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XXVI.20 That one must not decide by the principles of the civil laws things that belong to the law of nations

- The Spirit of Law - Book XXVI. On laws in the relation they must have with the order of things on which they bear -
Date de mise en ligne : vendredi 7 septembre 2018

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Liberty consists principally in never being forced to do a thing the law does not command ; and this situation can obtain only because one is governed by civil laws : we are therefore free because we live under civil laws.

It follows from this that princes who do not live among themselves under civil laws are not free, they are governed by force ; they can continually force or be forced. Whence it follows that treaties they have made by force are as obligatory as those they might have made willingly. When we who live under civil laws are compelled to make some contract which the law does not require, we can under protection of the law protest the violence ; but a prince, who is always in this situation in which he forces or is forced, cannot complain about a treaty that has been imposed on him by violence. It is as if he were complaining about his natural state ; it is as if he wanted to be a prince with respect to other princes, and the other princes were citizens with respect to him : in other words, it is to belie the nature of things.