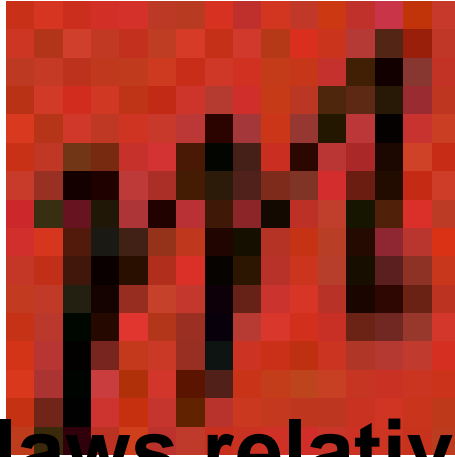


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II.5 On laws relative to the nature of the despotic state

- The Spirit of Law - Book II. On laws which derive directly from the nature of the government -

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II.5 On laws relative to the nature of the despotic state

It results from the nature of despotic power that the man who alone wields it likewise has it wielded by one man alone. A man whose five senses constantly tell him that he is everything and others are nothing is naturally lethargic, ignorant, and sensual. So he abandons administration. But if he entrusted it to several men, there would be disputes among them ; they would plot to be first among the slaves ; the prince would be obliged to resume his management. It is therefore simpler to abandon it to a vizier [1] who will from the start have the same authority as he. In this state, the establishment of a vizier is a fundamental law.

It is said that a pope upon his election, convinced of his own inadequacy, was at first extremely reluctant. He finally accepted, and placed all the business in the hands of his nephew. He was admiring of him, saying : "I would never have believed it could be so easy." So it is with Eastern princes. When they are taken from the prison where the eunuchs have weakened their heart and mind and often left them in ignorance even of their own situation, to place them on the throne, they are at first taken aback ; but once they have named a vizier, and have delivered themselves in their seraglio to the most brutish passions ; when in the midst of a demoralized court they have followed their most foolish whimsies, they would never have believed it could be so easy.

The more the empire is extended, the more the seraglio grows, and consequently the more besotted is the prince with pleasures. Thus, in these states, the more peoples the prince has to govern, the less he thinks about government ; the greater the matters to be decided, the less they are pondered.

[1] The kings of the Orient always have viziers, according to Mr. Chardin [VI, 92].