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Of the Absolute Rights of Individuals (William Blackstone; excerpt)

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“Of the Absolute Rights of Individuals”

(Excerpt)

By William Blackstone

1753

[Blackstone, William. “Of the Absolute Rights of Individuals.” Chapter 1 of Book 1 in *Commentaries on the Laws of England in Four Books*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co. 1893. Volume 1. In the Public Domain. Accessed 5/23/2017. http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2140#Blackstone_1387-01_279.]

By the absolute *rights* of individuals, we mean those which are so in their primary and strictest sense; such as would belong to their persons merely in a state of nature, and which every man is entitled to enjoy, whether out of society or in it. But with regard to the absolute *duties*, which man is bound to perform considered as a mere individual, it is not to be expected that any human municipal law should at all explain or enforce them. For the end and intent of such laws being only to regulate the behaviour of mankind, as they are members of society, and stand in various relations to each other, they have consequently no concern with any other but social or relative duties. Let a man therefore be ever so abandoned in his principles, or vicious in his practice, provided he keeps his wickedness to himself, and does not offend against the rules of public decency, he is out of the reach of human laws. . . . But, with respect to *rights*, the case is different. Human laws define and enforce as well those rights which belong to a man considered as an individual, as those which belong to him considered as related to others.

Original Author Sort: Blackstone, William

Publication Date: 11753.00.00.##

Topic: [Natural Law and Natural Rights in the American Constitutional Tradition](#)

Subtopic: [The Bill of Rights](#)

Publication Date Range: 1753

Source URL: <http://nlncrac.org/american/bill-of-rights/primary-source-documents/commentaries>