



An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (Oxford World's Classics)

William Godwin

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'To a rational being there can be but one rule of conduct, justice, and one mode of ascertaining that rule, the exercise of his understanding.'

Godwin's Political Justice is the founding text of philosophical anarchism. Written in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution, it exemplifies the political optimism felt by many writers and intellectuals. Godwin drew on enlightenment ideas and his background in religious dissent for the principles of justice, utility, and the sanctity of individual judgement that drove his powerful critique of all forms of secular and religious authority. He predicts the triumph of justice and equality over injustice, and of mind over matter, and the eventual vanquishing of human frailty and mortality. He also foresees the gradual elimination of practices governing property, punishment, law, and marriage and the displacement of politics by an expanded personal morality resulting from reasoned argument and candid discussion. Political Justice raises deep philosophical questions about the nature of our duty to others that remain central to modern debates on ethics and politics.

This edition reprints the first-edition text of 1793, and examines Godwin's evolving philosophy in the context of his life and work.

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