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# Jacob Bielfeld's "On the Decline of States" (1760) and its Relevance for Today

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The idea of economic decline has been with us for a very long time. The notion that human societies are bound to follow the cyclical patterns of nature – birth, life, decline and death – is found from the Greek philosophy of Plato to the Arab philosophy of Ibn-Khaldun. Only late Renaissance and Enlightenment *Entzauberung* – demystification – of the world picture view freed mankind from the cyclical vicissitudes of the blindfolded goddess Fortuna and opened up for rational economic policy to prevent booms and bust.<sup>2</sup> During the last century the theory of decline in the West manifested itself in German *Kulturpessimismus* with Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1918)<sup>3</sup>, in the United States with Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987)<sup>4</sup>, but also as harsh reality in the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The combined effects of the present economic crisis, which started as a financial crisis in 2007, and the rise of Asia – particularly China – have again put the subject of economic decline on the agenda in Western countries. In a now virtually forgotten economic bestseller, *Institutionen Politiques*, German Economist Jacob Bielfeld (1717-1770), an advisor to Frederick the Great of Prussia, has a very comprehensive and – as opposed to Spengler's generalisations 150 years later – very concrete, detailed and specific list of the factors which cause the decline of nations. This paper brings the first ever English translation of this chapter with a brief discussion arguing for a renewed relevance not only of the factors and mechanisms pointed to by Bielfeld, but also of Bielfeld's fact-based and taxonomic approach to economic understanding. An important reason for re-publishing Bielfeld's chapter on the decline of nations is that it compares so favourably with the narrow focus of modern economic theory on the subject, exemplified in Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson's *Why Nations Fail*.<sup>5</sup>

Europe at the time of Bielfeld presented a large number of nations from which to draw experiences. The 1648 Peace of Westphalia had produced around 400 independent states in Germany alone, although by 1760 the number had decreased considerably. Due to his position at the Court of Frederick the Great and in Prussia's Foreign Service, Bielfeld had unique

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<sup>2</sup> For a brief discussion of this, see Reinert, Erik *How Rich Countries got Rich..and why Poor Countries stay Poor*, London: Constable, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> *Untergang des Abendlandes*, first German edition of the first volume was published in 1918 (Vienna, Braumüller).

<sup>4</sup> New York: Random House.

<sup>5</sup> New York: Crown, 2012. For a good critique of Acemoglu and Robinson, see Vries, Peer "Does wealth entirely depend on inclusive institutions and pluralist politics?", *The Other Canon and Tallinn University of Technology Working Papers in Technology Governance and Economic Dynamics*, No. 43, 2012, downloadable at <http://technologygovernance.eu/files/main//2012092612501919.pdf>

access to information from many nations. Precisely because of this privileged access to information, Bielfeld's correspondence was published and translated (from French) also into German and English.<sup>6</sup>

The rich sample of different nations pursuing different strategies in different contexts allows Bielfeld a large number of national case-studies on which to draw. Closer to our time, The Great Depression also provided a setting where national strategies differed – e.g. whether to stay on the Gold Standard or not – from which nations could learn from each other.

With today's coordinated policies and one-size-fits-all approach of the European Union, the diversity from which Bielfeld and his contemporaries could draw is gone. Europe has lost a diversity which historically probably has been crucial to its success, becoming "standardised" and "homogenised" in a lot of areas from a single currency to bank supervision to standardisation of shapes of cucumbers to research policy. I suggest this chapter be read in the spirit of evolutionary economics, where the "market" is so much more than a mechanism setting prices. At the time of Bielfeld Europe was an arena where different ideas, in the form of laws, types of government, efficiency of armaments, and economic policy were continuously compared and tested against each other, attempting to arrive at a "best practice" from a huge number of cases. As opposed to a unified China, Europe at the time was a huge living laboratory. From an evolutionary perspective<sup>7</sup>, rather than from one of equilibrium, today's Europe is facing decline where seemingly only one solution is considered, however poor the results may be, say, in a Greek rather than in a German context. Today's political approach inside the European Union has reduced the possibilities of learning to a minimum. From this perspective alone, Bielfeld's account is interesting.

Oswald Spengler uses the concept *Gleichzeitigkeit*, or *simultaneity*, in the sense of processes taking place at the same stage in the historical cycle. This notion may also be employed in Carlota Perez' theories of sequential technological paradigms, where new technological revolutions are often accompanied by hegemonic shifts between world powers.<sup>8</sup> From this point of view one could think of the simultaneity of the decline of the English Empire

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<sup>6</sup> Bielfeld's *Lettres familières et autres* (1763), in two volumes, was translated into German in 1765. The 1768 English translation is entitled *Letters of Baron Bielfeld: Secretary of Legation to the King of Prussia; Preceptor to Prince Ferdinand; Chancellor of the Universitys (sic) in the dominions of his Prussian Majesty, F.R.A.B. &c. Author of the Political Institutes(sic): containing original anecdotes of the Prussian Court for the last twenty years*, London: J. Robson, 1768.

<sup>7</sup> As in the perspective of Nelson, Richard & Sidney Winter, *An Evolutionary Theory of Economic Change*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982.

<sup>8</sup> Perez, Carlota, *Technological Revolutions and Financial Capital: The Dynamics of Bubbles and Golden Ages*, London: Elgar, 2002.

around 1900 and that of the United States today, i.e. the US today may be at the same stage in the maturity cycle as England was around 1900. From this perspective of simultaneity one might expect the United States soon to repudiate the benefits of free trade as England did in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

From a perspective of simultaneity and technological shifts, Bielfeld's account is interesting also because of a possible technological simultaneity of the period up to 1760 with that of today. His account was written towards the end of a period when Europe's most prosperous city-states, from Venice to Amsterdam, experienced relative, even absolute, economic decline. The First Industrial Revolution, one of Perez' techno-economic paradigms, had benefitted the large nation states England and France at their expense. The present period may be one where the exhaustion of the Mass Production Paradigm in a similar way coincides with a transfer of industrial and economic power from the West itself to Asia and China. In this perspective we shall see that many of Bielfeld's factors contributing to decline are at work.

### **German Economics: Jacob Bielfeld and his contemporaries.**

Of four great German Enlightenment economists, Bielfeld is probably the most forgotten. These are, in order of year of birth, Georg Heinrich Zincke (1692-1769), Jacob Bielfeld (1717-1770), Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi (1717-1771), and Johann Friedrich von Pfeiffer (1718-1787)<sup>9</sup>. All published profusely, but – importantly – of the four only Jacob Bielfeld makes it to Ken Carpenter's honours list of *Economic Bestsellers before 1850*<sup>10</sup>.

Bielfeld's main work made it into 12 editions, including two translations each into German and Spanish, and one each into Italian and Russian. One reason for Bielfeld's greater international fame at the time is probably that his *Institutions Politiques* was first published – in 1760 – in French, rather than in German. French being the main academic and political language in Europe of the period, Bielfeld's work was more internationally accessible than that of the others. Bielfeld's background as part of the Court of Frederick II of Prussia was very different from that of the other authors. Zincke, Justi, and Pfeiffer were all state employees with a military background. They were all what at the time somewhat derogatorily

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of Justi's life and work, also comparing him to Zincke and Pfeiffer, see Reinert, Erik S. 'Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi (1717-1771): The Life and Times of an Economist Adventurer', in Backhaus, Jürgen (ed.), *The Beginnings of Political Economy: Johann Friedrich Gottlob von Justi*, New York: Springer, 2009, pp. 33-74. I leave out a fifth important economist, Johann Beckmann (1739-1811) here because his is a slightly later generation.

<sup>10</sup> Carpenter, Kenneth, *Economics Bestsellers before 1850*, Boston: Harvard Business School, 1974. Downloadable on [www.othercanon.org](http://www.othercanon.org)

was called *Projektmacher* (project makers) and *Staatsabenteurerer* (state adventurers),<sup>11</sup> and all three ended up spending time in jail accused of embezzlement.

This contrasts sharply with the faith of Jacob Bielfeld who, as a childhood friend of Frederick II (the Great) of Prussia (1712-1786) spent his life close to European courts, was employed in the Prussian Foreign Service, as tutor to Crown Prince August Ferdinand, and was ennobled. Bielfeld was therefore in a much better position to make international comparisons also of non-German states than our three other authors of Enlightenment Cameralism. This international perspective will be evident in the chapter of *Institutions Politiques* which is translated here.

But as economists Zincke, Bielfeld, Justi, and Pfeiffer still had much in common. They all covered a holistic subject which today would be split into different academic branches, and they contributed to the enormous growth of European economic literature which started around 1750<sup>12</sup>. They each published one main work which could be used as a textbook in German Enlightenment economics. Justi published an impressive 67 books<sup>13</sup>, but his 13 translations into 5 languages are from 8 different books.<sup>14</sup> Zincke was ahead of the trend with his two-volume work in 1742.<sup>15</sup> Zincke was also the one who consciously kept the links

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<sup>11</sup> There are important common elements between our German *Staatsabenteurerer* and the English Merchant Adventurers, like Sir Francis Drake. They were all working on behalf of their governments. But while the merchant adventurers were often pirates with a government licence in what most of the time in the end was a zero-sum-game – the gold of Spain changed hands and got English owners – Zincke, Justi and Pfeiffer as Cameralist economist adventurers were both theorising and putting into practice an economic theory where new learning and new institutions, and manufacturing under increasing returns, increased the size of the economic pie. In a sense Zincke, Justi, and Pfeiffer were one-man research and development institutions and entrepreneurs on behalf of the state. In spite of their misfortunes, they represent a type of theorising and practice that was a necessary passage points for the development of modern Europe (see Reinert 2009).

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion, see Sophus Reinert, *Translating Empire*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011 and Carpenter, Kenneth, "Manufactures in European Economic Literature of the Enlightenment", in Backhaus, Jürgen, *Physiocracy, Antiphiocracy and Pfeiffer*, New York: Springer, 2011, pp. 5-21.

<sup>13</sup> For a bibliography of Justi, see Reinert, Erik S. and Hugo Reinert, 'A Bibliography of J.H.G. von Justi' (with Hugo Reinert) in Backhaus, Jürgen (ed.) *The Beginnings of Political Economy: Johann Friedrich Gottlob von Justi*, New York: Springer, 2009, pp. 19-31.

<sup>14</sup> The languages were French, Spanish, Dutch, Russian and English. Justi's editions and translations are spread among so many different works that no single one qualifies for Carpenter's bestseller list.

<sup>15</sup> Zincke, Georg Heinrich, *Grund-Riß einer Einleitung zu denen Cameral-Wissenschaften, in welchem die ersten Vorbereitungs- und Grund-Lehren, so in der wirthschaftlichen Policey-Wissenschaft abzuhandeln, in einem kurzen Zusammenhang zum Behuff seiner Academischen Vorlesungen vorgestellt werden. Nebst einer vorläufigen Abhandlung von der Art und Weise junge Leute auf Universitäten nicht nur darinn theoretisch zu unterrichten, sondern auch denenselben zur würrklichen Ausübung Anleitung zu geben*, Leipzig: Caspar Heinrich Fuchs, 1742. The two total more than 1000 pages.

to the economics of Ancient Greece by translating and publishing Xenophon's *Poroi*<sup>16</sup>.

Justi has several works aiming at being a general textbook, but the main one is his *Grundsätze der Policy-Wissenschaft* first published in 1756.<sup>17</sup> Pfeiffer's main textbook was published between 1764 and 1778, eight parts in five volumes.<sup>18</sup> With a third volume published posthumously, Bielfeld's *Institutions Politiques* ran into three volumes.

In addition to writing books, all four main German Enlightenment economists ran their own economic journals. Zincke's *Leipziger Sammlungen von Wirthschaftlichen- Policy- Cammer- und Finantz-Sachen* (Leipzig Papers on Police, Economic and Finance Matters) ran from 1742 to 1767. Bielfeld's weekly *Der Eremit (The Hermit)* ran only from 1767 to 1769. Due to his itinerant activities, partly caused by war, Justi ran a total of seven different journals published in eight different German cities. The one with the longest life span, from 1754 to 1768 was the *Physikalisch-oeconomische Real-Zeitung*.<sup>19</sup> Pfeiffer's journal, *Vermischte Verbesserungs-Vorschläge und freie Gedanken über verschiedene, den Nahungszustand, die Bevölkerung und Staatswirthschaft der Deutschen betreffende Gegenstände*, was only published between 1777 and 1778.<sup>20</sup>

### Jacob Bielfeld – a brief account of life and work.

As an important advisor to Frederick the Great of Prussia, Bielfeld is frequently mentioned in the literature, but there is not much on Bielfeld himself. The literature is limited to two relatively slim theses (*Inaugural-dissertationen*) on him, by Gerda Voss from the University of Berlin in

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<sup>16</sup> Zincke, Georg Heinrich, *Xenophons Buch von den Einkünften, oder dessen Vorschläge, wie das bereiteste Vermögen grosser Herren und Staaten nach ächten Grund-Sätzen des Finanz-Wesens zu vermehren, aus dem Griechischen ins Teutsche übersetzt, und mit historisch-politischen Anmerkungen, sonderlich aber von Oeconomischen- Policy- Cammer- und Finanz-Sachen versehen*, Wolfenbüttel & Leipzig: Meitzner, 1753 (a massive volume of 564 pages)

<sup>17</sup> *Grundsätze der Policy-Wissenschaft in einem vernünftigen, auf den Endzweck der Policy gegründeten Zusammenhange und zum Gebrauch Academischer Vorlesungen abgefasst*, 2<sup>nd</sup> enlarged edition, Göttingen: Verlag der Wittve Vandenhoeck, 1759. This work was translated into Italian and Spanish.

<sup>18</sup> Pfeiffer, Johann Friedrich von *Lehrbegriff sämtlicher oeconomischer und Cameralwissenschaften*, Stuttgart und Mannheim: Johann Christoph Erhard und C. F. Schwan, 1764-1765 and 1777-1778.

<sup>19</sup> Initial full title: *Physikalisch-oeconomische Real-Zeitung, aus denen von der Natur- und Haushaltungs-Wissenschaft, Feld-Bau, Heilungs-Kunst, Cameralwesen, Policy, Künsten, Manufacturen und Handlung handelnden Schriften zusammen gelesen und mit neuen Stücken, Versuchen und Anmerkungen versehen nebst einer allgemeinen Anzeige alles dessen, was bisher in diesen Sachen geschrieben worden*. Continued under different titles.

<sup>20</sup> Continuing this tradition Johann Beckmann's journal, the *Physikalisch-oeconomische Bibliothek*, ran in 23 volumes from 1770 to 1807.

1928<sup>21</sup> and by Friedel Stössl<sup>22</sup> from the University of Erlangen in 1937. We also have an *Eloge* published after he passed away.<sup>23</sup> A brief outline of his life follows here.

Born into a family of merchants in Hamburg in 1717, Jakob Friedrich von Bielfeld's life was international already from an early age. In 1732 he started his university studies in Leyden, Holland. In 1735 he travelled in Holland, France, and England. In 1738 he met and befriended then Crown Prince Frederick of Prussia. Like Frederick, Bielfeld was a freemason. With Frederick's ascent to the Crown in 1740, Bielfeld started his diplomatic career as Counselor to the Prussian Consulates in Hannover, later in London and Berlin. In 1745 he became tutor to Prince August Ferdinand, in 1747 he became curator of Prussia's universities and director of Berlin's famous Charité hospital. In 1748 Bielfeld was ennobled as Baron, and after 15 years of service to Prussia – at the age of 38 – he withdrew from a *vita attiva* to a *vita contemplativa* at his properties in Altenburg in the Eastern part of Germany in 1755. Due to the Seven Years' War Bielfeld had to leave Altenburg in 1757 for his native Hamburg, returning only in 1763. He died in Altenburg in 1770, at the age of 53.

With the exception of his short-lived journal *The Hermit*, published towards the end of his life, Bielfeld wrote in French. Another important and equally forgotten German economist who wrote in French was Ernst Ludwig Carl (1682-1742).<sup>24</sup> In addition the *Institutions Politiques* (1760) – from which this translation is taken – and his correspondence and the journals – all already mentioned above – Bielfeld also wrote an interesting work on the recent progress of Germany<sup>25</sup> and an encyclopedic work in the Enlightenment tradition: *L'érudition universelle, ou Analyse abrégée de toutes les sciences, des beaux-arts et des belles-lettres* in four volumes.<sup>26</sup> The English edition is entitled *The elements of universal erudition: containing an analytical abridgment of the sciences, polite arts, and belles lettres*.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Baron von Bielfeld; ein Beitrag zur Geschichte Friedrichs des Grossen und des ausgehenden Rationalismus*, Berlin: Curtis, 1928. 62 pages.

<sup>22</sup> *Jakob Friedrich von Bielfeld: sein Leben und Werk im Lichte der Aufklärung*, Forchheim: O. Mauser, 1937. 87 pages.

<sup>23</sup> Fournay, Johann Heinrich Samuel, "Eloge de M. de Bielfeld", in *Nouveaux Mémoires de l'Académie royale des sciences de Berlin*, Berlin: Voss, 1772.

<sup>24</sup> Carl, Ernst Ludwig, *Traité de la Richesse des Princes, et de leurs états: et des moyens simples et naturels par y parvenir*, Paris: Theodore Legras, 1722-1723. Carl is the first to introduce the pin factory as an example to illustrate the division of labour, which more than 50 years later was to be made famous by Adam Smith.

<sup>25</sup> *Progrès des allemands dans les sciences: les belles-lettres & les arts, particulièrement dans la poésie & l'éloquence*, Amsterdam: F. Changuion, 1752.

<sup>26</sup> Berlin: n.p., 1768.

<sup>27</sup> London: G. Scott, for J. Robson, 1770, Dublin edition: Printed for H. Saunders, J. Potts, etc, 1771. Three volumes.



These publications all fall within the realm of the normal for economists of Bielfeld's generation and importance. His only atypical publications are comedies, which were first staged in Berlin. One comedy is entitled *The Germans in Paris*.<sup>28</sup>

The volumes of *Institutions Politiques* from which the present chapter on the decline of states is taken, are written in the venerable *Fürstenspiegel* – of “King’s Mirror” – tradition. Going back to Greek (Aristotle) and Roman (Pliny the Younger) this type of work lists the virtues and duties of ruler and princes, establishing the necessary wisdom and principles for good governance. An important German predecessor was Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff's *Teutsche Fürstenstaat* published in 1656 which was continuously in print for 100 years, the last edition being printed in 1754.<sup>29</sup> Seckendorff and Bielfeld were both employed by men who represented the best intellectualism of Enlightened Despotism: Ernest the Pious of Gotha and Frederick the Great of Prussia respectively.

Frederick the Great's *Antimachiavel* (1740), his criticism of Nicolò Machiavelli, represented a curious incident inside the *Fürstenspiegel* tradition. This book was the result of Frederick's correspondence with Voltaire from 1736 to 1740. Also Bielfeld corresponded with Voltaire.

Bielfeld's approach is taxonomic and typical of his time. Like Linnaeus (1707-1778) did in the world of plants and animals, Bielfeld attempts to create order in the economic and political world by creating the necessary categories of forces at work. The first person to create a scientific economic treatise, Antonio Serra (1613)<sup>30</sup>, also used a taxonomic approach, and the same approach was found in English economics before Adam Smith.<sup>31</sup> In contrast with his predecessors, Smith eliminated important taxonomies as found e.g. in King (1721) – that of “good” and “bad” trade among them – and insisted on the counterintuitive proposal that all economic activities are qualitatively alike as agents of economic wealth.<sup>32</sup> Portugal having neglected its manufacturing sector, Bielfeld here (1760) sees that nation's position vis-à-vis Britain as one of unfortunate depen-

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<sup>28</sup> *Comédies nouvelles, par M. le baron de Bielfeld*, Berlin: E. de Bourdeaux, 1753. *Amusemens* (sic) *dramatiques de Monsieur le Baron de Bielfeld*, Leyden: Sam. et Jean Luchtmans, 1768. *Les Allemands à Paris, comédie*, no place, no publisher, no date.

<sup>29</sup> On Seckendorff, see Reinert, Erik S., “A Brief Introduction to Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff (1626-1692)” in *European Journal of Law and Economics*, Vol. 19, 2005, pp. 221-230.

<sup>30</sup> Reinert, Sophus A., ed. Antonio Serra, *A 'Short Treatise' on the Wealth and Poverty of Nations (1613)*, London: Anthem, 2011.

<sup>31</sup> King, Charles, *The British Merchant; or, Commerce Preserv'd*, London: John Darby, 1721. 3 volumes.

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of this, see Reinert, Erik S. “The Role of the State in Economic Growth”, in *Journal of Economic Studies*, vol. 26, No. 4/5, 1999, pp. 268-326.



dency. This of course contrasts sharply with Adam Smith's (1776) and David Ricardo's (1817) use of Portugal as an example of the blessings created by free trade.

Bielfeld's emphasis on avoiding inequity is noteworthy. This was strongly emphasised in pre-Smithian economics all over Europe: In Germany by Seckendorff and Justi, in France by Marquis de Vauban (1633-1707), and in Italy by Pietro Verri (1728-1797). Both Vauban's and Verri's main works made it to Carpenter's bestseller list; *Projet d'une dixme royale* (1707) *Meditazioni sulla economia politica*, (1771). Indeed the issue of equity seems to be remarkably similar, but cyclical, across culture and time. The advice of General and Governor Thahir Ibn al Husein (775-822) on this issue is equally relevant in Western politics today, 1.200 years later: "Distribute (taxes) ..among all taxpayers in a fair, just and equitable manner and make them general, not exempting anyone because of his noble rank or great riches.. and do not levy on anyone a tax which is beyond his capacity to pay".<sup>33</sup>

The experience-based knowledge and wisdom contained in Bielfeld's work reminds one of the teachings and wisdom of Benjamin Franklin's *Way to Wealth*, which was first published in 1757. Franklin aimed his wisdom at the common man, Bielfeld's *Institutions* aimed at the rulers and administrators of Europe, while his works on *General Erudition* had been aimed at the common man. Contrary to what could be expected, Benjamin Franklin's *Way to Wealth* – not Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* – is the most published economics book in history, judged by the number of different editions.<sup>34</sup> It is certainly dramatic that this kind of economics – both at the macro and micro levels – has now virtually disappeared from economic science. The aim of The Other Canon Foundation is to revive this experience-based economics tradition. The translation and publication of this chapter from Bielfeld are part of this effort.

## **The Chapter 'On the Decline of States'.**

The following is an attempt at a résumé of the chapter, paraphrasing and citing Bielfeld (italics are mine). Numbers in brackets refer to the relevant paragraph in the translation itself which follows after the résumé.

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<sup>33</sup> The quote comes from the *Prolegomena* of Ibn-Khaldun (1332-1406), quoted in Neumark, Fritz, "Zyklen in der Geschichte ökonomischer Ideen", in *Kyklos*, Vol. 28, 1975, No. 2, p. 274.

<sup>34</sup> More than one thousand editions of Benjamin Franklin's *Way to Wealth* in 22 different languages were published before 1851. A forthcoming work by Harvard's Kenneth Carpenter will be documenting these editions.

In sharp contrast to today's equilibrium economics, Bielfeld starts out his chapter on the decline of states with the basic assumption that everything in the world is characterised by instability: "The most formidable empires are subject to the law of change and inconstancy". When change occurs in "great bodies" (like empires) these are called revolutions, Bielfeld states, that is when the "face of the universe is changed".

A "universal history of the world" investigates both the causes and effects of revolutions, Bielfeld says. He distinguishes between two kinds of revolutions, the natural and the political. The former are "grievous effects of nature, such as earthquakes, floods, plagues and like scourges". The latter revolutions are "caused by men, and alters only the system of states, by changing the form of their government, or by subjecting their peoples to alien laws", which is the subject of Bielfeld's inquiry.

Bielfeld's taxonomy starts by distinguishing between *internal* and *external* causes of decline. The power of the state may be *real* or *relative*, as is shown by external threats to the state. The internal power of the state may also be founded upon "the *local situation*, or on *opinion*, or *accessory*." The local situation may be affected by natural disasters, and responses to it may be strengthened or weakened given the circumstances of the country. On opinion (or ideology) Bielfeld states that, "The power of opinion becomes weaker, and falls into decline, in proportion as the opinion upon which this power is based dissipates in the mind of men; and as a consequence one must not find it at all strange that those who are at the head of such a state seek to perpetuate this opinion, whether it be true or false."

There are also direct and indirect causes of decline, "Among the great number of direct or indirect causes that can abbreviate the life of a government, change the system of states, and overturn empires, we will only indicate the principal causes, and those that produce the most sudden effects.

Bielfeld's taxonomy distinguishes between 8 *external* (alien) and 17 *internal* (intrinsic) causes of decline. In this résumé we have numbered the external factors from E-1 to E-8 and the internal ones from I-1 to I-17. One can imagine using these categories today for a summary diagnosis of national problems. The United States may presently be seen as suffering from E-4 (imperial overextension), I-8 (neglect of production and science, de-industrialisation), I-15 (debt), increasingly I-16 (constant internal wrangling) and probably also I-7 (too much freedom destroying social cohesion). From Bielfeld's perspective many Arab countries may be seen as suffering from E-2 (war), E-5 (dependency), probably I-1 (unwise constitutions), I-2 (defective public administration), I-5 (excessive religion),

sometimes bordering on I-6 (oppression), and definitely I-8 (decline of production and science).

### **E-1. Migration**

It is remarkable that, writing during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Bielfeld would put migration as the top external danger to a nation. At the time, the Indian Nations of North America were being ruined by migration from Europe, but as expected this was not what Bielfeld had in mind: "Among the alien causes one can count first of all **the great migrations of peoples**, such as the spectacle that the fourth and fifth centuries offered Europe. Now hordes of Goths, Vandals and other Barbarians stream from the depths of the north to flood Europe, extending their conquests to Spain, to Italy and even Africa; now the peoples who inhabit the most northerly countries attack their neighbours towards the south, forcing them to leave their home. These last are then constrained in turn to fall upon other peoples who were their southern neighbours; and so, little by little, move around each other in turns, constantly pushing towards the most equable climates. (paragraph 5)

"...Indeed, each nation changed place, kingdoms, empires and republics were destroyed, or founded, or transported to other lands... **Is it unthinkable that one day there will arise from the Australian lands, from the almost unknown African interior, from Ethiopia, from the depths of Asia, from the upper Americas, an innumerable swarm of men, stronger, more robust, more indefatigable than the Europeans, and put to rout all the skill, all the facility of the latter in the art of war, and all their policy?** (5) I concede that such a revolution seems far removed, but it is not impossible; and without wishing to **anticipate remote evils**, there are dangers in this respect that are much closer to us". (6)

### **E-2. War**

"War, unjust or equitable, can cause the decline of states. Wars may result in states declining by degrees rather than through one-off battles. All the writers on the rights of peoples maintain that the right of conquest is a legitimate right; but even if it were not, the greatest part of the changes occurring in empires, and in the world since its origin right up to the present day, have they not been occasioned by force of arms? Fortunate wars elevate states, just as the unfortunate ruin them. **It is however a rarity that one war alone destroys at once an empire.**

"... Princes, ministers, generals need to be persuaded of a Divine Providence ruling all, but act as if they do not believe this, and as if good or bad outcomes depend upon their own prudence; for indeed experience proves that all incidents of war, as in all other affairs of the world, derive

always from natural causes. It is only visionaries, or spirits too slothful or stupid, who attribute each accident to the immediate and miraculous guidance of the Supreme Being; if they open their eyes, if they examine properly, then they will find this cause to be a side effect". (7)

### **E-3. Excessive demands from neighbouring states**

"When a neighbouring power makes excessive advances in all objects of policy, its expansion can become the third cause, whether proximate or more remote, of the decline of another state. "

Excessive demands between states, in a context of a zero sum game, may lead to the decline of a state. Setting strategic long term objectives is crucial, and prudent negotiations can forestall war. "Europe's political system is today in general such that one state is not able to raise itself except at the expense of another, whether it be by conquest, or by commerce etc. Each degree of real power which it acquires gives it at least one more degree of relative power, and the degree that it gains is a loss for its rivals. Ultimately, going from strength to strength, it comes imperceptibly to engender terror among the other sovereigns, finally setting their measure. Nearly all statesmen have felt this truth. The lengthy disputes between the Austrian and Bourbon Houses, between the northern powers etc. have been ruled by no other principle; but cabinets only too rarely adopt the most fitting measures to prevent this excessive elevation of powers which is capable of inspiring in them a proper jealousy. Such cabinets can be seen to favour minor interests over major, ceding the most essential, constant advantage to a passing one, and sometimes concluding alliances with rivals which not only serve in turn to fortify the latter against themselves, but also against their natural allies, with whom they should make common cause by opposing in concert the expansion of these same rival powers. The Latin tag which is so true, and so politic, *obstare principiis*, that it is necessary to act quickly if not to be acted upon, is too much neglected by those who conduct affairs of state, and **sometimes a century of war is needed to gain what one could have been able to forestall by a few strokes of the pen."**

### **E-4. Imperial over-extension**

"The over-extension of an empire nearly always becomes a cause of its decline."

Bielfeld here makes the same point about Imperial overstretch which Paul Kennedy was to make about the United States more than 200 years later. To Bielfeld, uniting all lands under one empire is a "chimerical undertaking" because a central power cannot know what is happening in the

distant parts of the empire. The governance structures of the empire in far off places are susceptible to breaking at any moment. Rebellions and internal wars are viewed as more dangerous than external ones. The local senates that have to be established in the provinces form so many, almost independent, states; and the loose relationship they enjoy with the principal government can break at any moment. Rebellions and internal wars are more dangerous than external wars, hence the dismembering of provinces, and the decline, fall, destruction of the state. (9)

### **E-5. Dependency**

Bielfeld here raises the questions which, starting in the 1960s, created such a huge debate in Latin America: dependency. The contemporary example he uses, that of Portugal vis-à-vis Britain, seems very well taken. The absolute dependence of a state on another power is yet another cause of its gradual weakening, says Bielfeld: "The dependency of one nation upon another, may be for reasons of idleness or because of the need for protection ("vice of police") or regarding its basic needs (food-stuffs, manufactures and other primary needs).

The origin of dependence may be the result of bad policy. The dependent state may become way too entangled with its powerful ally. It may sell all or most of its produce to it and rely too much on the "subsidies" it receives. Bielfeld warns that, "These are involvements which go further than one thinks."

This dependence can come from **national idleness**, or from a **vice of police (policy) such that for most foodstuffs, manufactures and other prime needs** the country is compelled to provide for itself through another strong people, not being able to do otherwise in this regard. Portugal is almost in this situation vis-à-vis Britain. However, this dependence finds its origin in an inferior system of policy embraced by the government, in which it espouses all the disputes of a powerful ally, taking its part too deeply, attaching its fortune to that of that same ally through almost indissoluble links, and above all when it sells to this ally more or less all its forces and in return becoming too reliant on subsidies. **These are involvements which go further than one thinks.** Sailing in a stormy sea, one's barque is attached to a first-rate vessel with chains which one would not know how to break when this vessel is imperilled, and the barque is dragged with it into the abyss. (10)

### **E-6. Grandiosity of Independence**

"The decline of the state may also be occasioned by the affectation of a great independence and an authority capable of casting into shade other sovereigns."

A state that becomes over-confident in its ability to be independent may raise the ire of other states that may result in other states uniting against it. It may also lead to undertakings that are beyond the means of the state. Power ought to be exercised judiciously and avoid excess.

A state that wishes to concern itself entirely with itself, breaking all liaisons, whether of commerce or of friendship with the rest of Europe – such a state revolts all other powers. **There is an art in hiding all the power that is possessed, and policy demands that that one never makes use of it on small occasions, but reserves it for major occasions.** (11)

If the state can enfeeble itself through the excessive indolence of those who govern it and who do not know how to make use of all its advantages, render its laws valued, render it respected by its neighbours, it can also be plunged into irreparable misfortune by a sovereign who embarks upon vain, chimerical, perilous undertakings that are absolutely beyond his powers. If he ventures upon commerce that he would not be able to protect, if he seeks justice with armed force for a power that can crush him, if he demands prerogatives and extraordinary honours, if he conceives projects of conquest that are too extensive. This point is obviously also relevant for modern democracies.

#### **E-7. Division of Empire (or “Balkanisation”)**

This is another issue which has reemerged in Europe, reinforced by the financial crisis. “The state also suffers loss by the monarch dividing his empire. Splitting up of territories weakens the state, this is in terms of pursuit of the ‘good life’ in the nation, and more especially as regards external threats. Splitting up the empire is against natural law and leaders should not be allowed to whimsically divide up territory”

There is a difference between what constitutes the Empire’s possessions and that of its sovereign. The latter may be divided up, but division of the former needs to be thought of in different terms. Saxony, the richest and most extensive province of Germany, lost all of its unity through the territorial divisions and sub-divisions which were successively made between the different lines of the House of Saxony and the diverse branches of each line. **This division of states is both unjust and futile. The least reflection on the origin of peoples and of civil government reveals that men are united in the body of society so that they might be stronger, and only consent to be ruled over by a sovereign so that they might be happier by their union, and to be able to oppose the attentions of their enemies with greater vigour under a common chief.** But this chief has no right to partition a country and a people that the ancients have once brought together, and for which providence has conferred upon it a government with the

tacit and express condition that it maintain the country and people as entire as it is able.

All the deference that peoples show to their sovereigns is given only on the condition that they do not break the knot that binds them, and which keeps them in a *corps d'état*.

Ultimately natural law, the rights of peoples, and the founding constitutions of the greater part of countries are opposed to such partitions. One most essential part of the happiness of peoples must not depend on the caprice of a sovereign, and once a province is incorporated into the state, it can only be detached by *force majeure*, which silences all consideration of equity, and all policy. **But policy, whose principal object is that which is useful, does not lose sight of that which is equitable.**

There is also a great difference to be made between the succession of sovereigns and that of private persons. One cannot divide up men and people as one divides up other goods of fortune; and considering the matter closely, sovereignty is not a good over which its possessor has disposal, but rather a responsibility, an office with which he is endowed. (14). Here Bielfeld's discussion of luxury and on the roles of princes is also most interesting.

#### **E-8. Single sovereign (or Sovereignty is indivisible)**

There cannot be two sovereigns for the same state. Such attempts can become a direct cause for decline of a state. The political axiom stating that sovereignty is indivisible, since power divided is power enfeebled, also shows us why two princes cannot simultaneously occupy the same throne. Such an arrangement thus becomes a very direct cause for the decline of a state.

The following represent Bielfeld's internal (or intrinsic) factors of decline.

#### **I-1. Unwise Constitutions leading to inequity.**

Again it is interesting what Bielfeld chooses as his first cause of decline, in this case internal: **constitutions which lead to inequity**. "Similar states, seemingly defective edifices where burdens and support are poorly distributed and the proportions irregular, **crumble of themselves and succumb under their own weight**. The ancient Greeks, who groped unceasingly for the best form of government for their republics, fell into bad hands, and their legislators, lacking theory and experience, made monsters of republics which destroyed themselves whereas their citizens performed prodigies of valour against their external enemies".



## I-2. Insane Sovereign.

Insane sovereigns can lead to the decline of the state and should be removed or replaced by a guardian acting in his stead. "The constant mistakes committed by an extravagant prince occasion the decline of his state before the wisest ministers are able to remedy them."

## I-3. Requirements of state (Public Administration)

In Bielfeld's discussion here we see the outlines of a description of a Weberian bureaucracy. The state needs to be supported by loyal ministers. It is not sufficient for the state to be regular, certain, and predictable and the leader wise. Loyal ministers are also needed. It is not enough that the form of a government be regular, and the prince wise; *for the preservation of the state one also needs loyal ministers.*

As only God can do everything, even the greatest king has need of support in governing, and in carrying out his wishes. Imagine a state that falls into the hands of incompetent, or ill-intentioned, ministers. Every occasion to do good for the country is missed, all the misfortunes that can befall a country are not forestalled. Success will never follow the wisdom or generosity of a prince's resolve, for it will sour in execution; such failures unsettle the prince, and make him uncertain of the measures that he should take in future. (22)

## I-4. Relaxation of morals (importance of morals and Rule of Law)

"The *relaxation of moeurs*, in the maintenance of good order and of society, in the observance of laws – these are all once again a direct and intrinsic cause of the decline of a state."

Mediocre laws that are observed are preferable to wiser laws that are neglected. It is the people which make up the state; if this people abandon itself to all sorts of vices, only one or two generations is needed for it to become debilitated; this is a fact based upon centuries of experience.

**Laws are not promulgated as a vain speculation, to occupy doctors and schoolmen, but to be put into practice.** Well-observed, but somewhat mediocre, laws make the state stronger than wiser laws that go neglected. The impunity with which crimes are committed becomes the source of a thousand evils in the state, and as a consequence of its decay

## I-5. Excessive Religion

"Those who argue that *religion* is of no use in the government of a state, and that cunning and the gallows is sufficient to deter malefactors and maintain good order, are talking claptrap."

Religion is important to a state. However religion has to subordinate itself to the king, and do so wisely. Religion should not be too dominant. Let us beware! As soon as positive religion spreads in a country, taking the place of natural religion, too speculative and too uncertain for the multitude, since each man is different in sentiment and insight – then this country is on the way to decline.

“This nation [England], the most political of all, recognises that its happiness, its tranquillity, the maintenance of its power, depend to a great extent upon the maintenance of its religion. Here **religion has subordinated itself to the king, and does so wisely.** (24) But as much as it is necessary for the good of the state for religion and a solid piety to prevail in the nation, **it is fatal if the state allows it to become too ascendant.** A people of devotees, of whatever religion, would be a people both ridiculous and feeble. The reasons for this are so palpable that they require no elaboration. **External devotion too easily leads to enthusiasm, to superstition, to fanaticism, to idleness, to indolence,** to a disregard for worldly matters which is so harmful to the progress of the arts, talents and commerce.” (25)

#### I-6. Oppression / Limits on Liberty (or Despotism)

Where despots limit the liberty of the people, the state cannot be powerful as there is not a time when the ruler is not at risk of losing the rulership. The means used to maintain domination and obedience of the people weakens the state. In other words, oppression is not a sustainable form of government

**In countries where the natural liberty of men is oppressed by a purely despotic yoke, the state cannot be very powerful.** There is not one moment when the despot is not in danger of perishing on his throne, and it costs a thousand-fold more to achieve obedience to absolute power than to the power of the Law. **The measures that such a despot is obliged to continually take to maintain the people in a state of obedience, and to prevent sedition, absorb half of the natural forces of the state;** each popular riot, which occurs despite all precaution, weakens it all the more, and each revolution that overthrows the monarch shakes the state to its foundations. Hence the unimaginable weakness of the Ottoman Empire, and other Asiatic monarchies which would, in the absence of this vice, shake all Europe. **It appears that slavery renders men at once worthless.**

#### I-7. Excess of liberty.

Too much liberty and freedom can limit the need for restraint that is essential for the creation of social cohesion and the “general good” (*ben*

*commune*). In modern terms this could be translated as a focus on individual rights at the expense of the correlative obligations that flow from such rights, to both individuals and collectives/communities. Likewise it could be expressed as an exclusive focus on *freedoms to* (e.g. to carry a gun), at the expense of *freedoms from* (e.g. from being shot).

“A people which seeks to become too free gives to its neighbours the means to forge its chains. To make men combine for the general good there is need of a restraint that will render them obedient, and a power that will make them all subjects”. (27)

#### **I-8. Decline of Production. Neglect of agriculture, commerce, sciences, useful arts and passion for liberal arts and frivolity.**

**“When a nation neglects to perfect agriculture, commerce, the sciences and the useful arts (i.e. handicraft and manufactures), giving itself with too great a passion to the liberal arts and frivolous objects, it can only become weak, and the state languishes”** (28) This point is obviously extremely relevant for Europe and the United States at the moment, and how the present (2013) crisis is handled.

#### **I-9. Arrogance, pride, and idleness.**

This is an argument much in line with economist Thorstein Veblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). “Another very direct cause of the weakness and decline of a state is **the pride and idleness of the nation**. It was a great political idiot who was the first to seek to persuade the nobility into believing that they demean themselves through honest employment of their own hands. The author of the *Persian Letters*<sup>35</sup> admirably depicts the arrogance, the indolence, and the dislike of labour in the Spanish nation, especially among the nobility. He writes that nobility is acquired through sitting around.”

“The nobility sets a dangerous example for the people. Their inactivity introduces idleness to that class of citizens whose work buttresses the state. Nobody has ever told me that the nobility are sufficiently occupied by warfare. Wars are short and the peace is long”. (29)

#### **I-10. Senseless laws**

Laws need to be wise in and of themselves but also take into account the context in which they are applied or made. “We remarked above all that laws must not only be full of wisdom in themselves, but also quite appropri-

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<sup>35</sup> I.e. Montesquieu.

ate to the countries for which they are made." In other words: context is very important. What use is it if, while the state is well-founded, the prince wise, ministers excellent, *moeurs* good, **the laws are ridiculous?** (31)

Here follows criticism of other religions, Catholicism and Jewry (32 & 33). Bielfeld's ugly anti-Semitism is unfortunately rather typical of the period, and is similar to that of Voltaire (with which, as reported, Bielfeld corresponded).

### I-11. Excessively large colonies

Compared to the mechanistic understanding of trade in David Ricardo, Bielfeld in this paragraph (indirectly) explains why colonial trade differs from symmetrical trade among equal nations. "**Excessively large colonies** which the state establishes in distant provinces, and above all in other parts of the world, enfeeble the state, and moreover become an intrinsic cause of its decline." Large colonies need to be managed to gain the advantages from them without it becoming a cause of decline.

"I say **excessively large**, since one should not imagine that my remarks bear upon the colonies that Holland, England and France, for example, maintain, and almost constantly refresh in their Asian and American possessions. For apart from these nations being extremely numerous in themselves, and that they enrol as many foreign subjects as they can for their transport, it has to be considered that these colonies procure to the metropole five significant advantages which abundantly repay the losses incurred by the citizens removed, and who remain dependent on the state, constantly contributing to the good of the state. These advantages are 1. a much greater consumption of the products of the land which the metropole sends there; 2. the addition of a greater number of manufacturers, artisans etc. who serve the needs of the colonies; 3. the augmentation of navigation and of all workers contributing to it; 4. the export of a greater quantity of foodstuffs that are necessary in these colonies; 5. a much greater superfluity of foodstuffs and merchandise which these colonies provide, and which the metropole provides to other peoples, which leads to the continual growth of its commerce."

### I-12. Epidemics and occupational Health.

"**Epidemics** greatly ravage the people and weaken the state, depriving it for a considerable period of the resources necessary to defend itself against an unjust aggressor."

Failing to maintain the people, and the armies, in good health enfeebles the nation.

"If one persists in establishing some good citizens in a country where the air is bad, sending them into mines which exhale sulphurous vapours, employing them in the cultivation of rice which grows only in mires constantly inundated with stagnant water and so on; such action constantly enfeebles the state's people, and as a result slowly leads, almost unfailingly, to the decline of the state". (35)

### **I-13. Abuse of Spirits and Strong Liquors.**

"The abuse the people make of spirits and other strong liquors; we add here that liquors can weaken a nation if they are made use of without due moderation."

As example Bielfeld uses the excess of alcohol consumption in England in 1734 and 1735, before wise legislation make the English again turn to "healthy beer".

### **I-14. Relaxation of military discipline**

"The **relaxation of military discipline** also leads a state into unending loss." Women who have such influence over the hearts of men, priests, merchants, manufacturers, artisans, cultivators – they all desire peace, and look upon it with the greatest happiness. They are right in one sense, but they do not at all see that a lengthy peace corrupts the soldiery, relaxes discipline, allow the officer and the soldier to become unpractised in their art, and softens them. One would wish that in time of war the entire army would be composed only of lions, and in time of peace of sheep; but this is to ask for a contradiction, to want a chimera. Many people find military discipline too harsh in a peace-time garrison; it seems much too gentle when they march on the enemy. Men are never in agreement with themselves. They learn that peace is made to accustom officer and soldier to war, that discipline must be constantly upheld in an army, that the most skilful princes set up exercise encampments, carry out manoeuvres, marches, reviews, all to keep their troops up to the mark, making them practised, and not allowing them to forget the fatigue of serious campaigns, nor the art of winning." (37)

### **I-15. Debt**

Bielfeld distinguishes between two kinds of debt: sovereign debt and debt accrued in commercial transaction. "...a state can have two kinds of debt: one whose real value is employed in manufactures, commerce, and all sorts of useful establishments for the relief of the people; the other in which the fund is consumed by the sovereign in frivolous expenditure. The excess of this latter kind of debt can only enervate the state, and lead it into a certain ruin." Today we can observe that also democratic governments may engage in *frivolous expenditure* and assume large debts.

"If the country in question has no kind of equivalent for the debt contracted upon its credit, if it has insufficient means to regain through the balance of its commerce the interests which the state pays annually on the borrowed capitals, not long is needed before it falls into decline." (38)

#### **I-16. Constant internal wrangling**

"The **continual wrangling between ministers, generals and others** in monarchies, and in republics the divisions between Senate and People, between magistrates and the heads of government – both can easily lead the state into decline, and from decline to fall."

Constant wrangling between ministers, generals and others in monarchies, and senate and people in republics, can lead to state decline because "that **every kingdom divided against itself will be reduced to a desert, and every city or house divided against itself cannot persist**". However it is recognised that 'real boats rock', and that divisions are "a necessary consequence of the republican state".

While one can of course imagine the most perfect form of government and set out the wisest maxims of policy, it is always necessary to place conduct of the diverse branches of government in different departments, which is to say, in the hands of men who are full of passion. If these passions blind them, if their views of matters are too diverse, if they are divided among themselves, their actions will unfailingly be at cross-purposes, and the state will fall into anarchy. Such divisions are more frequent and more dangerous in republics, for there is not an authority either as great or as active as in monarchies capable of reuniting all employees under the banner of the public good, and making everyone to address their own tasks in spite of themselves. Divisions are a necessary consequence of the republican state; they always have been, and always will be. Sovereign power cannot make itself felt too quickly to suppress disunion and bring its progress to a sudden halt, even with the greatest rigour. (39)

#### **I-16. Interfering with fundamental laws of government.**

"**When a republic interferes with the fundamental laws that regulate the constitution of its government** the state runs a very great risk of running to ruin.

I know that different times call for different ways, and that laws have to follow those changes that occur in the world's state of affairs; but the constitution of the state must never alter, and the laws bearing upon this must remain as far as possible immutable. Every political arrangement has

its disadvantages, and it is better to deal with those that arise from an established system than to change a system that has long supported a state. Experience is here in agreement with theory and principles." (40)

### **I-17. Regicide or assassination of the sovereign**

The killing of the sovereign is an indirect cause that can bring about the decline or overthrow of a state, weakening its resilience. One thinks that these evil deeds, whose seed was sown in the works of Machiavelli and his disciples, have been stifled by the philosophical spirit which has, over the last few centuries, improved Europe's police, and it has been said, made Europe more virtuous.

"... all the citizens of a country, in submitting themselves to monarchical government, feel that their individual wills are united in the single person of the sovereign, to whom they accord an authority necessary to this end, and related powers to set it to work; that the person of the monarch has been rendered sacred and inviolable by the universal consent of all civilised nations, and the king is endowed with the title of "majesty" to impress upon the hearts of all men a greater veneration for their dignity. One also sees that it is not permissible for any member of society, of whatever estate, and whatever degree he might be, to believe his own interest, or that of the state in general, to be hurt in any particular, or betrayed by the decrees of his sovereign, such that he acquires the slightest trace of a right to make an attempt on the monarch; for on the contrary, each citizen is individually wounded by this same *attentat*. (41)



**Bielfeld, *Institutions Politiques*, volume 2.**  
**Ch. XV. On the Decline of States<sup>36</sup>**

§1. We have throughout this work reviewed the means by which states arise and sustain themselves; our work would be left imperfect if we did not undertake some investigation of the causes of their decline and of their fall. To such we devote this chapter, which will perhaps not be the least interesting. Policy will here discover the principal reefs against which the State is in danger of running. Princes and Ministers, true pilots at the helms of empires, will find here a chart of soundings and of the most dangerous places. Having seen what they have to do, they will now see what they have to avoid. How happy for them if, in noting the hazards, these hazards serve as lessons and examples which prevent their being suffered!

§2. The quintessence of everything in the world is *instability*. The most formidable empires are subject to the law of change and inconstancy. The Roman monarchy, a true colossus of power, as M. Montesquieu says, *ends like the Rhine which is no more than a brook when it loses itself in the ocean*. When change comes for great bodies, when kingdoms or empires are dismembered, weakened, destroyed, when nations are extinguished, when in other words the face of the universe is changed, these are called *revolutions*. The tissue of these revolutions forms the *universal history of the world*, which not only accounts for that which has happened, but also investigates the causes, and explains their effects. It is this history that the statesman unceasingly studies. (Part I Ch. II §§13, 14). He finds there the practice of a science for which we shall give him the theory; he sees there the theatre of the world opened up, and all of our rules set in train.

§3. But all the particular changes that occur in the world seem made only to concur in the maintenance of the general system, which is immutable. Revolutions do not change countries at all, and rarely their inhabitants. A country with fertile soils never lacks for men to cultivate them. The land is not destroyed, nor are all the citizens exterminated in the revolutions which occur in states and which overturn empires. One must therefore distinguish two kinds of revolution that a country can suffer, the one *natural*, the other *political*. The first are occasioned by the grievous effects of nature, such as earthquakes, floods, plagues and like scourges. It is easy to see that we do not at all talk here of those natural causes in

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<sup>36</sup> Translated by Keith Tribe. Copyright 2013 The Other Canon Foundation, Norway. In the original 1760 edition (The Hague: Pierre Gosse, 1760) this chapter comprises pages 309 to 338 of volume (part) two. This second and last volume closes with a chapter *Conclusions* (pages 339-344) and a subject index to volume two. The footnotes from this point on are those of Bielfeld.

the destruction of states. The second kind of revolution is caused by men, and alters only the system of states, by changing the form of their government, or by subjecting their peoples to alien laws. It is the latter whose sources we seek to discover.

§4. History teaches us (§2.) that, from the origins of the world right up to our present days, no empire has maintained itself in the same condition, nor under the same form of government. The most powerful monarchies have been overwhelmed by the weight of their own grandeur. Numerous and martial nations have left their native lands, the resting place of their ancestors, to found kingdoms beneath other skies and distant climes. All of the empires of which we know are newcomers, including our own; the most enduring has been that of China. Whether we follow the dubious chronology of the Chinese, or whether we adopt that of the Europeans which has little more certainty, the era in which this empire was founded goes back so far that we lose sight of it. It was however conquered by the Tartars, who adopted some of China's laws and customs, and which in return introduced into this country some of their own. The descendants of the Tartar conquerors still reign in China; but the Chinese empire, in spite of the 22 families that have successively occupied the throne, in spite of internal wars, and in spite of the conquest of the Tartars, preserves itself in the grandest style. This extended period of time is a political phenomena and will seem incomprehensible enough to us, if we do not allow that the situation of China at the extreme orient of the known world contributed a great deal to making the country great, and that for the entire time it was governed by philosophers, or rather, the philosophical spirit which does nothing without principle and reason, which does not involve prejudice, which respects the dominant religion without however allowing it to enter into the affairs of state, which excludes from counsel all trace of fanaticism, and which turns the greatest amount possible in every situation to public utility. One can only seek the causes for the endurance of states in principles founded upon truth and reason, which are eternal and always uniform. However, the greatest perfection of the constitution of a state consists in its endurance, as we have seen in Vol. I Ch. III §14.

§5. Among the great number of direct or indirect causes that can abbreviate the life of a government, change the system of states, and overturn empires, we will only indicate the principal causes, and those that produce the most sudden effects. These causes are either *alien*, or *intrinsic*. Among the alien causes one can count first of all the great migrations of peoples, such as the spectacle that the fourth and fifth centuries offered Europe. Now hordes of Goths, Vandals and other barbarians stream from the depths of the north to flood Europe, extending their conquests to

Spain, to Italy and even Africa; now the peoples who inhabit the most northerly countries attack their neighbours towards the south, forcing them to leave their home. These last are then constrained in turn to fall upon other peoples who were their southern neighbours; and so, little by little, move around each other in turns, constantly pushing towards the most equable climates. The same thing happens with the Scythians, the Saracens and other peoples both numerous and poor, and so in consequence bellicose. In all of the revolutions it cannot be other than that the face of Europe and a part of Africa was entirely altered. Indeed, each nation changed place, kingdoms, empires and republics were destroyed, or founded, or transported to other lands. It will be perhaps said that *this cause of the destruction of states is no more than ideal, and no like revolution now need be feared*. With that I cannot entirely agree. So many countries of which we know nothing are contained in the map of the world, and there are so many others that we know badly; similar events are neither physically nor morally impossible. Is it unthinkable that one day there will arise from the Australian lands, from the almost unknown African interior, from Ethiopia, from the depths of Asia, from the upper Americas, an innumerable swarm of men, stronger, more robust, more indefatigable than the Europeans, and put to rout all the skill, all the facility of the latter in the art of war, and all their policy?

§6. I concede that such a revolution seems far removed, but it is not impossible; and without wishing to *anticipate remote evils*, there are dangers in this respect that are much closer to us. One only needs to cast one's eyes over the Mappa Mundi to see the immensity of the land under the domination of the Russian and Ottoman Emperors. It is true that up until the present these nations have enjoyed the extravagance of possessing such extents of territory without necessity or use; but can they not change their customs, their inclinations, their policy and their talents? Can the spirit of conquest not seize their leaders? We will not deal any further with a matter of which we have already spoken in Ch. IV §31. It is a dangerous sea on which our political helmsmen (*Palinures Politique*) slumber with too much self-assurance.

§7. *War is the second alien cause* that can occasion the decline of states; whether this war be undertaken by an unjust conqueror, or whether it be founded upon equity. All the writers on the rights of peoples maintain that the right of conquest is a legitimate right; but even if it were not, the greatest part of the changes occurring in empires, and in the world since its origin right up to the present day, have they not been occasioned by force of arms? Fortunate wars elevate states, just as the unfortunate ruin them. It is however a rarity that one war alone destroys at once an empire. Three Punic Wars were needed to ruin Carthage; but as the least

reverse suffered by a power at first weakens it, and reinvigorates its enemy, or its rival, states ordinarily move from decline to fall by degrees. Any reversal in war is therefore to be feared by a state; and the sovereign must not betray a careless indifference when he survives it, but do his all to prevent them. A monarch is not fit to reign who receives news of the taking of one of his most important fortresses while taking amusement playing an instrument, continues playing and says, with a revolting indolence, *ha, they say it was a pretty little town*. Sangfroid of this sort is culpable. I consider that the kind of war, like that of empires, is in the hands of Providence, but it makes use of men to execute its decrees. Princes, ministers, generals need to be persuaded of a Divine Providence ruling all, but act as if they do not believe this, and as if good or bad outcomes depend upon their own prudence; for indeed experience proves that all incidents of war, as in all other affairs of the world, derives always from natural causes. It is only visionaries, or spirits too slothful or stupid, who attribute each accident to the immediate and miraculous guidance of the Supreme Being; if they open their eyes, if they examine properly, then they will find this cause to be a side effect.

**§8.** When a *neighbouring power makes excessive advances in all objects of policy, its expansion can become the third cause, whether proximate or more remote, of the decline of another state.* (See Ch. IV §8. & §26.) Europe's political system is today in general such that one state is not able to raise itself except at the expense of another, whether it be by conquest, or by commerce etc. Each degree of real power which it acquires gives it at least one more degree of relative power, and the degree that it gains is a loss for its rivals. Ultimately, going from strength to strength, it comes imperceptibly to engender terror among the other sovereigns, finally setting their measure. Nearly all statesmen have felt this truth. The lengthy disputes between the Austrian and Bourbon Houses, between the northern powers etc. have been ruled by no other principle; but cabinets only too rarely adopt the most fitting measures to prevent this excessive elevation of powers which is capable of inspiring in them a proper jealousy. Such cabinets can be seen to favour minor interests over major, ceding the most essential, constant advantage to a passing one, and sometimes concluding alliances with rivals which not only serve in turn to fortify the latter against themselves, but also against their natural allies, with whom they should make common cause by opposing in concert the expansion of these same rival powers. The Latin tag which is so true, and so politic, *obstare principiis*, that it is necessary to act quickly if not to be acted upon, is too much neglected by those who conduct affairs of state, and sometimes a century of war is needed to gain what one could have been able to forestall by a few strokes of the pen.

**§9.** *The over-extension of an empire nearly always becomes a cause of its decline.* All of the ancient monarchies are so many examples of this

truth. The grandeur that was Alexandria brought about its destruction after the death of its founder. Rome crumbled under the weight of its own forces. Most useful instruction on this matter can be drawn from the excellent work of M. Montesquieu on the causes of the Romans' greatness and of their decline. He there describes with an admirable sagacity all that served to strengthen the nerves and springs of the empire when it advanced to greatness, and to weaken it once it had achieved greatness. I think it impossible to say anything better, more profound, and more true on this subject than that which he has said; and so that I can avoid here repeating his ideas, I recommend the reading, or rather study, of this incomparable treatise to all those destined to public affairs; and I allow myself to add only one remark. The wish to unite all lands under one empire is in my opinion a most vain and chimerical undertaking, for its government would be morally impracticable. Despite communication by letter and its swiftness, it is impossible that the sovereign, who would have established his seat at the centre of such a monarchy, could learn soon enough of everything that occurred in distant provinces, and communicate to such distant parts his commands. Human vision does not extend beyond its horizon, and the vision of the most perfect government cannot extend to the end of the world. The local senates that have to be established in the provinces form so many, almost independent, states; and the loose relationship they enjoy with the principal government can break at any moment. Hence rebellions and internal wars more dangerous than external wars, hence the dismembering of provinces, and the decline, fall, destruction of the state.

§10. *The absolute dependence of a state on another power is yet another cause of its gradual weakening.* This dependence can come from national idleness, or from a vice of police such that for most foodstuffs, manufactures and other prime needs the country is compelled to provide for itself through another strong people, not being able to do otherwise in this regard. Portugal is almost in this situation vis-à-vis Britain. However, this dependence finds its origin in an inferior system of policy embraced by the government, in which it espouses all the disputes of a powerful ally, taking its part too deeply, attaching its fortune to that of that same ally through almost indissoluble links, and above all when it sells to this ally more or less all its forces and in return becoming too reliant on *subsidies*. These are *involvements which go further than one thinks*. Sailing in a stormy sea, one's barque is attached to a first-rate vessel with chains which one would not know how to break when this vessel is imperilled, and the barque is dragged with it into the abyss.

§11. The decline of the state may also be occasioned by *the affectation of a great independence and an authority capable of casting into shade*

*other sovereigns.* A state that wishes to concern itself entirely with itself, breaking all liaisons, whether of commerce or of friendship with the rest of Europe – such a state revolts all other powers. There is an art in hiding *all the power* that is possessed, and policy demands that one never makes use of it on small occasions, but reserves it for major occasions. Allowing it to erupt too soon, and for trifles, this will attract the attention of other princes to one's disadvantage, succour envy and enemies without necessity, and prompt them to unite themselves in opposition to us. More than one state has been halted in the midst of its advance for having neglected this maxim.

§12. If the state can enfeeble itself through the excessive indolence of those who govern it and who do not know how to make use of all its advantages, render its laws valued, render it respected by its neighbours, it can also be plunged into irreparable misfortune by a sovereign who embarks upon vain, chimerical, perilous undertakings that are absolutely beyond his powers. If he ventures upon commerce that he would not be able to protect, if he seeks justice with armed force for a power that can crush him, if he demands prerogatives and extraordinary honours, if he conceives projects of conquest that are too extensive, if he undertakes works comparable to those of the Romans, or buildings such as graced ancient Greece and Egypt, if he wishes to possess an army, a navy, a Court, fortified places, canals, Appian Ways, and a thousand similar things for which his country lacks resources; far from strengthening the state, he casts it into lethargy. The plans of Charles XII were too great for Sweden; and this kingdom was a hairsbreadth from loss when the death of the Prince put a stop to their execution.

§13. The state also suffers loss by the monarch dividing his empire. The monarchy founded by Philippe, King of Macedonia, and which his son rendered almost universal, was broken up in the hands of Alexander's successors, who shared it out between themselves. The division that Theodosius made of the Roman Empire between his sons Arcadius and Honorius was the real cause of its decline. The formidable Western Empire which Charlemagne re-established with so much effort was dismembered, or rather shattered, by the division that this emperor made between his sons. Saxony, the richest and most extensive province of Germany, lost all of its unity through the territorial divisions and subdivisions which were successively made between the different lines of the House of Saxony and the diverse branches of each line. This division of states is both unjust and futile. The least reflection on the origin of peoples and of civil government reveals that men are united in the body of society so that they might be stronger, and only consent to be ruled over by a sovereign so that they might be happier by their union, and to

be able to oppose the attentions of their enemies with greater vigour under a common chief. But this chief has no right to partition a country and a people that the ancients have once brought together, and for which providence has conferred upon it a government with the tacit and express condition that it maintain the country and people as entire as it is able. God himself brought together the twelve tribes of Israel, and when this people divided itself, forming themselves into two distinct kingdoms, the Jewish nation was extremely enfeebled by this, and this division became the source of its decline. All the deference that peoples show to their sovereigns is given only on the condition that they do not break the knot that binds them, and which keeps them in a *corps d'état*. Each partition that a prince undertakes in his state is a manifest injustice committed against his subjects. It is even necessary to include under this rule those provinces of which he has made armed conquest; for such conquests have been made with the forces of the hereditary state, with the money and the blood of subjects; once incorporated into the state, they cannot be dismembered on the whim of a prince, giving institutions to his children, seeking to form different sovereignties, give them away, and reduce the established state, which has itself been substantially weakened in conquering them. Ultimately natural law, the rights of peoples, and the founding constitutions of the greater part of countries are opposed to such partitions. One most essential part of the happiness of peoples must not depend on the caprice of a sovereign, and once a province is incorporated into the state, it can only be detached by *force majeure*, which silences all consideration of equity, and all policy.<sup>37</sup>

§14. Nothing is therefore wiser, nor more just, than the establishment of the *right of primogeniture*, which is founded on the principles established above, since reason and experience have demonstrated that indivisible succession, passing through the male firstborn, preserves the state as much as the division of the country serves to ruin it. But policy, whose principal object is that which is useful, does not lose sight of that which is equitable. It might seem that sons born to the same father have an equal right to his succession, and that the younger siblings have cause to complain if the eldest inherits all, while they remain indigent. Policy has therefore forestalled this difficulty, establishing (1) that the younger siblings participate in succession to the allodial goods, whether moveable or immoveable, which are not incorporated to the crown but separated from it; (2) that the eldest who inherits sovereignty be obliged to show due *privilege (apanage)* to the other princes of his house, sufficient to provide for the maintenance of the dignity of their birth; or (3) that the sovereign provides a suitable establishment for each of his sons by buying at his

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<sup>37</sup> See what we have already said on this matter: This volume, Ch. I §44, 45.



own cost lands and seigneurages which place them beyond absolute dependence upon the head of the family. The late King of Prussia adopted this course; but his lands, or seigneurages, cannot involve any right of sovereignty, which has always to remain indivisible. With these safeguards, or similar, no prince provided with dispensations has a right to complain; other than that this right of primogeniture be introduced in all fiefs. There is also a great difference to be made between the succession of sovereigns and that of private persons. One cannot divide up men and people as one divides up other goods of fortune; and considering the matter closely, sovereignty is not a good over which its possessor has disposal, but rather a responsibility, an office with which he is endowed. We have already noted in the first chapter §§44 & 45 that the utility of young princes even finds itself in the institution of primogeniture and privileges: for, supposing a king ruling over a vast monarchy, and the division among a numerous family, that each branch retained this right of division; at the end of four or five generations the sub-divided portions would be so small that the princes, descended from so considerable a stem, would be no more than little rulers of miniature states which were of little more significance than the fortune of a well-to-do gentleman. As sovereigns they would no longer have any real grandeur, and as a result no consideration at all among the other European sovereigns, and would be obliged to entirely concede precedence to the privileged princes of large houses. On the other hand, the state loses nothing by contributing to the privileges of the princes, since they are obliged to spend their money provided to them for their upkeep in the same country; on the contrary, their luxury places a much greater value in circulation, and this money percolates into the total mass of public wealth; without taking into account that many courts, or houses of princes of privilege, make a country more radiant and attracts strangers. If they possess lands, they possess them as subjects, and prosperous subjects, who are able to ameliorate and improve these lands, make cultivators and other inhabitants happy, and profit the state by their increased spending. And so from whichever side one considers the establishment of privileges and of primogeniture, it is one of the most agreeable inventions of policy.

**§15.** The political axiom stating that sovereignty is indivisible, since power divided is power enfeebled, also shows us why two princes cannot simultaneously occupy the same throne. All such imperial associations, of which one can find many examples in the history of emperors, erred grievously against sound policy. Placed together on the Russian throne the imbecile Ivan and the wise Peter I would have done inexpressible harm to this empire if the co-regency had lasted any longer. Such an arrangement thus becomes a very direct cause for the decline of a state. History furnishes us with a thousand proofs, and the simple lights of rea-

son are able to convince us *a priori*. But this thought supposes that the sovereigns reign with an equal authority; for when the monarch becomes enfeebled with age, or by infirmity, a princess overwhelmed by the burden of public affairs, if associated through a regency with a son, a husband, a brother, transferring to them the cares of government, then the case is not the same, and the consequences are not at all so dangerous. This associate prince is merely a species of a Grand Vizier, a prime minister who can be deposed, and who must account to the sovereign for his actions.

§16. We have stated (Ch. IV §§5, 9, 10 & 11) that the power of a state is either *real*, or *relative*, founded upon the *local situation*, or on *opinion*, or *accessory*. Having expounded the principal causes which concur in the decline of the two first species of power, let us briefly examine the how latter three can be enfeebled by alien causes. When Nature breaks the barriers that serve to shield a country, when seas and rivers are rendered impracticable by the sandbanks that are raised there, when the countryside is under water, when mountains crumble, in a word, when there is a considerable change in the land itself, a country loses the advantages of an original situation, and the power of the state goes into decline through like disasters. It is for a wise sovereign to foresee, as much a human powers are able, the effects of like scourges, and to repair the hurts that they cause. But happily such accidents are rare, and one sees most often that the power of situation is enfeebled either by the commerce of neighbours; or by the efforts made by neighbours to render this situation ineffectual, substituting Art for Nature, or by putting themselves in a condition of surpassing the country once favoured. It is therefore necessary that the government of a powerful state neglect not the slightest means to preserve this same advantage to its greatest extent, and be able to force, if need be, all those who seek to deprive it of such advantage to desist from their projects by armed might. On this principle is founded all the efforts that England constantly makes to preserve a maritime empire, by employing immense sums for the upkeep of its navy and of its ports.

§17. The power of opinion becomes weaker, and falls into decline, in proportion as the opinion upon which this power is based dissipates in the mind of men; and as a consequence one must not find it at all strange that those who are at the head of such a state seek to perpetuate this opinion, whether it be true or false. Suppose for a moment that the religion of Christians began to lose some part of its credit, or faded away like so many before, or that the Roman Church ceased to be as triumphal as it has been over one thousand years, or that Protestantism became universal; it is clear that the power of the Pope would fall together with the

entire hierarchy of the Roman Church. Is it therefore surprising to see the trouble taken in Rome to maintain, by persuasion or by force, the Catholic religion in full vigour, and to crush all those who would raise their head against it? Would not policy itself connive a little in the establishment of the Inquisition if this tribunal did not agitate on behalf of maxims so odious, and if it was not in the hands of the most culpable villains on earth? It is not for nothing that the ingenious author of the *Henriade* put the seat of policy in Rome;<sup>38</sup> for one would not know how to sufficiently admire the art and the amount of skill with which this court maintains its authority, and conserves the resources on which it has lived for centuries. If all the European powers believed that the establishment of the Knights of St. John on the island of Malta gave them a fortress useless against the Turks and African pirates, and that on the basis of this prejudice abandoned this order to the hatred of the Ottoman Empire, all their institutions would soon be destroyed; and it is important for them to maintain this favourable opinion of their utility among commercial nations in particular, for the fate of Christianity in general, and of navigation in particular, in purging the seas of corsairs and vigorously opposing the undertakings of infidels.

**§18.** Finally, *accessory power* is lost when distant provinces are taken by a foreign force and pass into other hands, or when their possession becomes more of a burden than a service to the state which holds them under its domination. If Portugal came to lose Brazil and its Asian possessions, if the islands and continental provinces that had belonged to Venice were also taken, these powers would find themselves very much enfeebled; and as a result the metropolis has to make much greater efforts to ensure their preservation, for their loss would immediately bring about their own decline. But there are provinces whose preservation itself becomes so onerous that this charge weakens the state, and so becomes the source of its frailty. A remarkable example is supplied by the island of Corsica, whose restless, malcontent and seditious inhabitants twenty-five years ago drove their sovereign, the Genoese Republic, to despair. If rebellion continues in the kingdom it is certain that the state of the Genoans will pass from decline to its annihilation. In a similar case the sovereign must carefully seek the true cause that renders retention so difficult, let fall no view on the preservation of ancient maxims, but when at last he has the means ready, he must change the system, abolish grievances, and seek all possible expedients to ameliorate the yoke upon those for whom he seeks to re-establish peace.

**§19.** Such are the general foreign causes in the decline of states; let us now consider those that can be intrinsic causes. It cannot be gainsaid

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<sup>38</sup> *Henriade*, Song Four where he says: "In the heart of the Vatican there reigns Policy...".

that the first is *a vicious constitution of the state itself*. A monstrous form of government, that lacks the essential properties that we have developed in Ch. III of the first part, will not be able to maintain itself. Similar states, seemingly defective edifices where burdens and support are poorly distributed and the proportions irregular, crumble of themselves and succumb under their own weight. The ancient Greeks, who groped unceasingly for the best form of government for their republics, fell into bad hands, and their legislators, lacking theory and experience, made monsters of republics which destroyed themselves whereas their citizens performed prodigies of valour against their external enemies. We will not say more on this matter, so that we do not go back on ourselves and repeat the remarks made at the beginning of this work.

**§20.** But *the best regulated state can run to ruin when governed by an insane sovereign*. The constant mistakes committed by an extravagant prince occasion the decline of his state before the wisest ministers are able to remedy them. It is an evil, it is a scourge which it is difficult to prevent and hinder. It is Providence that bestows good and bad kings upon nations. The most suitable and dexterous counsellors can mitigate the follies of the latter, but not eradicate the fatal traces that always remain. When a sovereign prince suddenly succumbs to dementia the sensible course is for him to be removed from society; the presumptive heir, supported by the parents closest to the throne, ministers, generals and the various estates of the country, can take care of him, maintain the prince under the watch of those he can trust, place him in the most honourable and commodious prison possible, strip him of all power and assume the reins of government. This successor becomes the guardian of the insane prince, and state regent until recovery is complete, or until the death of the prince. However inviolate sovereignty may be, the rights of the people, which have for their object their safety, are far more sacred, and millions of men must not suffer the extravagances of one individual whose deranged mind is made manifest.

**§21.** It is written in Ecclesiastes Ch. 10 verse 16: "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child". This statement is decreed by Divine Wisdom. Natural and positive law remove, it is true, regency from kings and minor princes, placing them under wise tutelage. This instance has been foreseen everywhere, and there is hardly a land in which such laws do not determine the age at which a sovereign can rule in his own right, and the persons upon whom the guardianship and regency of the state is conferred until he reaches his majority; but these periods of a sovereign's minority visit evils and distress upon people and provinces. These are stormy times when all passions become inflamed, with terrible effect. The history of modern France provides us with more than one example.

There is not one minority that has not threatened to shake this great monarchy to its foundations. What evils occurred under those of Charles IX, Louis XIII, Louis XIV, and even if one wishes, Louis XV! These latter, it is true, do not approach those which prevailed during the rule of the first three; at least no blood was spilled; the confusions brought about in the system, far from having fatal consequences, could be turned to the advantage of the state, and the chicanery occasioned by the Papal Bull of 1713 belonged rather to the genre of theatre than to that of policy. This is an Italian farce which can be ended with a thrashing, and statesmen are wrong to take it seriously. The reason that the distress of this last period of minority has been neither as terrible nor as bloody as those before is that the regency is in the hands of a clever prince, and that supreme authority was not in any respect divided. The tribulations of guardians and regents are caused by the competition of too many eminent persons for sovereign power. Such persons, blinded by their new authority, and quite certain that they will retain this for only a short time, abuse their power; and only three consecutive periods of minor sovereigns suffice to place the kingdom in desperate straits. Policy therefore seeks, where guardianship becomes inevitable, to place it in the hands of a prince of the house closest to the throne, or to sovereignty, having the greatest interest in governing wisely, and there are a thousand precautions to take so that all his authority is returned to his pupil as soon as he attains that age at which he can rule.

**§22.** It is not enough that the form of a government be regular, and the prince wise; *for the preservation of the state one also needs loyal ministers.* We have learned of the importance of this in the second chapter of this part. As only God can do everything, even the greatest king has need of support in governing, and in carrying out his wishes. Imagine a state that falls into the hands of incompetent, or ill-intentioned, ministers. Every occasion to do good for the country is missed, all the misfortunes that can befall a country are not forestalled. Success will never follow the wisdom or generosity of a prince's resolve, for it will sour in execution; such failures unsettle the prince, and make him uncertain of the measures that he should take in the future. Eccentric resolutions, or approaches either false or tyrannical, will by contrast succeed, and assume the appearance of utility. This is how bad ministers can corrupt the most well-intentions sovereign. If they call for support on the charms of a cherished mistress the state is unfliningly set on a downward path, and more than a sage and fortunate ruler is needed to restore its ancient vigour.

**§23.** The *relaxation of moeurs*, in the maintenance of good order and of society, in the observance of laws – these are all once again a direct and intrinsic cause of the decline of a state. It is the people which make up

the state; if this people abandons itself to all sorts of vices, only one or two generations is needed for it to become debilitated; this is a fact based upon centuries of experience. As soon as *moeurs* were corrupted among the Assyrians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, and in all modern empires, their states soon went into decline. It is impossible to maintain society without order, and the maintenance of society requires that the population is the foundation of all fortunate policy (See Part One Ch. V). Laws are not promulgated as a vain speculation, to occupy doctors and schoolmen, but to be put into practice. Well-observed, but somewhat mediocre, laws make the state stronger than wiser laws that go neglected. Above, the impunity with which crimes are committed becomes the source of a thousand evils in the state, and as a consequence of its decay. The strange constitution of the government of Poland makes laws that are insufficiently observed, and criminals have too many ways of sheltering themselves from the pursuit of justice. It would however be difficult to imagine a nation so numerous, brave, spiritual, living in a fine country that was as frail as the Polish nation.

§24. Those who argue that *religion* is of no use in the government of a state, and that cunning and the gallows is sufficient to deter malefactors and maintain good order, are talking claptrap. Are all infringements of the law of such a nature to merit death, or corporal punishment, or such punishment that serves to ruin the citizen? Would one prefer to arrive by violence and by cruelty at an end to which one could find a way as gentle, as likeable, as the cult of the divine? Will a legislator be sorry to have this brake to keep men to their duty? Let us beware! As soon as positive religion spreads in a country, taking the place of natural religion, too speculative and too uncertain for the multitude, since each man is different in sentiment and insight – then this country is on the way to decline. There is no country in Europe that can be thought more open to the Christian religion than England, and which has greater respect abroad. The temples are superb and numerous, the clergy well-paid and well-regarded, the bishops rich and at the head of the nation, the divine cult practised with dignity and with all external marks of devotion, Sunday and feast days are observed with a rigour not found anywhere else, all commerce, all work, all play, all music prohibited on those days consecrated to religious practice. This nation, the most political of all, recognises that its happiness, its tranquillity, the maintenance of its power, depend to a great extent upon the maintenance of its religion. Here religion has subordinated itself to the king, and does so wisely.

§25. But as much as it is necessary for the good of the state for religion and a solid piety to prevail in the nation, it is fatal if the state *allows it to become too ascendant*. A people of devotees, of whatever religion, would

be a people both ridiculous and feeble. The reasons for this are so palpable that they require no elaboration. External devotion too easily leads to enthusiasm, to superstition, to fanaticism, to idleness, to indolence, to a disregard for worldly matters which is so harmful to the progress of the arts, talents and commerce. One only has to glance at a map of Europe and run through all the countries in which Roman Catholicism reigns with an excessive authority to which the people too blindly submit; one will see everything without spirit and without vigour. A short time ago we read some *Mémoires*<sup>39</sup> which contained many anecdotes concerning the reign of Louis XIV. The statesman able to read quickly over the more frivolous passages and meditate on that which is essential will find here many reasons for the good and the bad fortune of this great monarch. Religion appears to have become the prime motivation. The affairs of France prospered as long as the king had mistresses and favourites who furthered his sense of glory and the pleasures of his heart; Louis supported efforts for a united Europe, triumphed, and made conquests; until a lady who portrayed herself in her letters and her actions as a penitent prostitute seized the heart of this king and led him through devotion to love, and through love to devoutness, to confessors, directors, Jesuits, bishops, religious and other persons belonging to the clergy involved in affairs, occasioning schisms, the formation of cabals, preoccupying the monarch with petty troubles and turning his attention away from the larger matters which were proper to him. Ministers were by turns appointed and dismissed through the intrigues of priests, or on suspicion of the purity of their belief. Skilled generals, but accused of Jansenism, were no longer allowed to command armies; instead these armies were entrusted to inept, but orthodox, officers. Confessors made the king a weak and ridiculous personage, making him slave to all kinds of mummery. The whole Court was at prayer while heretical enemies were in action. Troops were everywhere vanquished, cities taken, fleets wrecked, and France found itself in total decline. As the king reduced his godliness, and the credit of priests diminished, so political and military talents once more had the right to be employed, so godliness waned at St. Cyr, God blessed France's armies, and re-established its affairs.

**§26.** In *countries where the natural liberty of men is oppressed by a purely despotic yoke, the state cannot be very powerful.* There is not one moment when the despot is not in danger of perishing on his throne, and it costs a thousand-fold more to achieve obedience to absolute power than to the power of the Law. The measures that such a despot is obliged to continually take to maintain the people in a state of obedience, and to prevent sedition, absorb half of the natural forces of the state; each

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<sup>39</sup> Laurent Angliviel de La Beaumelle, *Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire de Madame de Maintenon, & à celle du Siècle passé*, Amsterdam 1755-1756.



popular riot, which occurs despite all precaution, weakens it all the more, and each revolution that overthrows the monarch shakes the state to its foundations. Hence the unimaginable weakness of the Ottoman Empire, and other Asiatic monarchies which would, in the absence of this vice, shake all Europe. It appears that slavery renders men at once worthless.

§27. *Too much liberty* also becomes the cause of the decline of a state. All is lost if this liberty descends into libertinage. This is the most dangerous excess into which a nation can fall. The extreme weakness of the Kingdom of Poland and the lethargy of the Dutch Republic have virtually no other source. A people which seeks to become too free gives to its neighbours the means to forge its chains. To make men combine for the general good there is need of a restraint that will render them obedient, and a power that will make them all subjects.

§28. *When a nation neglects to perfect agriculture, commerce, the sciences and the useful arts, giving itself with too great a passion to the liberal arts and frivolous objects, it can only become weak, and the state languishes.* There is not one page in the first part of this work that does not indicate the reasons for this. The inhabitants of the countryside of Portugal come down from the mountains to bring into the towns fruits which the land there produces quite naturally. They carry a guitar or a lute under a small cloak into Spain, they strum them delicately, are born lyrical poets, compose airs and lyrics, sing them, accompanying themselves, and do no other work with their fingers. The other half of the nation lives in churches, kneeling at the foot of an image of one or other saint; the Inquisition stultifies the remainder. Portugal finds all its manufactures and meets nearly all its needs through the wise English, who enfeeble them by taking Portugal's specie, and rendering this kingdom incapable of making the least progress, nor even the least defence without its support. It is very easy to discover the cause of such decline.

§29. I am unable to turn my eyes upon Italy without feeling private distress. This country, so celebrated, and still so beautiful, has very much declined from its ancient splendour. Today the French, the Germans, the Spanish and other peoples seem to meet there to fight, and to divide its provinces among themselves. The reason for this is that the nation is degenerating, the whole day is spent idling, at spectacles, in pleasure, and in too great an application to the fine arts. All cities in Italy have become much like Capua. Augustus I King of Poland, being once again merely Elector of Saxony, travelled to this country, and stayed for a time in Venice. There he saw a play in which the Germanic nation was very badly abused. Piqued by this outrage, he sketched a little comedy which he had performed in his palazzo. It was *Caesar's Dream*. This great man, from the very first scene, returned

to the land, and appeared to be delighted to find himself in Italy, but is very astonished to hear cries of "Who goes there?" in the German language. He replies "Caesar", questions the sentry, and learns to his great astonishment that the Germans, whom he had otherwise treated as barbarians, are the masters of such beautiful provinces in this country. He examines the soldier, admires his armour and most of all his musket, which goes off and frightens him; but recovering from his initial surprise, the sentry tells him that the Germans had invented this weapon and the lethal powder with which it was charged. What, he cried! Has Prometheus stolen the fire from the skies and given it to savages, or even Jupiter given them his thunder! He continued questioning the soldier on the progress of his nation, and considered all that he saw and heard. During the ecstasy of his astonishment and of his admiration the German left, and there appears on the scene an inhabitant of ancient Cisalpine Gaul, carrying a hurdy-gurdy which he played to make a monkey dance; he is followed by a singer, the barbarity of whose parents has made him a eunuch, by a crowd of masked Venetians, by a troop of Arcadian poets crowned as laureates of Apollo, by several *monsieurs* and Roman abbots, some painters and other artists. Only with extreme grief does Caesar learn that all these personages are Italian; that the Capitol is inhabited by a Pontiff who has in Rome taken the place of the Scipios, Pompeys, the Luculluses, that his country is prey to foreign nations, and that the descendants of the warriors who had in days of yore brought him so many victories now concern themselves with spectacle and music, have become soft with gallantry, or serve the amusement and luxury of other peoples. He dies a second time, of grief. This dramatic fiction tells us, in jest, everything that policy might reveal to us through serious argument concerning the causes of the decline of Italy.

§30. Another very direct cause of the weakness and decline of a state is *the pride and idleness of the nation*. It was a great political idiot who was the first to seek to persuade the nobility into believing that they demean themselves through honest employment of their own hands. The author of the *Persian Letters* admirably depicts the arrogance, the indolence, and the dislike of labour in the Spanish nation, especially among the nobility. He writes that nobility is acquired through sitting around. The nobility sets a dangerous example for the people. Their inactivity introduces idleness to that class of citizens whose work buttresses the state. The word "derogate" should be banned from the French language as it has been from others, or at least uniquely attached to vile employments. The vice itself is dishonouring, and idleness lends it support. Nobody has ever told me that the nobility are sufficiently occupied by warfare. Wars are short and the peace is long. The officer is not sufficiently useful in times of peace. He can do something other than exercise his men, and a numerous nobility will not always find openings in an army.

§31. What use is it if, while the state is well-founded, the prince wise, ministers excellent, *moeurs good, the laws are ridiculous*? We spoke in Ch. VI of the first part of laws and legislation; we believe to have there shown the principal rules that must be observed, and the most necessary precautions that the legislator must take in promulgating new laws, and we remind our readers of these arguments. We remarked above all that laws must not only be full of wisdom in themselves, but also quite appropriate to the countries for which they are made. A single senseless law, especially when it bears upon something relating to the constitution of the state, can engender inexpressible evils. Montesquieu remarks<sup>40</sup> with great justice that Constantine made a cardinal error when he transferred the capital of the empire to Constantinople, and wishing that his new city would resemble in all respects the older one, he decreed that grain would also be distributed there to the people, and that the grain of Egypt be nevertheless sent there. This law became one of the causes of the decline of the Eastern Empire.

§32. Of all senseless laws the most fateful are those which tend directly, or indirectly, to the *depopulation of the state by promoting, or even decreeing, celibacy*. When a Christian sect prohibits what the Holy Scripture allows in clear and simple terms, or when they decree what Divine Law prohibits, it is a culpable error; but when positive religion makes laws, prescribes rules founded upon futile casuistic subtleties, or upon theological interpretations repugnant to Natural Law, to the manifest aim of the Creator, or even that of society, to the happiness of the state, one can boldly say that such a religion is unworthy of God and men, and that such dogmas must be proscribed. A thousand passages and a thousand examples can be found in the Bible which authorise the marriage of priests and of the people of the Church; natural law and the well-being of society demand it; the dogmas of the Roman Catholic religion oppose it; what conclusion must one draw from this contradiction? What does sound policy say here? One is not content to prohibit marriage to persons who serve the Church, as with bishops, curates etc., one also condemns to celibacy numberless persons of the two sexes who devote themselves to the religious condition and idleness, like monks, religious persons, canons, abbots, knights of military orders, and all the rest; for whether one buries expectations of family in monasteries, or such persons are constrained to violate their vows, this gives rise to scandal, and leads to subjects who, through the disgrace of their birth, and by their poor education, are more a charge on the state than of use to it.

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<sup>40</sup> *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*, Paris 1734 Ch. XVII.

§33. For, once again, it is not a matter of indifference to the state with what kind of subjects the country is populated. If it were only a question of numbers, one could help matters by, for example, establishing in the more deserted provinces a throng *of Jews*, a nation which is among men as rabbits are to quadrupeds, who multiply themselves with a surprising fecundity, and ruin the countries that they people. Being not at all proper to agriculture, nor to any necessary art, one can tolerate the Jews, but not make them a source for population. (See Part One Ch. VIII §35). All of them are born with a usurious mind, their children are as useless to the state as are their parents, and their excessive number ruins commerce. Here experience serves as our guide, and shows that a commercial state can only tolerate a small number of Jews, as one finds in England, in Holland, in Hamburg and elsewhere; whereas too great a number, as in Poland, in Prague etc. is more detrimental. But whatever may be the received state maxims in a country on the tolerance of Jews, it is barbarous to use them as does the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal, and unjust to burden them with the vexations such as they sometimes bear in Germany, or in Poland.

§34. *Excessively large colonies* which the state establishes in distant provinces, and above all in other parts of the world, enfeeble the state, and moreover become an intrinsic cause of its decline. I say *excessively large*, since one should not imagine that my remarks bear upon the colonies that Holland, England and France, for example, maintain, and almost constantly refresh in their Asian and American possessions. For apart from these nations being extremely numerous in themselves, and that they enrol as many foreign subjects as they can for their transport, it has to be considered that these colonies procure to the metropole five significant advantages which abundantly repay the losses incurred by the citizens removed, and who remain dependent on the state, constantly contributing to the good of the state. These advantages are 1. a much greater consumption of the products of the land which the metropole sends there; 2. the addition of a greater number of manufacturers, artisans etc. who serve the needs of the colonies; 3. the augmentation of navigation and of all workers contributing to it; 4. the export of a greater quantity of foodstuffs that are necessary in these colonies; 5. a much greater superfluity of foodstuffs and merchandise which these colonies provide, and which the metropole provides to other peoples, which leads to the continual growth of its commerce. We do not here have in mind those large colonies, these forms of emigration, such as that in which Spain engaged to America shortly after the discovery of the New World. All the wealth of Peru and Chile has not hitherto been able to repair the enfeeblement that Spain has drawn from them; and when a state seeks to found a colony it is of

ultimate importance to establish the principles upon which one will work, to make laws of consequence, and to make use of the greatest possible sobriety in the transport of subjects thence.

**§35.** *Epidemics* greatly ravage the people and weaken the state, depriving it for a considerable period of the resources necessary to defend itself against an unjust aggressor. These scourges have been discussed in the first part of this work (Ch. V §§18, 21 & Ch. VII §13.) together with the remedies which a prudent police can introduce. Sometimes these maladies (which, without being the plague itself, carry off no fewer subjects) are caused by an unhealthy climate, infected air, mortal exhalations which prevail in certain marshy areas, which attack inhabitants and, through contagion, spread their venom far and wide. There are several border cities in Flanders that are in this unfortunate position, and where the air is so impure that the Republic finds it necessary to renew the garrison every year, for the regiments stationed there are reduced by one half during this period. This inconvenience obliges the Estates General to replace all its garrison troops at least every two years, before each regiment, in turn, undergoes this dreadful year, the burden of which cannot be borne by just one regiment. But this constant turnover of troops causes much disorder, and costs for the army; it tires the soldiers, and ruins the officers. I do not know whether it would be better to leave the worst places without a garrison, at least in times of peace, or to find there such expedients as might diminish the evil by some means; but it is certain that humanity and policy prohibit sovereigns from consigning their subjects to an almost inevitable evil. If one persists in establishing some good citizens in a country where the air is bad, sending them into mines which exhale sulphurous vapours, employing them in the cultivation of rice which grows only in mires constantly inundated with stagnant water and so on; such action constantly enfeebles the state's people, and as a result slowly leads, almost unfailingly, to the decline of the state.

**§36.** Some remarks would already have been found (Part I Ch. VIII §26.) *regarding the abuse the people make of spirits and other strong liquors*; we add here that liquors can weaken a nation if they are made use of without due moderation. During the years 1734 and 1735 England was about to undergo a distressing experience if the wisdom of the government had not forestalled it. All sorts of vile distillations were sold at such a low price that the people drank to the greatest excess. The father of a family was no longer master of his servants, a tradesman of his workers, the officer of his soldiers, the captain of a ship of his sailors. All the common people were drunk before the hour for dinner, and in their drunkenness they assumed an insupportable insolence. The health of the Eng-

lish was disappearing, the same with manufactures, industry, commerce, navigation, military discipline etc. In 1736 an Act of Parliament prohibited almost entirely the use of brandy and gin, or at least raised their price so that the quantity was reduced; people were obliged to give them up and return to beer, the ancient and healthy beverage of the people. In northern countries, and most of all in Russia, there is again an excessive consumption of strong liquors, which might bring about fatal consequences for these nations. In truth, the rigours of the climate in those parts call for the use of spirits, but it is the abuse that has to be suppressed.

§37. The *relaxation of military discipline* also leads a state into unfailling loss. Nearly all monarchies, be they ancient or modern, have run upon this reef, all the more dangerous for being hidden. Women who have such influence over the hearts of men, priests, merchants, manufacturers, artisans, cultivators – they all desire peace, and look upon it with the greatest happiness. They are right in one sense, but they do not at all see that a lengthy peace corrupts the soldiery, relaxes discipline, allow the officer and the soldier to become unpractised in their art, and softens them. One would wish that in time of war the entire army would be composed only of lions, and in time of peace of sheep; but this is to ask for a contradiction, to want a chimera. Many people find military discipline too harsh in a peacetime garrison; it seems much too gentle when they march on the enemy. Men are never in agreement with themselves. They learn that peace is made to accustom officer and soldier to war, that discipline must be constantly upheld in an army, that the most skilful princes set up exercise encampments, carry out manoeuvres, marches, reviews, all to keep their troops up to the mark, making them practised, and not allowing them to forget the fatigue of serious campaigns, nor the art of winning. What is said here about the army applies also to the navy. A power formerly strong and much feared at sea enjoys a long peace. Warships remain tied up in harbour for half a century rotting away, their crews laid off, the admirals and skilful naval officers die; they are replaced by those without experience, the fleets only leave harbour for manoeuvres; war breaks out, the ships are armed and crewed, squadrons reappear at sea; all their undertakings fail; the commanders, for want of experience, give wrong signals, lacking discipline marines and sailors commit cowardly acts, all is despair, the state is in danger, there is surprise that ancient valour has been lost; sometimes matters do not go so badly given the pitiable circumstances.

§38. We have seen in Ch. X in Part One, dealing with public opulence, that a state can have *two kinds of debt*: one whose real value is employed in manufactures, commerce, and all sorts of useful establishments for the relief of the people; the other in which the fund is consumed by the sov-

ereign in frivolous expenditure. *The excess of this latter kind of debt can only enervate the state, and lead it into a certain ruin.* If the country in question has no kind of equivalent for the debt contracted upon its credit, if it has insufficient means to regain through the balance of its commerce the interests which the state pays annually on the borrowed capitals, not long is needed before it falls into decline. Catholic countries are particularly subject to a kind of exhaustion which is more or less marked in proportion to the extent that its people, or its princes, are bigoted. I refer to ordinary and extraordinary contributions that the Court of Rome levies every year, and which it draws through the hands of the clergy of those countries in which the Catholic religion predominates. It is certain that these contributions, for very many years, must amount to quite considerable sums, the Protestant countries being in this regard at a great advantage over the others. In these latter, the modest salaries of the churchmen provide their maintenance, and it is spent, it circulates, and it always remains within the state. In the former, the immense incomes of the clergy are only partially spent, another part passes into the Treasury, and the third part takes the road to Rome and never returns. This is how the Holy See, whether nephews of the Popes, whether Roman princes, prelates, family, grow rich in Italy at the expense of other nations. Every sovereign must consider whether he weakens his state through the loss of all the money he allows the Pope to draw from his people; he must set limits to the superstitious liberality of his subjects, and not allow them to impoverish themselves in the Kingdom of the Earth for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.

**§39.** *The continual wrangling between ministers, generals and others in monarchies, and in republics the divisions between Senate and People, between magistrates and the heads of government – both can easily lead the state into decline, and from decline to fall. The Mouth of Truth says that every kingdom divided against itself will be reduced to a desert, and every city or house divided against itself cannot persist.* While one can of course imagine the most perfect form of government and set out the wisest maxims of policy, it is always necessary to place conduct of the diverse branches of government in different departments, which is to say, in the hands of men who are full of passion. If these passions blind them, if their views of matters are too diverse, if they are divided among themselves, their actions will unfailingly be at cross-purposes, and the state will fall into anarchy. Such divisions are more frequent and more dangerous in republics, for there is not an authority either as great or as active as in monarchies capable of reuniting all employees under the banner of the public good, and making everyone to address their own tasks in spite of themselves. Divisions are a necessary consequence of the republican state; they always have been, and always will be. The author of the



*Causes of the Greatness and Decline of the Romans*<sup>41</sup> has quite rightly written:

Whenever one sees that everything is tranquil in a state that calls itself republican one can be assured that there is no liberty. What is called union in a body politic is something quite equivocal. It is possible to have union in a state where there seems to be no disorder, that is to say, a harmony from which results happiness which is alone true peace. This is like those parts of the universe linked eternally by the action of the one and the reaction of the other. But in the accord of Asiatic despotism, that is to say, every government that is not moderate, there is always a real division. The labourer, the man of war, the merchant, the magistrate, the noble, they are united only in oppressing each other without resistance; if one sees here union, it is not the citizens themselves who are united, but corpses entombed side by side.

When these real divisions break out into open ruptures, or degenerate into civil wars, the state is not far removed from loss; and sovereign power cannot make itself felt too quickly to suppress disunion and bring its progress to a sudden halt, even with the greatest rigour.

**§40.** *When a republic interferes with the fundamental laws that regulate the constitution of its government* the state runs a very great risk of running to ruin. I know that different times call for different ways, and that laws have to follow those changes that occur in the world's state of affairs; but the constitution of the state must never alter, and the laws bearing upon this must remain as far as possible immutable. Every political arrangement has its disadvantages, and it is better to deal with those that arise from an established system than to change a system that has long supported a state. Experience is here in agreement with theory and principles. I never glance at the history of Rome, I never reflect on the causes of the various revolutions in this monarchy, but find my way to the *people's tribunes*. The introduction of these magistrates, which altered quite essentially the original constitution of the Roman Republic, became the source of all its ills. The Dutch Republic was founded under the auspices of a *stadhouder*, and the establishment of the *Stadhouderat* became an essential part of its government. Each time this republic has sought to do without such a head it has fallen into manifest decline; and when close to extinction, it has been rescued by the re-establishment of the *Stadhouderat*, which I allow does have its difficulties, but which will always undergird the United Provinces.

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<sup>41</sup> Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*, Ch. IX.

§41. Among the one thousand indirect causes which bring about the decline and overthrow of states, shaking their constitution, weakening their resilience, one can count regicide, or assassination committed against the person of the king, sovereign, prince, or head of the republic. One feels an inner repugnance in dealing with a crime so horrible; and one would voluntarily turn one's eyes away from something so revolting to humanity, if the monsters vomited up by hell had not recently awoken the idea of such a frightful *attentat*. One thinks that these evil deeds, whose seed was sown in the works of Machiavelli and his disciples, have been stifled by the philosophical spirit which, over the last few centuries, has improved Europe's police, and it has been said, made Europe more virtuous. One flatters oneself that, since the time of the Gérards, the Clémens, the Ravailacs, the daggers in the hands of parricides, and the poisons of false, cruel, bloody and cruel policy, are no longer those of rational beings. We do not even intend to talk about the matter in this book, so that we do not have to recall the memory of names and such odious crimes; but since the life of the two best kings on earth,<sup>42</sup> who were the delights of their people, who merited all of their love, and whose names are dear to posterity, were not secure from *attentats* committed by cowardly assassins, we are constrained to portray all the horror of this crime, and to inform how much it seems detestable to true and healthy policy. The murder of a simple child born into the most vile class of citizens is a crime abominable in the eyes of the Supreme Being, and the laws of all civilised [*polices*] peoples punish it with death; oh! what would it be if the murderous knife, or the poison, is placed in the breast of a personage of the kind placed at the helm of government to watch over the security, and to contribute to the welfare of the whole nation? But the peak of all abomination is when a parricidal hand attacks the purple, and lands its blows on the throne. The Holy Scripture and the lights of reason are in agreement in recounting the horror of such an action. The first teaches us in a thousand places that Christians should submit themselves to the temporal authority that God has established for his people, should respect it, and that it is the greatest of crimes to strike against he who is anointed by the Eternal; the second tell us that no man of merit, no wise man, would wish to take on the tiresome job of governing the state, or to contribute to its happiness, if the law did not render his days secure against the bloody vengeance of a malcontent, or a guilty subject. Ministers and magistrates would live in perpetual danger and the state would soon be prey to villains. And as we have proved in Ch. III of the first volume, that all the citizens of a country, in submitting themselves to monarchical government, feel that their individual wills are united in the single person of the sovereign, to whom they accord an authority neces-

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<sup>42</sup> Louis XV of France and Joseph, King of Portugal.

sary to this end, and related powers to set it to work; that the person of the monarch has been rendered sacred and inviolable by the universal consent of all civilised [*policies*] nations, and the king is endowed with the title of “majesty” to impress upon the hearts of all men a greater veneration for their dignity. One also sees that it is not permissible for any member of society, of whatever estate, and whatever degree he might be, to believe his own interest, or that of the state in general, to be hurt in any particular, or betrayed by the decrees of his sovereign, such that he acquires the slightest trace of a right to make an attempt on his monarch; for on the contrary, each citizen is individually wounded by this same *attentat*. It is for these reasons, and for a thousand others, that the laws set no limit to the rigour of the torments appropriate for punishing a regicide; and if it is true that the humanity of the judges appointed to hand down a cruel sentence in respect of such a cruel assassin tells them that mercy is moving, and that the heart suffers when having to impose such horrible torments upon an unfortunate, it is no less certain that the safety of many thousands of citizens, and even of the human race, must prevail over compassion, which must set an example of rigour in regard to other crazed villains, and that the love of Justice must in such moments stifle in one’s heart the voice of nature and feelings of pity.

**§42.** But if a determined tyrant, a Nero, a Basilowitz, is unfortunately on the throne, whose rage attacks and destroys true religion, or reverses the essential constitution of the state so as to introduce extreme despotism, exercising the cruellest tyranny and bathing his best subjects in blood; if, I say, in such a case, the leaders of the people, the most eminent magistrates, princes of the blood all agree that for the preservation of the state the reins of government should be torn from such a monster, that he should be deposed, imprisoned and perhaps, for want of an alternative, put to death to preserve the life and fortune of so many innocent citizens, it seems that such an action should not be strictly included under the name and idea of regicide, or of the assassination of a sovereign. But it is very rare to see a tyrant so determined, with such a taste for blood, on the throne; ancient and modern history provides us with very few examples. Tyranny has to be so extravagant, so clearly established, in sum, so notorious, that it is almost impossible to foresee, or at least determine, a case where such a conspiracy would become legitimate. Policy has for its object the preservation of states; all its maxims must contribute to this end; but its silence is eloquent when such a delicate question is presented for decision; it is too accustomed to treat the person of the sovereign as inviolable.

**§43.** Such are in general the principal causes of the decline of states. There are more, and more particular, ones; but they are so indirect, and

of such great number, that the limits of this work preclude their elaboration. We are hurrying to its conclusion, and we will end with a brief reflection on the characteristics by which one can establish whether a state is rising or declining. These characteristics, similar to symptoms of health or of sickness in the human body, can be either internal, or external. The growth or the diminution of public revenue is the surest thermometer for the prosperity of a country; but to form a good judgement it must be assessed in peacetime and by the ordinary means of collection, without special exactions, without new taxes, without arbitrary levies, capitation payments, or other charges or compulsory payments. The augmentation of the number of inhabitants, best judged by careful personal assessment, or by examining the consumption of wheat, tells one more than other calculations whose principles are uncertain; the progress of luxury, which progresses without effort, the growth of commerce, which can be known from simply going through the customs records, the rise of manufactures, whether old or new, the increase of capital, the construction of new buildings or the repair of the old, the success of art and of artisans, the contented humour of the people, the good condition of the army and of the navy, the relative cost of necessities, the rates of exchange, the arrival of strangers who come to settle in the country, the prevalence of liberty and good order, all of these advantages form the visible marks of the prosperity of the state, as do the opposing disadvantages testify to its decline. The influence that the sovereign gains in the general affairs of Europe, the celerity with which other princes seek his alliance, the glory and success which he establishes in feats of arms, the advantageous treaties that he concludes, whether for political ends or for the commerce of his subjects, his flag that flies on all seas and in all foreign ports, the friendly welcome and distinctions offered his ministers in other courts; it is by these conspicuous marks that the cabinets of other kings and foreign nations can recognise the degree of prosperity, of greatness, or of weakness, in which each state finds itself. These are the characteristics that make themselves manifest from afar. The busy statesman never ceases to keep his eye on all these matters, on both the state for which he works, as well as the position it holds in relation to others in the general system of Europe. A true Argonaut, he can never fall asleep but with one eye open. If he follows the lessons of policy such as contained here, he can hope to make himself useful to his prince and to his country; but he has no hope of general approbation, and criticism cannot deflect him from the path of reason and probity. The world will never lack for trouble-makers who attack good ministers just as they attack good books.

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