

## Edmund Pendleton Speech: Virginia Ratifying Convention, 12 June 1788

On the subject of Government the worthy member (Mr. *Henry*) and I differ at the threshold. I think Government necessary to protect liberty. He supposes the American spirit all-sufficient for the purpose. What say the most respectable writers—Montesquieu, Locke, Sidney, Harrington, &c? They have presented us with no such idea. They properly discard from their system, all the severity of cruel punishments, such as tortures, inquisitions, and the like—shocking to human nature, and only calculated to coerce the dominion of tyrants over slaves. But they recommend making the ligaments of Government firm, and a rigid execution of the laws as more necessary than in a Monarchy—to preserve that virtue, which they all declare to be the pillar on which the Government, and liberty its object, must stand. They are not so visionary, as to suppose, there ever did or ever will exist a society, however large their aggregate fund of virtue may be, but hath among them persons of a turbulent nature, restless in themselves, and disturbing the peace of others—Sons of rapine and violence, who unwilling to labour themselves, are watching every opportunity to snatch from the industrious peasant the fruits of his honest labour. Was I not then correct in my inference, that such a Government and liberty were friends and allies, and that their common enemy was turbulence, faction, and violence? 'Tis those therefore that will be offended by good Government, and for those I suppose no Gentleman will profess himself an advocate. The writers just mentioned, point out licentiousness as the natural offspring of liberty, and that therefore all free Governments should endeavor to suppress it, or else it will ultimately overthrow that liberty of which it is the result. Is this speculation only? Alas! reason and experience too fatally prove its truth in all instances. A Republican Government is the nursery of science. It turns the bent of it to eloquence, as a qualification for the representative character, which is, as it ought to be, the road to our public offices. I have pleasure in beholding these characters already produced in our councils—and a rising fund equal to a constant supply—May heaven prosper their endeavors, and direct their eloquence to the real good of their country. I am unfortunate enough to differ from the worthy member in another circumstance. He professes himself an advocate for the *middling* and *lower* classes of *men*. I profess to be a friend to the *equal* liberty of *all men*, from the palace to the cottage, without any other distinction than between *good* and *bad* men. I appeal to my public life and private behaviour, to decide whether I have departed from this rule. Since distinctions have been brought forth and communicated to the audience; and will be therefore disseminated, I beg Gentlemen to take with them this observation, that distinctions have been produced by the opposition. From the friends of the new Government, they have heard none.—None such are to be found in the organization of the paper before you.

Why bring into debate the whims of writers—introducing the distinction of *well born* from others?—I consider every man *well born* who comes into the world with an intelligent mind, and with all his parts perfect. I am an advocate for fixing our Government on true republican principles, giving to the poor man free liberty in his person and property. Whether a man be great or small he is equally dear to me. I wish, Sir, for a regular Government, in order to secure and protect those honest citizens who have been distinguished—I mean the industrious farmer and planter. I wish them to be protected in the enjoyment of their honestly and industriously acquired property. I wish commerce to be fully protected and encouraged, that the people may

have an opportunity of disposing of their crops at market, and of procuring such supplies as they may be in want of. I presume that there can be no political happiness, unless industry be cherished and protected, and property secured.—Suppose a poor man becomes rich by honest labour, and increases the public stock of wealth, shall his reward be the loss of that liberty he set out with? Will you take away every stimulus to industry, by declaring that he shall not retain the fruits of it? The idea of the poor becoming rich by assiduity is not mere fancy. I am old enough, and have had sufficient experience to know the effects of it. I have often known persons commencing in life without any other stock but industry and economy; by the mere efforts of these, rise to opulence and wealth. This could not have been the case without a Government to protect their industry.—In my mind the true principles of republicanism, and the greatest security of liberty, is regular Government. Perhaps I may not be a republican, but this is my idea. In reviewing the history of the world, shall we find an instance where any society retained its liberty without Government? As I before hinted, the smallest society in extent, to the greatest empire, can only be preserved by a regular Government, to suppress that faction and turbulence so natural to many of our species. What do men do with those passions when they come into society? Do they leave them? No—they bring them with them.—These passions which they thus bring into society will produce disturbances which without any check will overturn it.

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