

Chapter I

SUBJECT OF THE FIRST BOOK

Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains. Many a one believes himself the master of others, and yet he is a greater slave than they. How has this change come about? I do not know. What can make it legitimate? I believe I can settle this question.

If I looked only at force and the results that stem from it, I would say that as long as a people is compelled to obey and does obey, it does well; but that, as soon as it can shake off the yoke and does shake it off, it does even better; for, if men recover their freedom by virtue of the same right by which it was taken away, either they are justified in taking it back, or there was no justification for depriving them of it. But the social order is a sacred right that serves as a foundation for all others. This right, however, does not come from nature. It is therefore based on conventions. The question is to know what these conventions are. Before coming to that, I must establish what I have just stated.

Chapter II

PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES

The earliest of all societies, and the only natural one, is the family; yet children remain attached to their father only so long as they need him for their own survival. As soon as this need ceases, the natural bond is dissolved. The children being freed from the obedience which they owed to their father, and the father from the concern he owed his children, become equally independent. If they remain united, it is not because of nature but of choice; and the family itself is kept together only by convention.

This common liberty is a consequence of man's nature. His first law is to attend to his own survival, his first concerns are those he owes to himself; and as soon as he reaches the age of rationality, being sole judge of how to survive, he becomes his own master.

The family is, then, if you will, the first model of political societies; the leader is the analogue of the father, while the people are like the children; and all, being born free and equal, give up their freedom only for their own advantage. The whole difference is that, in the family, the father's love for his children repays him for the concern that he bestows upon them; while, in the State, the pleasure of ruling makes up for the leader's lack of love for his people.

Grotius denies that all human authority is established for the benefit of the governed, and he cites slavery as an example. His steady line of reasoning is to establish right by fact.* A more consistent method might be used, but none more favorable to tyrants.

It is doubtful, then, according to Grotius, whether the human race belongs to a hundred men, or whether these hundred men belong to the human race; and he appears throughout his book to incline to the former opinion, which is also that of Hobbes. In this way we have mankind divided like herds of cattle, each of which has a master, who looks after it in order to devour it.

Just as a herdsman is superior in nature to his herd, so leaders, who are the herdsmen of men, are superior in nature to their people. Such was, according to Philo's account, the reasoning of the Emperor Caligula, inferring truly enough from this analogy that kings are gods, or that men are animals.

The reasoning of Caligula is similar to that of Hobbes and Grotius. Aristotle, before them all, had also said that men are not naturally equal, but that some are born to be slaves and others to rule.

Aristotle was right, but he mistook the effect for the cause. Every man born in slavery is born for slavery; nothing is more certain. Slaves lose everything in their chains, even the desire to escape from them; they love their servitude as the companions of Ulysses loved their brutishness.† If, then, there are slaves by nature, it is because there have been slaves contrary to nature. The first slaves were made by force; their cowardice kept them in bondage.

I have said nothing about King Adam nor about Emperor Noah, the father of three great monarchs who split the universe among them, like the children of Saturn with whom they are likened. I hope that people will give me credit for my moderation; for, as I am a direct descendant of one of these princes, and perhaps of the eldest branch, how do I know whether, by examination of titles, I might not find myself the legitimate king of the human race? Be that as it may, it cannot be denied that Adam was sovereign of the world, as Robinson was of his island, so long as he was its sole inhabitant; and it was a convenient feature of that empire that the monarch, secure on his throne, had nothing to fear from rebellions, or wars, or conspirators.

* "Learned researches in public law are often nothing but the history of ancient abuses; and to devote much labor to studying them is misplaced pertinacity" (*Treatise on the Interests of France in Relation to Her Neighbours*, by the Marquis d'Argenson). That is exactly what Grotius did.

† See a small treatise by Plutarch, entitled *That Brutes Employ Reason*.

Chapter III

THE RIGHT OF THE STRONGEST

The strongest man is never strong enough to be always master, unless he transforms his power into right, and obedience into duty. Hence the right of the strongest — a right in appearance assumed in irony, and in reality established in principle. But will this term ever be explained to us? Force is a physical power; I do not see what morality can result from its effects. To yield to force is an act of necessity, not of will; it is at most an act of prudence. In what sense can it be a duty?

Let us assume for a moment this so-called right. I say that nothing results from it but inexplicable nonsense; for if might makes right, the effect changes with the cause, and any force that can overcome the first can claim its rights. As soon as men can disobey with impunity, they can do so legitimately; and since the strongest is always in the right, it makes sense to act in such a way as to be the strongest. But what kind of right perishes when might disappears? If one is compelled to obey by force, there is no need to obey from duty; and if one is no longer forced to obey, obligation is at an end. We see, then, that this word *right* adds nothing to force; here it means nothing at all.

Obey the powers that be. If that means, Yield to force, the precept is good but superfluous; I reply that it will never be violated. All power comes from God, I admit; but every disease comes from Him too; does it follow that we are prohibited from calling in a physician? If a robber should catch me deep in a forest, am I bound not only to give up my money when forced, but am I also morally bound to do so when I might hide it? For, after all, the gun he holds is a superior force.

Let us agree, then, that might does not make right, and that we are bound to obey none but lawful authorities. Thus we return to my original question.

Chapter IV

SLAVERY

Since no man has any natural authority over his fellow men, and since might is not the source of right, conventions remain as the basis of all lawful authority among men.

If an individual, says Grotius, can alienate his freedom and become the slave of a master, why should a whole people not be able to alienate theirs, and become subject to a king? In this there are many equivocal terms

requiring explanation; but let us confine ourselves to the word *alienate*. To alienate is to give or sell. Now, a man who becomes another's slave does not give himself; he sells himself at the very least for his subsistence. But why does a nation sell itself? So far from a king providing his subjects with their subsistence, he draws his from them; and, according to Rabelais, a king does not live on a little. Do subjects, then, give up their persons on condition that their property also shall be taken? I do not see what is left for them to keep.

It will be said that the despot secures for his subjects civil peace. Be it so; but what do they gain by that, if the wars which his ambition brings upon them, together with his insatiable greed and the vexations of his administration, harass them more than their own dissensions would? What do they gain by it if this tranquillity is itself one of their miseries? Men live tranquilly also in dungeons; is that enough to make them contented there? The Greeks confined in the cave of the Cyclops lived peacefully until their turn came to be devoured.

To say that a man gives himself for nothing is to say something absurd and inconceivable; such an act is illegitimate and invalid, for the simple reason that he who performs it is not in his right mind. To say the same thing of a whole nation is to suppose a nation of fools; and madness does not confer rights.

Even if each person could alienate himself, he could not alienate his children; they are born free men; their liberty belongs to them, and no one has a right to dispose of it except them themselves. Before they have reached the age of rationality, the father can, in their name, stipulate conditions for their preservation and welfare, but not surrender them irrevocably and unconditionally; for such a gift is contrary to the ends of nature, and exceeds the rights of paternity. In order, then, that an arbitrary government might be legitimate, it would be necessary for the people in each generation to have the option of accepting or rejecting it; but in that case such a government would no longer be arbitrary.

To renounce one's liberty is to renounce one's essence as a human being, the rights and also the duties of humanity. For the person who renounces everything there is no possible compensation. Such a renunciation is incompatible with human nature, for to take away all freedom from one's will is to take away all morality from one's actions. In short, a convention which stipulates absolute authority on the one side and unlimited obedience on the other is meaningless and contradictory. Is it not clear that we are under no obligations whatsoever toward a man from whom we have a right to demand everything? And does not this single condition, without equivalent,

without exchange, presuppose the nullity of the act? For what rights would my slave have against me, since all that he has belongs to me? His rights being mine, this right of me against myself is a meaningless term.

Grotius and others derive from war another origin for the supposed right of slavery. The victor having, according to them, the right of slaying the vanquished, the latter may purchase his life at the cost of his freedom; an agreement so much the more legitimate that it turns to the advantage of both.

But it is clear that this supposed right of slaying the vanquished in no way results from the state of war. Men are not naturally enemies, if only for the reason that, living in their primitive independence, they have no mutual relations sufficiently durable to constitute a state of peace or a state of war. It is the relation of things and not of men that constitutes war; and since the state of war cannot arise from simple personal relations, but only from real relations, private war — war between man and man — cannot exist either in the state of nature, where there is no settled ownership, or in the social state, where everything is under the authority of the laws.

Private combats, duels, and encounters are acts that do not constitute a state of war; and with regard to the private wars authorized by the Establishments of Louis IX, king of France, and suspended by the peace of God, they were abuses of the feudal government, an absurd system if ever there was one, contrary both to the principles of natural right and to all sound government.

War, then, is not a relation between man and man, but a relation between State and State, in which individuals are enemies only by accident, not as men, nor even as citizens,* but as soldiers; not as members of the fatherland, but as its defenders. In short, each State can have as enemies only

* The Romans, who understood and respected the rights of war better than any nation in the world, carried their scruples so far in this respect that no citizen was allowed to serve as a volunteer without enlisting expressly against the enemy, and by name against a certain enemy. A legion in which Cato the younger made his first campaign under Popilius having been re-formed, Cato the elder wrote to Popilius that, if he consented to his son's continuing to serve under him, it was necessary that he should take a new military oath, because, the first being annulled, he could no longer bear arms against the enemy (Cicero, *De Officiis* I, II). And Cato also wrote to his son to abstain from appearing in battle until he had taken his new oath. I know that it will be possible to urge against me the siege of Clusium and other particular cases; but I cite laws and customs (Livy, V. 35–37). No nation has transgressed its laws less frequently than the Romans, and no nation has had laws so admirable.

other States and not individual men, inasmuch as it is impossible to claim any true relation between things of different kinds.

This principle also conforms to the established maxims of all ages and to the accepted practices of all civilized nations. Declarations of war are not so much warnings to the powers as to their subjects. The foreigner, whether king, or nation, or private person, that robs, slays, or detains subjects without declaring war against the government, is not an enemy, but a pirate. Even in open war, a just prince, while he rightly takes possession of all that belongs to the State in an enemy's country, respects the person and property of individuals; he respects the rights on which his own are based. The aim of war being the destruction of the hostile State, we have a right to slay its defenders so long as they have arms in their hands; but as soon as they lay them down and surrender, ceasing to be enemies or instruments of the enemy, they become again simply men, and no one has any further right over their lives. Sometimes it is possible to destroy the State without killing a single one of its members; but war confers no right except what is necessary to its end. These are not the principles of Grotius; they are not based on the authority of poets, but are derived from the nature of things, and are founded on reason.

With regard to the right of conquest, it has no other foundation than the law of the strongest. If war does not confer on the victor the right of slaying the vanquished, this right, which he does not possess, cannot be the foundation of a right to enslave them. If we have a right to slay an enemy only when it is impossible to enslave him, the right to enslave him is not derived from the right to kill him; it is, therefore, an iniquitous transaction to make him purchase his life, over which the victor has no right, at the cost of his liberty. In establishing the right of life and death upon the right of slavery, and the right of slavery upon the right of life and death, is it not manifest that one falls into a vicious cycle?

Even if we grant this terrible right of killing everybody, I say that a slave taken in war, or a conquered nation, is under no obligation at all to a master, except to obey him so far as compelled. In taking an equivalent for his life the victor has conferred no favor on the slave; instead of killing him unprofitably, he has destroyed him for his own profit. Far, then, from having acquired over him any authority in addition to that of force, the state of war subsists between them as before, their relationship itself is the effect of it; and the exercise of the rights of war supposes that there is no treaty of peace. They have made a convention. Be it so; but this convention, far from terminating the state of war, supposes its continuance.

Thus, however we might view things, the right of slavery is null and

void, not only because it is illegitimate, but because it is absurd and meaningless. These words, *slavery* and *right*, are contradictory and mutually exclusive. Whether spoken by a man to a man, or by a man to a nation, such speech as this will always be equally aberrant: "I make an agreement with you wholly at your expense and wholly for my benefit, and I shall observe it as long as I please, while you also shall observe it as long as I please."

Chapter V

THAT IT IS ALWAYS NECESSARY TO GO BACK TO A FIRST CONVENTION

Even if I conceded all that I have so far refuted, those who favor despotism would be no farther advanced. There will always be a great difference between subduing a multitude and governing a society. When isolated men, however numerous they may be, are subjected one after another to a single person, this seems to me only a case of master and slaves, not of a nation and its leader; they form, if you will, an aggregation, but not an association, for they have neither public property nor a body politic. Such a man, even if he enslaved half the world, is never anything but an individual; his interest, separated from that of the rest, is never anything but a private interest. If he dies, his empire after him is left disconnected and disunited, as an oak disintegrates and becomes a heap of ashes after fire has consumed it.

A people, says Grotius, can give itself to a king. According to Grotius, then, a people is a people before it gives itself to a king. This gift itself is a civil act, and presupposes public deliberation. Consequently, before examining the act by which a people elects a king, it would be well to examine the act by which a people becomes a people; for this act, being necessarily anterior to the other, is the real foundation of the society.

In fact, if there were no anterior convention, where, unless the election were unanimous, would be the obligation upon the minority to submit to the decision of the majority? And from where do the hundred who desire a master derive the right to vote on behalf of ten who do not desire one? The law of the plurality of votes is itself established by convention, and presupposes unanimity at least at one point in time.

Chapter VI

THE SOCIAL PACT

I imagine men reaching a point when the impediments that endangered their survival in the state of nature prevailed by their resistance over the forces that each individual could use to survive in that state. At that point this primitive condition can no longer subsist, and the human race would perish unless it changed its mode of existence.

Now, as men cannot create any new forces, but only combine and control those that do exist, they have no other means of self-preservation than to form by aggregation a sum of forces which may prevail over the resistance, to put them in action by a single motive power, and to make them work in concert.

This sum of forces can be produced only by the combination of many; but the strength and freedom of each man being the chief instruments of his survival, how can he pledge them without doing harm to himself, and without neglecting the concern he owes to himself? This difficulty, applied to my subject, may be expressed in these terms: —

“To find a form of association that may defend and protect with the whole force of the community the person and property of every associate, and by means of which each, joining together with all, may nevertheless obey only himself, and remain as free as before.” Such is the fundamental problem of which the social contract provides the solution.

The clauses of this contract are so determined by the nature of the act that the slightest modification would render them pointless and ineffectual; so that, although they have never perhaps been formally enunciated, they are everywhere the same, everywhere tacitly accepted and recognized, until, the social pact being violated, each man returns to his original rights and takes back his natural liberty, while losing the conventional liberty for which he renounced it.

These clauses, rightly understood, can be reduced to a single one, namely, the total alienation to the whole community of each associate with all his rights; for, in the first place, since each gives himself up entirely, the situation is equal for all; and, the conditions being equal for all, no one has any interest in making them burdensome to others.

Further, the alienation being made without reserve, the union is as perfect as it can be, and no individual associate need claim anything more; for, if any rights were left to individuals, since there would be no common superior who could adjudicate between them and the public, each, being on some issue his own judge, would soon claim to be so on all; the state of

nature would still exist, and the association would necessarily become tyrannical or pointless.

In short, each giving himself to all, gives himself to no one; and since there is no associate over whom we do not acquire the same rights which we concede to him over ourselves, we gain the equivalent of all that we lose, and more power to preserve what we have.

If, then, we set aside whatever does not belong to the essence of the social contract, we shall find that we can reduce it to the following terms: "Each of us puts in common his person and all his power under the supreme direction of the general will; and in return each member becomes an indivisible part of the whole."

Right away, in place of the particular individuality of each contracting party, this act of association produces a moral and collective body, composed of as many members as the assembly has voices, and which receives from this same act its unity, its common self (*moi*), its life, and its will. This public person, which is thus formed by the union of all the individual members, used to be called a *city*,* and now is called *republic* or *body politic*. When it is passive, it is called by its members *State*, and *sovereign* when it is active, *power* when it is compared to similar bodies. With regard to the associates, they take collectively the name of *people*, and are called individually *citizens*, inasmuch as they participate in the sovereign power, and *subjects*, inasmuch as they are subjected to the laws of the State. But these terms are often confused and are mistaken for one another; it is sufficient to be able to distinguish them when they are used with precision.

* The real meaning of this word has been almost completely erased among the moderns; most people take a town for a city, and a burgess for a citizen. They do not know that houses make the town, and that citizens make the city. This very mistake cost the Carthaginians dear. I have never read of the title citizens (*cives*) being given to the subjects of a prince, not even in ancient times to the Macedonians, nor, in our days, to the English, although nearer liberty than all the rest. The French alone employ familiarly this name *citizen*, because they have no true idea of it, as we can see from their dictionaries; but for this fact, they would, by assuming it, commit the crime of high treason. The name, among them, expresses a virtue, not a right. When Bodin wanted to give an account of our citizens and burgesses he made a gross blunder, mistaking the one for the other. M. d'Alembert has not erred in this, and, in his article *Geneva*, has clearly distinguished the four orders of men (even five, counting mere foreigners) which exist in our town, and of which two only compose the republic. No other French author that I know of has understood the real meaning of the word *citizen*.

Chapter VII

THE SOVEREIGN

We see from this formula that the act of association comprises a reciprocal engagement between the public and individuals, and that every individual, contracting so to speak with himself, is engaged in a double relation, that is, as a member of the sovereign toward individuals, and as a member of the State toward the sovereign. But we cannot apply here the maxim of civil law that no one is bound by engagements made with himself; for there is a great difference between being bound to oneself and to a whole of which one forms part.

We must further observe that public deliberations which bind all subjects to the sovereign in consequence of the two different relations under which each of them is regarded cannot, for a contrary reason, bind the sovereign to itself; and that accordingly it is contrary to the nature of the body politic for the sovereign to impose on itself a law which it cannot transgress. Since it can only be considered under one and the same relation, it is in the position of an individual contracting with himself; from which we see that there is not, nor can there be, any kind of fundamental law that is binding upon the body of the people, not even the social contract. This does not imply that such a body cannot perfectly well enter into engagements with others in what does not derogate from this contract; for, in regard to foreigners, it becomes a simple being, an individual.

But the body politic or sovereign, deriving its existence only from the sanctity of the contract, can never bind itself, even to others, in anything that derogates from the original act, such as alienation of some portion of itself, or submission to another sovereign. To violate the act by which it exists would be to annihilate itself; and what is nothing produces nothing.

As soon as the multitude is thus united in one body, it is impossible to harm one of the members without attacking the body, still less to harm the body without the members feeling the effects. Thus duty and interest alike oblige the two contracting parties to give mutual assistance; and those same men must seek to combine in this double relationship all the advantages implicit in it.

Now, the sovereign, being formed solely by the individuals who compose it, neither has nor can have any interest contrary to theirs; thus the sovereign power need make no guarantee to its subjects, because it is impossible for the body to wish to harm all its members; and we shall see hereafter that it can harm no one as an individual. The sovereign, for the simple reason that it is so, is always everything that it should be.

But this is not the case regarding the relation of subjects to the sovereign, which, notwithstanding the common interest, could not depend on them to fulfill their engagements, unless there were a way to ensure their fidelity.

Indeed, every individual can, as a man, have a particular will contrary to, or divergent from, the general will which he has as a citizen; his private interest may appear to him quite different from the common interest; his absolute and naturally independent existence may make him envisage what he owes to the common cause as a gratuitous contribution, the loss of which would be less harmful to others than the payment of it would be onerous to him; and, viewing the moral person that constitutes the State as an abstract being because it is not a man, he would be willing to enjoy the rights of a citizen without being willing to fulfill the duties of a subject. The perpetuation of such injustice would bring about the ruin of the body politic.

So that the social pact not be a pointless device, it tacitly includes this engagement, which can alone give force to the others — that whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the whole body; which means nothing else than that he shall be forced to be free; for such is the condition which, uniting every citizen to the fatherland, protects him from all personal dependency, a condition that ensures the control and working of the political machine, and alone renders legitimate civil engagements, which, without it, would be absurd, tyrannical, and subject to the most enormous abuses.

Chapter VIII

THE CIVIL STATE

The transition from the state of nature to the civil state produces a very remarkable change in man, by substituting in his behavior justice for instinct, and by imbuing his actions with a moral quality they previously lacked. Only when the voice of duty prevails over physical impulse, and law prevails over appetite, does man, who until then was preoccupied only with himself, understand that he must act according to other principles, and must consult his reason before listening to his inclinations. Although, in this state, he gives up many advantages that he derives from nature, he acquires equally great ones in return; his faculties are used and developed; his ideas are expanded; his feelings are ennobled; his entire soul is raised to such a degree that, if the abuses of this new condition did not often degrade him below that from which he has emerged, he ought to bless continually the

wonderful moment that released him from it forever, and transformed him from a stupid, limited animal into an intelligent being and a man.

Let us simplify this whole scheme into terms easy to compare. What man loses because of the social contract is his natural liberty and an unlimited right to anything that tempts him and that he can attain; what he gains is civil liberty and property in all that he possesses. So not to misunderstand these gains, we must clearly distinguish natural liberty, which is limited only by the powers of the individual, from civil liberty, which is limited by the general will; and we must distinguish possession, which is nothing but the result of force or the right of first occupancy, from property, which can be based only on a lawful title.

We might also add to the advantages of the civil state moral freedom, which alone enables man to be truly master of himself; for the impulse of mere appetite is slavery, while obedience to a self-prescribed law is freedom. But I have already said too much on this subject, and the philosophical meaning of the term *freedom* need not concern us here.

Chapter IX

REAL ESTATE

Every member of the community at the moment of its founding gives himself up to it, just as he is, that is, with all his being, his powers, and property. By this act, possession does not change its nature when it changes hands, and become property in those of the sovereign; but, as the powers of the State (*cité*) are incomparably greater than those of an individual, public possession is also, in fact, more secure and more irrevocable, without being more legitimate, at least in respect of foreigners; for the State, with regard to its members, is owner of all their property by the social contract, which, in the State, serves as the basis of all rights; but with regard to other powers, it is owner only by the right of first occupancy which it derives from individuals.

The right of first occupancy, although more real than that of the strongest, becomes a true right only after the establishment of the right of property. Every man has by nature a right to all that he needs; but the positive act which makes him proprietor of certain property excludes him from ownership of other property. His portion having been allotted, he must confine himself to it, and he has no further right to the property of the collectivity. That is why the right of first occupancy, so weak in the state of nature, is

respected by all citizens. In this right men respect not so much what belongs to others as what does not belong to themselves.

In order to legalize the right of first occupancy over any real estate whatsoever, the following conditions are necessary: first, the land must not yet be inhabited by any one; secondly, a man must occupy only the area required for his subsistence; thirdly, he must take possession of it, not by ceremonial statements, but by labor and cultivation, the only mark of ownership which, in the absence of legal title, ought to be respected by others.

Indeed, if we accord the right of first occupancy to necessity and labor, why not extend it as far as it can go? Is it impossible to assign limits to this right? Will the mere setting foot on common ground be sufficient to give an immediate claim of ownership? Will the power of driving away other men from it for a moment suffice to deprive them forever of the right of returning to it? How can a man or a people take possession of an immense territory and rob the whole human race of it except by a punishable usurpation, since other men are deprived of the place of residence and the sustenance that nature gives to them in common? When Núñez de Balboa on the seashore took possession of the Pacific Ocean and of all of South America in the name of the crown of Castille, was this sufficient to dispossess all the inhabitants, and exclude from it all the princes in the world? There could be innumerable ceremonies of the same kind; and the Catholic king in his study might, by a single stroke, have claimed possession of the whole world, only eliminating from his empire lands previously occupied by other princes.

We perceive how the lands of individuals, united and contiguous, become public territory, and how the right of sovereignty, extending itself from the subjects to the land they occupy, becomes at once real and personal; which places the possessors in greater dependency, and transforms their own powers into a guarantee of their fidelity—an advantage that ancient monarchs did not understand, for, calling themselves only kings of the Persians or Scythians or Macedonians, they seem to have regarded themselves as rulers of men rather than as masters of countries. Monarchs of today call themselves more cleverly kings of France, Spain, England, etc.; in thus holding the land they are quite sure of holding its inhabitants.

The unusual feature of this alienation is that the community, in receiving the property of individuals, so far from robbing them of it, only assures them lawful possession, and changes usurpation into true right, enjoyment into ownership. Also, the possessors being considered as holders of the public property, and their rights being respected by all members of the

State, as well as defended by all its power against foreigners, they have, as it were, by a transfer advantageous to the public and still more to themselves, acquired all that they have given up — a paradox easily explained by distinguishing between the rights that the sovereign and the proprietor have over the same property, as we shall see hereafter.

It might also happen that men begin to unite before they possess anything, and that afterwards taking over territory sufficient for all, they enjoy it in common, or split it among themselves, either equally or in parts determined by the sovereign. In whatever way this acquisition is made, the right that every individual has over his own property is always subordinate to the right that the community has over all; otherwise there would be no stability in the social union, and no real force in the exercise of sovereignty.

I shall close this chapter and this book with a remark which can serve as a basis for the whole social system; it is that instead of destroying natural equality, the fundamental pact, on the contrary, substitutes a moral and lawful equality for the physical inequality that nature imposed upon men, so that, although unequal in strength or intellect, they all become equal by convention and legal right.*

* Under bad governments this equality is only apparent and illusory; it serves only to keep the poor in their misery and the rich in their usurpations. In fact, laws are always useful to those who possess and injurious to those that have nothing; whence it follows that the social state is advantageous to men only so far as they all have something, and none of them has too much.