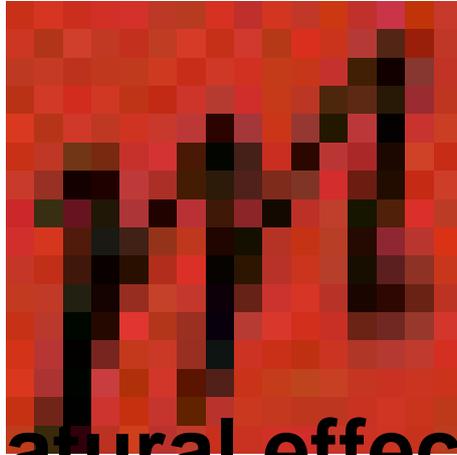


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VIII.11 Natural effects of the goodness and the corruption of principles

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

Date de mise en ligne : vendredi 24 août 2018

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Once the principles of the government have been corrupted, the best of laws become bad and turn against the state ; when its principles are sound, bad laws have the effect of good ones ; the strength of the principle is all.

The Cretans, in order to keep their first magistrates dependent upon laws, employed a most singular means : that of *insurrection*. A portion of the citizens would rise up, drive out the magistrates, and oblige them to return to their private lives. [1] This was supposedly done in consequence of the law. Such an institution, which established sedition to prevent the abuse of power, seemed bound to overturn any and every republic ; yet it did not destroy the republic of Crete. Here is why. [2]

When the Ancients wanted to evoke a people who had the greatest love for their fatherland, they cited the Cretans : "Fatherland," said Plato, "that name so dear to the Cretans." [3] They called it by a name that expresses the love of a mother for her children. [4] For love of fatherland rectifies everything.

The laws of Poland also have their *insurrection*. But the drawbacks that result from it make it clear that the people of Crete alone were able to employ such a remedy successfully.

The gymnastics exercises instituted by the Greeks depended no less on the soundness of the government principle. "It was the Lacedæmonians and the Cretans," says Plato, "who opened those famous academies that enabled them to hold such a distinguished rank in the world. At first modesty was shocked, but it gave way to the public utility." [5] In Plato's time these institutions were admirable [6] ; they contributed to a great purpose, which was military art. But when the Greeks had no more virtue, they destroyed even military art ; they no longer entered the arena to be trained but corrupted.

Plutarch tells us that in his time the Romans thought these games had been the principle cause of the servitude into which the Greeks had fallen. [7] It was on the contrary the Greeks' servitude that had corrupted these exercises. In Plutarch's time, [8] the parks for naked combat and the game of wrestling made the youth cowardly, incited them to a deplorable love, and made of them nothing but professional dancers. But in the time of Epaminondas, the exercise of wrestling enabled the Thebans to win the battle of Leuctra. [9]

There are few laws which are not good when the state has not lost its principles ; and as Epicurus said, speaking of wealth, it is not the liquor which is corrupt, it is the vessel.

[1] Aristotle, *Politics*, book II, ch. x.

[2] They came together at first against outside enemies, which was called syncretism (Plutarch, *Moralia*, p. 88).

[3] *Republic*, book IX.

[4] Plutarque, *Moralia*, in the treatise *An seni respublica gerenda sit* ['Whether an old man should engage in public affairs'].

[5] *The Republic*, book V.

[6] Gymnastics was divided into two parts, danse and wrestling. In Crete armed dances of the Curettes were seen, in Lacedæmon those of Castor and Pollux, in Athens the armed dances of Pallas, well suited to those who were not yet old enough to go to war. Wrestling is the image of war,

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says Plato (*Laws*, book VII). He praises Antiquity for instituting only two dances, the Pacific and the Pyrrhic. See how this latter dance was applied to military art (Plato, *ibid.*).

[7] *Moralia*, "Roman Questions."

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Plutarch, *Moralia*, *Quæstiones convivialium* ["Table talk"], book II.