



## Always Turning the Other Cheek?

An Introduction to the Question 'Christianity and Resistance'

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**Always Turning the Other Cheek?  
- An Introduction to the Question ‘Christianity and Resistance’**

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*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.  
For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are  
ordained by God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power,  
resisteth the ordinance of God[...]  
Rom. XIII, 1-2*

John Locke argues in his ‘The Second Treaties of Government’ that a state is necessary to avoid the total anarchy and a ‘state of nature’ where all fight all (chapters II & III), and thus he is in accordance with both with Aristotle who argues that it is the task of the state to secure stability for its citizens (‘Politik’, Book 5), and with Hobbes, who described the world outside the state with his famous words: ‘It is a jungle out there’. The state prevents that anarchy should move inside the state borders, it gives stability and peace. Resistance to the state’s orders is basically an action no state can tolerate, as it undermines the executive’s authority and may lead to the loss of the states legitimacy, to anarchy and eventually to the break down of the state. And man long for pace and stability not anarchy, but at any cost, is there a limit when resistance against the state is necessary?

The topic of this short chapter, indeed this whole book is resistance understood as the opposition to something one disagrees with, concretely ‘the state’. Resistance may be legal or illegal; it may be passive or active. But if all governance comes from God are Christians allowed to resist any Government at all?<sup>1</sup> This question has been answered differently by different persons at different times in different situations, and it not the aim of this chapter to give an answer to the question. But whatever the answer may have been, through the ages, it has had political, moral and some times personal consequences.

The aims of this chapter is not to give a narrative of church history, but to look at the concept of resistance from a theological and a politological / philosophical angle. We will focus on three central periods: the formative years of the Church (30 AD until around 500), the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Although relevant and interesting, this book does not look at Christians oppressing other Christians out of religious disagreements even though the former may be in government; thus ‘incidents’ like the prosecution of the Anabaptists by the Zwinglianer in Zurich will not be looked into.

century (including the Reformation), when the doctrines were conceived and developed by clergy as well as politologists, and the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, where the *ancienne regime* was overthrown, and a legitimating for that was needed. These were the crucial periods, where the concept was developed; the later times basically draw on the earlier thinkers.

## The beginning

During the first century AD Christianity began spreading within the Roman Empire which was approaching the zenith of its power building on Augustus victory over Antonius. Augustus reformed the religious system of Rome emphasising the ancient Roman gods and traditions, restoring temples, rites etc. and trying to stop the infiltration of the Oriental gods, sceptical philosophy and atheism, which were considered dangerous to the state, the regime. His reform secured a certain stability over the next 200 years (Grane 173/22). One important factor in this context was the worship of the emperor, beginning with the worship of his genius but soon, under Caligula, one worshiped not only the genius and the deceased emperors but the living ones as well ('Caesar and god'). In the meantime the Church itself expanded; Acts as well as the Letters in the New Testament give a vivid account of that. The two most important factors being Paul's opening of Christianity to non-Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AC moving the centre of the Church from a small provincial town to Rome and Ephesus, conducting a final breach with Judaism and at the same time placing itself centrally in the Empire. Apart from Nero's rather local persecution in Rome (64 AD) there were no conflict between the state and the Christians<sup>2</sup>. Augustus' death (14 AD) had implied a climate of larger tolerance towards other religions which the Christians could profit from when they began spreading some decades later. Adding to this, the Christians constituted a minority and were not considered a threat to the Roman state or its religion. But this did not prevent local episodes, as Christianity was itself intolerant towards other religions, claiming to be the only true way to salvation – Acts tell several episodes where Christians were persecuted locally (13,59; 14;1-6; 14,19). But generally the period was tranquil for the new Church which respected the Emperor and his officials; they lived in the World but tried not to be of the world.

During the second century the Roman Empire expands and consolidates under the leadership of the adopted emperors (e.g. Trajan, Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius). The state is strong and not threatened, culture flourishes, one speaks of 'the golden century'. But this does not imply that Christianity is an accepted religion, it is illegal and not looked at with tolerance, neither from the other religions nor from the state. But a correspondence from Emperor Trajan to the governor in Asia Minor, Plinius the Younger from approx. 112 reveals, that although the emperor considers Christians worthy of the death-penalty, they are too unimportant for the state to begin investigations to eliminate them on a larger scale (Bruce1991/14-19). The Church itself expanded slowly during this century, perhaps due to the hostile environment.

The end of the second century and all of the third century were bad for the Roman empire. After Marcus Aurelius came the rule of Commodus, initiating a period of unrest lasting under the house of Septimus Servus (193-235) and the soldier emperors which – with the exeption of Diocletian – lasted until Constantinus the great. The state was weakened inside by many and incompetent Emperors and civil wars, as well as a steady building pressure from outside which had been there since the mid-second century.

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<sup>2</sup> Although two prominent Christians, St. Peter and St. Paul were killed.

According to Latourette (1965 / chapter 4) the problems Rome had in this period were interpreted by some as a result of the apostate from the old gods, as well as the upcoming of the Christians. While accepting the rule of the Emperor and even praying for him, the Christians could not worship him or the ancient Roman gods, and as the emperor was seen both as the personification of the state and as a god, it was easy to argue for the Christians as at best illoyal and at worst blasphemous heathens disregarding the old gods etc. When adding to this the Christian claim of exclusive knowledge of salvation, the scene was set for prosecutions and they came.

The Church itself ran through a strong development in this period. At the beginning it was weakened by internal disagreements and syncretism (Gnosis, Markion, Montanism) but it is possible to claim, that this internal threat was overcome around 180 as one also agreed on the canon as well as the rules for baptism. At the organisational level the bishops were able to strengthen their position (apostolic succession), organise cooperation between the dioceses (Synods) etc. But this also made the Church more visible and slowly more powerful. Septimius Severus forbade conversion to Christianity, and Emperor Decius trying to renew the Roman spirit dictated that all Roman citizens should offer up to the Roman gods. According to Grane (1973/66) did this lead to the first organised prosecution (250-251) but did not cost many martyrs but many *lapsi*. Under any circumstances the Church was better prepared when Emperor Valerianus' prosecutions began in 257. Christian services were prohibited, the clergy were ordered to sacrifice to the gods and senators and knights were threatened with confiscation of their property (Grane 1973/67). The latter is interesting, as it implies that also members of the Roman upper-classes were now turning towards Christianity. When Emperor Gallienus stopped the prosecutions the Church got around 40 years of peace which it used to consolidate itself until the last and worst prosecution was launched by Emperor Diocletian 303-304 lasting until 311. According to Robert Broughton (1966 / 199) did Diocletian consider the Church a powerful organisation, a state in the state, what he could not tolerate in a time of crisis. His prosecution had two phases; first the civil service and the army was cleansed for Christians (to secure a loyal instrument for the following process), then the Christians had to sacrifice to the gods; either that or deportation to the mines ... The prosecutions lasted until 311 when Emperor Galerius stopped them.

Concerning resistance the Church began as a tiny, fragile organisation which lived on the mercy of its environment. It was discriminated against from the state and parts of the civil society. And the Church, especially at the beginning, hardly had influential supporters. The Christians rendered passive resistance to the state and no other real alternative was left to it, neither do I recall having read suggestions of the opposite. Martyrdom was a reality, and a way to meet the Lord. In this sense, the choice was easy. Besides there was no Roman tradition to fall back on, should one have considered the idea<sup>3</sup>.

After Diocletian's resignation 305 war broke out among his designated successors. This civil war had a first end with Emperor Constantine the Great's (c. 208 - 337) victory over his rival Maxentius at the Milvia Bridge<sup>4</sup> 312, which makes Constantine ruler of the Western Empire, while Licinius rules the East until Constantine's victory over him in 324. But the Roman empire had suffered from the civil war. In 330 Constantine founded Constantinople, 'a new Rome', thus moving the centre of

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<sup>3</sup> In the republic a Roman civil servant could be tried before court after he had laid down his office; and during the emperors' era, they had a divine aura preventing resistance – but not assassination of political reasons.

<sup>4</sup> Legend tells that on the evening of the battle at Milvia Bridge (near to Rome), a cross appeared in the sky together with the words 'by this sign shall you conquer', turning Constantine favourably towards Christianity.

the Empire eastwards. Constantine and his successors were preoccupied with wars against Persia, the Franks, the Goths etc. Emperor Theodosius kept the Empire together until his death in 395, where it was divided between his two sons. The last western Emperor was Romulus Augustulus (476), whereas the eastern Empire went on until 1453.

Already 313 Constantine gave the Edict of Tolerance (Edict of Milan), in which the Church got official toleration, got its properties restored, and the bishops got a certain degree of jurisdiction. The change had come for the Church, a change which was finally crowned by its elevation to state-church in 380 at the same time as other religions were prohibited. In other words, the political situation of the Church was dramatically changed.

The price the Church had to pay was a loss of independence. Constantine needed the Church to legitimize his empire, and thus he needed a united church. So when the Church was faced with internal fights he would intervene, either with direct orders or by calling an ecumenical council as he did in Nicaea 325 to solve the Arian conflict and to formulate Christian doctrine; works he himself participated in.

The questions of resistance, military service and war were not serious questions before 313. But afterwards some of these questions popped up, now that the Church and the State were in close alliance. Augustine (354-430 AD), in his *de civitate dei* as well as in his *letters* does not directly set up a doctrine on the right of resistance, he does discuss reasons for war, and if one follows Home it is also possible to deduce a certain right of resistance. According to Augustine one may conduct war according to the will of God (Book 1.21) e.g. against the heathens attacking (2001 / .221), but it should be just (Book 15,4) and its aim should be peace (Book 19, 12). He also writes a Christian senior officer (2001 / 217): "Therefore it ought to be necessity, and not your will, that destroys an enemy who is fighting you. And just as you use force against the rebel or opponent, so you ought now to use mercy towards the defeated or the captive, and particular so when there is no fear that peace will be disturbed". Augustine also nailed down the criteria of a just war (*bellum iustum*):

- 1) its aim must be the re-creation of the legal order i.e. peace with the adversary, not the destruction of him (*recta intentio*).
- 2) Just war may only be waged by a (legitimate) government, to him: the Roman emperor (*legitima auctoritas*). And
- 3) the course of the war must be the threat of breaking the legal order (*causa iusta*).

Home (without year) argues, that according to Augustine, God's state will remain in a state of contradiction to the earthly state (*civitas terrene*), only with the Church as a vague mirror of God's states glory, and *thus* the Christians, to save the eternal life are allowed to resist the earthly powers.

Taking a large step forward in time Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274) treated the question of 'tyrannicide'<sup>5</sup>. The 13<sup>th</sup> century witnesses the many wars between France and England, the Emperor and the Pope etc. The Pope tries to claim his superiority over the Emperor as well as the king of France. The Empire gets weakened and consists of a multitude of principalities, all organised in a feudal way. Thus the question of resistance is more than just theoretical. Thomas

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<sup>5</sup> Tyrannicide must be understood as the ultimate kind of active resistance. Other kinds of resistance were known and accepted as common law through the middle ages, as long as they did not exceed the boundaries of proportionality: e.g. refusal of showing obedience (Wilhelm Tell), refusal of paying taxes, doing drudgery. This was done to restore rights and of course it was easier for a nobleman than a peasant to do this.

Aquinas approved of it. The tyrant is (cf. Harty): “[...] a traitor acting against the common well, and, like any other criminal, may be put to death by legitimate authority. If possible the legitimate authority must use the ordinary forms of law in condemning the tyrant to death, but if this is not possible, it can proceed informally and grant individuals a mandate to inflict the capital punishment.” The word ‘grant’ is important, as it implies, the killer must have a mandate, not do it on his or her own whim. According the same source, Thomas Aquinas accepted tyrannicide as a last resort, but also rooted in a higher power than an individual’s idea. This is in accordance with the medieval understanding that government comes from God, carried out by people to the benefit of men. It is also in accordance with the Augustinian dictum of violence must only be used to restore peace and justice. This same understanding of use of violence comes through when looking at his understanding of (just) war which is equivalent to Augustinus’:

- 1) Only governments had the right to declare war (*legitima potestas*)
- 2) There had to be a just reason for war (*causa iusta*)
- 3) There had to be a will to re-construct justice (*recta intentio*).

According to Thomas Aquinas is war of aggression not allowed<sup>6</sup>.

## **The Reformation and the theologians thought of Resistance**

The Catholic Church discussed the question of tyrannicide at the Council of Constance (1414-18) under the direction of the Emperor, and came out against it, condemning it as contrary to faith and moral. The Council was important, as it attempted to restore the Church after the Popes were in Avignon and the general decay of the Church’s power, morally and politically (at time there were two Popes, bribery etc.).

A good hundred years later, the Reformation swept Europe, and the new Churches had to make a stand on the question, too in that extremely tense and uncertain time; tense and uncertain for the churches and for the peoples. The Constancer Council had not solved the moral crisis of the Church. Although Emperor Charles V fought both for the Church and the Empire, he was not able to prevent the disintegration of the Empire, esp. in Central Europe nor the continuing moral decay of the Church, eventually leading to the Reformation.

As mentioned the Catholic Church did not approve of resistance. This would also be inconsistent, as the Pope still claimed to have the right to tell a prince if he behaved rightly or not as he had done earlier e.g. King Henry of Germany’s walk to Canossa 1076. Still there were theologians within the Catholic Church who discussed the right of resistance like the Spanish Jesuite Mariana (1599), coming out in favour of it.

Martin Luther (1483 - 1546) may look ‘woolly’ in his approach to resistance, and he had witnessed the ‘German Peasant’s War’ (*Bauernkrieg*). The peasants, in a miserable economic and social situation, had witnessed the behaviour of the clergy of the Catholic Church and had been able to read the newly translated New Testament (1522) and Martin Luther’s ‘On the freedom of a Christian man’, *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen* (1520). These books inspired them to ask, why they had to work for the upper classes. The result was violent uprisings, the slaughter of

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<sup>6</sup> I have included the question of just war because it shows the great restraint both Augustinus and Thomas Aquinas laid down on the use of violence, be that from the side of the state or the citizens. Violence was *ultima ratio*.

many peasants, and the endangerment of Luther's reformation due to the princes misbelieve or fear of the consequences. But when looking in his '*Tischreden*' he is fairly clear (1953/197, my translation):

*"May one kill a tyrant, who acts against law and equity ?*

For a civilian or a common man, who holds no public office or command, it is not suitable, that he should do it [kill a tyrant, SD], even if he could – the fifth commandment prohibits it: You must not murder. But if I should find a man with my wife or my daughter, even if he was not a tyrant, I would kill him. Therefore: If he takes the wife of this one, the daughter of the other one, and the land and possessions of a third one, and if the subjects then unite in order to put an end to his violence and tyranny, they shall kill him like any other murderer or robber"

But then (1953/197p., my translation)

*"Example of steadiness*

If the authorities themselves are hostile and against God's word, we yield, sell and leave everything, flee from one city to the other, as Christ commands: For because of the gospel, one should not make noise nor make opposition, but suffer everything."

In other words, I find Luther fairly clear: when considering the general problem he accepts the right to resistance, if the subjects *in globo* decide so. But in accordance with Aquinas he advises a single individual to use the *jus emigrandi* if prosecuted.

Jean Calvin (1509 – 1564) was very clear in his teachings. Leaning on Augustine and Thomas Aquinas he emphasised the state's authority over man: In a fallen world the state is necessary to keep order and justice. Thus there is no individual right of resistance. But as Iain Maclean rightly remarks does Calvin's emphasise of God's absoluteness open up for organised resistance, when the ruler's commands are in conflict with God's word. No state is absolute, only God is. In 'The Institutes of the Christian Religion', Book 4 'On the Duty of Magistrates' Calvin stresses that that removing of a ruler, who is not in accordance with God, is a duty of the magistrate or other lower institutions. It is not a right of individuals or groups of citizens. Calvin very much wanted to prevent anarchy.

Text ....

The Anabaptists have their origin in the Zwinglian reformation in Zürich (1525), which they basically supported but did not find excessive enough. In the 'Schleitheimer Article' from 1527 they lied down their basic dogmatic: The non-recognition of child baptism, the non-recognition of earthly authorities, the refusal of paying tax, doing military service, and take the oath. Adding to this they formed their own congregations. Their dogmatic fundament was the Sermon on the Mount. They belong to the founders of the pacifist tradition. Resistance, which inevitably would happen, was logically of passive nature.

These basic positions have been held by the four churches up through the centuries, but they have developed according to the surrounding society. During the reformation the Reformed and the Protestant Churches turned more open to resistance, to defend the right faith, when they were threatened, and the Catholic Church kept its strong point of 'no resistance'. Concurrently with the end of the religious wars in Europe, the upcoming of the modern state system (Westphalian Peace 1648) as well as the victory of absolutism ('King by the Grace of God'), the influence of the churches declined and often degenerated into instruments of the state, which is hardly a good position for new thinking and development of doctrines of resistance.

The doctrine of resistance as expressed by the Catholic Church, the Reformed Church and also the Protestant Church is characterised by the utmost restraint in the use of power – and even more so the Anabaptists. The fear of anarchy, civil war etc. is immanent. Thus the teaching of the churches has basically been in support of the state and of status quo until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where Christian inspired peace movements began to pop up. One example is the inter-denominational Fellowship of Reconciliation, which was founded in 1914 in an attempt to stop the First World War by peaceful means, and consisting of British, German and later also American persons.

## **Political thought and the right of resistance in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century**

When looking at the theological debate on resistance it is natural to use the denominations as way of categorising the various contributions. But this would hardly work, when looking at the secular discussion of resistance. In the history of political thought, philosophy and related sciences one may distil two archetype approaches or worldviews: an idealist or liberal approach, looking at man with positive eyes. Man is basically good and is able to be improved through education etc. The development of society in general is positive and progressive; theoretically it is possible to make a perfect society on earth and at the end of the process the state is hardly needed. Exponents are e.g. Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Karl Marx. The other archetype is the 'realist' or conservative one. Man is selfish and egoistic and education etc. may help to cut away the worst edges but not alter the human nature fundamentally. History repeats itself and heaven is NOT a place on earth. Exponents are Aristotle, Machiavelli (1469-1527), Thomas Hobbes and Reinhold Niebuhr. These approaches to the human nature run through the Western history of ideas; some times in a pure form, but also in a variety of mixes. Not all Christian scholars belong to the 'realist' or rather pessimistic school, but there seem to be a 'lumping' together in that category, depending on how much emphasis is put on heredity sin etc. On the other hand one may find 'non Christians' in the realist group, like Edmond Burk, just as one may find Christian thinkers in the liberal corner, like John Locke.

Machiavelli's name is linked to 'Il principe' (The Prince) a manual on how to obtain and keep power. But he also wrote a book on republics and democracy (Discourses on Livy). Still, his understanding of the human as well as the possibilities for positive changes remained rather pessimistic, although he pleaded for republicanism i.e. democracy<sup>7</sup>. Already in book 1, chapter 5, in Discorsi,

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<sup>7</sup> "Man kann nie einen Übelstand beseitigen, ohne dass ein anderer daraus entsteht." (Discorsi, 1. Buch) and "Je mehr Macht die Menschen haben, um so mehr missbrauchen sie diese und werden übermütig." (Geschichte von Florenz, 2. Buch)

Religiously the Dutch scholar and statesman Hugo Grotius (1583 - 1645) sided with the Arminians against the Calvinists in the question of the cause of free will and predestination. He did not believe, that war could be excluded between states, but his aim was to make it less brutal in general and to protect the civilians in particular.

"I saw in the whole Christian world a license of fighting at which even barbarous nations might blush. Wars were begun on trifling pretexts or none at all, and carried on without any reference of law, Divine or human."

--Hugo Grotius -- *Prolegomena*

In his *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* ('On Law of War and Peace') from 1625. Book 1, chapter 4 discusses the question of citizens' right to resistance, or as he considers it: war against their ruler.

"Among all good men one principle at any rate is established beyond controversy, that if the order should not be carried out."

Grotius accepts an extremely limited right of active resistance and does not allow the ruler to be hurt, while leaning at e.g. David and Saul. Although David knew that king Saul wanted him dead and David had a bodyguard, David fled and tried to hide instead of standing up and defend himself. Also Grotius refers to the first generations of Christians who, although prosecuted did not resist. Resistance is only acceptable

Uprising against a usurer is acceptable as he has come to power illegally

He also quotes and agrees with Favonius' statement "civil war is a worse evil than unlawful government" (Book 1 Chapter 4, XIX.2).

Summing up Grotius is extremely restrictive in allowing resistance against a tyrant compared to Calvin and Luther; resistance is only acceptable as a very last resort before being killed, and even then Grotius opts for being killed...

The general idea of Grotius is to maintain peace and tranquillity within the state, and not to

Restricted self-defence is OK (Book 1, Chapter 4, VII.5-7) Refererer bl.a. til David (realist tradition)

Thomas Hobbes (1588 - 1679 ) got accused for being an atheist, is an arctype realist. His famous statement to the Earl of Essex about society 'it is a jungle out there', as well as his characteristic of mankind as 'Homo homine lupus' tells that (1994 / 106):

"For the laws of nature (as justice, equity, modesty, mercy, and (in sum) doing to others as we would be done to) of themselves, without the terror of some power to cause them to be observed, are contrary to our natural passions, that carry us to partiality, pride, revenge, and the like"

He was the farther of the idea of a social contract made by men living in a state of nature, and afraid of their lives. So much afraid that they were ready to give up parts of their freedom for the establishment of a commonwealth (1994 / 109):

“The only way to erect such a common power as may be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners and the injustice of one another, [...], is to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, [...] unto one will, which is as much as to say, to appoint a man or assembly of men to bear their person, and every one to own and acknowledge himself to be author of whatsoever he that so beareth their person shall act, [...]”.

The regent (Hobbes preferred monarchy) is above the law. If he is wise he will follow the natural law, and try to give good and fair laws, carrying about society etc. as it will secure stability wealth and minimise the risk of rebellion. But no one can prevent him from not looking after the society and pursue egoistic goals. I agree with Colette Kouadio’s summery that:

“Il faut bien voir qu'aux yeux de Hobbes le droit de résistance est purement et simplement exclu. Le souverain, même s'il use de la dernière violence, ne peut rien faire contre l'intérêt du peuple puisqu'il le sort de la pire des situations qui soit : l'état de nature. Toute révolte risque de faire réapparaître cet état de nature. Or, si *"à l'état de nature l'homme est un loup pour l'homme, à l'état social l'homme est un dieu pour l'homme"*. Certes si le pouvoir était à ce point arbitraire qu'il mettrait en péril la vie de ses sujets, ceux-ci peuvent se défendre (c'est en effet pour se préserver qu'ils ont admis le contrat) mais cela ne signifie pas qu'il y ait droit à la résistance. Le pouvoir est absolu parce que c'est le garant de sa stabilité. Cela ne signifie pas qu'il soit nécessairement arbitraire ou despotique.”

Thus even in Hobbes’ universe man has a limited right to resist the regent, namely the one of self defence<sup>8</sup>.

John Locke (1632 - 1704), who sympathised with the Armenians (Gough 1956/ix), was basically a Whig but followed Augustine, and the other protestant thinkers of the reformation, when writing his ‘The Second Treatise of Government’ in 1690. In chapter 18 ‘On Tyranny’ he deals with the question of resistance. He begins by defining tyranny as “[...] the exercise of power beyond right, which nobody can have a right to. And this is making use of the power any one has in his hand, not for the good of those who are under it, but for his own private separate advantage” (Lock 1956/100). To Locke the regent is a subject to the law, contrary to Hobbes. Thus his answer to the question whether resistance is acceptable is stringent (1956/102):

“To this I answer, that force is to be opposed to nothing but to unjust and unlawful force; whoever makes any opposition in any other case draws on himself a just condemnation both from God and man, [...]”

Such were the theoretical basis up to the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Only a very limited right to resist the sovereign was accepted, and that was equally the case whether the scholar belonged to the idealist or realist tradition. The last half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw two great revolutions: the American and the French.

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas S. Schrock 1991 gives an in-depth analysis of ‘The Right to Punish and Resist Punishment in Hobbes’s Leviathan.

## The Great Revolutions

An important argument for a revolution in America was delivered by Thomas Paine (1737-1809), a broke Englishman whom Benjamin Franklin got to know and send to Philadelphia. His great contribution was the pamphlet 'Common Sense' from 1776.

He begins his pamphlet by making the important distinction between society and government (Section I):

“SOME writers have so confounded society with government, as to leave little or no distinction between them; whereas they are not only different, but have different origins. Society is produced by our wants, and government by wickedness; the former promotes our happiness *positively* by uniting our affections, the latter *negatively* by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is a patron, the last a punisher

“Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one; for when we suffer, or are exposed to the same miseries *by a government*, which we might expect in a country *without government*, our calamity is heightened by reflecting that we furnish the means by which we suffer. Government, like dress, is the badge of lost innocence; [...].”

As one does need a government, then its source of legitimacy and sovereignty stems from the majority of the people. He goes on arguing, that the British constitution has cemented tyranny, and that the America suffers economically from the connection (section III):

“I have heard it asserted by some, that as America hath flourished under her former connexion with Great-Britain, that the same connexion is necessary towards her future happiness, and will always have the same effect. Nothing can be more fallacious than this kind of argument. We may as well assert that because a child has thrived upon milk, that it is never to have meat, or that the first twenty years of our lives is to become a precedent for the next twenty. But even this is admitting more than is true, for I answer roundly, that America would have flourished as much, and probably much more, had no European power had any thing to do with her. The commerce, by which she hath enriched herself are the necessaries of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe.”

Consequently he suggests an independent America under a president and a continental congress. Also one should remember that the American Revolution, was an uprising of citizens outside the mainland, and was basically legitimized through the claim of being deprived from democratic right ('No taxation without representation') as well as general exploitation from the mother country. In other words the sovereign did not obey the laws of the country, and an uprising was legitimate in a Lockean sense.

The French Revolution was of a different kind. It took place in the mother country and its aim was to transform the existing system of government and to reform the whole society:

In the preamble of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, as approved by the National Assembly of France, August 26, 1789 the reason for the change is given:

“The representatives of the French people, organized as a National Assembly, believing that the ignorance, neglect, or contempt of the rights of man are the sole cause of public calamities and of the corruption of governments, have determined to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, unalienable, and sacred rights of man, in order that this declaration, being constantly before all the members of the Social body, shall remind them continually of their rights and duties; in order that the acts of the legislative power, as well as those of the executive power, may be compared at any moment with the objects and purposes of all political institutions and may thus be more respected, and, lastly, in order that the grievances of the citizens, based hereafter upon simple and incontestable principles, shall tend to the maintenance of the constitution and redound to the happiness of all.”

The concrete background for the French Revolution was a desolate economy, large unemployment, monopolies and a rigid society, which divided the citizens in three categories: the clergy, the nobility and the commoners. The ideological or philosophical background was the enlightenment and its belief in the possibilities of the future. Among many sources of inspiration were John Lock and Charles-Louis de Secondat Montesquieu (1689 - 1755).

The French minister of Finance Jacques Necker, had tried to reform the finances, but got stopped by the regional parliaments. This prompted Abbé Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès (1748 – 1836) to write the single most influential pamphlet on the situation in France titled ‘Qu’est-ce que le tiers état?’ (What is the third state?). He begins his pamphlet thus:

”The plan of this book is fairly simple. We must ask ourselves three questions.

1. What is the Third State? Everything.
2. What has it been until now in the political order? Nothing.
3. What does it want to be? Something....

[and ends]:

The Third Estate embraces then all that which belongs to the nation; and all that which is not the Third Estate, cannot be regarded as being of the nation.”

In his pamphlet Sieyès criticises the privileges of the nobility and argues that they are a burden upon the state and that the whole system of privileges prevents progress, and he goes on:

“In the first place, it is not possible in the number of all the elementary parts of a nation to find a place for the caste of nobles. I know that there are individuals in great number whom infirmities, incapacity, incurable laziness, or the weight of bad habits render strangers to the labors of society. The exception and the abuse are everywhere found beside the rule. But it will be admitted that he less there are of these abuses, the better it will be for the State. The worst possible arrangement of all would be where not alone isolated individuals, but a whole class of citizens should take pride in remaining motionless in the midst of the general movement, and should consume the best part of the product without bearing any part in its production. Such a class is surely estranged to the nation by its indolence.”

To Sieyès the nation is the commoners, the Third Estate:

“The Third Estate embraces then all that which belongs to the nation; and all that which is not the Third Estate, cannot be regarded as being of the nation.

What is the Third Estate?

It is the whole.”

Sieyès actively participated in the writing of the ‘Declaration of the Rights of Man’ in which art. 2 is especially noteworthy in this context as it clearly expresses a right of resistance (slightly ironic considering the regime of terror and later the Napoleonic dictatorship which were to follow):

“2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression. “

With its belief in enlightenment, rationality of man, in short ‘progress’, as well as the right to oppose and resist oppression, the fundamental texts of the revolution places it clearly in the ‘liberal’ tradition.

Taking yet another leap in history, the idealist or liberal worldview concerning resistance is enhanced to further. For Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) and Friederich Engels (1820 – 1895) history was one long series of fights (Communist Manifesto):

“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.”

But they were positive towards progress both concerning technology, society and education. Capitalists’ unjust and brutal treatment of the proletariat would lead to the proletarians uniting and fighting the bourgeoisie in their own countries, then united. The aim would be a society without classes and without the right of property (Communist Manifesto):

“The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

Working Men of All Countries, Unite!”

Resistance against the oppressor was, according to Marx & Engels, not only a possibility or an obligation; it was natural.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel Bensaïd has written a communist analysis of the question of resistance ‘Theses of resistance ‘ (2004)

Conclusion:

The question of resistance was important from the very beginning of the Church in the first centuries AC. As the Christians did not have any instruments of power at their disposal, the question was whether to resist passively or not at all. The first prosecutions showed us that both options were chosen.

of minor interest in the first centuries AC, as the Christians

The French Revolution changes the concept of resistance within the liberal or idealistic worldview. From laying an emphasise on stability in the society, it moves towards 'justice'. But it still embraces the whole range from pacifism to revolution. In other words from non-resistance to active resistance. The realist worldview still emphasises stability and looks at resistance with suspicion, but it recognises it as a last way out.

Comparing to the churches present view of resistance

Where as the churches still defend a limited right to resistance, especially the liberal or idealistic world view within political thought has developed dramatically since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The classical writers such as Grotius, Hobbes and Loche in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century still defended the restricted right to resistance, the two realists Hobbes and Grotius the strictest, the idealist or liberal Loche less so, Enlightenment and increasing secularisation influenced on political thought of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Although Grotius was somewhat conservative in his views, his ideas on war, conquest, and the law of nature continued to be revered and expanded by more liberal philosophers like [John Locke](#) in his *Two Treatises on Civil Government* (1689). Locke agrees with Grotius in using the analytical device of a state of nature that exists before civil government and in the general claim that might does not make right as well as the claim that just wars aim to preserve rights.**

In feudal Europe a right of resistance was accepted, as the feudal system was build on a contractual relationship; if the king did not fulfil his obligations, his vassals were allowed to rebel.

The rights of resistance have clearly developed much more within the political thought than within the theological.

But the theological discussion of a right of resistance has been clearly influenced by the political circumstances. Both e.g. Luther and Calvin needed to create a right of resistance, to secure their followers survival during the Reformation.

On the other hand, the very liberal Emanuel Kant, a true child of the Enlightenment is told to have cried out: 'Das Volk hat nichts zu tun als zu gehorchen!', but he was Prussian<sup>10</sup>.

(E.g. Althusius, Grotius, Hobbes, Locke, Burke, Kant (Das Volk hat nichts zu tun als zu gehorchen))

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<sup>10</sup> 'The people has nothing to do but to obey!' My translation, SD

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Captain:

Grotius discusses war as being a mode of protecting rights and punishing wrongs. It is a mode of judicial procedures. Although war was considered a "necessary evil," it needed to be regulated. The "just war," in the eyes of Grotius, is a war to obtain a right.

Grotius discusses three methods of for settling a dispute peacefully. The first is conference and negotiation amongst two rivals or contestants. The second method is called compromise, which is a settlement in which each side gives up some demands or makes concessions. The third is that of single combat or choosing by lot. Grotius believed that it is sometimes better to renounce rights than to try and enforce them. When it comes to bargaining and mediation he holds that for any of the three methods listed above, it is of extreme importance to select a judge with character and decency. Grotius discusses these methods of achieving peace to ultimately obtain some form of justice. He says, "For justice brings peace of conscience, while injustice causes torment and anguish... Justice is approved, and injustice condemned, by the common agreement of good men." (Prolegomena)

★★★★☆ **Radical Calvinism and the Natural Right of Resistance**, January 2, 2006  
Reviewer: **Robert A. Williams "libertarian"** (Oberlin, OH United States) - [See all my reviews](#)

~~REAL NAME™~~

Out of the religious wars between the Protestants and the Catholic Church emerged a surprisingly modern theory of individual natural rights and justified violent resistance to authority. Using ancient Roman private law concepts to justify rebellion against tyrants, Radical Calvinists such as John Ponet, Christopher Goodman, George Buchanan - all of Scotland and England, contributed, while Francois Hotman, Theodore Beza and Mornay of France transformed an essentially religious duty to resist into a secular, moral, and even natural, right of resistance.

Prior to 1530, Skinner says that Lutherans and Calvinists followed a "theory of passive political obedience" and "their leaders were almost wholly unprepared to defend their Church". Calvin thought, to oversimplify a bit, that all rulers were ordained by God, good or bad, and that man, as God's subjects, must endure the Divine Plan. Luther restated his position in 1530 - "It is in no way proper for anyone who wants to be a Christian to stand up against the authority of his government, regardless of whether that government acts rightly or wrongly".

However, a few months later, the Catholics had outlawed the Lutherans (Diet of 1530) and then Gregory Bruck, Chancellor to John of Saxony, wrote his private-law theory of resistance "Whether it is lawful to resist a judge who is proceeding unlawfully". Bruck took the view that "The Emperor is seeking to impose his judgement in matters of faith" where he "has absolutely no jurisdiction at all". Then in October, as a result of a meeting at the Palace of Torgau, Luther capitulated - "until now we have taught absolutely not to resist the governing authority [because] . . . we did not know that the governing authority's law itself grants the right of armed resistance".

Skinner says "after the immediate crisis had passed, the Lutherans not only continued to endorse the private-law theory of resistance, but even began to revise and develop it", including Luther. Here Luther smacked counter to Calvin by stating in 1539 that "The Emperor is head of the body of the political realm", and as such is "a private man to whom political power is granted for the defence of the realm". The Lutherans also developed a constitutional theory of resistance in that lesser politicians are equally ordained by God and thus can outnumber an unrighteous superior, but this theory did not develop into a natural right of resistance.

However, Skinner says "the basic argument in favour of resistance advanced by the Calvinists (during the late 1540s) . . . was largely a repetition of the Lutheran constitutional theory". He adds "When we turn, however, from the continental leaders of Calvinism to the more revolutionary protagonists of the movement in England, we find a very different situation . . . the Scots and English revolutionaries . . . began to exploit the more individualistic and radically populist implications of the private-law argument".

Ponet and Goodman abandoned "the cardinal Augustinian assumption that, even if our rulers fail to discharge the duties of their offices, they must still be regarded as powers ordained of God". Goodman used Conciliar thinking to bring him to the conclusion that "it is lawful for the people, yea it is their duty, to do it themselves", thereby ensuring that they "cut off every rotten member" and to impose the law of God "as well upon their own rulers and magistrates as upon others of their brethren". Goodman thought God would punish anyone who did not carry out their duty, and armed thus, Calvinists revolted successfully from the Catholics.

At this point in history, "the radical Calvinists of the 1530s have no such concept of political resistance as a right" apart from a religious duty. This thinking was later accomplished "by the Huguenots during the French religious wars in the second half of the sixteenth century".

Skinner says "Since [the Huguenots]. . . were in a considerable minority, they could scarcely hope to invoke the available Calvinist theory of revolution, and demand . . . that the whole body of the godly people should rise up against the congregation of Satan in order to establish the congregation of Christ. They needed to develop a revolutionary ideology capable of appealing . . . to the various Catholic malcontents".

The French monarchy "had rendered itself so unpopular in the first half of the sixteenth century", that the Huguenots sought to appeal to the general discontent. The Huguenot monarchomachs (those who argued for the right and/or duty of subjects to resist unjust rulers), best exemplified by Francois Hotman's "Franco-Gallia" (1573), concentrated on grounding their arguments on real or presumed historical precedents in French laws and institutions resulting in a rather narrowly legal and historical argument. Their conclusions and implications were limited to promoting specific liberties of various privileged orders in French society.

Skinner says "The essence of the Huguenot case is thus that the magistrates and representatives of the people have the moral right to resist tyrannical government by force, a right which is founded on the prior and natural right of the sovereign people to treat the commonwealth as a means for securing and improving their own welfare". He concludes that "with Beza, Mornay and their followers, the idea that the preservation of religious uniformity constitutes the sole possible grounds for legitimate resistance is finally abandoned. The result is a fully political theory of revolution, founded on a recognisably modern, secularised thesis about the natural rights and original sovereignty of the people".

In summary, Skinners says that Radical Calvinism developed a secular, moral, and natural right of resistance. Yet it seems to me that they did so grudgingly and never really fully grasped natural law or natural rights. J.W. Allen noted in his "A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century", p314, that the language of universal natural rights "served no Huguenot purpose. It served, in truth, no purpose at all at the time, though, one day, it might come to do so".

The Right To Keep and Bear Firearms; Gerry A. Shade,  
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