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 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

He 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 sells the country to effeminacy 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, before all 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 periculosam libertatem quam quietum servitium.*'†

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*, *gerontes*. 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‡ came to be preferred to age, and aristocracy became elective. Lastly, the bequeathing of power together with goods 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 national energies 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 domain 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, that is simply so that the administration of public affairs may 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 preference.

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,

naturally bringing together 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 contingent; 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, should 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 princelings, 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.

* 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 profound 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.]

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 intelligent 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

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 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, everything 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 sophism 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.

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

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