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ROUSSEAU

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*The Social Contract*  
and other later political  
writings

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY  
VICTOR GOUREVITCH

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itself to as few as half. Aristocracy, in turn, can restrict itself to anywhere from half the people to the smallest number. Even Royalty admits of being shared to a certain extent. Sparta consistently had two Kings by constitution, and the Roman Empire is known to have had as many as eight Emperors at once, without its being possible to say that the Empire was divided. Thus there is a point at which each form of Government merges into the next, and it is evident that under just these three headings, Government admits of as many different forms as the State has Citizens.

[6] What is more: Since this same Government can in certain respects subdivide itself into different parts, one administered one way, the other another way, the combination of these three forms can result in a multitude of mixed forms, each of which can be multiplied by all the simple forms.

[7] There has always been much argument about the best form of Government, without considering that each one of them is the best in some cases, and the worst in others.

[8] If in each State the number of supreme magistrates should be inversely proportional to the number of Citizens, it follows that in general Democratic Government suits small States, Aristocratic Government suits [404] medium-sized ones, and Monarchy large ones. This rule is directly derived from the principle; but how is one to enumerate the many circumstances which can make for exceptions to the rule?

#### CHAPTER FOUR OF DEMOCRACY

[1] He who makes the law knows better than anyone else how it should be executed and interpreted. It would therefore seem that there could be no better constitution than one in which the executive power is combined with the legislative: But this is precisely what makes this Government inadequate in certain respects, for things which ought to be kept distinct are not kept distinct, and the Prince and the Sovereign being nothing but the same person, form, so to speak, nothing but a Government without a Government.

[2] It is not good that he who makes the laws execute them, nor that the body of the people turn its attention away from general considerations, to devote it to particular objects. Nothing is more dangerous than the influence of private interests on public affairs, and abuse of the laws by the Government is a lesser evil than the corruption of the Lawgiver, which is the inevitable consequence of particular considerations. Then, the State being adulterated in its very substance, all reform becomes impossible. A people which would never misuse the Government would not misuse independence either; a people which would always govern well would not need to be governed.

[3] In the strict sense of the term, a genuine Democracy never has existed, and never will exist. It is against the natural order that the greater number govern and the smaller number be governed. It is unimaginable that the people remain constantly assembled to attend to public affairs, and it is readily evident that it could not establish commissions to do so without the form of the administration changing.

[4] Indeed, I believe I can posit as a principle that when the functions of Government are divided among [405] several tribunals, the least numerous sooner or later acquire the greatest authority; if only because of the ease in dispatching business, which naturally leads them to acquire it.

[5] Besides, how many things difficult to combine does not this Government presuppose? First, a very small State where the people is easily assembled, and where every citizen can easily know all the rest; second, great simplicity of morals to preclude excessive business and thorny discussions; next, much equality of ranks and fortunes, without which equality of rights and authority could not long subsist: Finally, little or no luxury; for luxury is either the effect of riches, or makes them necessary; it corrupts rich and poor alike, the one by possession, the other by covetousness; it sells out the fatherland to laxity, to vanity; it deprives the State of all its Citizens by making them slaves to one another, and all of them slaves to opinion.

[6] That is why a famous Author attributed virtue to Republics as their principle; for all these conditions could not subsist without virtue: but for want of drawing the necessary distinctions, this noble

genius often lacked in precision, sometimes in clarity, and he failed to see that since Sovereign authority is everywhere the same, the same principle must obtain in every well-constituted State, more or less, it is true, according to the form of the Government.

[7] Let us add that there is no Government as subject to civil wars and intestine turmoil as Democratic or popular Government, because there is none which tends so strongly and so constantly to change its form, nor any which requires greater vigilance and courage to maintain in its form. It is in this constitution above all that the Citizen must arm himself with force and steadfastness, and every day of his life say in the bottom of his heart what a virtuous Palatine\* said in the Diet of Poland: "I prefer a perilous freedom to quiet servitude."

[406] [8] If there were a people of Gods, they would govern themselves democratically. So perfect a Government is not suited to men.

CHAPTER FIVE  
OF ARISTOCRACY

[1] We have here two very distinct moral persons, namely the Government and the Sovereign, and consequently two general wills, one in relation to all the citizens, the other only for the members of the administration. Thus, although the Government may regulate its internal policy as it pleases, it may never speak to the people except in the name of the Sovereign, that is to say in the name of the people itself; which should never be forgotten.

[2] The first societies governed themselves aristocratically. The chiefs of families deliberated among themselves about the public business; young people readily yielded to the authority of experience. Hence the names *Priests, elders, senate, gerontes*. The savages of northern America still govern themselves this way in our day, and they are very well governed.

[3] But in proportion as instituted inequality prevailed over natural inequality, riches or power\* was given preference over age, and

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

\* It is clear that among the ancients the term *Optimates* does not mean the best, but the most powerful.

Aristocracy became elective. Finally, power bequeathed to the children together with the father's goods made families patrician, Government became hereditary, and there were twenty-year-old Senators.

[4] There are, then, three kinds of Aristocracy: natural, elective, hereditary. The first is suited only to simple peoples; the third is the worst of all Governments. The second is the best; it is Aristocracy properly so called.

[5] In addition to having the advantage of distinguishing between the two powers, Aristocracy has the advantage of choosing its members; for in [407] popular Government all Citizens are born magistrates, whereas this Government restricts them to a small number, and they become magistrates only by being elected;\* a means by which probity, enlightenment, experience, and all the other reasons for public preferment and esteem are so many further guarantees of being well governed.

[6] Moreover, assemblies are more easily convened, business is discussed better, and dispatched in a more orderly and diligent fashion, the State's prestige is better upheld abroad by venerable senators than by an unknown and despised multitude.

[7] In a word, the best and most natural order is to have the wisest govern the multitude, so long as it is certain that they will govern it for its advantage and not for their own; institutions and procedures should not be multiplied needlessly, nor should twenty thousand men be employed to do what a hundred well chosen men can do even better. But it must be noted that here the corporate interest begins to guide the public force less in accordance with the standard of the general will, and that another inevitable decline deprives the laws of a portion of the executive power.

[8] With regard to suitable particular circumstances, the State should not be so small nor the people so simple and upright that the execution of the laws follows directly from the public will, as it does in a good Democracy. Nor should the nation be so large

\* It is very important to regulate by laws the form of electing magistrates; because if it is left to the will of the Prince, hereditary Aristocracy is the inevitable consequence, as it was in the Republics of *Venice* and of *Berne*. Indeed, the first has long since been a dissolved State, whereas the second maintains itself through the extreme wisdom of its Senate; it is a most honorable and a most dangerous exception.