

Part 12: Book 3, Chs. 7 & 8

Book 3, Ch. 7: Mixed Governments

All governments are mixed to some degree. “An isolated ruler must have subordinate magistrates; a popular government must have a head.”

Usual reasonable-sounding Rousseau first paragraphs in a chapter...

Executive power is distributed between the greater and lesser numbered groups. The larger group may depend on the smaller for direction or vice versa. When that distribution is equal, that is good because it creates “unity in the government.” England good; Poland bad.

Begs the question that “unity in the government” is a good thing. What if the government is aiming for policies that impoverish the people, as [it is supposed to](#) in Rousseau’s framework?

Simplicity is a virtue in government but sometimes division is necessary. “[W]hen the prince is more closely related to the Sovereign than the people to the prince, this lack of proportion must be cured by the division of the government.”

This appears to be more pseudo-mathematical gibberish. Since nobody knows how closely someone is related to the Sovereign, it’s a moot point, and will always be a source of unsolvable argument.

Intermediate magistrates, if they exist, do not mix the government, but rather they moderate it. Tribunals can be used to concentrate a government that is too large or too lax.

Now Rousseau creates a third level of government to “moderate” the government, without carefully explaining what this new term means. It’s the same kind of rhetorical trick that “progressives” use.

“[T]he maxima of both strength and weakness are found in simple governments, while the mixed forms result in a mean strength.”

More failed pseudo-math jargon.

Book 3, Ch. 8: That All Forms of Government Do Not Suit All Countries

“Liberty, not being a fruit of all climates, is not within the reach of all peoples.”

This *sounds* like the kind of thing someone would say to justify dominating some group of people. To connect this directly to climate is even worse because it disconnects it from the people themselves. It *sounds* like an apology for African colonization woes.

Since the government gets what it consumes from the surplus of the people, if that surplus is too small or the appetite of government too large, the government cannot stand.

Unless the government gets what it consumes by providing voluntarily agreed-to services. If there really is no surplus, then we have a situation where everyone is literally farming from dawn till dusk each day and barely avoiding starvation. This is not a common state for humanity, even in the 1700s. Leisure, for instance, is a form of surplus.

“The charge should be measured not by the amount of the impositions, but by the path they have to travel in order to get back to those from whom they came. When the circulation is prompt and well-established, it does not matter whether much or little is paid; the people is always rich and, financially speaking, all is well.”

Assumes charitably that wealth extorted from the people somehow makes it back to them. The possibility of a plutocracy or just an oversized bureaucracy consuming excesses is not addressed.

More distant governments are more burdensome and so need a richer populace. E.g. monarchy for rich nations.

Why are we supposed to believe that more burdensomeness is a good thing under any circumstances? Why should the people tolerate a burdensome government in the first place?

Climate affects productivity of land, therefore the government will be affected by it, as well. Barren lands stay uncultivated or are populated by savages, poor lands for barbarians, up to best lands with free peoples.

Again, the subsistence farming model. Rousseau does not recognize that extended capital structures can result in higher productivity, or that different countries can reach mutually beneficial agreements to deal with relative scarcity and comparative advantage.

(Again, Rousseau was writing before Ricardo, but still!)

Rousseau also claims that hot lands are more productive, yet the peoples of hot lands are content with less food, luxury, etc. Hot countries are in need of people.

Cultural aspects involving more or less demand for luxury and fine foods may indeed be influenced by long-term historical knowledge of productivity levels. Again, Rousseau seems to be trying to justify African colonization.

Digression on difficulty in setting up a revolt in heavily-populated countries. Easier for government to track down dissidents and silence them. “The advantage of tyrannical government therefore lies in acting at great distances.” “The least populous countries are thus the fittest for tyranny.”

This is so confused, putting all of the qualities of a government on a scale based on population size. Are we to believe that medium-sized countries with aristocracies are more fit for tyranny than absolute monarchies of large countries? None of this is coherent at this point; Rousseau has simply chosen a single variable and plopped all the things he cares about onto that axis, with almost no attention to confounding factors. When he mentions confounding factors, it’s usually done in such a way as to effectively say nothing.