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VIII.3 On the spirit of extreme equality

- The Spirit of Law - Book VIII. On the corruption of the principles of the three governments -

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VIII.3 On the spirit of extreme equality

The true spirit of equality is as far from the spirit of extreme equality as heaven is from earth. The former does not consist of seeing to it that everyone commands, or that no one is commanded ; but in obeying and commanding one's equals. It does not seek to avoid having masters, but to have only one's equals as masters.

In the state of nature, men are indeed born into equality, but they cannot possibly remain that way. Society causes them to lose it, and they become equal again only thanks to laws.

Such is the difference between democracy that is structured and democracy that is not, that in the former there is an equality of citizens, and in the latter an additional equality of magistrates, senators, judges, fathers, husbands, and masters.

The natural place of virtue is at liberty's side ; but it is not found more often at the side of extreme liberty than of servitude.