

### THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

arching of the vault, he knows that morals, which develop more slowly, ultimately become its immovable keystone. Among these various classes of law, it is only Political Laws, which constitute the form of government, that are relevant to my subject.

### BOOK III

BEFORE speaking of the various forms of government, let us try to fix the precise meaning of this word, which has not hitherto been very well explained.

#### CHAPTER I *Of Government in General*

I MUST warn the reader that this chapter should be read with care, for I have not the skill to make myself clear to those who do not wish to concentrate their attention.

Every free action has two causes which concur to produce it, one moral - the will which determines the act, the other physical - the strength which executes it. When I walk towards an object, it is necessary first that I should resolve to go that way and secondly that my feet should carry me. When a paralytic resolves to run and when a fit man resolves not to move, both stay where they are. The body politic has the same two motive powers - and we can make the same distinction between will and strength, the former is *legislative power* and the latter *executive power*. Nothing can be, or should be, done in the body politic without the concurrence of both.

We have seen that the legislative power belongs, and can only belong, to the people. On the other hand, it is easy to see from principles established above [Book II, Chapters 4. and 6] that executive power cannot belong to the generality of the people as legislative or sovereign, since executive power is exercised only in particular acts which are outside the province of law and therefore outside the province of the sovereign which can act only to make laws.

The public force thus needs its own agent to call it together and put it into action in accordance with the instructions of the general will, to serve also as a means of communication between the state and the sovereign, and in a sense to do for the public person what is done for the individual by the union of soul and body. This is the reason why the state needs a government, something often unhappily confused with the sovereign, but of which it is really only the minister.

What, then, is the government? An intermediary body established between the subjects and the sovereign for their mutual communication, a body charged with the execution of the laws and the maintenance of freedom, both civil and political.

The members of this body are called magistrates or *kings*, that is to say *governors*, and the whole body bears the name of *prince*.\* Thus, those theorists who deny that the act by which a people submits itself to leaders is a contract are wholly correct. For that act is nothing other than a commission, a form of employment in which the governors, as simple officers of the sovereign, exercise in its name the power it has placed in their hands, a power which the sovereign can limit, modify and resume at pleasure, since the alienation of such a right would be incompatible with the nature of the social body and contrary to the purpose of the social union.

I therefore call 'government' or 'supreme administration' the legitimate exercise of the executive power, and I call 'prince' or 'magistrate' the man or the body charged with that administration.

It is in the government that we may discern those intermediary forces whose relations constitute those of all with all, or of the sovereign with the state. This last relation can be

\* Thus in Venice the ruling college is called the Most Serene Prince even when the Doge is not present.

depicted as one between the first and last terms of a geometric progression, of which the geometric mean is the government. The government receives from the sovereign the orders which it gives to the people; and if the state is to be well balanced, it is necessary, all things being weighed, that the product of the power of the government multiplied by itself should equal the product or the power of the citizens who are sovereign in one sense and subjects in another.

Furthermore, no one of these three terms can be changed without destroying the ratio. If the sovereign seeks to govern, or if the magistrate seeks to legislate, or if the subjects refuse to obey, then order gives way to chaos, power and will cease to act in concert, and the state, disintegrating, will lapse either into despotism or into anarchy. Lastly, as there is only one geometrical mean between two extremes, there is only one good government possible for any state; but as a thousand events may change the relations within a nation, different governments may not only be good for different peoples, but good for the same people at different times.

To try to give some idea of the various relations which may exist between the two extremes, I shall take as an example the number of the people, as this is a relation easily expressed as a ratio. Suppose the state is made up of ten thousand citizens. The sovereign can only be considered collectively and as a body, but every member as a subject has to be considered as an individual. Thus the sovereign is to the subject as ten thousand is to one, that is to say, each single member of the state has as his own share only a ten-thousandth part of the sovereign authority, although he submits himself entirely to it. Now if the people is increased to a hundred thousand men, the position of each subject is unaltered, for each bears equally with the rest the whole empire of the laws, while as sovereign his share of the suffrage is reduced to one hundred-thousandth, so that

he has ten times less influence in the formulation of the laws. Hence, while the subject remains always one single individual, the ratio of sovereign to subject increases according to the number of citizens. Whence it follows that the more the state is enlarged, the more freedom is diminished.

When I say that the ratio increases, I mean that it is farther removed from unity. So the greater ratio in the mathematical sense, the smaller the relationship in the popular sense; for in the former, the ratio, considered according to this, is measured by the quotient, whereas in the latter, the relationship, considered according to identity, is judged by similarity.

The smaller the relationship between the particular wills and the general will, that is, between the people's morals and the law, the more repressive force will have to be employed. Hence, for the government to be good, its strength must be increased to the extent that the people is more numerous.

In proportion as the enlargement of the state means offering the holders of public authority more temptations and more opportunities to abuse their power, it follows that the more power the government needs to control the people, the more power the sovereign needs, in its turn, to control the government. I am speaking here not of an absolute power, but of the relative power of the different elements in the state.

It follows from this dual relationship that the geometric progression between sovereign, prince and people is by no means an arbitrary idea, but a necessary consequence of the nature of the body politic. It follows further that one of the terms, namely the people as subject, is represented by unity, every time the square of the ratio is increased or diminished, the simple ratio increases or diminishes in the same way, and the middle term, the government, is in consequence changed. This shows that there is no one unique and absolute constitution of government, but that there may be as many different kinds of government as there are states of different sizes.

If anyone, wishing to ridicule this system, suggested that in order to find this geometrical mean and construct the body of the government one need only on my view take the square root of the number of the people, I should reply that I am here using numbers only as an example; and the ratios of which I speak are not measured merely by the number of men but more generally by the amount of activity, which results from the concurrence of innumerable causes; I should add that although I have borrowed momentarily for the sake of expressing myself in fewer words, the language of mathematics, I am still well aware that mathematical precision has no place in moral calculations.

The government is in small what the body politic (which includes it) is in large. It is a fictitious person endowed with certain faculties, active like the sovereign, passive like the state; and it can be broken down into similar relations; in consequence these relations yield a new ratio; and within each of the magistracies until we reach a single indivisible middle term, that is, a single chief or supreme magistrate, who may be shown at the centre of this geometrical progression, as the unifying term between the series of fractions and the series of whole numbers.

Without burdening ourselves with such a multiplication of terms, let us simply consider the government as a new body within the state, distinct from both people and sovereign and intermediary between the two.

There is this essential difference between the two bodies — the state exists in itself while the government exists only through the sovereign. Thus the dominant will of the prince is, or ought to be, only the general will or the law, and his force nothing other than the public force concentrated in his hands; as soon as he resolves to perform on his own authority some absolute and independent act, the union of all begins to

slacken. And if in the end it comes about that the prince has a particular will more active than that of the sovereign, and if, to enforce obedience to this particular will, he uses the public force which is in his hands, with the result that there are, so to speak, two sovereigns, one *de jure* and the other *de facto*, then the social bond vanishes at once and the body politic is dissolved.

Even so, for the body of the government to have an existence, a real life distinct from the body of the state, and for all its members to be able to act in concert and serve the purpose for which the government has been set up, it must have a particular *ego*, a consciousness common to its members, a force, a will of its own tending to its preservation. Such a particular existence implies assemblies, councils, a power to deliberate and determine rights, titles, and privileges which belongs exclusively to the prince, and which should make the position of the magistrate the more honourable in proportion to the extent to which it is the more arduous. The difficulty is to find a method of ordering this subordinate whole within the greater whole, so that it does not weaken the general constitution while strengthening its own, and so that its private force, designed for its own preservation, shall always be distinct from the public force, designed for the preservation of the state; in short, so that it will always be ready to sacrifice the government to the people and not the people to the government.

Moreover, even though the artificial body of the government is the work of another equally artificial body, and even though it has only a kind of borrowed and subordinate life, this does not prevent its being able to act with greater or less vigour and speed, and enjoying, so to speak, a health that may be more robust or less. Lastly, without departing directly from the purposes for which it has been set up, it may deviate from them in varying degrees according to the manner in which it has been constituted.

It is all these differences which give rise to the various relations that ought to exist between the government and the body of the state, in accordance with the fortuitous and particular relations by which this same state is changed. For often the government which is in itself the best becomes the most evil unless its relations with the state are modified to meet the defects of the body politic to which it belongs.

## CHAPTER 2

*The Constitutive Principle of the Different Forms of Government*

To explain the general reason for these differences, it is necessary to distinguish here between the prince and the government, as I have already distinguished between the state and the sovereign.

The body of the magistrates may be composed of a greater or lesser number of members. We have already observed that the ratio of sovereign to subjects is greater to the extent that the people are more numerous, and by an obvious analogy we can say the same of the government in relation to the magistrates.

As the total power of the government is at all times that of the state, it never varies; and from this it follows that the more force the government exerts over its own members, the less there remains for it to use over the whole people.

Hence the more numerous the magistrates, the weaker the government. As this principle is fundamental, let us try to make it clearer.

We may distinguish in the person of the magistrate three essentially different wills. First, there is the will which belongs to him as an individual, and tends only to his personal advantage. Secondly, there is the collective will of the magistrates;

this is concerned only with the advantage of the prince, and might be called the corporate will, since it is general *vis-à-vis* the government and particular *vis-à-vis* the state of which the government is a part. Thirdly, there is the will of the people or the sovereign will, which is general both with regard to the state considered as a whole and with regard to the government considered as part of the whole.

In a perfect system of legislation, the individual or particular will would be nonexistent, the government's own corporate will very subordinate, and the general or sovereign will therefore always dominant and always the sole regulator of all the others.

In the order of nature, on the contrary, these different wills become the more active the more they are self-centred. Hence, the general will is always the weakest, the corporate will takes second place, and the particular will comes first of all; so much so, that within the government, each member is primarily a private self, secondly a magistrate, and thirdly a citizen. This sequence is exactly the reverse of what the social order demands.

That being so, let us suppose that the government is in the hands of a single individual. Then the particular will and the corporate will will be perfectly united, and the corporate will accordingly raised to its highest possible degree of intensity. Now, since the exercise of power depends on the degree of will, and since the absolute power of the government is invariable, it follows that the most active government is that of one man.

If, on the other hand, we combine the government and the legislative authority, make the prince the sovereign, and each citizen a magistrate – then the corporate will, being merged in the general will, will be no more active than the general will, and so leave the particular will to command the totality of power. Thus the government, having always the same abso-

lute strength, will be left with a minimum of relative strength and activity.

These relations are indisputable, and other considerations add further confirmation. It is clear, for example, that each magistrate is more active within the body of the government than is each citizen within the body of the state, and hence that the particular will has more influence over the acts of the government than it has over those of the sovereign, for every magistrate is nearly always entrusted with some distinct function of government, while no citizen, taken singly, has any distinct function of sovereignty. Besides, the more the state expands, the more its real strength is increased, though not in proportion to its expansion; but if the state remains the same size, the magistrates can be multiplied without the government gaining thereby any real strength, since its strength is that of the state, which is always the same. In this way the relative strength or activity of the government diminishes without there being any possibility of its absolute or real power increasing.

Again, there is no doubt that the dispatch of public business becomes slower in proportion as there are more persons responsible for it; attaching too much importance to prudence, large bodies attach too little to luck; they miss opportunities, and they deliberate so long that they lose the profits of deliberation.

I have just shown that the government slackens to the extent that the magistrates are multiplied, and I showed earlier that the more numerous the people, the more the repressive force must increase. From this it follows that the ratio of magistrates to government should be the inverse of the ratio of subjects to sovereign; that is to say, the more the state is enlarged, the more the government must reduce its ranks, so that the number of magistrates diminishes in proportion to the increase of the people.

I should add that I am speaking here of the relative strength of the government and not the quality of its behaviour; for, on the contrary, the more numerous the magistrates, the closer their corporate will approaches the general will, while under a single magistrate that same corporate will is, as I have said, only a particular will. Thus there is lost on the one side what could be gained on the other; and the art of the lawgiver is to know how to settle the point at which the strength and the will of the government, which always stand in inverse ratio, can be combined in the proportion most beneficial to the state.

### CHAPTER 3

#### *Classification of Governments*

In the preceding chapter we saw why the different types or forms of government are distinguished according to the number of members who compose them; it remains to be seen in the present chapter how this classification is made. First, the sovereign may put the government in the hands of the whole people, or of the greater part of the people, so that there are more citizen-magistrates than there are ordinary private citizens. This form of government is known as *democracy*.

Alternatively, the sovereign may confine the government to the hands of a few, so that there are more ordinary citizens than there are magistrates: this form of government is called *aristocracy*.

Yet again, the sovereign may concentrate the entire government in the hands of one single magistrate, from whom all the others will derive their power. This third form of government is the most common, and is called *monarchy* or *royal government*.

It should be noticed that all these forms, or at any rate the

first two, can be had in greater or lesser degrees; they have a fairly marked elasticity. Democracy may include all the people or it may be limited so as to include only half. Aristocracy in its turn may extend to half the people or be limited to the smallest possible number. Even royal government can to some extent be shared. Sparta had always two kings according to its constitution, and the Roman Empire is known to have had as many as eight Emperors at once without it being true to say that the Empire was divided. Thus there is always a point at which each form of government overlaps the next form; and it is clear that although government has only three names, it is actually open to as many variations of form as the state has citizens.

Moreover, since a government is able in certain respects to divide itself into separate parts, one administered in one way and the other in another way, the three forms of government may be combined to yield a multitude of mixed forms, each of which it can multiply by the three simple forms.

Throughout the ages men have debated the question 'What is the best form of government?', and yet they have failed to see that each of the possible forms is the best in some cases and the worst in others. If in each particular state the number of supreme magistrates should be in inverse ratio to the number of citizens, it follows that, in general, democratic government suits small states, aristocratic government suits states of intermediate size and monarchy suits large states. This rule follows directly from our axiom; but how are we to calculate the multitude of particular circumstances which may offer exceptions to the rule?

CHAPTER 4  
*Democracy*

**H**E who makes the law knows better than anyone how it should be executed and interpreted. So it might seem that there could be no better constitution than one which united the executive power with the legislative; in fact, this very union makes that form of government deficient in certain respects, for things which ought to be kept apart are not, and the prince and the sovereign being the same person constitute, so to speak, a government without government.

It is not good that he who makes the law should execute it or that the body of the people should turn its attention away from general perspectives and give it to particular objects. Nothing is more dangerous in public affairs than the influence of private interests, and the abuse of the law by the government is a lesser evil than that corruption of the legislator which inevitably results from the pursuit of private interests. When this happens, the state is corrupted in its very substance and no reform is possible. A people which never misused the powers of government would never misuse independence, and a people which always governed itself well would not need to be governed.

In the strict sense of the term, there has never been a true democracy, and there never will be. It is contrary to the natural order that the greater number should govern and the smaller number be governed. One can hardly imagine that all the people would sit permanently in an assembly to deal with public affairs; and one can easily see that they could not appoint commissions for that purpose without the form of administration changing.

I believe indeed that one can lay down as an axiom that

when the functions of government are divided between several commissions, those with the fewest members acquire sooner or later the greatest authority, if only because the facility of dispatching business leads naturally in that direction.

Besides, how many things that are difficult to have at the same time does the democratic form of government not presuppose? First, a very small state, where the people may be readily assembled and where each citizen may easily know all the others. Secondly, a great simplicity of manners and morals, to prevent excessive business and thorny discussions. Thirdly, a large measure of equality in social rank and fortune, without which equality in rights and authority will not last long. Finally, little or no luxury; for luxury is either the effect of riches or it makes riches necessary; it corrupts both the rich and the poor; it surrenders the country to indolence and vanity; it deprives the state of all its citizens by making some the slaves of others and all the slaves of opinion.

This is why a celebrated author has made virtue the cardinal principle of a republic; for all the conditions that I have named cannot prevail without virtue. But this same great genius, having failed to make the necessary distinctions, was often wrong and sometimes obscure, and failed to see that since the sovereign authority is everywhere the same, the same principles should have a place in every well-constituted state, though to a greater or lesser extent, assuredly, according to the form of the government.

We may add that there is no government so liable to civil war and internecine strife as is democracy or popular government, for there is none which has so powerful and constant a tendency to change to another form or which demands so much vigilance and courage to maintain it unchanged. It is under this constitution, more than others, that the citizen must be armed with strength and fidelity, and repeat from the bottom of his heart every day of his life the words a virtuous

Palatine\* once spoke in the Diet of Poland: 'Malo periculosa libertatem quam quietum servitum.'<sup>†</sup>

If there were a nation of Gods, it would govern itself democratically. A government so perfect is not suited to men.

#### CHAPTER 5

##### Aristocracy

We have here two distinct artificial persons, namely the government and the sovereign, and therefore two general wills, one belonging to all the citizens, and the other to members of the administration only. Thus, although the government may regulate its interior discipline as it pleases, it can never speak to the people except in the name of the sovereign, that is, in the name of the people itself — something that must never be forgotten.

The first societies were governed aristocratically. The heads of families deliberated on public business among themselves; the young people yielded willingly to the authority of experience. Hence the names of *priests, elders, the senate, gerentes*. The savages of North America still retain today this method of government, and they are very well governed.

But to the extent that artificial inequality came to prevail over natural inequality, riches and power,<sup>‡</sup> came to be preferred to age, and aristocracy became elective. Lastly, the bequeathings of power together with property by fathers to their children made families patrician and so made government hereditary; and then there appeared senators aged twenty.

There are thus three types of aristocracy, natural, elective

\* The Palatine of Posen, father of the King of Poland and Duke of Lorraine.

† 'Better freedom with danger than peace with slavery.' [Trans.]

‡ It is clear that the word *Optimates*, for the ancients, did not mean the best but the strongest.

and hereditary. The first is suited only to primitive peoples; the third is the worst of all governments; the second is the best, and this is aristocracy in the true sense of the word.

Aristocracy has not only the advantage of distinguishing between the sovereign and the government, it has also the advantage of selecting its magistrates. Under popular government all the citizens are born magistrates, while this other system limits itself to a small number of magistrates, every one of whom is elected,\* a method which makes honesty, sagacity, experience and all the other grounds of popular preference and esteem further guarantees of wise government.

Besides, assemblies can be more easily arranged, business can be better discussed and be dispatched with more order and diligence; the credit of the state is better upheld in the eyes of foreigners by venerable senators than it is by an unknown and despised multitude.

In a word, it is the best and most natural arrangement for the wisest to govern the multitude, if we are sure that they will govern it for its advantage and not for their own. One ought never to multiply devices uselessly, or employ twenty thousand men to do what a hundred picked men could do much better. But it must be noted that the corporate interest begins at this point to direct the forces of the state less strictly in accordance with the general will, and that a further inevitable tendency is for a part of the executive power to escape the control of law.

As for the circumstances which suit this form of government, it is not necessary to have the state so small or the people so simple and upright that the execution of the law follows

\* It is of the utmost importance that the law should regulate the procedure of election of magistrates, for if this is left to the will of the prince, there will be no avoiding a decline into hereditary aristocracy, as happened in the Republics of Venice and Berne. The first of these two states has long since fallen into decay, while the other preserves itself only by the extreme wisdom of its senate — a very honourable and very dangerous exception to the rule.

directly from the public will, as is the case in a good democracy. Nor must the nation be so large that the magistrates, being widely scattered, have to take upon themselves some of the powers of the sovereign, each in his own region; and so begin by making themselves independent and end by becoming masters.

But if aristocracy calls for rather fewer virtues than does popular government, it still calls for virtues of its own, such as moderation among the rich and contentment among the poor; for it seems that strict equality would be out of place; it was not observed even in Sparta.

Moreover, if this form of government involves a certain inequality of wealth, it is good that the administration of public affairs be entrusted to those who can best give all their time to it, and not, as Aristotle asserted, so that the rich should always be chosen. On the contrary, it is necessary that an opposite choice should occasionally teach people that merit is a more important qualification than riches for preferment.

#### CHAPTER 6

##### Monarchy

So far we have considered the prince as a collective and artificial person, unified by the force of the law and acting as trustee of executive power in the state. We have now to consider that power being held in the hands of a natural person, a real man, one having the sole right to exercise it according to the law. Such a man is known as a monarch or king.

Contrary to the other administrations, where a collective being represents an individual, in this one an individual represents a collective being; so that the moral unity which constitutes the prince is at the same time a physical unity,

bringing together naturally those faculties which the law brings together with such difficulty in the other forms of administration.

Thus the will of the people and the will of the prince, the public force of the state and the individual power of the government, all respond to the same mover; all the levers of the machine are in the same hands; all act towards the same end; there are no conflicting movements to counteract one another, and we cannot imagine any constitution where more action would be produced by less effort. Archimedes sitting quietly on the shore and effortlessly launching a large ship is the model of a skilful monarch governing his vast kingdom from his chamber and making everything move while he himself seems motionless.

But if there is no government more vigorous than monarchy, there is also none where the particular will has more command, and more easily dominates the other wills. Everything moves towards the same end, it is true, but that end is not the public happiness; and the very strength of the administration operates continuously to the disadvantage of the state.

Kings want to be absolute, and from afar men cry out to them that the best way of becoming absolute is to make themselves loved by their people. This is a fine precept; and even in some respects a very true one. Unfortunately, it will always be laughed at in courts. The power which rests on the love of the people is undoubtedly the greatest, but is precarious and provisional; and princes will never be satisfied with it. The best kings want to be able to be bad if they feel like it without ceasing to be masters; a political sermonizer may well tell kings that since the people's force is the king's force, a king's best interest is to have the people flourishing, numerous and formidable; but kings know very well that this is not true. Their personal interest is primarily that the people

should be weak, wretched and never able to resist them. I admit that if the subjects were always perfectly submissive, then it would be to the interest of the prince for the people to be strong, so that the people's strength, being also the prince's strength, would make him feared by his neighbours; but since this is only a secondary and subordinate advantage, and since strength is incompatible with submissiveness, it is natural that princes always prefer the doctrine that is more immediately useful to them. This is what Samuel put forcefully to the Hebrews, and what Machiavelli has proved very clearly — under the pretence of instructing kings, he has taught important lessons to the people. Machiavelli's *Prince* is a handbook for republicans.\*

We have seen from the discussion of general proportions that monarchy is suited only to large states, and we find this again when we examine monarchy in itself. The more numerous the public administrators, the more the ratio between prince and subjects diminishes and approaches parity, coming to a point where the ratio is one to one, or equality itself, in democracy. This same ratio is greater to the extent that the government contracts, and reaches its maximum when the government is in the hands of a single man. Then there is too great a distance between the prince and the people and the state lacks bonds of union. For such bonds to be formed there must be intermediary ranks, with princelements, grandees, and a nobility to fill them. But all this is unsuited to a small state, which would be ruined by so many social orders.

But if it is difficult for a large state to be well governed, it is still more difficult for it to be well governed by a single man; and everyone knows what happens when a king rules through deputies.

An essential and inevitable defect, which will always make monarchical government inferior to republican government, is that whereas in republics the popular choice almost always elevates to the highest places only enlightened and capable men, who fill their office with honour, those who rise under monarchies are nearly always muddled little minds, petty knaves and intriguers with small talents which enable them to rise to high places in courts, but which betray their ineptitude to the public as soon as they are appointed. The people is much less often mistaken in such choices than is a prince, and a man of real merit is almost as rare in a royal ministry as a fool at the head of a republican government. Thus, when by some happy chance a born ruler takes the helm of affairs in a monarchy that is almost wrecked by swarms of egregious administrators, then everyone is amazed at the resources he discovers, and his reign marks an epoch in the history of the country.

For a monarchy to be well governed, its size and extent ought to be proportionate to the talents of those who govern. It is easier to conquer than to administer. With enough leverage, a finger could overturn the world; but to support the world, one must have the shoulders of Hercules. However small the state may be, princes are almost always inadequate. When, on the other hand, it happens that the state is too small for its ruler, a very rare thing, then it is even worse governed, because such a ruler, in following his own broad vision, forgets the people's interest; and he makes them no less miserable by the misuse of his superabundant abilities than a mediocre ruler would make them through the defects of an insufficient talent. It is as if kingdoms ought, so to speak, to expand or contract with each successive reign, according to the capacity of

\* Machiavelli was a gentleman and a good citizen; but being attached to the house of Medici, he was forced during the oppression of his country to disguise his love of liberty. The very choice of an execrable hero reveals his secret intention, and the antithesis between his principles in his book *The Prince* and those in his *Discourses on Livy* and *The History of Florence* proves that this found political thinker has so far had only superficial or corrupted readers. The Pope's court strictly prohibited his book, which I can well believe, since that was the Court he depicts most plainly. [Note added to the Edition of 1782.]

the prince. In a republic, on the other hand, where the talents of the senate are of a more settled measure, the state can have fixed boundaries without the administration working any less well.

The most perceptible disadvantage of government by one man is the lack of that continuity of succession which provides an uninterrupted bond of union in the other two systems. When a king dies, another is needed; elections leave a dangerous interval; they are stormy; and unless the citizens have more disinterestedness and integrity than is usual under such governments, there will be bribery and corruption. It is difficult for one to whom the state has been sold not to sell it in his turn, and recover from the weak the gold which the strong have extorted from him. Sooner or later, under such an administration everything becomes venal; and the peace which is then enjoyed under kings is worse than the disturbances of interregnums.

What has been done to prevent this evil? Thrones have been made hereditary in certain families, and an order of succession thus set up to prevent any dispute on the death of the king — that is to say, by substituting for the disadvantages of elections, the disadvantages of regencies, apparent peace has been preferred to wise administration, and the risk of having children or monsters or imbeciles for rulers preferred to having to dispute the choice of a good king. People do not realize that in exposing themselves to the hazards of these alternatives, they are gambling against all the odds. It was a very shrewd remark that the young Dionysus made to his father, when his father, reproaching him for a dishonourable action, said: 'Did I set you such an example?' 'Ah,' replied the son, 'your father was not a king.'

When someone is brought up to command others, every-thing conspires to rob him of justice and reason. Great pains are taken, we are told, to teach young princes the art of ruling;

but it does not appear that this education does them any good. It would be better to begin by teaching them the art of obeying. The greatest kings known to history were not among those brought up to rule, for ruling is a science that is least well mastered by too much practice; it is one a man learns better in obeying than in commanding. *Nam utilissimus idem ac brevissimus bonarum malarumque rerum delectus, cogitare quid aut nolueris sub alio Principe aut volueris.*\*

One consequence of this lack of coherence is the instability of royal government, which, being sometimes directed according to one plan and sometimes according to another, depending on the personality of the king who rules, or of those who rule for him, cannot long have a fixed objective or a consistent policy; this unsettledness makes the state drift from principle to principle, and from project to project, a defect not found in those forms of government where the prince is always the same. Thus we see that, in general, if there is more cunning in a royal court, there is more wisdom in a republican senate, and that republics have a more stable and effective guidance — something which cannot obtain where every revolution in the administration means a revolution in the state — for it is the universal rule of all ministers and nearly all kings to reverse the policy of their predecessors.

This same lack of cohesion gives the lie to a fallacy which is very common among royalist political thinkers, that is, not only of comparing civil government to household government and the prince to the father of a family — a fallacy I have already refuted — but also of generously attributing to a royal ruler all the virtues he has need of, and always assuming that the prince is everything he should be. With the help of these assumptions, royal government becomes manifestly preferable

\* 'The best as well as the shortest way to find out what is good and what is bad is to consider what you would have wished to happen if someone other than yourself had been Prince.' (Tacitus, *History*, Book I.) [Trans.]

to all other kinds, because it is incontestably the strongest, and needs only a corporate will more in harmony with the general will to be also the best form of government.

But if, according to Plato, a born king is a very rare being – how often do Nature and Fortune combine to enthrone such a man? And if a royal education necessarily corrupts those who receive it, what must be expected of a succession of men brought up to rule?

It is deliberate self-deception to confuse royal government with the government of a good king. To understand what this form of government is inherently, one must consider it as it is under mediocre or evil princes, for either princes will be such when they accede to the throne or such is what occupying the throne will make them.

Although these difficulties do not escape our authors, they have never been in the least embarrassed by them. The remedy, they say, is to obey without a murmur. God in his wrath inflicts bad kings on us, so they must be endured as a divine punishment. This argument is undoubtedly edifying; but I fancy it is more suited to the pulpit than to a book of political theory. What would be said about a physician who promised miracles, and whose whole art was to teach the sick to practise patience?

We all know that we have to put up with a bad government when it is bad; the problem is to find a good government.

number to the smaller – with this difference, that sometimes the many submit to the few, and sometimes the few submit to the many.

Sometimes there is an equal division, either when the constitutive parts are mutually dependent, as in the government of England, or when the authority of each part is independent but imperfect, as in the case of Poland. This latter form is bad, because there is no unity in the government, and the state lacks bonds of union. Which is better: a simple form of government or a mixed one? This is a question much debated by political theorists, and one to which I myself must give the answer I gave earlier about all forms of government.

In itself, the simple form of government is the best, precisely because it is simple. But when the executive power is not sufficiently subordinate to the legislative – that is to say, when the ratio of prince to sovereign is greater than that of people to prince – this lack of proportion has to be remedied by dividing the government, for then all the diverse elements of the government will have no less authority over the subjects, but their separation will make them less powerful against the sovereign.

The same disadvantage can also be prevented by establishing intermediate magistrates who, separated from the government altogether, serve only to balance the two powers, and uphold their respective rights. Then the government is not mixed, it is tempered.

The opposite disadvantage can be remedied by similar means; and when the government is too slack, commissions can be set up to give it concentration. In the first case, the government is divided in order to weaken it; in the second, in order to strengthen it. This is the practice of all democracies. The maximum of strength and of weakness are equally found in the simple forms of government, whereas the mixed forms provide a moderate degree of strength.

### CHAPTER 7 *Mixed Forms of Government*

**STRICTLY speaking**, no government of a simple form exists. A single head of state has to have subordinate magistrates; a people's government must have a head. Thus in the division of executive power there is always a gradation from the larger