

Thoreau on Civil Disobedience

Thoreau's thoughts on governments and the individual force me to think deeply about the system that I (we) subject ourselves to everyday.

1. How did this structure manifest?
2. Is it effective?

Today, things like globalization and the Internet stimulate conversation around these questions. As globalization furthers, clashing ideologies and cultures are bumping heads. The Internet has created a more transparent world via cheap and seemingly instantaneous communication at scale. However, questions about governments and rights in general remain unanswered. Recently, in the US, issues regarding Internet access and privacy surfaced a horrific abuse of power, and a lack of concrete boundaries.

Ultimately, it's the responsibility of the people to dictate the government's fate.

In general, people are quick to agree with governments. It's safe. It's easy. Even if they disagree with certain *acts* made by government, their passiveness and tolerance of those acts enables injustice to exist.

Governments exude strength. Their sheer force can be intimidating. Should one resist or challenge them, unjust or just, they can reduce one's individual liberty (or the sense of one). This can create a sense of fear — something governments willingly use at their disposal.

Civil Disobedience influenced individuals like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi. Today Thoreau's ideas are more relevant than ever. The

battle between the individual and the State persists. Perhaps it's time to wake up.

Powerful excerpts from Henry David Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience"

1. Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison.
2. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.
3. Unjust laws exist; shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them all at once?
4. I saw that the state was half-witted, that it was timid as a lone woman with her silver spoons, and that it did not know its friends from its foes, and I lost all my remaining respect for it, and pitied it.
5. Thus the State never intentionally confronts a man's sense, intellectual or moral, but only his body, his senses. It is not armed with superior wit or honesty, but with superior physical strength. I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion. Let us see who is the strongest.
6. I should endeavor to be satisfied with things as they are.
7. The progress from an absolute to a limited monarchy, from a limited monarchy to a democracy, is a progress toward a true respect for the individual.
8. There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly.
9. Is a democracy, such as we know it, the last improvement possible in government? Is it not possible to take a step further towards recognizing and organizing the rights of man?

10. I perceive that, when an acorn and a chestnut fall side by side, the one does not remain inert to make way for the other, but both obey their own laws, and spring and grow and flourish as best they can, till one, perchance, overshadows and destroys the other. If a plant cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so a man.