

John Locke's *Second Treatise on Civil Government*,
Robert Michels' *Political Parties*, and a Solution Between the Two

Alexandra Simon

Grand Valley State University

Early Modern Philosophy

31 October 2020

In his book *Second Treatise of Civil Government* (1689), philosopher John Locke writes on Natural Law with an aim of finding a route to equality amongst all classes. He argues that “the natural state of man” has freedom with the limitations only of his will, likewise he cannot impede on anyone else's. Locke also notes that man constructs a natural duty to do good unto others, as he would not want others to do harm to him, this causes suffering and includes infringing upon his will. Equality, Locke explains, is true to man's nature: as nature “has made no such [hierarchical] distinction between one man and another, nor” a contract that would mirror ones between workers and masters. In this type of political “parental” power, the state looks to benefit the majority.

The antithesis to Locke's Natural Law would be the Iron Law of Oligarchy. Named by sociologist Robert Michels, in his book *Political Parties* (1911), the Iron Law is that a hierarchy within man is logically inevitable. Michels writes that A) the proletariat who are able to get into power will be “blind” by generalities versus actual opinions of the majority and B) the proletariat will eventually fall to what bourgeoisie would do: masking personal interest with majority interest. Largely, Michels argues that a cyclical hierarchy between workers and masters is natural to man as representation of a majority cannot exist within the minority ruling class.

What can be said now is that man is not born to nature, he is born into a pre-existing society. There is no actual choice in that matter: it could be that man's evolution went from a freedom of wills (one's own) to a hierarchy of being under a minority rule. In a political power, Locke's natural government, wanting to benefit the majority, could not exist in Michels' view on the bourgeoisie's masking personal benefit. The next step to this would be the truest form of voting, where the majority rule means just that: every vote counts and there is no sense of majority-representation that could be potentially masked with majority-benefit.

References:

Locke, J., Shapiro, I. (ed.), (2003) *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*. ProQuest Ebook Central

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uma/detail.action?docID=3420119>.

Michels, R. (2000). *Political Parties: A sociological study of the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracy*. ProQuest Ebook Central

<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.gvsu.edu/lib/gvsu/detail.action?docID=31177>

51.