



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
PADERBORN

Universitätsbibliothek Paderborn

The Works of George Lord Lyttleton

Lyttelton, George <Lord>

London, 1774

XXXII. Marcus Aurelius Philosophus - Servius Tullius.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-50364](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-50364)

such a reluctance proceeds from a very noble cause, and seems agreeable to the dignity of a great mind in bad times, yet it is a fault against the highest of moral obligations, the love of our country. For, how unworthy soever individuals may be, the public is always respectable, always dear to the virtuous.

P H O C I O N.

True: but no obligation can lie upon a citizen to seek a public charge, when he foresees that his obtaining of it will be useless to his country. Would you have had me solicit the command of an army which I believed would be beaten?

A R I S T I D E S.

It is not permitted to a state to despair of its safety, till its utmost efforts have been made without success. If you had commanded the army at Chæronea, you might possibly have changed the event of the day: but, if you had not, you would have died more honourably there, than in a prison at Athens, betrayed by a vain confidence in the insecure friendship of a perfidious Macedonian.

XXXXXXXXXX

DIALOGUE XXXII.

MARCUS AURELIUS PHILOSOPHUS.—SERVIUS TULLIUS.

SERVIUS TULLIUS.

YES, Marcus, though I own you to have been the first of mankind in virtue and goodness, though, while you governed, philosophy sat on the throne and diffused the benign influences of her administration over the whole Roman empire, yet, *as a king*, I might, perhaps, pretend to a merit even superior to your's.

MARCUS

MARCUS AURELIUS.

That philosophy you ascribe to me has taught me to feel my own defects, and to venerate the virtues of other men. Tell me therefore, in what consisted the superiority of your merit *as a king*.

SERVIUS TULLIUS.

It consisted in this, *that I gave my people freedom*. I diminished, I limited the kingly power, when it was placed in my hands. I need not tell you, that the plan of government instituted by me was adopted by the Romans, when they had driven out Tarquin, the destroyer of their liberty; and gave its form to that republic, composed of a due mixture of the regal, aristocratical, and democratical powers, the strength and wisdom of which subdued the world. Thus all the glory of that great people, who for many ages excelled the rest of mankind in the arts of war and of policy, belongs originally to me.

MARCUS AURELIUS.

There is much truth in what you say. But would not the Romans have done better, if, after the expulsion of Tarquin, they had vested the regal power in *a limited monarch*, instead of placing it in two annual elective magistrates, with the title of consuls? This was a great deviation from your plan of government, and, I think, an unwise one. For a *divided royalty* is a solecism, an absurdity in politics. Nor was the regal power, committed to the administration of consuls, continued in their hands long enough, to enable them to finish any difficult war, or other act of great moment. From hence arose a necessity of prolonging their commands beyond the legal term; of shortening the interval prescribed by the laws between the elections to those offices; and of granting extraordinary commissions and powers, by all which the republic was in the end destroyed.

* 4. A

SERVIUS

SERVIUS TULLIUS.

The Revolution which ensued upon the death of Lucretia was made with so much anger, that it is no wonder the Romans abolished in their fury the name of king, and desired to weaken a power, the exercise of which had been so grievous; though the doing this was attended with all the inconveniences you have justly observed. But, if anger acted too violently in reforming abuses, philosophy might have wisely corrected that error. Marcus Aurelius might have new-modeled the constitution of Rome. He might have made it a *limited monarchy*, leaving to the emperors all the power that was necessary to govern a wide-extended empire, and to the senate and people all the liberty that could be consistent with order and obedience to government; a liberty purged of faction and guarded against anarchy.

MARCUS AURELIUS.

I should have been happy indeed, if it had been in my power to do such good to my country. But the gods themselves cannot force their blessings on men, who by their vices are become incapable to receive them. Liberty, like power, is only good for those who possess it, when it is under the constant direction of virtue. No laws can have force enough to hinder it from degenerating into faction and anarchy, where the morals of a nation are depraved; and continued habits of vice will eradicate the very love of it out of the hearts of a people. A Marcus Brutus, in my time, could not have drawn to his standard a single legion of Romans. But further, it is certain that *the spirit of liberty* is absolutely incompatible with *the spirit of conquest*. To keep *great conquered nations* in subjection and obedience, *great standing armies* are necessary. The generals of those armies will not long remain subjects; and whoever acquires dominion by the sword, must rule by the sword. If he does not destroy liberty, liberty will destroy him.

SERVIUS TULLIUS.

Do you then justify Augustus for the change he made in the Roman government?

MARCUS AURELIUS.

I do not—for Augustus had no lawful authority to make that change. His power was usurpation and breach of trust. But the government, which he seized with a violent hand, came to me by a *lawful* and *established* rule of succession.

SERVIUS TULLIUS.

Can any length of *establishment* make despotism *lawful*? is not liberty an inherent, inalienable right of mankind?

MARCUS AURELIUS.

They have an inherent right to be governed by laws, not by arbitrary will. But forms of government may, and must, be occasionally changed, with the consent of the people. When I reigned over them, the Romans were governed by laws.

SERVIUS TULLIUS.

Yes, because your moderation, and the precepts of that philosophy in which your youth had been tutored, inclined you to make the laws the rules of your government and the bounds of your power. But, if you had desired to govern otherwise, had they power to restrain you?

MARCUS AURELIUS.

They had not.—The imperial authority in my time had no limitations.

SERVIUS TULLIUS.

Rome therefore was in reality as much enslaved under you as under your son; and you left him the power of tyrannizing over it by hereditary right.

MARCUS AURELIUS.

I did—and the conclusion of that tyrant was his murder.

SERVIUS

SERVIUS TULLIUS.

Unhappy father! unhappy king! what a detestable thing is absolute monarchy, when even the virtues of Marcus Aurelius could not hinder it from being destructive to his family, and pernicious to his country, any longer than the period of his own life. But how happy is that kingdom, in which a *limited monarch* presides over a state *so justly poised*, that it guards itself from such evils, and has no need to take refuge in arbitrary power against the dangers of anarchy, which is almost as bad a resource, as it would be for a ship to run itself on a rock, in order to escape from the agitation of a tempest!

FOUR*