy, particularly highlighting the stories of Gideon and Samuel, which illustrate divine disapproval of kingship. Gideon explicitly refuses kingship, proclaiming that God should rule over the people, while Samuel conveys that the desire for a king reflects a rejection of divine sovereignty.



**3. Critique of Hereditary Succession:** Paine articulates that hereditary succession is inherently unjust. He argues that it perpetuates the rule of potentially unworthy individuals based solely on birthright, opening the door for foolish, wicked, or incompetent leadership. This principle offends the notion of equality and disregards the potential contributions of others.

**4. The Folly of Historical Claims:** He traces the origins of kingship to usurpation and self-serving power rather than noble ascent, critiquing the historical narratives that paint monarchs in a positive light. He challenges readers to recognize that ruler-centric narratives often omit the violence and injustice underpinning monarchy.

**5. Consequences of Monarchical Governance:** The dangers of hereditary succession extend beyond the individual monarch; they can lead to governance by minors or the senile, creating instability and opening the door to exploitation by unscrupulous advisors. Paine emphasizes that monarchy does not guarantee peace and often results in civil strife, citing the bloody history of England's monarchy.

**6. Inefficacy of Kingship:** Paine further explores the often-ambiguous role of a king, questioning the relevance of such governance in societies where rulers are neither judges nor warleaders. He suggests that in seeking a king, people seek an image of strength, but in reality, such figures are often



uninvolved and detrimental to national welfare.

**7. An Argument for Republicanism:** He concludes with a stark contrast between monarchies and republics, suggesting that greater proximity to republican governance yields a more functional and equitable society. By emphasizing the republican virtues inherent in a government established by the people, he insists that monarchy corrupts and undermines the very foundation of liberty.

Ultimately, Paine's critique of monarchy and hereditary succession is robust, urging readers to reconsider the natural rights of individuals and the moral basis for governance. His call for a government that reflects the will and interests of the people resonates with the ideals of republicanism, advocating for a system free from the injustices of inherited power.

Key Theme	Description
Historical Context of Kingship	Paine argues that early societies lacked kings and were more peaceful, using Holland as an example of stability without monarchy.
Scriptural Disapproval	References biblical stories of Gideon and Samuel to highlight divine disapproval of kings and the rejection of God's sovereignty.
Critique of Hereditary Succession	Argues hereditary succession is unjust, allowing unworthy leaders to rise based solely on birthright, undermining equality.
The Folly of	Challenges the positive portrayals of kingship, revealing its

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<b>Key Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
Historical Claims	origins in violence and usurpation rather than noble lineage.
Consequences of Monarchical Governance	Examines the instability caused by hereditary succession, including governance by minors or incompetents, leading to exploitation.
Inefficacy of Kingship	Questions the need for kings, suggesting they often lack relevance and can harm national welfare despite appearing strong.
An Argument for Republicanism	Contrasts monarchy with republicanism, advocating for a government by the people that upholds liberty and rejects inherited power.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** The Injustice of Hereditary Succession

**Critical Interpretation:** Imagine waking up each day aware that your life's direction and the leadership governing your community are determined not by merit, but by someone's birthright. Paine's critique of hereditary succession implores you to recognize the extraordinary potential within every individual, urging you to seek leaders who truly represent the interests and capabilities of the populace. This realization can be transformative, empowering you to challenge the status quo and advocate for systems that elevate the meritocratic values that foster growth, innovation, and equality. By rejecting the idea that power should rest in the hands of a few based solely on lineage, you are inspired to actively participate in a democratic society, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to shape their future and contribute to the collective well-being.

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## **Chapter 3: THOUGHTS ON THE PRESENT STATE OF AMERICAN AFFAIRS**

In this significant chapter from "Common Sense," Thomas Paine presents a compelling argument regarding the state of American affairs during the period leading to the Revolutionary War. He urges readers to adopt a mindset free of prejudice, appealing to both reason and emotion as he delineates the necessity of independence from Great Britain.

Paine emphasizes that the struggle is not merely one of a localized conflict; rather, it encompasses the entirety of the American continent and posterity itself. He expresses that the current moment is pivotal for establishing a continental union, where the repercussions of present decisions will extend far into the future. For him, reconciliation with Britain serves only to prolong domination and delay the inevitable.

To explain the intricacies of this deep-rooted dependence, Paine examines the alleged benefits of remaining connected with Great Britain, arguing that the connection is fallacious. He suggests that if America flourished under

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# Chapter 4 Summary: OF THE PRESENT ABILITY OF AMERICA, WITH SOME MISCELLANEOUS REFLECTIONS

In Chapter 4 of "Common Sense," Thomas Paine presents a compelling argument for American independence, focusing on the present capabilities of the colonies and the essential need for unity in order to establish a strong and independent nation. His insights can be distilled into several key points.

**1. Inevitability of Separation:** Paine begins by asserting that separation from Britain is inevitable and that the colonies must recognize their current strength and readiness for independence. He emphasizes that all men he has encountered recognize this truth, yet they disagree only on the timing. Paine argues that the time for independence is now, bolstered by a general consensus among the colonies.

**2. Strength in Unity:** He highlights the idea that unity is more critical than mere numbers. Although America possesses a large and impressive force, it is the cohesion among the colonies that will ultimately enable them to successfully repel foreign threats and achieve independence. Paine insists that disunity could be disastrous, as individual colonies may not withstand external pressure alone.

**3. Economic Considerations:** Paine addresses the financial implications



of independence, noting that the colonies have no significant debts and that any incurred in the pursuit of independence would be a mark of their virtue. He argues that it is more honorable to take on some debt for the sake of future generations than to leave them with unresolved issues and a burden of oppression.

**4. Naval Capability:** The author underscores America's natural resources and potential for building a formidable navy, emphasizing the importance of maritime strength for national security. He points out America's access to necessary materials like timber and iron for shipbuilding, indicating that the colonies are uniquely positioned to create their own naval power without reliance on Britain.

**5. Need for Local Governance:** Paine critiques the reliance on British protection, arguing that such dependency is not only impractical but also dangerous. He warns against the assumption that Britain, which seeks to subdue America, would protect it fairly. Instead, he advocates for the colonies to take charge of their own defense and governance to secure their freedoms.

**6. Opportunistic Timing:** Paine states that now is the most suitable moment for establishing a government; any delay could lead to more complex conflicts and divisions among the colonies. He suggests that the current unity borne out of shared struggles offers a unique opportunity to



draft a charter for self-governance that aligns with the needs and aspirations of the colonies.

**7. Independence as the Path Forward:** He posits that declaring independence would not only be a legal necessity but also a strategic move that would allow the colonies to garner international support and establish trade relations without British interference. By positioning themselves as independent, the colonies could appeal to other nations for assistance, changing their international standing from conflicting subjects to sovereign entities.

**8. Religious Freedom:** Paine advocates for the protection of diverse religious opinions within the new government, indicating that true freedom of belief should be safeguarded. He posits that a government should not impose a singular religious view but rather foster a society where various beliefs coexist harmoniously.

**9. Awareness of Domestic Challenges** In considering the internal divisions among the colonies, Paine cautions against the long-term dangers of neglecting the urgency of unifying under a common cause and governance structure. He expresses concern over the potential for jealousy and conflict should unity not be solidified at this critical junction in history.

Finally, Paine concludes by underscoring the critical need for a definitive

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declaration of independence, articulating the practical and philosophical benefits of breaking away from British rule. He urges that through such an act, the colonies can truly set themselves on the path of self-governance and establish a legacy for future generations. The chapter serves as a rallying call for unity, strength, and courage in the face of adversity, urging the colonies to seize the moment for independence.

Key Points	Summary
Inevitability of Separation	Paine asserts that the separation from Britain is inevitable, and the colonies must realize their readiness for independence, with consensus on the urgency of this move.
Strength in Unity	Paine emphasizes the importance of unity over numbers, arguing that cohesion among the colonies is crucial for repelling threats and achieving independence.
Economic Considerations	Paine highlights that the colonies have minimal debts and that incurring some debt for independence is virtuous compared to leaving future generations with burdens.
Naval Capability	Paine discusses America's potential for building a strong navy using its natural resources, essential for national security and independence from Britain.
Need for Local Governance	Paine critiques reliance on British protection, asserting that the colonies should establish their own governance to ensure freedom and safety.
Opportunistic Timing	Paine states that the present is the best time for establishing a government; delay could lead to complex conflicts, and current unity offers a unique chance for self-governance.
Independence as the Path Forward	Declaring independence is positioned as a strategic necessity to gain international support and trade relations, transitioning the colonies to sovereign entities.



Key Points	Summary
Religious Freedom	Paine advocates for protecting diverse religious opinions, arguing that the new government should foster cohabitation of various beliefs rather than impose a single view.
Awareness of Domestic Challenges	Paine warns of the long-term dangers of failing to unify under a common governance structure and expresses concern over potential internal conflicts if unity is neglected.

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