

# The Citadel State

Of statecraft, power, and ideals

Jonathan Holslag

As the world becomes more insecure, European states retreat, but expect others to watch their backs. Citizens in those rich states often demand diplomats and soldiers to stand guard, but refuse to be watchful and responsible themselves. Instead of erecting such empty fortress, this book argues, the state must turn itself into a citadel: a citadel of power, virtue, and dignity.

This classical notion of statecraft should urgently replace the prevalent paltry pretences of statecraft, which cover up our weakness rather than solving it. True statecraft works inside-out. When dignity and virtue are engrained in the minds of citizens, the state prospers through creativity, civic duty, perseverance, and pioneering. That prosperity is the condition for all other forms of power.

This book calls for balance: in the first place between realism and ideals. It is both a conceptual and practical guide. It explains why the state matters, how servants of the state can circumvent pitfalls, and how a citadel state can be built: through civic education, good governance, care for nature, sound economics, as well as external policy.

“It is sometimes said that statecraft is the art of the possible. But how can the possible be art? Art overcomes the limitations of the possible. You cannot overcome the possible without ideals.”

Cover picture: Ambrogio Lorenzetti  
Allegory of Good and Bad Government, Siena, 1339.

Jonathan Holslag lectures international politics at the Free University Brussels. He has written several acclaimed books, including *World Politics Since 1989* (Polity, 2021) and *A Political History of the World* (Penguin, 2019).

“The only one I know on the European continent who really gets it about our world today.” *Robert D. Kaplan.*

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To E.

A heart to care and the courage to show it.



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*National character and, above all, national morale and the quality of government are the most important, but also the most elusive, components of the power of the state.*

Hans Morgenthau, 1948.

*Doubtless it is thought noble to build oneself fortresses impregnable to an enemy: but in my judgment it is far nobler to fortify one's own soul.*

Xenophon, 380 B.C.E.



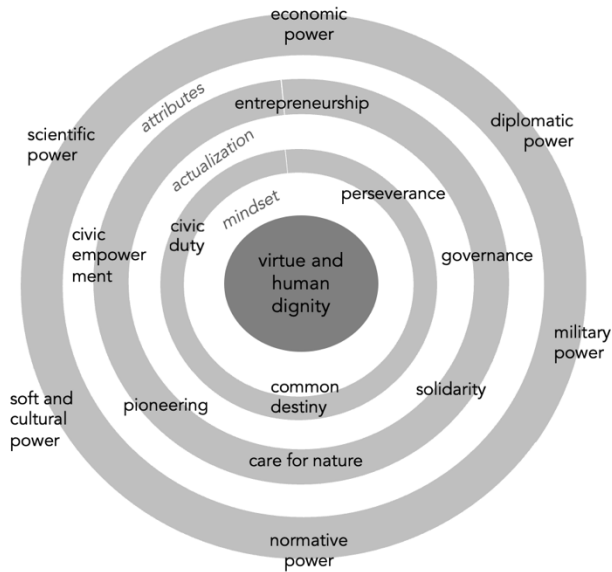


## Introduction

How can a state survive – and flourish in a turbulent world? It can do so, this book argues, by transforming itself into a citadel. Indeed, a citadel. Imagine this citadel. High up from its centre, rises its inner sanctum, its shrine: its ideal vision of a dignified citizen. More than anything, it is this beacon that guides life, that celebrates life. It radiates hope and ambition. It outshines distraction. This citadel rests on clear knowledge of historical sacrifice and common destiny. Its cornerstones are timeless: humanism, fortitude, prudence, magnanimity, temperance, and justice. They form the spirit that runs down to all quarters of the state, its streets, its squares, its schools, its factories, its laboratories, its art studios. The sanctuary is served by guardians; citizens who display exceptional dedication and skill to advance the state’s power, its prosperity, and the effectiveness of its government – all with an eye on its ideals. Those citizens are part of a state that is confident, cohesive, and compassionate, welcoming to whoever is ready to support it, capable of coexisting with other states, yet firm enough to stand up to challengers. The statecraft discussed in this book is about building that citadel, about harnessing the power to further happiness and security.

This citadel consists of different circles. The heart is formed by civic virtue and human dignity. The second layer concerns dedication. It involves a common destiny, civic duty, and perseverance. The third ring of state power is about the actualization of those qualities through good governance, an ethical marketplace that stimulates entrepreneurship and pioneering, civic empowerment, care for each other, and care for nature.

This subsequently helps to strengthen different attributes of power: wealth, diplomacy, military strength, normative and cultural appeal, scientific power, and so forth. The stronger these layers of power, the more the state will be able to preserve its internal cohesion, to make its own choices, and to shape its external relations.



*Figure.* The attributes of power.

This metaphor of a citadel state matters. It matters because the world has rapidly evolved from an age in which borders were no longer deemed important to one in which people assume they can hide behind borders. Particularly in the West, it seems that societies transit from the decadence without walls to decadence behind walls. It results in a state in which preservation of consumption seems to be all that matters, where

resilience is promised without citizens being called to take their responsibility, where the government pretends it delivers that with martial manifestations of hard power. Cocaine infesting the state? Bring in the military. Climate change causing floods? Bring in the military. Terrorists? Bring in the military. Refugees? Bring in the military. Even then, what matters the most, is the pretence of power and security, its visibility. Never mind how strong and effective those capabilities are. Worse even. Absent the readiness to invest, states divest themselves of their core duties, outsource them to private actors, to other states, and even their rivals. All around the borders, terrain is vacated, relinquished to hostile forces that creep closer and closer.

What emerges is the image of an empty fortress that starkly contrasts with the citadel. The empty fortress approaches security outside-in: fences, border guards, soldiers, and different manifestations of mercenaries and unreliable partnerships are invited to protect the state.<sup>1</sup> The citadel approaches security inside-out, focussing on the emancipation of its citizens, their intrinsic motivation to excel, to pioneer, to care. Power is its main source of security, power connected to virtue. Power requires hard work, a constant effort to reinforce and reinvent the state. The distribution of power changes continuously, sometimes with a sudden bang, but most of the times incrementally, as a result of the choices of numerous individual citizens, companies, and so forth. An empty fortress, on the contrary, highlights the protection of its borders, assumes it can freeze a political situation. It takes the state for granted and ignores how its power is accumulated – or lost. An empty fortress has an outside-in approach towards security, but also towards citizenship. Its citizens prioritize what they have, their outer shield of possession, status symbols, superficial



convictions, and gadgets. They are mellow materialists. The only thing that then still has to happen, is to wave a flag – and wrongfully call it patriotism.

This empty fortress continues the characteristics of its predecessor: the shopping-mall-state. This shopping-mall-state does not pay attention to the intrinsic qualities of its citizens either, it does not expect them to participate, or to think. The shopping-mall-state is an inflated creation of glass, a high-tech version of the Crystal Palace. It does not even own that creation; as it is likely financed by private billionaires or murky investment funds from other states. Who still minds sovereignty? It is glass in a sense that it is utterly permeable. It has no soul, no culture, no vision.<sup>2</sup> Nobody is supposed to have a vision, certainly not its leaders. Vision, to use the words of one former prime minister, is like an elephant: it hinders the view. What matters is buying; not being. Doors open automatically. There are no checks. Everyone with money can set up shop. Lured by the dazzling light of the mall, the state seems to need no regulation. Drove of citizens, completely unburdened by ethics and history, act almost automatically. Like ants in a kitchen they scurry in search of more sweetness. They surface from their caverns of routine, anonymity and dependency. If they would ever forget to take the escalator up to this world of instant-gratification, they are reminded of this by countless digital wires that activate their impulses. All the state needs to do, is to provide ports and parking lots – and carelessly call it freedom.

The introduction so far might have made you suspicious. Why these metaphors? This is a deliberate choice. Decades of dispassionate books about world politics, have created the impression that the whole matter can be studied and managed by timid technocrats,

unbiased scientists and armchair strategists, that countless fragments of scientific insights and practical planning could engender change. Reason can only lead to change, however, when it sparks passion. Dispassionate knowledge decouples from courage.<sup>3</sup> The metaphor of a citadel can also come across as nationalistic. But is not. Nationalism is the support for the state at the detriment of others. It is exclusive and draws its strength from aversion towards others. This book does not depart from aversion or hatred towards others, but from dedication and even affection towards your own state, its people, its nature – and, indeed, its government. I refer to it as patriotism. Nationalism is a negative affirmation; patriotism a positive affirmation. This book holds that states remain vital units in world politics and that citizens should care for the fate of the state.

Some could even find this problematic. Because patriotism is conservative and protectionist. This, it will become clear, does not have to be the case. The book posits indeed that states should preserve power and be on their guard. That pursuit, however, should not stand in the way of ideals. It is sometimes said that statecraft is the art of the possible. But how can the possible be art? Art overcomes the limitations of the possible and you cannot overcome the possible without ideals. So, statecraft is about harnessing power to realize ideals. A citadel state has its defences, gates that can be closed, ports that can be protected. But the more it feels confident in combining power with ideals, the more it preserves its cohesion and will be ready to show magnanimity to the rest of the world. The citadel is my ideal image, my metaphor, and I can only hope that it has some appeal. You cannot take away someone's story without offering a new one.<sup>4</sup>

## Thoughts and theory

This book reflects two decades of wandering and does not pretend to be conclusive. Political beliefs with the pretence to be conclusive are dogmas. Dogmas kill thinking. Hence, this book attempts not to erect a theory. What is theory anyhow? Those scientists that pretend to fight a battle of angels, elevated far above all murmur and perplexity, feeling so uplifted to the vantage point of impartiality that they forget how their tournament is incited by the same passion, envy and ambition that one finds in the cohorts that are apparently beneath them. The rigour of method is but an instrument to these passions, in the same way that a lawyer interprets law to his financial benefit or an accountant exploits tax rules to protect the wealth of his clients. The average crusader probably showed more introspection. As it is so easy to spot the flaws in a theory, every attacker can easily claim a domain for himself, shattering the big debates into endless disciplines, ever more narrow and specialized.<sup>5</sup> Knowledge-microscopists, Friedrich Nietzsche called them.<sup>6</sup> They make me think of the warlords I saw in Congo, with its endlessly atomizing brutality, the one fighting for a fistful of diamonds, his neighbour for his harem, and still another for a flat screen television in his hut. With that difference that theorists often hardly survive outside their microscopic realm of citations and junior researchers. They ultimately grown tired as a learner, as Nietzsche also observed, attach themselves somewhere to specialize, so that they will no longer attain to their elevation.<sup>7</sup> Albert Einstein said something similar:

*“So many people today – and even professional scientists – seem to me like somebody who has seen thousands of trees but has never seen a forest. A*

*knowledge of the historic and philosophical background gives that kind of independence from prejudices of his generation from which most scientists are suffering. This independence created by philosophical insight is – in my opinion – the mark of distinction between a mere artisan or specialist and a real seeker after truth.”<sup>8</sup>*

An approach that has been helpful to me, is offered by the Prussian strategist Carl von Clausewitz. “Theory cannot equip the mind with formulas for solving problems, nor can it mark the narrow path on which the sole solution is supposed to lie by planting a hedge of principles on either side,” he wrote, “But it can give the mind insight into the great mass of phenomena and of their relationships, then leave it free to rise into the higher realms of action. There the mind can use its innate talents to capacity, combining them all....”<sup>9</sup>

Thought is a journey without a finish. It is solitary. To use the consoling words the American writer Robert Kaplan once offered to me: “Thinking is loneliness.” We are the emperors of our own mind. We should never accept suzerainty in that regard. There will be many conversations along the way, sometimes with likeminded companions. One meets them as often in books as in life. Niccolò Machiavelli, for instance, felt very lonely with his thoughts, but described to a friend how he conversed with his friends in old books: with Aristotle, and Homer, with Thucydides and Livy – and Dante. He described how he returned to his cottage in the evening and entered his study, how he took off his clothes of the day, “covered with mud and mire”, and how he, decently reclothed, entered the ancient courts of ancient men, where they received him lovingly. “I feed on the food that alone is mine and that I was born for,” he wrote, “Here I am not

ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions and they in their humanity reply to me. For the space of four hours I feel no boredom, I forget every pain, I do not fear poverty, death does not frighten me.”<sup>10</sup> Wandering is hard and our brains dislike doubt. Doubt and disorientation tire. Humans are programmed to avoid becoming tired. Education should help citizens to persist on their journey and avoid settling in early conclusions. This book offers to be your thought-provoking companion for a while, but also encourages you to find other companions and to continue your own way.

Writing a book is like a pause on a journey. One looks back from a hill top, from a quiet island, or from the clearing in a forest to give meaning to the observations along the way. I recollect to have been lonely at the beginning, when I was among the few in the capital of Europe to argue that hard military power mattered, that economic security was important, and that trade was not vanishing the fault lines between states. My region, Europe, would not be allowed to retire gleefully in its postmodern vision of peace, solar panels, and bicycle lanes. I was an outlier in the debate, a doomsayer, a protectionist, a hawk. Doors closed, several of them. But the world changed. Europe’s power declined and authoritarianism around Europe became more brutal. Russia attacked Ukraine. The mood shifted to realism. Ministers, business people, diplomats and generals came to me. “You told us so, you were right.” The centre of the debate shifted accordingly. By then, however, I had moved on myself. Today, I still insist that military power is important, that we need to reduce our economic dependence and that we have to stand strong towards aggressors. But I came to understand that there can be no hard power if the inner-sanctum of virtue is not respected.

Important events revealed that necessity to me. When the European Union slapped sanctions on Russia after the annexation of the Crimea, in 2014, several interest groups, like farmers demanded “to give Russia back” as an export market. When European states tried to counter Russian disinformation campaigns, intelligence services found that technically difficult, but also concluded that the core vulnerability was Europe’s declining political trust; not the penetration of Russian agents. “They lean against an open door.”<sup>11</sup> When China retaliated with economic sanctions against Lithuania for the latter’s deepening relations with Taiwan, most Lithuanians turned against their government’s policy.<sup>12</sup> When the European Commission launched its Global Gateway, an attempt to balance China’s Belt and Road Initiative, large companies and private investors balked. External policy demands internal support: in terms of power and legitimacy. Statecraft cannot be confined to the government. The whole state needs to be involved. “When rulers leaders see nothing around them but dumb despair or culpable indifference to the highest interests of the state, or satisfaction at their dissolution,” the Austrian statesman Friedrich von Gentz contended, “they must possess more than mortal energy, and more than human wisdom to preserve the people from ruin.”<sup>13</sup>

Admitted, several arguments in this book are not original, and why should a book always have the pretence to be original? Is there not a profound silliness in the way writers pretend to have concocted revolutionary ideas, with creative titles, schemes, and captivating revisionist arguments, while the same insights have been formulated in slightly different ways, many times before? Is it not even more senseless to try to rally readers by highlighting how different opinions are, while the common ground is sometimes much larger, to

pretend that that compromise is impossible, while ideas are not mutually exclusive? To initiate a battle of magnifying glasses that establishes how different thinkers are, while there are so many common themes throughout their work? I prefer to be a little bird, roaming the forest of books, looking at it from the vantage point of different trees, trying to sing a song now and then, and attempting to build a nest with pieces of wisdom from different places. I read, listen, observe, and interpret, intrigued and sometimes excited, and try to write the result down. Each generation passes down the wisdom of the past, complements it with new insights, approaches it from a different context, and tries to make it relevant for the future. The reader will often discover suggestions for a balanced approach, perhaps to the point that it becomes enervating. This is not because of a hesitance to take strong position, but because, Aristotle in mind, statecraft requires moderation and balance.

This book is thus eclectic, and difficult to put in one of the traditional schools of thinking about politics and statecraft. It agrees with political realists that the state, power, and state interests are the driving force of world politics, and that this often leads to competition. International politics is tragic. The ever-changing balance of power, emotion, and misunderstanding make it tragic. It agrees with neorealists that states are locked in a highly competitive system and that this makes lasting cooperation difficult. States have no choice but to adjust their policy to the balance of power.<sup>14</sup> Anarchy often exists between states and inside states. Both forms reinforce each other. As a first-row spectator of that tragedy, you can curse, lament, and shout; but it rarely changes the plot. We must be aware of the tragic character that world politics has showed throughout history. The book takes issue, however, with the way

neorealists demoted internal qualities of the state, like virtue.<sup>15</sup> Balancing without taking these issues into consideration cannot be effective. Think again about those Europeans demanding politicians “to give Russia back” and to end their sanctions. Hard and economic power depend of soft capabilities, like pioneering, entrepreneurialism, and ethics. It is indeed difficult to go against certain traits, like short-sightedness and selfishness. Trying to promote active citizenship is a humbling endeavour as well. Still, as sceptics like Raymond Aron also avowed, states should try.<sup>16</sup> They should have an ideal, and work towards it.

In that regard, this book is closer to classical realism. In Reinold Niebuhr’s words, statecraft aims to find the point of concurrence between the parochial and the general interest, between the national and the international in an interconnected world. It tries to foresee the future but is also conscious of the limits of citizens’ knowledge.<sup>17</sup> We find a similar notion in Hans Morgenthau’s work. Like Niebuhr, he contended that the national character, the moral determination, and the capacity to mobilize national capabilities are important determinants of the state’s ability to respond to external challenges.<sup>18</sup> Virtue and the quality of wills and minds are also important.<sup>19</sup> “A government that is truly representative, not only in the sense of parliamentary majorities, but above all in the sense of being able to translate inarticulate conviction and aspirations of the people into international policies, has the best chance to marshal the national energies in support of those objectives.”<sup>20</sup> Without virtue, material capabilities are a ship without a helmsman or a compass. Classical realism shares the scepticism of neorealists that states are forced into a reactive modus with regard to the balance of power, but offers additional insights into how states can balance



at the level of security by building resilience at the level of economics, education, science, and morals.

This opens the door to constructivism. Material power is crucial, but material power depends on immaterial factors: virtue, entrepreneurialism, justice, and so forth. Power is shaped by ideas.<sup>21</sup> Hard power, military force and wealth remain indispensable, but what allows for the accumulation of it, is a raft of soft moral standards and civic qualities. Hence, the metaphor of a citadel, towering, in a way, but with its main bastion, its inner-sanctum, consisting of tender moral qualities, its bricks being the dedication, strength, and passion of every single citizen. The inner-sanctum is the incubator, the source of intrinsic motivation that powers all the rest. Ideational empowerment, it will show, is difficult, but possible – to some extent. On the other hand, however, the book remains sceptical towards the optimist claim of some constructivists that the very nature of world politics can change, that people can transcend the local pull of politics and become world citizens. Even for the elite, world citizenship is often shallow. For the society as a whole, the sedentary nature of life, and limitations in terms of time to process information, cosmopolitanism remains even more difficult to achieve.

It also holds elements of liberalism. While the state is the main building block and will seldom be able to guarantee a free and fair exchange with other states, it should work towards an open, diverse, and free internal market.<sup>22</sup> But liberalism is about more than openness; for that one-sided notion will devolve into opportunism and laxity. Liberalism first of all requires the emancipation of citizens, so that they do not feel lost in a context of openness and use their liberty virtuously. That is also a core conviction of the Enlightenment: liberty combined with dignity and responsibility. Liberalism also demands

for transparency, for citizens to be able to make “Enlightened” choices. That is essential for democracies; but also for the market. Complex supply chains and globalization can indeed help foster productivity gains, but only if it is clear what the costs and benefits are at different stages. This also applies to the environmental impact. Environmentalism is often described as a “new school” in international politics, but the preservation of natural resources and environmental resilience is as old as writings about international politics. States must carefully manage their natural resources and limit environmental hazard. Harmony with nature is an attribute of state power.

## Scope

This book is an invitation to reflection and exploration. It is not a theory or manifesto; it is a compilation of ideas that will continue to mature. It combines insights from other thinkers, but also observations from my many activities close to policy and practice, which I wrote down in the last twenty years. The focus remains on the state, which can be defined as a society and its government, bound by a border. The first chapter clarifies what it means to conduct statecraft. It dwells on the motivations to work for the state, as well as the pitfalls in that regard, such as narcissism, intellectual retrenchment, and demagoguery. Leadership, the chapter argues, is not the same as wealth, fame, or votes; it is about the legitimacy that allows you to use these assets to engender change. It is what makes people move in the right direction.

Chapter two addresses the cosmopolitan claim that global citizenship is more relevant than patriotism. The chapter concludes that neither cosmopolitanism nor

patriotism have a decisive moral authority. Still, two factors make patriotism more compelling. The cosmopolitan enjoys his discoveries, not because the differences between states are effaced, but because they persist, because of the diversity between states and not their uniformity. Cosmopolitanism also becomes escapism if it does not take responsibility for local issues. Building on these observations, chapter three argues that for all the recurrent predictions that states would disappear, states are resilient as an organizing unit. Furthermore, states benefit from the pull of place, the gravity of geography. Despite communication and globalization, humans remain local in their activities, their orientation, and their contacts. States also benefit from the fact that megacities, the main nodes of globalization, are balanced by towns and villages in their hinterland.

Chapter four clarifies the purpose of the state. It is to maximize its power with an eye on security and happiness. Security can be pursued in different ways: pacification, protection, and empowerment. A good security policy puts the emphasis on the latter. Power remains the best guarantee for security, as it allows for resilience and flexibility in responding to a broad range of threats. Power is the means, security a necessity, and happiness is the ultimate goal. While the state should not impose a notion of happiness, it is important to reflect on what happiness could be, for only that allows to direct the energies and ambitions in a responsible direction. The chapter posits that we know quite well what happiness is when we combine philosophy, psychology, sociology, and neuroscience.

Chapter five dwells on the meaning of power. Power allows states to make their own choices and to influence those of others. Power *can* lead to influence.

This chapter insists that states must steer clear of a rigid neorealist fixation with economic and military power. Hard power and wealth cannot last without virtue and common values. Power is a means to realize values and ideals – to make dreams happen. The remainder of this chapter clarifies the nature of a state’s power. It proposes that power is comprehensive and broad, that all power is relative, that the pursuit of power requires virtue, and that the subtle realm of low politics is at least as decisive as the dramatic realm of high politics.

Statecraft, the construction of a citadel, starts with moral empowerment. Moral empowerment, chapter six explains, does not discard the scepticism about the stubbornness of human nature and the difficulty to achieve it. The required investments are significant, whereas the gains will not always be straightforward. Parents have to spend time raising children. Community service is a must. Schools should be supported. Civic education and moral empowerment come with risks: the risk of going too far, of not doing enough, of doing the wrong things. Balance is advised, balance between teaching and exploration, between harmony and diversity, between deliberation and authority, between mildness and perseverance. In any case, moral empowerment demands for existential and fundamental ethical questions to be asked, about the purpose of life, society, and the state, about human nature, for liberal arts, advanced philosophy that allows citizens to reason and discover the merit of an argumentation, aesthetics, and, still, perseverance. Moral empowerment means that citizens aspire the good things in the most difficult circumstances.

Chapter seven deals with governance. It starts by suggesting that the form of government is insufficient to guarantee political effectiveness. A true democracy can

be considered superior, but a true democracy is hard to build. Many democracies sing their own praises, but are flawed in different respects. They might have the mechanics of a democracy, the checks and balances, the voting procedures, but not the spirit of a democracy. Hence, the main question should not be how power is divided, but what is done with it. This chapter identifies and elucidates eight key attributes of good governance: representativeness, clear responsibilities, accountability, just authority, the monopoly of violence, protection of property, the rule of law, and oversight and foresight.

Chapter eight pays attention to nature. One must never accept the myth that the state must no longer care about natural resources, this chapter asserts. It discusses land, water, food, energy, minerals, and the importance of a healthy ecosystem. Overall, it is important for the state to remain close to them, to be aware of their importance, whether they are found domestically or abroad. Using them carelessly is a waste of power. Statecraft demands knowledge of the land: its natural endowments and its scarcity. From that knowledge, states must balance short-term availability and affordability with other factors like sustainability and security. It should relentlessly aim at efficiency and preservation. Prosperous states manage nature; prosperous, healthy, and happy states remain close to nature.

It is difficult for poor states to become rich, yet also for rich states to preserve their prosperity. Chapter nine proposes six cardinal balances for sound economic policy. States should maintain a proper balance between private and public initiative in the economy. The degree of state control is not so determining for economic dynamism. What matters more, is the extent to which efficiency is advanced through mechanisms that reward

actors that contribute to the long-term interests of the state. The state should also guard a proper balance between extrinsic material and intrinsic humane progress. The yardstick of growth is not only the production of goods and services, but also the capacity for furthering human fulfilment, identity, and so forth. Third, states should balance domestic and external interests. States will always depend on other states. Yet, to make independent choices, economic exchanges should be equitable and external dependencies should either be avoided or diffused. Fourth, states must balance between transparency and complexity. Specialization, division of labour, and global supply chains are inevitably complex. But a market also requires transparency so that consumers are allowed to make rational choices and the state must retain oversight in order to assess the benefits of international economic exchanges. States, and this is a fifth task, need to balance ends and means, and guarantee that eventual debt helps to make the economy stronger in the long run. States, finally, have to preserve a healthy equilibrium between different sectors: primary activities, manufacturing, commercial services, and public services.

The following chapters engage the diplomatic and military dimension of statecraft. Chapter eight argues that diplomacy is an instrument for the state to leverage its power towards other states. The main task of the diplomatic service is hence to use the power of the state to develop foreign relations that benefit the power of the state. Diplomatic power is shaped by the power of the state, combined with superior knowledge and superior bargaining skills of the state's diplomatic service. The first section asserts that such sense of realism and humility is key. The task of diplomats at the service of the state is not to change the world, but to help change the world by allowing their state to preserve the power to

advance its values and ideals. State diplomats must heed the escapism of cosmopolitanism, as well as the lure of going native in the states where they are posted. This sense of realism is no pretext for opportunism. Virtue is to be displayed in diplomacy. Deceit and excess will be punished. Diplomacy must display respect, prudence and moderation. The final sections of this chapter develop on the duty of the diplomat, the character of the diplomat, diplomatic information and diplomatic bargaining.

Military power is not meant to advance world peace but to contribute to the security of the state. Like any weapon, it must be handled with care. In that regard, excessive influence of the military forms as much a risk as the recklessness of politicians who in most states command the armed forces. Quality and quantity, we also concluded, are both important. A state cannot choose between technology and soldiers, for instance. It needs both. Similarly, it is also an illusion for states to be able to choose between offense and defense, between territorial and foreign operations. States must preserve enough military power in comparison to their foes. Ideally, such balancing happens in a gradual and measured way, combined attempts at transparency and dialogue. Sudden and aggressive balancing is often the consequence of a period of ignorance and the lack of balancing. A precondition for measured and gradual balancing is that the state remains alert to threats. To that end, the armed forces must have the capacity to gather intelligence, to reflect, to carry out strategic foresight, and to communicate their findings transparently. Why civilians should keep a check on eventual military recklessness, the military certainly should keep a check on civilian recklessness.

This overview makes clear that the book is broad introduction. Its objective is to provide the reader a framework that explains how the different domains of statecraft are connected. It is important that the practitioner specializes, but it is equally important that the practitioner remains aware of the context in which he or she specializes.



# I

## Crafting the state

Before you begin exploring statecraft, you must ask yourself why you want to make this journey. Why do you read about statecraft? Why do you care? In any case, you are not alone. Every year, hundreds of thousands of students enrol into political science programmes, traineeships in government, political parties, and so forth. But why statecraft? Of all crafts, statecraft is a very difficult one. Few things are more challenging than to craft a state. You could have imagined easier projects. A life in an ivory tower, for instance, observing through a narrow embrasure how the world unravels, or a life fleeting on the wide oceans of the global market, drifting from the one shore to the other depending on the winds of fortune. You could *use* the state, to pursue fame and wealth, while you make it look like a noble deed of *servicing* the state. There is no better disguise for opportunists and narcissists than pretending to work for the state. One of the most important threats to statecraft is a lack of introspection and misplaced claims of leadership.

It is with small contributions that the prosperity of a state is built. Merit is not only to be found in the achievement, but in the tenacity of trying – even when everything around seems to be more bound for tragedy than for prosperity. Merit is not found in the acquisition of fame, votes, and wealth, not even in the gaining of power, but in how that power is acquired and used. It is often said that power is all that matters, while virtue is elusive. Yet, when the fame and votes are gone, when the self-confidence of the moment makes place for introspection and concerns about the future, when

children and grandchildren judge their parents, the next generation writes the history of the previous generation, differentiates good from bad with dispassionate detachment - virtue is ultimately all that matters.

Yes, some people remain incorrigible and are buried with their illusions of benevolence. Literally. Kings extorted and killed people, just to take their opulence and prestige to the next life. That megalomania has left us the pyramids of Egypt and the terracotta army of China. It is not different in our times. However much a former German prime minister was scorned for selling his services to Russia, he maintained that he did not make a mistake. Even when a former Belgian prime minister was widely criticized for his bad policy and for becoming a lobbyist for a Chinese company, he persisted that his critics were silly and xenophobic. In those cases, however, their children will bear part of the disgrace as long as they bear the name of their opportunistic parents. You can buy a lot for your children, but you cannot buy the honour and respect of generations that look back. Moreover: not all leaders evade introspection. Some of the greatest leaders, like Frederick William of Prussia, Louis XIV, and the Han Emperor Wu, were at pains when they wrote their heirs with spiteful lessons from their reign: "If later generations repeat what I have done, this will be following the path of the fallen Qin," admonished Wu, "Be careful-do not choose reckless or base actions."<sup>1</sup> It is this small jewel of wisdom that each generation of teachers and thinkers passes on to the next.

While they try to highlight their originality, their innovation to what was said in the past tends to be limited. The more books about statecraft you read, the more you notice that the same warnings, the same debates, and the same frustration comes back

continuously. The old is repeated with new vigour and in a new context.

So, what are your motivations to help *crafting* the state, or, at least, to understand it better? This chapter first lays out the pitfalls – including aspirants with unclear motivations, the lure of so-called leadership programmes, and groupthink – as well as ways to circumvent them. Subsequently, it elaborates on leadership as well as the many false and flawed forms of leadership which consists, as you will discover, of a whole circus with lords of the flees, wizards, and bull fighters. Leadership, this chapter argues, is not the same as wealth, fame, or votes; leadership is about the wisdom and legitimacy that allow you to use these assets to engender change. Leadership is power combined with wisdom and legitimacy. That is what makes people move and move in the right direction.

## **Phaethon**

Writing about good statecraft is a feeble antidote to bad statecraft. Writers have formulated similar warnings in the past. Throughout history, scholars wrote mirrors, or *specula* for princes, long volumes about history, philosophy, and ethics. Kings themselves invested in the education of their princes. One Chinese emperor famously instructed his children discipline and morals in what was called the room of no leisure. The Greek writer Xenophon relayed to us the idealized account of how the first king of Persia saw to the grooming of his son, Cyrus the Great. He wanted him to act “like a man of years.”<sup>2</sup> The French monarch Louis XIII wrote a long, affectionate letter to his son, the crown prince, advising him prudence, compassion, and rigour. But from the moment that the Dauphin became Louis XIV, the youthful king embarked

on risky conquests. He himself braved musket salvos and led the charges of his troops. At the court, he spent lavishly. Only when the Sun King grew older, scourged by loss and poor health, he returned to the counsels of his teachers and set off to write a long letter to his son, the new Dauphin, passing on the counsels he emphasized: prudence, compassion, and rigour. Humbled by decades of turbulence, he suggested the Dauphin to learn from past experiences, yet also avowed that at an early age, when life is propelled by restlessness and ambition, it is almost irresistible to chase fame. Wisdom usually reaches maturity when defeat and pain have revealed the limits of fame. "It may be, my son," he wrote, that you will read these advises "at an age when one is far more in the habit of dreading than loving it."<sup>3</sup>

Hence, Louis XIV, thinking back of his own dashing into prominence, phrased his letter with tenderness and the expectation that it might not entirely be appreciated by the Dauphin. The tale of Phaethon must have been in the king's mind. It tells how Helios lost his reckless son because he could not prevent him from racing a golden chariot pulled by furious stallions. "He does not know where he is, or where he is going, swept along by the will of the winged horses." The Gods made an end to the wild ride and Phaeton crashed. Louis XIV had the tale of Phaethon casted into a statue in a lake of Versailles and written into an opera. Icarus is a similar tale. Icarus and his father Daedalus escaped from Crete using wings of wax and feathers. Daedalus warned his son not to fly too high in the heat of the sun, yet Icarus ignores him. Like Phaethon, his flight becomes uncontrollable and his adventurism led to his own demise. Power and the impatience of youth are a combustible combination. There is another factor, that aggravates its effect: flatterers. Talented, impatient

people, on the road to power, often find themselves surrounded by servants and advisers who fire them up, like Phaethon did with the horses of Helios. That, too, is an important warning: distrust flatterers. Distrust the cheering crowd. But once you step into the chariot, we learn, it is very difficult to rein in on the excitement.

These concerns are not limited to rulers of a distant past. I recollect a hard-hitting conversation with the late Peter Sutherland in a hotel lobby in Lisbon. We were both about to catch our flight after a meeting: me in coach, he, I surmised, in his private jet. Peter was tired and pensive after a day of meetings about the state of the world. "Sometimes, I wonder what our generation has done with our society. We have enjoyed wealth and power, but we have to put our children in gated communities and houses with a panic room. Their world falls apart inside and outside. Have we done the right thing?"<sup>4</sup> At the age of seventy, my interlocutor had seen it all. He had just retired as chairman of the world's largest investment fund, after having been head of the World Trade Organization, European Commissioner, and the highest legal advisor to the Irish government. "I think our main problem was that we did not take enough time to reflect on what the purpose was of what we were doing, that there had to be more growth and more of everything, but that the meaning of it was not properly thought through," he continued, "Along the way, we lost the confidence of too many people and, frankly, I am not always confident myself anymore. We must now invest all our efforts in the next generation."

What ruins our character, Seneca remarked, is the fact that none of us looks back over his life.<sup>5</sup> The Greek orator Demosthenes spoke in that regard of the risks of a fast life.<sup>6</sup> Power, impatience, and apparent success do not accept to be slowed by introspection. It is often said

indeed that introspection and doubt impede the accumulation of power, that decisiveness is the foremost quality. What is more, once pretenders to power unleash their energies, they turn against any hindrance of introspection that is on their way. Conscience is but a word that cowards use, devised at first to keep the strong in awe, fumbles Richard III in a play of William Shakespeare. The Roman statesman Cicero, tried to warn the new generation of leaders in his republic against such recklessness. "Let those who are to preside over the state obey two precepts," he wrote, "one, that they so watch for the well-being of their fellow-citizens that they have reference to it in whatever they do, forgetting their own private interests; the other, that they care for the whole body politic, and not, while they watch over a portion of it, neglect other portions." Cicero was murdered by one of the politicians he criticized, the hand with which he wrote his diatribes symbolically cut off. It is sometimes said that the pen is stronger than the sword and that virtue is supreme, but the sword and vice must never be underestimated.

The suggestion that resolution is more important than introspection, as Shakespeare's Richard III formulated, is dumb. Without introspection and orientation, politics cannot be effective. So, there will be new counsels for new generations. But how can they have impact? The founding fathers of the United States asked themselves that very question. They too were concerned that the young and ambitious state would forget about the principles in the constitution, that the pursuit of liberty would become decoupled from dignity, and give way to partition and barbarianism. In his farewell address, the first president, George Washington, reiterated the importance of virtue and discipline. Thomas Jefferson suggested to keep the constitutional

spirit and the comprehension of the constitutional qualities fresh in mind by having a nation-wide mandatory meditation about the constitution every nineteen years. In some states, senior leaders are required to pass an education programme focussing on the common good and the constitutional principles. A professor of the Chinese Central Party School explained to me: "Ministers and leaders of large companies must be specialized and professional, but they must be faithful to the state and its values first."<sup>7</sup> One might deride this as Communist Party propaganda, but is it that harmful to extract such power brokers from their daily rush to think and discuss for several months about the purpose of power?

The two most powerful examples I can offer at this point come from the military. One of the most accomplished officers in the United States armed forces was James Mattis, a Marine who fought in Afghanistan and Iraq and became Defence Secretary. During a meeting in Washington D.C., he referred both to the British historian Barbara Tuchman's book *March of Folly* and the Greek philosopher Aristotle. During a conversation, he once stressed that history and philosophy books were his compass. Everyone should find a quiet moment each day to read. In a memo, general Mattis summarized it thus: By traveling into the past, I enhance my grasp of the present.<sup>8</sup> In other words, you can be strong and resolute, but without the compass of intelligence and wisdom, you get nowhere. Nowhere else I experienced that more compellingly than in some trainings I took with the special forces of my country. During a winter night, we were dropped individually. Snow covered the environment, faded orientation points, and hung around me like a fluorescent haze. If I would have relied solely on my resolution and strength, the

heavy terrain and backpack would have exhausted me without getting closer to target. To make progress, my fragment of a map and a compass were more important, and allowed me to set a straight line, an azimuth, and to ultimately reach the target. But the most important I learned, were the regular azimuth checks, brief moments in which you verify whether you are on the right track. Even a small deviation over a long distance can make you completely fail to reach target. Wisdom and virtue are to statecraft what that little compass needle meant during the dropping.

There can be no success without an inner compass, without meditation. While giants, from Louis XIV to George Washington, were not confident about the impact of their counsels, it is even less evident for an academic like me to expect impact. Still, if one chooses to serve the state, one has no other choice but to try again to reiterate one's concerns, as eloquent as possible, hopeful of influencing some, but also with the acknowledgment that nothing is more difficult to guide than ambition, impatience, and power. All matters of importance are profoundly humbling; otherwise, they cannot be important.

## **Motivation**

A first pitfall for people considering to work for the state concerns a false start because of unclear motivation. Serving the state is often explained as an existential choice.<sup>9</sup> We are through others, affirm our identity through others, and build our status through others. Serving many "others", in this case the citizens of a state, is thus a powerful way to give meaning to life. If the strongest and most lasting form of happiness is to do



good and to align success with virtue and honour, helping to empower the state becomes a relevant choice. More practically, the public sector in many states offers opportunities to remain close to others, to work with and for other people, to take initiative, to improve society, and to gain recognition. Private flourishing depends on public flourishing. These motivations, such as altruism, mission valence, and transformational opportunities are so-called intrinsic motivations.<sup>10</sup>

But the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations is not always clear. The desire to accomplish yourself might presuppose that you think that there is a lot to accomplish, that you are confident. And are those virtue-seeking humanists not the ultimate narcissists? One can deride the billionaire for trying to build a base for life on the moon, but what then about the politician who seeks to influence the lives of a whole society, of millions if not hundreds of millions of people, the top-diplomat who expects to shape the course of world politics? The writer trying to give advice and expecting you to spend time on his book? Is not serving the state and receiving praise for the sacrifice the ultimate form of fame? Does the longing to shape the society, to tackle its many complex challenges, the explicit or tacit notion that we know better, not attest to immense self-confidence? Research indeed confirms that persons with a strong need for admiration and power feel more attracted to politics and civil service.<sup>11</sup> Many serve their own ego by pretending to serve the state. They come to suffer from a Messiah-complex.

The state also offers opportunities for a steady life. Beyond the visible high-fliers, the state can be a sanctuary for droves of mediocre security seeking employees, attracted by a reasonable salary, job-security, longer holidays, and often less pressure to perform than in

comparable activities in the private sector.<sup>12</sup> Research shows that external motivations are particularly compelling for those with fewer professional qualifications.<sup>13</sup> The same also applies for politicians. Less competent politicians often do not get the same rewards in the private sector.<sup>14</sup> “We are the professional politician generation, aren’t we?” a British politician remarked.<sup>15</sup> When serving the state becomes a job and politics becomes a profession, the self-questioning disappears. It impedes renewal and the rise of a new generation. It might very well be that talented youngsters are at the start driven by intrinsic motivations, but after a while, the seat in parliament becomes seen as an entitlement, because of excessive belief in one’s qualities or because there is no alternative that is equally as lucrative.

The combination of low intrinsic motivation, low qualification, high external motivation, and relatively high salaries is devastating for the functioning of a state. On the one hand, it breeds a caste of technocrat-bureaucrats and bureaucrat-politicians that come to function like a caste disconnected from the society they serve, or as Franz Kafka wrote, a castle. In that castle, he described mockingly: “The officials are well educated, but only in a one-sided way; in his own department, an official will see a whole train of ideas behind a single word, but you can spend hours on end explaining matters from another department to him, and while he may nod politely he doesn’t understand a bit of it.”<sup>16</sup> The Greek tragedian Aeschylus gives an equally powerful characterization in *Frogs*. “So now, because of him, our city here is crammed with bureaucratic types and stupid democratic apes who always cheat our people,” he writes, “Nobody carries the torch – no one’s trained in that these days.” On the other hand, however, external motivation

leads to populism. Politics becomes like an enterprise, a permanent market campaign with a major rendezvous with shareholders once every four years. This political entrepreneur is a pleaser. He will tell his possible clients and shareholders what they want to hear, confirms them, legitimizes them. Once again, the self-relativization vanishes. Like a small company, the political entrepreneur must sell-himself 24/7 and adjust his inner convictions to the mutterings and the sentiments that he picks up outside.

Hence, the first challenge is unclear motivation. It is not evident for young adults to orient themselves. Many students enrolling into related educational programmes in humanities have less clear expectations than, say, students in medicine, or engineering. They first want to discover society and sometimes have a broad notion of desired change. That is positive. But if inquisitiveness, independence, and curiosity are not properly sparked during these early years, public service becomes a fall-back option for security seekers and shallow narcissists. The first encounters with statecraft can be overwhelming and create an appeal that is based on pomp rather than passion: the ambassador showing up at a reception with canapés and champagne, the minister arriving in a chauffeured car, the general carrying his ribbons, the high-ranking official with his badge dangling, the advisers in the back row, and other subtle symbols of status, hints at secret insights, and signalling of power. Few things are more gratifying to such high-flyers than to be admired by a group of fresh students. Few things are easier for a university lecturer to make himself favoured among students than to give them an apparent exclusive moment with a high-flyer.

Promising young professionals will often encounter such pitfalls. They will receive invitations for

young leader programmes: visits abroad, conferences, and so forth. Hosts will make them feel important with as end goal to make themselves, their state, their organization, their vision, and so forth, more important. Sometimes this happens subtly. It concerns a tacit reward system that makes you receive more invitations, access to important personalities, opportunities to take a podium or to write for prestigious magazines as long as you remain supportive, enthusiastically share experiences on social media, and so forth. This is quiet incorporation. The rules and expectations are unspoken, yet by being incorporated and by receiving those opportunities, one no longer wants to miss them and thus accepts the unspoken rules and self-censorship. In extreme cases, these leadership meetings are unconcealed carnivals of narcissism. Once I was invited to a prestigious international forum, dedicated, as it said, to “build a better world”. Together with other so-called global shapers, we enjoyed an exuberant lunch and drinks in a five-star hotel in Istanbul. Subsequently, we were herded into a meeting room where a smartly-dressed communication director extolled for two hours how bright and important we were, and that we were so lucky to soon meet the upper-priest of the organization. When he arrived, late, obviously, the communication director went all out to state how grateful we should be that this guru shared some of his precious time and that it confirmed our role as shapers to carry out the ideals of the forum. Such meetings can be a very interesting social experiment if you do not get carried away. Otherwise, they do elicit a culture of vanity, where prestige, privilege, and thoughtless loyalty come first.

## Intellectual retrenchment

The latter phenomenon is related to a second pitfall: intellectual retrenchment or groupthink. Several times, I was invited in debates with politicians, all of them flanked by one or two communication advisors. One of these debates was on Dutch television with the young president of a green, humane, progressive party. He entered the lounge with three communication advisors, young professionals sporting expensive baskets. They nodded hastily to the other guests and retreated to a corner of the lounge. The politician had spent a long time in the makeup room. In no way, I felt the warm, human touch that the party claimed to stand for, and the smile he occasionally threw made me think more of the Joker in the Batman movies. But then, I felt pity. Visibly tired, he was pounded by his communication advisors. "When he says this... you should say that." Or: "Remember that we must highlight this..." Or, again: "It is important for our party to say this..."<sup>17</sup> A few years later, I was invited by a politician to participate in a book presentation. It was an interesting book about defence and the politician himself knew a lot about the matter. But from the moment we entered the scene, the many interesting observations from the book made place for visceral attacks against the defence minister, who was from another party, and his supposedly crooked ideology. What was expected to be a debate about defence and international security became a tirade aimed at domestic political opponents.

Early adulthood is an important moment of orientation, a moment of alignment towards groups and identity formation. Political parties, ideology, activism, and institutions offer opportunities in that regard. But this is often followed by narrow or negative self-

affirmation, with hostility towards 'the other' turning into the main driver of engagement. It takes a while of wandering to explore and understand the complexity of our society. Wandering is often uncomfortable, as not all tracks are beaten, nor are they all clear. Wandering, the introduction recognized, comes with doubt and loneliness. Doubt is unpleasant. Many young people therefore tend to settle down early, to identify themselves with a single theory, party, institution, or ideology, and to stop wandering. This is comfortable in a way, but it leads to a situation that crushes the mind and exterminates the inquisitive and empathic mind-set that is required to advance towards leadership.

Such young settlers become like a goat that is chained on a stick. First it comfortably munches the grass on the fringes. It tastes good. It tastes like more. There is more grass outside the perimeter that the chain allows to reach. But that would require efforts to break the chain and to venture into unknown territory. There is also some more grass in known territory, towards the stick. Most goats will continue to graze in circles around their stick, happily bleating. When at some point the chain of comfort gets stuck around the stick, the circles will become smaller, and it becomes a very choking experience. It will exhaust the goat so much that it will hardly get on its legs again. A first challenge is to avoid to become the goat around the stick, to preserve the inquisitiveness, perseverance, and empathy to wander, to explore, and to learn to know the world around you in as many of its aspects, as many ways of thinking as possible.

But this is not only a matter of personal motivation. Even for the free minds, professional context is often a funnel trap. If you enter professional life with an open, investigative mind, you will encounter so many limitations and constraints, that the mind is once more

nudged to close. The ideal of governance is that it recruits and promotes talented people that are best placed to defend the interests of the state. Meritocracy with an eye on the general interest. It starts with the idea of superiors being committed mostly to the public good, trying to find talent that can support organizations to serve these lofty objectives, and only as a next step considering how these talents can blend into the specific constellation of personal interests, expectations, and preferences.

Reality, however, is often the opposite. If you are talented and hard-working, you should expect yourself to be more likely perceived as a threat rather than an ally. In reality, the benchmark of merit is rarely the contribution to the general good, but rather the contribution to the interests and preferences of the person in charge. Public sector employees get privatised. Instead of the intrinsic quality to contribute to the general good, an important criterion for selection for important positions, even after formal and anonymous recruitment tests, is personal likeability, loyalty to personal or institutional interests, ideological conformism. Servility is often more important than strength. Obviously, those in senior positions and their organizations will claim that they serve the general interest, but when they allow others in, compliance matters more than courage. Some superiors do not search for the brightest, but try to lock potential competitors out and accordingly surround themselves with lackeys. Career often becomes a mental funnel. The immensely difficult task for young talent is to be aware of this reality from the start, to balance between a certain degree of conformism that is often a requirement to secure a position and the courage that is necessary to keep an eye on the general good and to keep questioning whether the organization contributes to it, to balance between the need of access to organizations, of a

good salary on the one hand, and, on the other, independence. The worst possible scenario for the state is a combination of narcissists seizing power and timid opportunists serving them.

There are as many different paths to the world of statecraft as there are personalities. Some of the brightest and most dedicated professionals were timid and hesitant at the start, kept doubting for a long time about the ethics of party politics or bureaucracy, yet struck a healthy balance between being loyal to the organization and staying loyal to their inner convictions – and made an impressive career. Others swore to become the next minister or ambassador before they even earned their bachelor degree and lost themselves in their own ambition or in a world of flatterers. Cultivating intrinsic motivation and keeping an eye on your internal moral compass, is vital. Few are those who wish to be endowed with virtue rather than to seem so.<sup>18</sup> External motivations are important, but they should not prevail. Besides unclear motivation, one should be aware of incorporation, intellectual retrenchment, and the funnel traps on the road of one's career.

These traps can be circumvented. A first rule of thumb: do not tie yourself too early. Job hopping, travel, and interning can all help to keep the horizon sufficiently wide. Professional life often lasts well over forty years. However tempting they are, instead of quick wins and fame, it is the life-time achievement that matters. Career-building is a marathon, not a sprint. It is normal to have a *sturm und drang* moment at the start. Professional agility comes later, cruising altitude probably between 45 and 55, and the age of true acknowledgement between 55 and 65. What matters is what you obtain at the finish. Second: a job remains a job. You work to live; you do not live to work. Work involves about a third of your time as an



adult. Life outside work is as important. Cherish it. Protect it. Personal growth requires leisure and liberty. Take a break or a sabbatical once every five years. Spend time outside the echo chambers. Volunteer in grass roots organizations a few times a month. Read widely. Change newspapers now and then. Read with an open mind the authors that you do not agree with. Listen with an open mind to what your opponents have to say. Learn new things. Explore new disciplines.

Third: Do not become a salary slave. Let your lifestyle lag a few pay scales behind what you earn. Ensure that you can quit. Diversify your options. Prevent that an organization makes your skills and knowledge so narrow that you become dependent on it. An organization that asks you to sacrifice your strength and growth for the sake of the organization is not a good organization. Do not become a narrow-minded technocrat: they make bad leaders. Fourth: Build in azimuth checks and frequently verify your moral compass. Sit down once every month and ask what the meaning is of what you do, whether its contributing to a strong society, and whether your organization is loyal to its mission. Loyalty without a moral compass results in docility. Fifth: always remember that the loyalty of a civil servant should first be with the state; not with an organization and individuals. Work for the state if your personal values align with its constitutional values. Compromise when the short-term damage done by it remains smaller than the long-term good that you can realistically expect as a result of this compromise. Confront whenever you have the power to do so and your sacrifice does not make the threat stronger. Quit when there is no way out. Sixth: empower yourself and seek allies. Finally: Do not fool yourself over any of these matters.

## Demagogy

“What qualities distinguish an individual as a leader?” the Greek-Roman historian Plutarch asked. Like in many other domains, one of the pitfalls of statecraft is that too many people think too fast that they are a leader. To lead, the dictionary says, is to make others go with you. Leadership is power connected to qualities like wisdom, vision, courage, and virtue. A society has handlers, skilful in executing a part of a process. It has managers, capable of shaping processes. It has leaders, capable of shaping the destination of those processes, the final direction in which energy is conducted.

In this regard, every profession matters. Craftsman, teachers, nurses, and other jobs are equally important. It is not only what you do that matters; but how you do it. The teacher that takes responsibility of a part of a process, not merely executes it but reinvents it, shows excellence, and energizes his colleagues. The teacher who uplifts the spirits of the thousands of students he has in his class during his career, can be more a leader than an education minister who tweaks the budgets and organization here and there. The craftsman or engineer that is not satisfied with existing ways of production, considers the changes around him in challenges and possibilities, revolutionizes production processes, and sets a new example in terms of technology, quality, and sustainability, is obviously more a leader than the president of the board of a multinational that mostly prioritizes the results of the next quarter and just follows the flow.

During a board meeting of a large multinational company in the retail sector, we discussed for several hours the importance of sustainability. The president had carved herself a reputation in the public debate for

highlighting health and nature. For that reason, she was a popular guest in talk shows and conferences. Yet, when I asked her in private after the board session how she thought to persuade consumers and to compete with cheaper retail chains, she answered: "At the end of the day, we can only go with the flow."

What explains that so many think of themselves as a leader without actually leading? An explanation is indeed that wealth and fame are considered synonyms for leadership. These attributes of power are a condition to lead and to influence the behaviour of others. But they are no guarantee. A democratically elected politician likes to think that he is a leader because he has a lot of votes. The demagogue that gets ten million votes but affirms his people in passiveness, has less power, though, than the politician that gets one million votes and arouses them to action and to change. The entrepreneur that makes a lot of profit by sustaining a decadent and unsustainable social model, might find himself a genius of daring and innovation; he remains more the equivalent of a drug dealer. The billionaire that prides himself on his artistic taste and his arts collection but grows his fortune on an economy of waste and pollution remains a barbarian. You can buy arts and fame, but not civility and honour. Rich people without wisdom and learning, the ancient Greeks had it, are but sheep with golden fleeces. A general that leads a brigade with bravery to the wrong war, is at best a manager, a commander, passing on the wrong decisions of his political superiors. He is a soldier sporting stars, not a leader. There are hundreds of ways to amass wealth and votes, but genuine political power is measured by the ability to keep your people on the path of virtue. Think of a gorilla in a circus cage, the biggest ape of his troupe, thumping on the chest, charming a female or two, but still going nowhere and remaining a

primitive entertaining the people in an iron cage of customs.

In that circus of would-be leaders, we also find the lord of the flees. This performer will invite visitors to look at his spectacle through a magnifying glass and make them think for a while that this tiny arena is all that matters. In the giant arena of society, the lord of the flees builds his tiny arena. Taming his small drove of flees, he feels all-powerful as long as he captures the attention. There are numerous examples. Consider the general that proudly reports having killed a terrorist leader, yet ignores the broader fight that he is losing. Think of the CEO who announces having made tremendous progress putting some solar panels on the roof of his warehouses, while the goods inside the warehouse continue to be imported from polluting states by polluting ships, brought to consumers by disposable workers that are treated like the goods themselves: without much care. Think of the politician that pretends to rescue his civilization by keeping out immigrants, while all he showcases, is the kind of rudeness, boisterousness, and flattery that brings a civilization down – leave alone that he has a vision for solving the many problems in the state of origin: poverty, bad governance, violence. The lord of the flees creates himself a mini-arena of potency to hide his impotency. He beckons his audience, which happily accepts the invitation to watch this micro-arena from above, instead of looking up at the real arena of world politics from below.

Or what to think of the wizard. He cannot be absent from our circus either. Like the caged gorilla and the lord of the flees, he masters the tricks of the circus: sensation, distraction, and illusion. But if the lord of the flees fashions the magnifying glass, the wizard is all about interstellar telescopic experiences. Great sensations.

Big ephemeral visions that carry the crowd away. Basic income, for instance, a universal income for all, presented as the ultimate antidote to all economic problems, or a canon of historical moments and personalities to rescue the culture and tradition of a region.

A fourth figure is the bull fighter, who gets the public on his hand by braving danger, sword in his hand, driving both his crowd and adversary to madness. He incites anger, passion, and energy, and directs it at a common enemy, the bull, which he promises to bring down. That enemy can be everything: a political opponent, another state, a minority group, a class. The advantage of bull fighting is that the audience can remain passive. It can show rage without having to be brave. The main problem with circus acts in statecraft, is that they put the would-be leader in the centre, make the game centred on his act, while the public remains seated. A true leader, on the contrary, puts the spotlights on the spectators. The stand where they seat becomes the arena of change. Furthermore, circus acts destroy perspective. Whereas not all the acts are entirely elusive or wrong, the show and its suspense ignore the wider context.

Leadership is often poorly understood. There are numerous leadership programmes, leadership courses, leadership books. Leadership is frequently thought to depend on the number of people obeying, the turnover of the company, or the wildness of visions. Many self-declared leaders are followers; they thrive on the society as it exists and do not necessarily try to help it progress.

Leadership depends on three core qualities: wisdom and virtue, legitimacy, and power. Wisdom and virtue are the most important ones. They require experience, study, and maturity. Leadership is a matter of standing tall, of having a broad whole-of-society and global view, a knowledge of the context which allows you

to set the right priorities. Leadership depends on the courage to confront citizens, to tell what they should hear, not what they want to hear. Leadership is about the deep moral authority that stirs the readiness to put the bar higher, to raise sights, and to work hard to get there. If votes and wealth put you in a position to make people pay attention to you; effective power is the capacity to influence their behaviour.

### **Wisdom and virtue**

A Chinese philosopher wrote: "A frog in a well cannot discuss the ocean, because he is limited by the size of his well. A summer insect cannot discuss ice, because it knows only its own season. A narrow-minded scholar cannot discuss the natural order, because he is constrained by his teachings. Now you have come out of your banks and seen the Great Ocean. You now know your own limitations, so it is now possible to discuss great principles with you."<sup>19</sup> The science of our time remains a kaleidoscope. It carves, categorizes and coins new concepts. If previous ages were focussed on attaining the bird's eye view of philosophy, today's social science is like a puddle full of frogs, each frog hardly able to look beyond the edges of his own lily pad, let alone beyond the banks of his puddle.

This is also true for the academic debate about statecraft. Some academics have narrowed statecraft to the use of economic tools in foreign policy, like sanctions and trade embargoes.<sup>20</sup> Others have defined statecraft as the skill to use the information and experience of international technocrats.<sup>21</sup> Statecraft has also been interpreted as the capacity to regain economic autonomy from other states or to make economic growth less

polluting.<sup>22</sup> However relevant these studies are, academic microscopism seems to coincide with political microscopism, or technocracy. Perhaps, the tendency towards microscopism at universities is even partially responsible for grooming a generation of politicians that either gets lost in endless details or stays on the surface of ideology.

True statecraft combines both perspectives: the view of the bird and the perspective of the frog. The ideal preparation allows to gain experiences in a series of concrete policy domains to master detail and to keep an eye on the horizon. If we compare a statesman, as for instance Plato did, to a helmsman, it is not sufficient just to know about the food stored inside the ship or about operating the small trysail, about the demeanour of the cook or the night-watchman. A helmsman knows his ship by knowing a little bit of every part of the ship, but also about the storms, the currents, and the stars, so that he can safely navigate. It is this knowledge and experience, the eye for the small and the endless, that should give the helmsman his authority to fulfil his most important task: to ensure the efficient functioning of his crew. Indeed, a good helmsman relies for his navigation on the dedication of his crew members. He is the ultimate system integrator. His mind depends on numerous other minds. His steady hand on the wheel relies on numerous other hands. In his role, hence, resides both supreme ability and supreme modesty.

Yet, times have changed since Plato. Society has become more complex and nobody is capable of mastering all the details alone. Statesmanship has been replaced by anonymous technocrats, lawyers, experts and computers. This evolution comes with risks, though. States consist of human beings and humans often become nervous if there is no transparency, if there are no clear

assessments, no clear choices, no clear decisions. Legitimacy depends on transparency. Particularly in times of crisis, societies tend to resurrect against vague and undetermined leadership. Imagine a large cruise ship that gets into stormy weather, with the only message blaring through the corridors: "No panic, the automatic pilot system will sort it out." Human beings will always want human leaders. Furthermore, a lack of transparency in statecraft will lead to the denial and demise of responsibility. The helmsman will blame the navigator, the navigator the radioman. Even in tranquil seas, states cannot afford governance to become a technocratic haze. Statesmanship cannot afford to get estranged from the fundamentals of society or to be alienated from what it leads. It needs to be close to the turbulent history that shaped society, to the core interests, virtues, and ideals that historic sacrifices were made for and to the people he serves, feel their passions, energy, hopes, and fears. It has seen the vessel of the state in all its important compartments. To lead, you need to know what you lead. It is a permanent interaction between large and small.

## Legitimacy

Plato's metaphor of a helmsman is closely related to another metaphor that has been commonly used throughout history and civilization: that of a herdsman.<sup>23</sup> The herdsman, which is, by the way, also staged by Plato, combines the instinct of the flock with wisdom. He draws his legitimacy from being *with* the flock; not from being part of the flock, but from guiding it and protecting it. The legitimacy of a herdsman depends on balancing wisdom and power. If he uses power without wisdom, if he becomes brutal, the flock will scatter and chaos follows;



if he has wisdom without power, the flock will scatter when it confronts threats. But it remains a difficult balancing exercise, to guide without becoming deceitful and arrogant; to stand tall without becoming imposing. Try to become a role model to the people, not their rival, Seneca advised, "Inwardly everything should be different, but our outward face should conform with the crowd... Let our aim be a way of life not diametrically opposed to, but better than that of the mob. Otherwise we shall repel and alienate the very people whose reform we desire."<sup>24</sup>

The images of aristocracy, of the helmsman and the herdsman seem at odds with an emancipated citizenship. And has the educated elite in the West, the elite that had huge opportunities to chart the way towards a better society, not been utterly deceitful to that society, leading to a backlash in which nobody trusts nobody anymore? And has that elite, while asserting its moral superiority, not just paid attention to its personal achievement rather than to the achievement of the whole society and the state? The elite has become a caste. It emancipated itself while forgetting to emancipate the rest, creating the most advanced discussion clubs, in Davos and Aspen, high-level advisory groups, conferences, magazines, and programmes for itself, without making the slightest effort to engage with beyond.

An elite talking to itself: This is a recurrent problem. Once you have a small group of like-minded people, you feel less urged to look beyond. Think of ivory tower academics; or for the same token the higher ranks of diplomacy or the military. They all claim to be far ahead, but they are often far ahead alone, not followed and often even resisted by the proverbial flock. Legitimacy is vital for a helmsman or a herdsman. It is built on his wisdom, the fact that he looks for the next

promised land beyond the next shrub, knows how to protect it. The relation of trust is the result of a long investment: time, sacrifice, as well as presence.

A state draws power from its scale, its ambition, and its efficiency. In the scale of the state, however, resides risk: the distortion of transparency and instinct. Imagine wild sheep high up in the mountains. Seasons change and they sense it. One by one they slowly migrate to the lower valleys. Now a predator closes in. Each herbivore is on its own and remains on its guard. As soon as it feels the slightest danger, it runs away. Each sheep is vulnerable and is aware of that. Adaptation in such context, whether as a response to slow changes or imminent threat, is organic, individual and diffuse. Now imagine a flock of domesticated sheep. The sheep on the outside might not realize that the grass is eaten on the inside of the flock and those in the middle not be aware of the dangers that lurk on the outside. They draw confidence from the size of the flock, the sheep dog on watch and the shepherd whom they expect to lead them to better pastures. Each sheep is vulnerable but is less aware of it. It responds less organically to change, certainly when the dogs are sleeping and the herdsman prefers to stay in bed or does not know what he is doing. But when it responds, it does so with greater force.

Humans tend to operate like a domesticated flock: a flock of impaired individualists. This argument will be developed in the following chapter. For now, it suffices to restate that flocks respond slower but with greater force to change and became used to rely on others for direction. Let us develop the metaphor a bit more. At some point, the flock's lush mountain pasture is eaten and the winter arrives on the hilltops. The flock gets restless, but has no instinct to find its way up or down the hills, does not know what dangers lurk in the forest. An

inattentive herdsman could have closed the pasture, yet fails to see the problem, so that infighting starts and members of the flock start to die – the weakest first. An inexperienced herdsman could try alleviate the stress with a little hay that he has stored, losing more time to get his flock down to the lower valleys before snow arrives. An even more inexperienced herdsman could also open the gate and follow his equally inexperienced flock to the hunting ground of wolves. The herdsman follows the nervous flock.

It is the same with statesmanship. It is not the sheep-hook that makes a statesman, but the wisdom and experience to lead, and to lead at the right moment. In the same way, it is not popularity, prestige, financial power, or the number of votes that create statesmen; it is what they do with it. It is very likely that the herdsman that kept the flock a little while more tranquil by bringing in some hay, was very much liked, until winter arrived and it was too late to move. And so might the flock have had very high expectations of the daring inexperienced herdsman who opened the gates. Those sheep followed him, bleating the lungs out of their desperate bodies, until they were decimated in the valley of wolves. Compare the first example to recent economic policy in the West. A good herdsman could have seen it coming decades ago that the lush plain of consumerism, opaque services, and polluting imports was untenable. But the most common response was to keep the society passive, by “feeding” it even more cheap imported goods, by pumping money in the economy without a strategy for making it contribute to new sources of prosperity, by soothing the crowd that everything would be fine. The policy was popular but only increased the adjustment shock. And when such a shock arrives, the political entrepreneurialism of passivity is often quickly replaced for the political

entrepreneurialism of anger, of blind self-defeating nationalism. Think of the American President Donald Trump, who achieved nothing with his buy-American slogans, besides even higher external deficits. A herdsman is ahead of his flock and ahead of the challenges.

The shepherd is a universal metaphor for a good leader. We find it in Plato, who likened society to a herd devoid of horns, but also in the works of the Chinese philosopher Mencius, in Buddhism, and in the stories of the African Songhai. Such image might smack of paternalism. Indeed, Plato described humans as sheep-like, creatures that can easily be misled, whose appetite is more developed than their courage. Evidently, there is a certain degree of paternalism in the metaphor. But it remains relevant. Other disciplines also highlighted this. Sigmund Freud wrote of humans as an obedient herd. Humans might be concerned most of the time with their own little part of pasture, they function like a herd. John Maynard Keynes referred to contagious animal spirits. Recent sociological and neuroscientific research confirmed it.<sup>25</sup> Like groups of animals, humans move purposefully, but only few have pertinent information as to where to travel.<sup>26</sup> Leadership thus remains vital.

If it remains difficult to accept this modest assessment of human nature, perhaps it is easier to accept that the flock of society is permanently challenged, and that it is immensely difficult for the individual, if only because of his limited time, to be always aware of the influences that are at work: the financial markets, the incessant advertisements, the cultural hegemony, as Antonio Gramsci put it, that often unconsciously aligns our ideals and identity with the interest of the strongest. Admittedly, many self-proclaimed leaders are also influenced by those powers and it would not be

appropriate to replace the one hegemony of ideas by the other. Yet, a true shepherd should keep an eye what is in the general interest, on what is virtuous. And if the virtue of the authoritarian ruler of Plato and Mencius is no longer acceptable to many of us today; a modern shepherd should not necessarily be a king and could keep an eye on the virtues that his society agreed on, on the virtues that are enshrined in the constitution; on universal human rights.

### **Holding the helm**

This chapter listed important pitfalls for aspiring leaders. Wrong motivations, a shepherd more fixated with his next roast than the long-term wellbeing of the flock, is a first pitfall. A second pitfall is that the herdsman comes to think and act like a sheep, or conforms with his flock. Leadership requires wisdom, legitimacy and power. Two questions, however, will continue to nag. Thinkers of all eras and regions envisioned helmsmen, herdsman or guardians to stand apart, to be ahead, or above even, and to be indispensable to guide a society or a state: Plato, the Old Testament, Augustine, Machiavelli, Boccacini, Nietzsche, and so forth.

Yet, it has also been stated, again and again, that leaders tend to go with the flock and not really lead it, that they are part of the flow of time, as Heraclitus would have put it, part of a *Zeitgeist*. "The best leaders can sense the winds of change and adapt with the times," was recently written in a renowned business magazine.<sup>27</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte himself stated: "I may have had many projects, but I never was free to carry out any of them. It did me little good to be holding the helm; no matter how strong my hands, the sudden and numerous

waves were stronger still, and I was wise enough to yield to them rather than resist them obstinately and make the ship founder. Thus, I never was truly my own master but was always ruled by circumstances."<sup>28</sup>

This might sound humble for an emperor, but Napoleon knew that he could never have advanced if there would not have been the restlessness, fear, and anger that had built up during centuries of autocracy and was released with the French Revolution. Disregarding the question whether he was a good leader, Napoleon was the culmination of centuries of change, not the cause of that change. Internal change in France, with the monarchy exhausting the treasury. Intellectual change, with generations of enlightenment thinkers clearing the ground for liberty, equality, and brotherhood. Franciscus van den Enden, defended this credo a century before the Revolution, but the king, still strong, had him executed. International change also played a role, the expansion of Great Britain, the Habsburgs looming over most of France's land borders, and the American Declaration of Independence, which was equally a culmination of centuries of passions that had built up.

It is important to guard against both extreme interpretations. Leadership does require to recognize that it is difficult to change society; but that can also be a guard against volatility. A society, a state, and global politics will also continue to consist of many different "flocks" of ideas, interests, cultures. They will go in different directions. But the well-shepherded flock that most happily finds the lushest meadows, will likely prompt others to follow. Leadership is often about triggering small changes, with the idealist hope that they amplify, yet with the realism to understand that this is not an automatic given.

## II

### Patriotism and cosmopolitanism

The previous chapter stated that leadership is the combination of power, virtue, wisdom and legitimacy. But if wisdom is so important, why should we limit ourselves to the finite realm of the state instead of considering the world? Why should we accept its borders when the world is knitted together by common interests and communication? Should the future not belong to cosmopolitans instead of patriots, should we not love the whole world instead of only the state or the *patrie*?<sup>1</sup> In the history of political thought, the promise of cosmopolitanism and the pull of patriotism have been like *yin* and *yang*. Cosmopolitanism means that one aligns his loyalty with the whole world and considers that universal values should be pursued universally; a patriot directs it to his state.

Young readers likely favour cosmopolitanism. Young people feel a strong drive to explore the world. (Yes, some stay young for ever in that regard.) If you are young in the West, you also have more opportunities to explore the world. You are more likely to have money to travel and it is also rather easy to roam the world with a passport from a rich state. Cosmopolitanism has become fashionable because the age of globalization expanded trade and communication. "Digital natives are born global citizens."<sup>2</sup> Many challenges are global: climate change, for instance, or, for the same token, information security, gender discrimination and weapons of mass destruction. The patriot might try to defend his borders, but many of these issues are no longer stopped on the border, if only because they are invisible or indivisible.

Global challenges demand global solutions – and global solidarity.

This chapter finds that that both approaches – patriotism and cosmopolitanism – have flaws. Yet, two elements make patriotism more compelling and a precondition for cosmopolitanism. On the one hand, the cosmopolitan enjoys his discoveries, not because the differences between states are effaced, but because they persist, because the diversity between states is articulated in arts, culture, and so forth. On other hand, cosmopolitanism tends to be escapism if it is not matched by a feeling responsibility with regard to local issues. Building on this argumentation, the following chapter explains that the pull of place remains stronger than the promise of cosmopolitanism and that the state as an organizing concept has outlived many challenges.

## **On patriotism**

Patriotism means devotion to your state, it is a sentiment of love and fellowship that ties citizens together.<sup>3</sup> But, critics remark, how many times has that love for the state not been misused? Patriotism can be a pretext for abuse, “the last refuge to which the scoundrel clings”. Those scoundrels have been kings, who used their patria as a preserve for predatory taxation, a prison in which the weak are exploited by the strong. What are cities, states and kingdoms but workshops of avarice?<sup>4</sup> Examples are countless. The ancient Indian vedic stories gave a prominent place to the Sreshthin, close to the king. He was an influential businessman. Ancient Chinese records report several occasions in which large land owners became extremely powerful. The historian Polybius describes how a group of businessmen from Southern



Italy had greedily eyed the rich soils of Sicily and advocated expansion, but also how the state had weakened its position through what we would refer to today as outsourcing. "Every transaction which comes under the control of the Roman government is farmed out to contractors," he complained.<sup>5</sup> Or what to think of the powerful family of the Fuggers that bankrolled the Habsburg empire; the trading companies that drew states into colonial adventures. And how many other states did not depend on private foreign lenders to fund their armies. As King George III put it: "This war, like the last, will prove one of credit." Think of the settlers and traders that spearheaded colonialism, in Ancient Greece, at the time of the Srivijaya Empire in today's Indonesia, or at the time of the East Indian Company. The flag followed the trade.

The state as an instrument of the rich was also exactly what Karl Marx had in mind. He saw industrialists exploit the monopoly of violence of the state to pound down labour union protests. Or consider the self-declared freedom fighter that sells out the mineral wealth of his state as soon as he becomes president. Or the way states have become a bonanza for professional politicians, consultants, and lawyers. Think of the many interest groups milking the state's subsidies and shaping its tax laws for private benefit. For decades, Western companies relocated their activities to emerging economies and downscaled their presence in their home market. But when they started to recognize the economic nationalism of those emerging economies, they went back to "their" government to explain that state security made them entitled to get subsidies. "There is not a foot of land in the world," wrote Marc Twain, "which does not represent the ousting and re-ousting of a long line of successive 'owners' who each in turn, as 'patriots' with

proud swelling hearts defended it against the next gang of robbers who came to steal it and became swelling-hearted patriots in their turn.”<sup>6</sup> The shield that is supposed to defend the common good of the state is often used to defend the private good of the few.

Patriotism is said to impede cooperation and to catalyse war. It is seen standing in the way of empathy between nations, and considered a relentless internecine desire for self-affirmation. “Patriotism is a kind of religion,” wrote Guy de Maupassant, “it is the egg from which wars are hatched.”<sup>7</sup> The *patria* is possessive, it closes, comes with border markers and walls, not bridges and ports from which explorers leave. Patriotism is a kind of attitude in which the success of one’s neighbour becomes a threat, or at the very least a catalyst of envy. As Voltaire put it: “Such then is the human condition, that to wish greatness for one’s state is to wish harm to one’s neighbours.”<sup>8</sup> To be a good patriot, critics hold, means to be an enemy to humanity. This enmity between states prevents them from standing up to common challenges, such as environmental crisis, financial instability, smuggling, and piracy. This is referred to as the collective action problem. But it also holds smaller states back from working together when their common security is imperilled by rising empires. “In my humble opinion, there is no better plan for the king than to unite the six states of Han, Wei, Qi, Yan, Chu, and Zhao in a vertical alliance to oppose the Qin,” advised Su Qin, a strategist in ancient China. Yet, again and again, the Chinese states at that time relapsed into infighting. In the Bible’s Isaiah, God summons the Biblical kingdoms to form an alliance against the rising Assyrian empire: “Band together, you peoples!”<sup>9</sup> Still, those alliances did not last long. When the Ottoman Empire closed in on Europe, the pope despaired: “You Germans who do not

help the Hungarians, do not hope for the help of the French. And you Frenchmen do not hope for the assistance of the Spaniards unless you help the Germans. Now that Mehmet has conquered the Orient, he wishes to conquer the West.”<sup>10</sup> Hence, patriotism, while it is claimed to protect the state, puts the state on the path of peril. How can a small state protect its borders against formidable external threats?

Furthermore, the obsession with borders dissuades internal efforts at augmenting the state’s power. Conservative notions of territory and history, if not balanced by a plan to progress, deter patriots from the task of reinventing the sources of social resilience. On the other side of the border, the world continues to change and the balance of power keeps shifting. Imagine a dam separating a small lake from a very big lake, and leave aside the question for a moment whether this dam is desirable. One can try to elevate the dam, but the only way to keep it upright is that the two water levels do not differ too much. Borders and isolationism offer limited protection to shifts in the balance of power. Preserving the balance of power requires hard work and dedication of all citizens. But once again, patriotism can deviate attention from the fundamental sources of power, such as civic engagement, dignity, and entrepreneurship, to exterior symbols of power, like flags, hymns, and parades. It can shift the dedication from one’s society to a shallow disdain for others, from the focus on one’s own responsibility to an obsession with responsibility of others, and from the focus on one’s task to live life to the fullest, to scorn for the lives of others.

So, the readiness to sacrifice is exchanged for complacency and complacency leads to ruin. Examples of the shallowness of patriotism are endless. After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, for instance, drivers put patriotic

bumper stickers on their car throughout the United States, oblivious to the fact that those cars often ran on fuel sold by the very states that offered sanctuary to terrorists. The same British Brexit-patriots that rallied to end the alleged dictatorship of the European Union sought closer cooperation with dictatorships elsewhere. The prime minister of Hungary patriotically profiled himself as the shield of Europe towards migrants from the South, but put his state's gates wide open to competitors from the East. Or think about the European centre politician trying to rally national unity politely by cheering a national football team whose players hardly pay taxes, play for clubs financed by authoritarian competitors, and use sport stadiums abroad that are built by modern slaves.

In extreme cases, patriotism becomes so vicious that it turns against its own guardians, maddened by a pretence of glory and incited by opportunists for whom the state is but a cover-up for self-enrichment. Indeed, it has been insisted that patriotism does not resign citizens from the plight of an open mind-set. Theodore Roosevelt insisted that one of the most patriotic duties is to remain critical. But is not that kind of enlightened patriotism utmost utopian? Does not the very promise of patriotism combined with the innate limitations of the human mind inevitably lead to problems? Can we expect humans to tolerate the discomfort of uncertainty and moderation, once they have erected their banners patriotism? Are critical voices not silenced by people who deem criticism unpatriotic? What about Socrates? He defended that his criticism of the state was an expression of his devotion to the state. I am the gadfly, he stated, while the state is like a great and noble steed who is slow in his motions owing to his very size and requires to be stirred into life. Socrates was forced to drink the fatal cup of hemlock.

Patriotism maddens, Socrates' death sentence showed, it kills moderation and introspection.

No other pretext for greed and short-sightedness is so commonly used as a flag. Patriotism, this section shows, can be a pretext for private exploitation, the state being instrumentalized for private gain. Patriotism can impede cooperation with regard to common challenges and can incite wars. Protectionist patriotism, fixated on the status-quo of borders, hardly helps to defend the state against rising empires and can ferment complacency behind the borders. The state, indeed, becomes the empty fortress that was presented in the introduction. Patriotism can become an alibi to escape from the individual responsibility on which the strength of the state depends, a fig leaf that masks complacent pride, and the venom that kills its own guardians. There is not the slightest reason to take issue with these critiques. They are important and valid: one after one. Yet, this criticism addresses the abuse of patriotism, not patriotism itself. Patriotism, it was signalled at the outset, implies devotion, love, and fellowship. In that sense, to be sure, it remains an ideal. The real manifestations of patriotism often deviate from that ideal. To hate the other is often easier than to show dedication. Yet, as long as we accept ideals to remain important, the criticism of the abuse of the ideals does not render the ideal as such worthless.

### **On cosmopolitanism**

"Oh my God, look at that picture over there! There is the Earth coming up. Wow, is that pretty!" A day before Christmas, in 1968, three astronauts navigated a spacecraft over the dusty surface of the moon. And there it was, rising like a sapphire lit up from the darkness, a

precious gem in the boundless cosmos: our blue planet tenderly swaddled in white plucks of clouds. Apollo 8 offered a new perspective on earth. In the infinite galaxy, this was our crowded ark of life. Suddenly, the borders that humans had drawn across that planet seemed meaningless, distance on earth trivial, and the obligation to work together to protect this delicate blue gem manifest. The astronauts of Apollo 8 affirmed a timeworn argument: the world is our village, and we are world citizens – cosmopolitans.

In each era, people have wanted to become citizens of the world, to break loose from boundaries, ignorance, and intolerance. They have tried to aspire towards universal peace, knowledge, and love. Yet, while cosmopolitans pretend to be detached from state power, a first important criticism is that they depend on the superiority the state. Cosmopolitanism is an expression of power, a preserve of citizens sitting at the top of the food chain, combining wealth, with education, and the freedom to travel at will. Think of the famous essay of John Maynard Keynes. “A citizen of London,” he wrote, “could secure forthwith, if he wished it, cheap and comfortable means of transit to any state or climate without passport or other formality, could despatch his servant to the neighbouring office of a bank for such supply of the precious metals as might seem convenient, and could then proceed abroad to foreign quarters, without knowledge of their religion, language, or customs.”<sup>11</sup> The world looks peaceful when it lays at your feet.

Paternalism characterizes this cosmopolitanism of the powerful. The world beyond the capital is their hunting ground for business and adventure, an object of study. The superiority of openness is also used paternalistically to force weaker states to tear down their

defences. The weakness of distant societies leads the cosmopolitan to make confident notes in travel diaries about curious savageness. Think of the Greek historian and traveller Herodotus. He came from a rich family in today's Turkey and wrote about other peoples as wild beasts. Zhang Qian, the ancient Chinese traveller and diplomat, departed from the bedazzling palace grounds of the Han Emperor. He reported how communication through interpreters allowed to interact with "nations holding widely different customs".<sup>12</sup> Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Battuta both descended from rich and cultured families in Andalusia and Morocco, worked at the court and travelled through parts of world in which Arab was the lingua franca. They displayed a distinct racist attitude towards both white and black people. Zechariah Aldahiri was a wealthy poet-traveller from Yemen. He left his wife to travel the surroundings of the Indian Ocean, moved to India, got a new wife, voyaged to Persia, married once more, and, ironically, captured the observations during his wandering in his *Book of Moral Instructions*.<sup>13</sup>

The world is a book, it is said, and you have only read the first page of it if you have only seen the motherland.<sup>14</sup> The cosmopolitan lifestyle is often held to be morally superior to the narrow-minded patriotic deplorable. Think of *Davos Man*, as the political scientist Samuel Huntington named him, Davos Man who considers himself "committed to improving the state of the world". Davos man who feels little need for national loyalty, considers national boundaries as obstacles, and national governments as residues whose only useful function is to facilitate the élite's global operations.<sup>15</sup> But what is morally superior about it? He is certainly not more ethical, as his club happily provides a forum to dictators in exchange for sponsoring. He is not necessarily more caring about our planet, as he travels

first class. He sees no problem in driving a Tesla and cheering the company's owner as he lobs fuel-guzzling rockets for billionaire tourists into space. There is no more pleasant way to rescue the world than *Instagramming* with a well-fed stomach from the soft calf leather backseat of a chauffeured Bentley that drives you back from another inspiring conference to the stylish calm of a private jet. He is not necessarily more enlightened either. He sees things bigger, but not always more sophisticated and clings as much to slogans as the sedentary deplorable he despises.

The home of these wealthy cosmopolitans is often the seat of empire. Cosmopolitan visions of universal harmony tend to be the constructions of states that benefit from the harmony. In China, for instance, Confucius wrote that all within the Four Seas had become his brothers. The four seas, the geographic horizons of Ancient China, referred to the South China Sea, the East China Sea, the Qinghai Lake, and the Baikal Lake. These horizons were imperial boundaries, with Chinese dynasties "pocketing all within the Four Seas and swallowing up everything in all Eight Directions." Plutarch aptly observed that the Greek city states looked at the inhabited earth as their stronghold. The Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius called himself a citizen of the world while commanding his legions to occupy a significant part of that world. The Indian Maurya Emperor Ashoka embraced the syncretic concept of *dhamma*, an expression of universal harmony, but only after decades of military conquest. The Indian Mughal Emperor Akbar promoted the Sufi principle *Sulh-I kul*, or universal peace, after having subjugated them by the sword. The Pax Sinica, Pax Romana, Pax Americana: what would they be without power? Cosmopolitan places of learning, such as the Academy of Athens, the



Sasanian Academy of Gondishapur, Abbasid House of Wisdom, the Songhay Academy of Timbuktu, the National Geographic Society were the intellectual manifestation of empires.

A first critique of cosmopolitanism concerns thus its claim of ethical supremacy. If cosmopolitanism is said to replace the narrow-minded strife between states by a world of equals caring for the common good, it often becomes an expression of a hierarchy, a lifestyle of powerful individuals living in powerful states. Similar to the discussion of patriotism, deviation from the ideal image of cosmopolitanism does not instantly disqualify that image. Still, in this case, we need to ask ourselves whether cosmopolitanism would be possible without the accumulation of power: the leisure to study, the wealth that is needed to travel. And can such wealth be accumulated without the state? So, if cosmopolitanism pretends to transcend state power, a characteristic on which it founds its claim for ethical superiority, does it really do so? Clearly not.

Cosmopolitanism also tends to pay more attention to the range of the exploration than to its depth and intensity. The cosmopolitan's love of the world, empathy, and understanding tends to be superficial, because he explores the world often literally through a fast-lane, chasing bucket lists at cruising altitude. This cosmopolitanism of the strong is about the romantic consummation of curiosities while remaining in the safe sphere of universal truths. Again, this can be seen as a criticism of the abuse of the ideal of cosmopolitanism, the cosmopolitanism of genuine explorers who fulfil their desire to understand by becoming a little bit sedentary at the places they visit. If one accepts this qualification, can we still expect to become genuine cosmopolitans? How much time does it cost to go native in different

civilizations? Is it possible when we often cannot even grasp the diversity at home? Will it not lead to cherry picking? Furthermore, and we will come back to this, what does the cosmopolitan himself contribute to the world's treasure of cultural diversity? The least we can conclude at this point is that ethical cosmopolitanism is far from evident and perhaps even less feasible than benign patriotism.

There also exists an anti-elite, dissident strand of cosmopolitanism. Perhaps the purest form of cosmopolitanism is the acceptance of a life of wandering, a life in which the forces of the world are accepted instead of repelled by means of walls, borders, and institutions. Only if we forego a sedentary life of possession, it assumes, we can be truly free. Yet, their ascetic liberty also proved to be a source of vulnerability. The Greek philosopher Diogenes called himself a citizen of the world, compared himself to a street dog, and relished a life without possession. "The earth belongs equally to all," he said, "undivided by walls or fences."<sup>16</sup> But he too could be deprived. After all, he hated it when others threw a shadow on him when he was taking a sunbath. The Chinese thinker Zhuang Zi advocated a life of wandering without destination. "Beasts that feed on grass do not fret over a change of pasture; creatures in water do not fret over a change of stream."<sup>17</sup> He suggested to enjoy the music of nature, the rustling of the weeping willows, but found himself deprived of that peace by the violence of the city. Saint Paul, the wandering apostle, can also be counted among them. "There is no longer Jew or Greek," he said, "there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female." Paul was tortured to death. The life of wandering cosmopolitans is a life of sacrifice that exerts limited appeal.

Stoic thinkers caution against wandering, but see cosmopolitanism as the acme of a steady mind. To them, cosmopolitanism is a component of existentialism. They propose a constant interplay between the search for a steady inner life and the experiences of the outer life. Becoming at peace with yourself and becoming at peace with the world. It was Epictetus who coined *polites tou kosmou*, citizenship of the world. Cicero, who embraced elements of stoicism, argued: "And when he has studied the heaven, lands, seas, and the nature of all the things and got a grip on the god who guides and rules these things and has recognized that he is not bound by human walls as the citizen of one particular spot, but a citizen of the whole world, as if it were a single city – then in this perception and understanding of nature, by the immortal gods, he will know himself."<sup>18</sup> Philo of Alexandria suggested that self-improvement required an individual to abandon his national customs. His contemporary, Seneca, held that the world is our state. One of the most powerful stoic works making the case for cosmopolitanism, is Justus Lipsius' *On Constancy*. The high mind, it held, is not troubled by what he cannot change and does not allow itself to be locked up inside narrow borders. But how agonized Lipsius was to see his hometown burned by foreign troops and to be forced to seek refuge abroad. How hard it was to show constancy amid that hardship. Almost all the works of thinkers inspired by Stoicism, like Cicero, Seneca, and Lipsius display this curious tension between the cause for resignation and the torment experienced when witnessing their state in crisis. If we exist partially *through* others, can it be that our inner world is not shaken by the turbulence of the outer world? Can there be constancy in a world that is not constant? It is easier said than done.

Cosmopolitan pacifism is displayed as a reaction against imperialism. Early traces of cosmopolitan pacifism are found in the Old Testament. It imposes constraints on war and prohibits the destruction of precious olive groves. During Spring and Autumn, a period of anarchy following the downfall of the Chinese Zhou Dynasty, competing states signed agreements about arms limitation, food prices and the role of women in diplomacy. Treaties were negotiated and kept in a palace of treaties, very much like the United Nations. Against that backdrop, Mencius stipulated that a virtuous man sees all those under heaven as his overriding responsibility.<sup>19</sup> Cicero established in his *Duties* that justice can only be secured when humans are bound by moral standards across borders. Natural law, he believed, implied harmony with universal principles of nature. Many of these natural laws were universal. Not only states were bound by cosmopolitan rules; their citizens were so too. Following that line of thought, Seneca proposed *ius humanum*, or human right. That human right also applied to slaves. Please remember, Seneca advised, that the person you call a slave rose from the same seeds, enjoys the same sky, and breathes the same air. As the horizon of world politics was regional, much of the thinking about peace had universal pretences, yet remained regional in its reach: the Ummah radiated from the Middle East, Christian peace from Europe, Buddhist peace from parts of India.

The Age of Enlightenment heralded the end of these regional boundaries. Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace*, published in 1795, articulated this new spirit of pacific cosmopolitanism energetically. Kant proposed three definitive articles. First, he argued, there should be a global republican constitution, an *ius cosmopolitanicum*, that provides in legal equality. "Man and nations stand

in mutually influential relations as citizens of a universal nation of man.”<sup>20</sup> Second, he proposed a pacific union between states. “Peace becomes a duty.” The third definitive article suggests all citizens to offer universal hospitality to each other. Cosmopolitanism, he asserted, entails cultural understanding, rational thinking, and free trade. In the following century, this argument would be supported by inventions. Steam engines and the telegraph were seen as “assembling all mankind upon one great plane, whence they can see everything that is done and hear everything that is said and judge of every policy that is pursued at the very moment those events take place.”<sup>21</sup> In the twentieth century, thinkers continued to develop on this idea. In the footsteps of Kant, Hannah Arendt proposed four cosmopolitan conditions: the recognition of living with other people, the need for engagement, the receptivity to the new, and acceptance that nothing is complete.<sup>22</sup> Mahatma Gandhi put it thus: “I believe that, if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him, and if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent.” Jacques Derrida echoed this.<sup>23</sup> He called cosmopolitanism forgiving, hospitable, and welcoming. The League of Nations and the United Nations embodied the hope for some universal government that would have the power to enforce universal laws and to protect citizens whoever the perpetrators of violence would be.

*“We the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations*

*large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, and for these ends to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples..."<sup>24</sup>*

Cosmopolitan pacifism is a beautiful idea. But as we questioned the gap between ideal and feasibility in case of benign patriotism, it becomes a ravine in case of cosmopolitan pacifism. How can we expect brotherhood to spread globally, if we can hardly extend it to the next street? How can we expect to supplant state laws by universal laws, if making laws inside the state is already so difficult? How can we imagine people to die for humanitarian causes in distant continents, if they are not even ready to die for the protection of their own state? So, as an ideal, cosmopolitan pacifism might be superior, but in reality, it is even harder to reach than the image of a benign state and benign patriotism. Cooperation between states, or multilateralism, hence, will remain more common than cooperation above states, or supranationalism. Even the European Union, despite three quarters of a century of trying, failed in creating a transnational army or a common policy towards global issues. These critiques still do not address the likelihood

of abuse: who will command that transnational army? Why should we expect the abuse of the state not be replaced by an even more problematic abuse of the world state?

Cosmopolitanism comes in different forms: imperial, dissident, stoic, pacifist, and so forth. The cosmopolitanism of the cynics never gained much traction. Its ascetism is difficult to reconcile with the footprint of most contemporary cosmopolitans anyhow. Stoic cosmopolitanism is problematic because it implies a resignation of the desire to improve society. Furthermore, we cannot assume humans to care about the abstract without being able to care about the nearby. Cosmopolitanism also risks becoming a form of escapism, a sphere of prophets, moaning and groaning like ghosts: without being heard. The ancient Chinese Spring and Autumn Annals have a powerful line on this: "There are arguments by scholars in their strange dress, but wars do not cease." Or, as Desiderius Erasmus has it: "When the mail-clad ranks confront each other and the trumpets blare out their harsh note, what use, I ask you, are those wise men who are worn out with their studies?"<sup>25</sup> The cosmopolitan claim to love everyone, to begin with, as Rousseau asserted, is often a coverage for selfish elitist complacency.<sup>26</sup> The claim to be a citizen of the world can be used just as easily to sustain privilege as to question it.<sup>27</sup> In that regard, it is not different from the lure of shallow patriotism.

In addition, cosmopolitan internationalism can become a haven for politicians that want to escape the obstinacy and the aversion inside their own society. "I found it easier to be here, among more likeminded people, than to fight every day for attention in domestic politics," a member of the European Parliament stated.<sup>28</sup> "The fun of working here," testified a former national diplomat,

now employed at the United Nations, "Is that you no longer have to convince people, because everyone here is convinced."<sup>29</sup> Sometimes, international organizations can indeed be used as a lever to promote reforms that are difficult to pursue inside the state. But when the international elites become disconnected from state politics, they too risk losing leverage. In that case internationalism becomes the of isolationism of the elite.<sup>30</sup> Abstract discourses of international cooperation and universal love can also become an alternative source of prestige. It is tempting for politicians to transcend the melee of the state by inviting a throng of journalists to follow along for a couple of days, when he participates in a large international meeting, makes expensive pledges and can be photographed among more senior leaders.<sup>31</sup> "A speech at the United Nations in New York is for a head of state the current equivalent of a what a reception by the pope once meant for a king in Europe."<sup>32</sup> The presence is more important than the promise.

The same can be said about the mismatch between the voluntarism of large companies to trumpet social responsibility and the reluctance to make it happen when their profit is at stake. Think of how cosmopolitans extolled globalisation, the rise of multinationals, and unrestrained capital flows as a way to build a harmonious world, yet ignored how globalisation often contributed to injustice at home or instability in the world, and, consequently, undermined the support for their globalist world view. In the nineties, more and more investment capital "disconnected" from their Western home markets. First, speculators from the United States contributed to financial crises in Eastern Asia and Mexico, which caused a lot of distrust and protectionism in states in those regions. Subsequently, after two domestic financial crises, the United States itself became more



protectionist and demanded companies refocus on rebuilding domestic manufacturing. Hence, the abstract claim of international progress and responsibility can distract the attention from concrete local progress. It becomes escapism. Responsibility is more compelling when it is tangible. Politics, like childcare, will be poorly done if each thinks herself equally responsible for all, rather than giving the immediate surroundings special care.<sup>33</sup>

Many international movements are single-issue movements. Think of activists saving whales, climate change movements, organizations that rescue refugees. These endeavours can be noble but have drawbacks. On the one hand, they can be inward-looking and intolerant, refusing to see the larger context or to make compromises. "You blame me to be radical!" a climate activist reprimanded a politician, "But I have to be radical. We cannot waste time. You talk about social consequences, but I insist we talk about environmental consequences."<sup>34</sup> It is as if the narrow borders of the state are being replaced by the equally narrow borders of the area of concern, as if vertical territorial borders are replaced by horizontal thematic borders. On the other hand, their influence remains often limited as long as they do not tie their action to local issues or fail make the challenges at the level of global common goods clear to citizens in their specific habitat. So, as much as it is an illusion to see borders as a barrier against global changes, it is an illusion to propagate change from the cruising altitude of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitan activism is constrained by both intellectual limitations and the limitations of power.

But do important changes not start with grand ideas? Many thinkers, from Christ and the Prophet Muhammad, to Karl Marx and Greta Thunberg, had

international appeal and became the face of a revolution. Yet, would Marx-citing labour union activists have braved the bullets if they were well-fed? Would they have risked their life if they would have not felt the possibility of change after a devastating World War? Why did the civil rights activist Martin Luther King succeed in what Olaudah Equiano tried in vain to achieve about two centuries earlier? Did climate change protests not erupt too late and only when the consequences of global warming were already being felt? Intellectuals gain prominence not only because of the power of their ideas but because of the power of the sentiments they describe. They are the face of revolutions and not so much the mastermind of big changes. Enlightenment ideals had been in the making centuries before the storming of the Bastille, social anger slowly moving to a tipping point. Like with the flow of a river, change depends on many millions of small particles that start to sediment. Often they are battered away by the current. Sometimes, they hold, form a critical mass, and make the river bend. So, grand ideas, and their prophets, stimulate and reflect change, but seldom cause change.

Readers could still remark at this point that the discussion so far puts up cosmopolitanism as a straw man, that it attacks sham derivatives, and ignores the real thing, the genuine forms of universal love, followed by the courage and capacity to act upon it. But that would then also apply to the criticism of patriotism, which also highlighted the rarity of genuine devotion to the state. Moreover, the fact that so many shallow forms of cosmopolitanism exist, confirms how difficult and rare it is to find true cosmopolitans, and that, indeed, it is easier to abuse the cosmopolitan ideal than to act upon it. And, yes, all change starts with hesitant first steps towards an ideal. Yet, too often, the ideal is used to continue business

as usual, to confirm inequalities, paternalism, and weak governance. The true benchmark of cosmopolitanism is not only the reach of the ambition, but reach combined with the depth of empathy, persuasiveness, and mobilization.

### **The pillars of Luxor**

A patriot, it goes, is a more advanced species of the caveman. His cave has become slightly bigger, but it is still a cave. This verdict captures one of the main critiques of patriotism. It is said to narrow the scope, mentally, economically, politically, and culturally. Whereas cosmopolitans stand tall, patriotism remains low to the ground. Literally almost. Patriotism, it has become clear, is indeed often abused. But cosmopolitanism is not morally superior. The moral balance does not tilt decisively to one direction. Stoic thinkers in this regard proposed a compromise: We belong to two states: that of our birth and the universal state that ties together all citizens. However tempting it is to accept it, and we certainly should try to find that balance, we still have to consider two arguments that make this balance slightly tilt towards patriotism: it is difficult to embrace the world confidently if one lacks a secure port of departure and it is difficult to speak of universal love, if there is no appreciation for what makes places specific, if cosmopolitans become, so to speak, fast-lane primitives.

It is more evident to first take care of one's state and to use that success to build the legitimacy for international engagement. The poet Alfred Tennyson argued: "What has been matured in the atmosphere of a profound knowledge of its own state and of the perfect thoughts that have been produced in that land, is ready

to accept and assimilate the cultures that come from other countries.”<sup>35</sup> In addition, the prosperity at home, creates the safe-haven that is a precondition for exploring broader horizons and to embrace differences. Rabindranath Tagore posited that a comfortable sense of belonging at home was key to embrace the world. World history has many examples of people who, forced to flee their state, contributed to progress; refugees from Aeneas, the mythical founder of Rome, to the French Huguenots that incited industrialization in England, to Albert Einstein. But world history has also many examples of insecure people that became protectionist, xenophobic, and a menace to others.

A second argument is that the cosmopolitan experience depends on local diversity. Humans do not travel the oceans for their flat horizon, but for the discovery of what lays behind. The world is not an interesting place because it is open, but because it is diverse, and because the interplay of geography and history leads to local nuances. The contemporary globetrotter does not brave crammed planes to discover another Victoria Secret franchise at his arrival, another MacDonald’s, or to find the same architecture with the same cheap Vietnamese granite, Chinese steel, and stained windows. He travels to taste the Italian terroir in his pasta, to crack the crust of a genuine French baguette, to taste the soaked landscape of Scotland in a glass of Single Malt, to savour a real Sichuan hotpot. So, why do we travel? Perhaps we travel because we need to for work, or because we cannot stop working when we stay home. But this is mere moving, not travelling. We travel because we expect our destination to be different. We expect to find elsewhere what we cannot find at home. The sensation of a place resides in what makes it unique, in its identity, in a history of care of local communities, in

the way that nature coexists with culture, the human touch, the mysticism. It resides in the fact that the ochre of Siena refracts the light differently than the ochre of Ouarzazate, that the pillars of Luxor are crafted differently than the colonnades of Tyre, and that the wilderness closes in on the ruins of Angkor differently than the ruins of Yaxchilan. Travel is controlled exposure to diversity. That difference is the result of a feel for what makes a place unique, the knowledge and craft that shaped it. That the world steadily becomes a monoculture of tastes, thoughts, and shapes, is not an expression of love for the world, but of arrogance and laziness. The next chapter develops this point further, explains why the pull of place has remained very strong and why despite being frequently declared impotent, the state continuously re-emerges as a crucial actor in world politics.

### III

#### The state

The previous chapter argued that we should take patriotism and cosmopolitanism for what they are: ideals. Ideals are prone to abuse. Still, the chapter concluded, it is difficult to imagine global love without caring for the people in your neighbourhood. Otherwise, cosmopolitanism only replaces the vertical compartments of the state with horizontal segregation between like-minded people. In addition, cosmopolitanism as an invitation to travel, cannot exist without the diversity that is preserved when people articulate what makes their place special. This chapter develops the argument further, but shifts the focus to the state. The discussion about the moral merit of patriotism and cosmopolitanism set aside, the state has proven robust as an organizing unit. This is because of the pull of place: the fact that humans still organize themselves mainly in terms of local contacts and interests.

But what is the state? A state is the combination of a society, a territory, and a government. *State* originates from the Latin word *status*, which means condition. That condition is one of change and longevity. Whereas the state seems to be a given in a lifetime, it is fluid in the *longue durée*. The state is not static. There are different kinds of states. They are differentiated by their power. On one side of the spectrum, one finds colonies; on the other: empires. Somewhere in the middle is the image of a sovereign state. A second qualifier is their size. There are small city-states, vast continental states, and everything in between. The constitutional architecture shapes the character of the state. There are union states, confederal states, federal states, and quasi-separated

states. It is also related to political-ideological unity, with some states deeply divided along partisan lines; others more disposed towards compromise or uniformity. Political organization also matters. In this regard, we discern monarchies, tyrannies, oligarchies, republics, democracies, ochlocracies, and so forth. There are rich and poor states; states with a high level of civilian and political virtue; states that are failed and corrupted by private greed. One has the nation state, the multicultural state, and everything in between. There are as many kinds of states as there are states. But whatever the specific characteristics, the core element of the state remains a society tied to a place with a sovereign government.

### **The irreplaceability of the state**

The state is our security, Antigone exclaims in the famous play of Sophocles. For a long time, it has been difficult for Western citizens who had lived their life in the golden age of globalization to appreciate this argument. Yet, more and more, the state returned to the forefront. Instead of vacating the market place, new plans were made for protecting industries. Instead of downplaying the importance of defence, states once again invested large sums in their armed forces. This is a phenomenon that we see very often around us. Wild animals band together when they are threatened. When the harsh winter arrives, birds form formations to safely navigate to the South. They huddle together to keep each other warm high up in trees or to keep their clearance open in the ice. We like a careless life that allows us to turn a blind eye to risks, until our confidence is shaken.

What helps to clarify, is a small anecdote about a previous neighbour of mine. Opposite to our house, lived a retired gentleman. He never closed his front door and was proud of it. "Nobody takes interest in me." Until one night, when noise woke him up. Since then, the door remained locked. It is the same with our attitude towards the state. The state gains attention when it is threatened. Hence, societies that live through a period of affluence and peace worry less about sovereignty and the functioning of their state than societies that suffer disorder and external threats. It is no surprise that important writings about the state originate from times of challenge. They envisioned a state that was secure on the inside and the outside. Patriotism germinates in times of insecurity; cosmopolitanism in times of prosperity.

In each era, there seemed to be a kind of fight between state-based sovereignty and universal harmony, an intellectual effort to capture this snapshot of history in rigid conceptual boxes. In the longer term, however, it reflects a dynamic oscillation of political integration and fragmentation. The quest for control and the consolidation of this control with borders, monopolies of military power and principles of sovereignty have been constant, the scale and centres have changed all the time. More useful than the snapshot-turned-into-theory approach, is to accept historic dynamism, the acceptance of change, that permeates through the ancient Egyptian dichotomy between *Maat* and *Isfet*, harmony and chaos, through works such as the Indian epics, where this longing for a chakravartin, or universal ruler, is in permanent friction with the state of Matsya Nyaya, a state of anarchy where strong states "eat" the weak, or through the history of writers like Thucydides that describe the tension between states, empires, and attempts at collective governance.



So, the idea of the powerless state has never disappeared. But the state has not disappeared either. States can indeed become powerless, but that does not mean that the state as an organizing unit in world politics vanishes. While the state has allowed itself to be influenced by multinational companies in one part of the world, it is the state that influences the agenda of multinational companies in the other part of the world. While one state struggles to convince citizens to make financial sacrifices to maintain vital infrastructure; another state still enjoys the mandate to funnel large amounts of wealth into roads, ports, and school buildings. While centrifugal forces like privatization, devolution and individualism prevail in one state, centripetal forces of nationalism and mercantilism are dominant in another. States wax and wane, but the state as an organizing unit does remain.

While each state has its own characteristics, the development of states follows a pattern. This started long before the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. That peace, it is often held, replaced the politics based on religion and the remnants of the feudal order with the so-called modern state based on the *raison d'état*, sovereignty, and centralized structures. Those states, it was argued, were locked in permanent competition, aimed to preserve their security through a balance of power, and pursued mature diplomacy. Such allegedly modern orders of sovereign states, however, are found throughout history and across the world. There is nothing new or modern about the Westphalian system. We can discuss about the size of the states, the intensity of diplomacy, but the seventeenth century European order, its balance of power, and its permanent rivalry over trade was not very different from the biblical states of the Levant, the Chinese Warring States, the Greek city states, or the Indian janapadas. Its

appearance continuously changes, but the essence of world politics remains constant: competing place-based polities.

The ancients have compared the life of states to the seasons. States keep coming back, but never entirely the same way. Another recurrent metaphor concerns the wheel of fortune. Cicero spoke of it. The Romans often thought the wheel to be driven by the force of recklessness which inevitably led the state to ruin. Ibn Khaldun also saw a cycle with five stages: construction marked by solidarity and authority, consolidation with the creation of strong central institutions, sovereignty and domestic harmony, peace and prosperity, and a final stage of greed, waste, unrest, and decline. Other medieval thinkers continued to refer to the wheel, yet insisted that God's providence made it spin. Several medieval manuscripts depict kings sitting on the *rota fortunae* during a moment of balanced virtue and justice, after which descent follows.

### **The turbulent life of the state**

"Is there a cycle governing this inner decay," the first Prime Minister of India asked, "and can we seek out the causes and eliminate them?"<sup>1</sup> Almost at the same time, a revolutionary activist asked China's Mao Zedong whether he had the power to escape from this historical cycle. To which Mao answered: "We have indeed found a path to escape from this cycle. It is called democracy."<sup>2</sup> Most states are born in a context of chaos and a fight for self-preservation. It is, however, not a given that people turn to the state or try to found a new state when they are insecure. They can turn to an alternative protector: a neighbouring king, a warlord, a usurper. Insecurity can

thus also lead to surrender, opportunism, and cowardice. Building or reinforcing the state is not the default modus in case of crisis. If an attempt is made at state building, it is almost always a brutal process. One can imagine a situation as Thomas Hobbes did, a ruler, a prince, a Leviathan, that gains the monopoly of power to end a situation of war of all against all: a Caesar, an Octavian, an Oliver Cromwell. One can imagine a war of liberation, such as Ivan IV's victory over the Tatars forming the start of Russian state building, or King Charles VII driving the English back to the other side of the Channel, so that the French state could grow. Sometimes, state building starts with public uprisings, such as the American Declaration of Independence, followed by a war of independence. This is the stage of existential struggle, the fight for sovereignty, the moment of creation. All means are legitimate. It is this savage experience, this trauma that imposes on many a desire for stability and the willingness to sacrifice.

*The industrious state.* States that pass this first selection test, move on to the struggle for consolidation. Juvenile states face many adversaries and fight defensive wars. The trauma of anarchy makes that citizens are aware of the price of sovereignty and unity. It impregnates them with a sense of modesty, with the conviction that cooperation is indispensable, that great things can only be achieved if many citizens make small contributions. This stage hinges upon the acceptance of the state and its government as the best guarantee for stability. It might not be ideal and sometimes imposing, but it is less abhorred than the alternative of anarchy. This phase comes with role models, like Solon, the cunning statesman of Athens, Lucius Cincinnatus, the farmer-general who helped secure the Roman Republic, or the Prussian King Fredrick II and the American Founding

Fathers, whom both, two millennia later, returned to the ideal of Cincinnatus.

Once political sovereignty is secured, the search for economic sovereignty starts. Hence the emphasis on infant industries, independent trading companies, financial reserves, attracting technology, and building vital infrastructure. This stage is marked by protectionism. "Free Trade! The call for free trade, is as unavailing as the cry of a spoiled child," stated the American Foreign Secretary Henry Clay, "If we throw our ports wide open to the admission of foreign productions, free of all duty, what ports, of any other foreign nation, shall we find open to the admission of our surplus produce?"<sup>3</sup> The industrious state exports more manufactured goods than it imports. If it has sufficient raw materials internally, it will likely run a trade surplus. This quest for growth happens with an eye on both military modernization and economic progress. If it succeeds, it provides the infant state with wealth to redistribute and to preserve its legitimacy. The industrious stage is inseparable from propaganda, the cultivation of myths, civic obedience, and repression of dissidence. Nothing is more important, the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping put it, than the preservation of stability. The state moves to the forefront, cultivates patriotism, though still a defensive kind of patriotism.

*The assertive state.* The passing of this test gives way to another challenge: the management of prosperity. As the founding generations pass away, the recollection of the struggle and sacrifices pales. New generations become accustomed to success and, as the fear for existential threats dissipates, become more confident and assertive. This is a golden moment, the state's month of May. It is thrust forward by an industrial and mercantile take-off. Companies become competitive and

take their first steps outside the protective cocoon of the state, in search for resources, export markets and investment opportunities. Hence, economic protectionism is increasingly counterpoised by more offensive economic nationalism that tries to open the borders of other states. But both are still in balance. On the military front, the focus on the defence of the border broadens to a larger sphere of influence, in which competitors have to be kept at a distance. "For one thing is quite certain," the Prussian king, Frederick William, admonished his son, "If you simply sit still in the belief that the fire is still far from your borders, then your lands will become the theatre on which the tragedy is played out."<sup>4</sup> In 1823, the United States added to its original defensive strategy of coastal fortresses, called the Third System, a vision for a broader sphere of influence, called the Monroe Doctrine. In the same way, the first leader of the Chinese People's Republic, Mao Zedong, replaced his emphasis on deep defence and people's war with active defence.

The state shows vigour and invests a lot in its military power. Soldiers are deployed to defend overseas commercial interests. The flag follows the trade. Economic presence slowly hardens into military presence. This leads to growing tensions, but the rising state, ambitious but still aware of its limitations, tries to avoid major conflicts: external resistance and war are important causes of early derailment of rising states. If the state becomes arrogant before it is powerful, it will exhaust itself. Internally, the state is still in charge, but influential corporate elites, interest groups, and an incipient middle class start to undermine the spirit of civic obedience. The collective good of the state remains central, but the private interest becomes more prominent. The state balances between juvenility and maturity, sacrifice and pleasure. No moment captures this better than when the

rising ancient city state of Athens discovered a silver mine. The assembly wavered on whether to give the silver to citizens to consume, or to continue to invest in the ships that were key in gathering and defending their wealth. The statesman Themistocles was at pains to convince the expectant assembly of the need for continued financial sacrifice.

*The mature state.* As the economy grows, the take-off makes place for consolidation and saturation. Wages increase. Land and resources become more expensive. Meanwhile, the return on investments decreases. Companies that have pioneered the search for profit abroad are now followed by a much larger group. The initial balance between defensive and offensive economic nationalism now shifts to the latter. The state is expected to facilitate foreign activities, to reduce trade barriers, and to secure investment. Smart trading states demand companies to repatriate profit in return. Economic activity at home shifts from industrial activities to services; from investment to consumption; trade balances into deficits. While companies and capital decouple from their native state, in exchange for poorer labour and more growth, the wealth of the mature state attracts migrants and the interest of poorer rising powers that try to make money out of exporting to the wealthy consumers.

The combination of domestic companies repatriating profit, the supplies by poorer states, and the cheap labour of immigrants only adds to the feeling of prosperity of a growing middle class. It is harvest time. Culturally, the myths and heroes, the ethos of toil and sacrifice, are long forgotten. The emphasis on the collective good shifts towards the private good. The very origins of the state, its fight for survival, seem alien. The collective ideals make place for individual dreams. The modesty disappears. Wealth removes the initial

diplomatic rigour, the discipline of keeping an eye on competitors, and the military self-restraint. Foreign policy is increasingly marked by a combination of hubris, laissez-faire, and laxity. Hence, both in domestic and foreign policy, the mood of confidence makes that the state as a guardian moves to the background.

*The decadent state.* After harvesting comes feasting. Farmers know that. They feast to express their gratitude and to mark the start of the filling of their storages for winter. Not so with states. Their greatest danger comes from excessive good fortune.<sup>5</sup> Such state first begins to hanker after things that are inessential, and then after things that are injurious, and finally it hands the mind over to material pleasure.<sup>6</sup> In this mature state, some politicians and intellectuals still urge to continue to invest some of the wealth in the vital tissue of the state, in infrastructure, industry, education, security, and so forth. But their appeals fall on deaf ears. If citizens had already lost their affinity with the historical struggle for the state's survival, and accordingly the importance of sovereignty, they also become estranged from the way wealth is created. The last remaining discipline disappears. Industries will leave. Imbalances will be ignored. Debt piles up without investing in productivity. The whole society spends beyond it means. Companies decouple entirely. In the realm of norms, self-restraint disappears. Individualism becomes exuberant, marked by reckless spending and an attitude of unrestricted expression of opinion without the responsibility to listen to opinions of others and to work towards compromise. At the end of the nineteenth century, Liang Qichao complained how his society had fallen prey to insolence and called his compatriots docile like tame lambs. "Our hands and feet are palsied and we have utterly lost the capacity to protect ourselves," he wrote, "For some

decades now, key figures and outstanding people have made it their chief occupation to talk about nothing but politics."<sup>7</sup>

The ideal of domestic harmony becomes replaced by diversity, which, though claimed to be morally superior, often becomes an acceptance of fragmenting. This is a time of information without wisdom. There is a lot of science, literature, and debate, about many little things. Science becomes a kaleidoscope. There is very little understanding about the primeval forces from which wealth and power are born. And if they are rationally understood; they no longer resonate, causing these insights to remain abstract and to seldom be converted into action. Those forces seem overcome but still lurk underneath. The state has no leverage whatsoever to remedy this. Education, culture, and media become facilitators of fragmenting; no longer a search for common ground. In terms of foreign policy: hubris is predominant, but the pushback by others becomes more forceful. On the diplomatic front, arrogance leads to overstretch; more international interference than the state can bear. This can be ignored for a while by paying mercenaries or bribing other states to stand guard. Both the inner defences and the outer defences crumble and there is not much that the state can do about it, because its authority has been replaced by oligarchs and mobs.

*The faltering state.* Bit by bit, decadence asks its price. When the harvest party lasts too long, the society will be too late to notice that autumn has arrived. It usually takes a lag for states to come to grips with their problems. The stage of denial turns into panic and the first response is to put the blame on others. The faltering state sinks into frustration and fear. Anger towards the state elite and external foes. Frustration and fear can be



transformed into a drive to reform. It can be a catharsis. But many circus artists – we made acquaintance with them in chapter one – will offer their services before serious cures are considered. Autumn is the summer for demagogues. Instead of making difficult choices, they endorse the state in its passiveness. In the short term, this is the most attractive prospect for people; but also for leaders that find the state’s leverage severely diminished and lack the combativeness that characterized early generations. Instead of assuming responsibility, others are held responsible. Who is to pay? Who is to bear the brunt of the reforms? Internally, this leads to even more fragmenting, tribalism even. The state becomes almost incapable of reform. The economic crisis becomes severe and makes the state more vulnerable to external threats, resulting in humiliation and intimidation. It is this crisis that wipes out the last bits of smug and complacency. The state, its leaders, and its citizens stare into the abyss. This is a make-or-break moment. In some occasions the failing state becomes a failed state, degenerates further, and loses its sovereignty. In other cases, it pulls itself up by the bootstraps and reinvents itself.

*The defensive state.* In some cases, people rally around new vigorous leaders. They will explain that the state has lived beyond its means and that new sacrifices will be needed. Think of the farmer trimming his fruit trees in autumn to reinvigorate growth in the next year. But clipping branches comes with difficult choices. As problems continue to grow, the state will have to become more defensive. The narrative about openness is replaced by protectionism. Key industries and knowhow are guarded again. Wealth is reoriented from consumption to investment in what makes the state strong and productive. Civic duty is restored and new attempts are made to weave diversity into harmony. Values are re-

asserted. Migration is limited. The defensive state reduces its international engagements. It will actively influence external economic relations so that they benefit the national interest. Yet, its defensive nationalism inevitably aggravates tensions with other states. So, while the defensive state seeks to reduce the costs of foreign and security policy, it might not be allowed to do so. Like in the early stages, it understands the need for sacrifice to preserve sovereignty and regain economic strength. The defensive state is a partial return to the heroic state.

Simplified trajectories should be treated with caution. Nothing repeats itself the same way and nothing is irresistible. Yet, simplified trajectories help us get grip on capricious processes. It can well be that at a certain time, there is a tendency in a part of the world for the state to rise or to fall, to become prominent or to retreat. But the state as an organizing unit has continued to live on. In the last decades, we saw the call for *laissez-fair* in parts of the West coincide with developmentalism elsewhere; the mature and decadent state on the one hand, and the industrious state on the other. Now, we seem to have moved to faltering states on the one hand, and assertive states on the other.

## **The pull of place**

The previous section argued that states remain a crucial organizing unit despite constant challenges and change. There is an additional observation that underscores their importance: the pull of place. Despite global communication, a lot of the interaction in terms of wealth, travel, and information remains remarkably local. Consider the world's wealth. Wealth has indeed become more movable. The world's financial capital stock, for

instance, is estimated to be around 380 trillion euros.<sup>8</sup> Yet, a very significant part, probably the most of it, is managed by banks, insurance companies and funds that are at least under some form of government control. Rich people have stashed about 9 trillion euros in tax havens; but the capital of state wealth funds is about as large. Indeed, states have been ravaged by speculation, but that does not mean that states no longer have leverage. It might not be equally divided and not always be tightly controlled as in regimes of state-capitalism, but the potential influence of states over movable wealth remains significant. Moreover, most of the world's wealth is immovable. The real estate sector alone is worth almost 300 trillion euros and this does not include all the factories, roads, railways, and so forth. Moreover, for the vast majority of people, fixed assets, a house, represent the largest part of their wealth.<sup>9</sup> Finally, state-owned companies still control a large part of the global economy. Of the total value of the world's two thousand largest companies, state-owned enterprises still account for twenty percent.<sup>10</sup> Hence, there might be a small elite whose wealth is fleeting, but for most people it remains a pile of bricks on a plot of land.

That brings us to another observation. The longing for a home has been one of oldest themes in literature. The oldest written story was punched in tablets of clay over four thousand years ago. It tells about king Gilgamesh. He first pursues immortality, roaming the world in search of adventure, yet comes to realize that the only thing immortal is his home city, Uruk in present-day Iraq. Mortals, the lesson seems, become a little more immortal by making their home a better place. Think of the Biblical story of Moses, who braves the Egyptian king to bring his people back home, to the promised land. Think of the Ramayana, about the exploits of prince

Rama, “bereft of home and kin and empire in the pathless jungle.” Or imagine the Greek hero Odysseus who defies intrigue and temptation to return to Attica. These are perhaps pieces of propaganda, to be sure, but they do touch a sensitive chord.

Perhaps one of the strongest universal desires, is the desire for a home. The oldest representation of a home is a simple cottage of clay. It has a walled courtyard and a tiny gate to the world. While the ancient Egyptian, for whom this model was made, relied heavily on the world around the farmhouse, its irrigation canals, its traders, its soldiers, and its administrators; the definition of a home was a place with a door, a door that could be closed. A door that made this tiny place a place of one’s own. Walls protrude prominently over the earliest epics like Gilgamesh. The Middle Eastern cities of that time relied on food supplies from a large hinterland and traded intensively with each other. Yet, Gilgamesh’ most important achievement were the walls he built, walls shining in the sun like bright copper. Uruk was a trading city. Its walls secured the wealth accumulated through trade.

This also applied to many other ancient trading hubs. Imagine the ancient city state of Athens. In the foreground, beckons the port of Piraeus, the pointed bows of triremes plying through the glistening sea. The port stands for liberty and discovery. In the background, on the acropolis stands the temple, symbol for the pride, unity, and identity. This whole city is surrounded by walls and watching towers, standing for security. This cityscape of ancient Athens is a powerful metaphor for the three functions of a city: security, unity, and openness. However much the statesman Themistocles believed that the Athenians should not be slaves to their land, he also insisted on fortifying it before it could go on to amass its

wealth via the sea. Openness without security, he thought, is a dangerous thing. Even nomadic people have a sense of home. When so-called primitive people wandered from cave to cave, they made it their temporary home by painting the walls. Nowadays, nomadic people often wander around holy places, to which they keep coming back to bury the dead and to pray. In Mongolia, herdsmen have sacred mountains; African hunter-gatherers have the Tsodilo Hills as their home shrine. Some of these nomadic shrines became permanent, such as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and the Kabaka in Mecca. Nomadic people too stick to the best pastures, wells, trade routes, and hunting grounds. They mark them, try to make them their own, and, if needed, defend them against others. Even if their home is more fluid, it nonetheless remains a home.

People settle. Settling means to possess a small part of our planet. To live means to claim a small part of our planet. Like the birds have their nests, foxes have their dens, and lions defend their territory, humans have a house and reside on average fifteen years in it.<sup>11</sup> A house is an efficient way to organize the fulfilment of vital needs, from sleeping to protection against the elements of nature. It can be a sound way to accumulate capital. But it can also be an opportunity to articulate ourselves, to affirm our identity, to realize our own little vision of paradise, with a dog, flower beds, and a white picket fence. Like the caveman asserted his identity with ochre and charcoal on the walls of his shelter, the contemporary urban Amsterdammer does so with a few flowerpots and fragrant wisteria winding up the rain pipe. A home is a place where we can be ourselves.

Most of these homes clutter into villages and towns. About 25 percent of the world population lives in rural villages, 50 percent in small towns and cities, and

another 25 percent in million-cities.<sup>12</sup> This too has important consequences for the state. If megacities are often more connected to the rest of the world, this is less the case of towns and villages. It explains why globalist mayors will not run the world and cannot move forward without taking the rest of the state into consideration. It also explains why authoritarian leaders often exhaust urban protestors, by balancing them against a more conservative or just more fragmented countryside. As a Russian politician put it: "A million protesters in Moscow is less than one percent of our population."<sup>13</sup>

These limitations are not only spatial. They are also mental. The social brain, our capacity for empathy and sympathy is limited. Plato wrote that strong social bonds are limited to about 5,000 persons. Plato's 5,000 people community would be just large enough to remember the faces.<sup>14</sup> Aristotle found that claims of justice vanished with distance.<sup>15</sup> Hierocles organized empathy in concentric circles with family at the core, followed by fellow citizens, and with the cosmopolis on the outer fringes. The British writer William Hazlitt summarized: "Could our imagination take wing to the other side of the globe or to the ends of the universe, could our eyes behold whatever our reason teaches us to be possible, could our hands reach as far as our thoughts or wishes, we might then busy ourselves to advantage with the Hottentots, or hold intimate converse with the inhabitants of the Moon; but being as we are, our feelings evaporate in so large a space – we must draw the circle of our affections and duties somewhat closer – the heart hovers and fixes nearer home."<sup>16</sup> Recent research confirms that the social brain functions most intensively in *clans* and *tribes* between 50 and 150 persons.<sup>17</sup>

Contacts do not need to be centred on a fixed place. We can perfectly imagine the globetrotter making

close friends as a bartender in Costa Rica, having some close colleagues while doing a little office job in London, and having a girlfriend or two in some beautiful Italian cities. But, again, this globetrotter lifestyle is a minority affair. Even in the European Union, with its generous Erasmus funding, less than three percent of students in higher education benefit from it.<sup>18</sup> The average rich state citizen only travels 10 kilometres from home per day, lives around 20 kilometres from his parents, and hardly travels to other states.<sup>19</sup> Hardly a few percentages migrate.<sup>20</sup> Media and connectivity offer little support either. Most social media friends live within 60 kilometres. Most people follow local news and prefer to watch local content on television or Netflix.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, to travel is not to go far, but to go wide and to go deep, to dare to let lose, at least for a while. Many of these new nomads just take their home to a different place. In the age of globalization, humans have remained sedentary.

The social brain has limitations and that also goes for the intellectual brain. Knowledge about the world is very limited.<sup>22</sup> My university long prided itself to groom citizens of the world and to decolonize the curriculum by paying more attention to sources from outside Europe. But every year, a test at the beginning of my course in the second year showed how limited knowledge about other cultures was. Remember the shallow cosmopolitan of last chapter? This forms a perfect illustration. Building world citizenship demands a very significant effort of study and comes with doubt. To discover the world and to broaden knowledge requires one to come loose from pre-occupations, to stretch the imagination, and to accept overwhelming complexity. Even neurologically, our brain has difficulties with that. Like physical exercises, the brain rewards mental achievement. It releases mesolimbic dopamine when we learn. Yet, our brain is

also programmed to dislike discomfort. In terms of learning, we tend to stay close to what we know and understand. Knowledge is like a basecamp. Exploring circles around the basecamp is easier than moving the camp to unexplored altitude. So, we tend to spin around our convictions. Confirmation bias, it is called. Academics travel easier to exotic conference places than to exotic ideas.<sup>23</sup> They create their own little globalized tribes of like-minded colleagues, with whom they can launch joint projects to confirm a theory, with whom they can cite each other in articles and add more cases in support of the intellectual totem. And like tribes, citation networks often even have their own gurus.<sup>24</sup> These are echo chambers for intellectuals.

The pull of place remains strong and states remain influential actors. They control a lot of fixed wealth as well as many strategic companies and investment capital. Most people spend their life inside the borders of one state. They build up their wealth inside this state, to begin with their house. That house is a crucial economic asset, a shelter for security, and an expression of identity. Most people also still live in towns, more so than in globally connected megacities. Their contacts are local and this has not changed a lot despite new connectivity instruments such as social media. Even mentally, we are inclined towards localism, the vertical localism of geography, or the horizontal localism of like-mindedness. Our capacity to establish friendships and meaningful relations is limited and that also goes for our intellectual capability to become a true world citizen. This localism is one of the main reasons why the state will unlikely be replaced by more cosmopolitan visions of society and governance, and why the main opponent of the state will also be more likely the tendency towards more fragmentation than the trend towards globalism.



## Conclusion

States have remained and will remain the most important building stones of politics. That does mean that one should limit his horizon to state borders. One can perfectly hold global or universal values and seek to contribute to the solution of global challenges. Yet, it is in the state and in different cities, streets, villages, schools, and so forth that lies an opportunity for concrete contributions. It is not by dancing around local problems that global problems are solved.<sup>25</sup> A good patriot can be a cosmopolitan – and the other way around.

Those who want to stand tall, should not let their mental borders be shaped by territorial borders. Travel and exploration can only be beneficial. As the British historian Tony Judt put it: “I prefer the edge: the place where countries, communities, allegiances, affinities, and roots bump uncomfortably up against one another – where cosmopolitanism is not so much an identity as the condition of life.”<sup>26</sup> Statecraft even requires exploration. Like the swallow flies to distant places and returns to his nest, those involved in statecraft should collect wisdom throughout the world and return with it to reinforce their citadel. Statecraft embraces the world, but does not get lost in it

## IV

### The Purpose of the State

Place remains a defining element in the organization of people and the state gives expression to that reality. The state is the combination of a territory, a society, and a government. Statecraft, consequently, is the capacity of that state to develop its power with an eye on security and happiness. It is important to define both concepts. This chapter argues that it is better to empower a society than to shield it from threats or to appease threats. The state requires the whole society to be engaged. It contends that happiness is best advanced by balancing pleasure and virtue, inner and outer development, leisure and effort. When those conditions are fulfilled, prosperity become progress, or the capacity to fulfil as many needs as possible by activating as many talents as possible of as many citizens as possible.

#### Security

Article three of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights promulgates: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person."<sup>1</sup> The security of person, however, is a precondition of life and liberty. Nothing else left a deeper impression of how life, liberty and dignity can be ground out of a human soul, than conversations with child soldiers in Africa. "I have stopped to exist," I heard from a girl in Uganda, only eight years old. War means death, mutilation, rape, and famine. The state must avoid war - at any expense. "At any expense?" Here we must pause. Can we assert that

so easily? The avoidance of war is sometimes abused by governments to protect themselves rather than their people.

Prosperous states can also cushion their citizens too much from insecurity. In the spring of 2022, I had a discussion with the minister of economy of a European state. I advised her to call on her citizens save money to handle the rising energy prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We must not cause panic, she retorted. In the summer of that year, I saw that minister again and counselled that she should suggest her society to limit spending during the holidays and to prepare for winter.<sup>2</sup> She persisted that this message would undermine confidence. Hence, the task of the state, she thought, was to prevent fear, while my idea was that a good security policy incorporates fear. Moreover, she assumed that the government could be responsible for security while citizens could carry on and consume.

Exposure to insecurity is important for states to stay alert. One of the most fundamental problems with security is that politicians like to be in control and to play the hero for their citizens. There are few more tempting opportunities to display their indispensability than to arrive in a crisis zone in a military sweatshirt with a cortege of crisis managers. Another problem is that citizens easily accept the idea that they can outsource security to professionals and carry on with their careless lives. A good security policy, however, consists of three elements: pacification, protection, and empowerment.

Pacification concerns the removal of the threat.<sup>3</sup> That can be done by *eliminating* the threat. States, for instance, have long tried to eliminate diseases, sometimes with success, like in the case of polio. Yet, it is rare that threats are entirely stamped out. Even polio has recently resurfaced. States have promised to eliminate terrorist

groups only to discover that small factions can recover and spread their ideas. Another way is to *reprogram* the threat. Pests, for instance, have been crossbred with less aggressive species. Radicalism has been mitigated by offering alternatives to vent frustration, like boxing clubs and street art walls. This is similar in external relations, where diplomats advance confidence building, collective security, and security communities to turn antagonistic states into peaceful actors.<sup>4</sup> A third option is to *appease* the threat: to give it what it wants. Appeasement was tried in vain towards Adolf Hitler. It is relevant to temper threats, but pacification brings the risk of a pretence that the threat environment can be shaped, that the root causes can be removed. This is seldom the case. Many factors are beyond control. Violence and extremism can be more rewarding than peace and moderation. Pacification is often temporary mitigation.

Protection does not try to pacify the threat, but to limit exposure to the threat. There are three categories of protection, to begin with *containment*. This can be done statically, by putting criminals in a prison, quarantining sick people, confining undesired groups to ghettos, imposing an embargo on a hostile state, isolating extremist parties, and so forth. It can be pursued by dynamically knocking down threats when they emerge, like police forces or a fire brigade. Containment supposes a superior position against a weaker threatening force. Separation is the same endeavour regarding a more equal force. In international politics, this is applied between states or alliances, by means of *deterrence* and economic block formation. Deterrence aims at military parity and to increase in the cost of aggression. But it often leads to arms races. Adversaries can also develop *blocks* or formal separation. The United States has started to stimulate investors to opt for friendly states instead of China. The

Seljuk king offered the Franks to divide the whole Middle East. A Chinese general suggested to divide the Pacific Ocean in two spheres of influence. In the fifteenth century, Spain and Portugal divided world with the Treaty of Tordesillas. *Isolation* is an attempt at protection against a superior force. It means a retreat and the acceptance that threats encircle the state. States have tried this via economic protectionism and border walls. All these forms of protection are inadequate because they try to freeze a situation that cannot be frozen, to fix the distribution of power while power is fluid. Protection permits a state to hide behind its ramparts, while the area beyond it becomes a power vacuum that allows the threat grow. It becomes an empty fortress instead of a citadel. The state exhausts itself because its expenses for protection increase, whereas its power remains stagnant. Like pacification, protection offers a temporary reprieve.

Empowerment is about remaining stronger than the threat. It reinforces the citadel inside-out. The more powerful the state, the more options it has in response to threats. Empowerment means that the state builds up *reserves* to outweigh or outlast the threat. This can relate to economic power, military strength, the capacity of hospitals to handle a sudden surge of patients, but also to the mental fitness of the society: its readiness for sacrifice. Reserves are often considered a luxury in prosperous times, but it returns as a necessity in times of crisis. In the years before the outbreak of the Covid pandemic, Belgium destroyed most of its stocks of face masks, because it was allegedly too expensive to store them. Stockpiling precious minerals was considered protectionist, until China decided to ban the export of some of them. Empowerment is also about *cohesion*: the strength of the bonds between the institutions of the state, between its citizens, and between the state and its external partners.

Unity is power. Empowerment is enhanced through *diversification*. During the Covid pandemic, Europe developed multiple vaccines, not only to stimulate competition between producers, but also to have different sources of supply. During the war in Ukraine it became clear that states with multiple energy suppliers were less affected. Diversification also means that multiple actors can be mobilized in crisis, that regular hospitals can work alongside military hospitals, for instance. These three factors – reserves, cohesion, and diversity – determine the flexibility of the state. Empowerment is never limited to the government; it involves the whole state. “Doubtless it is thought noble to build oneself fortresses impregnable to an enemy,” wrote Xenophon, “but it is far nobler to fortify one’s own soul against all the assaults of avarice, extravagance, and fear.”<sup>5</sup> In a citadel state, every citizen is a guardian.

Absolute security does not exist. Security will always demand a dynamic combination of efforts towards pacification, protection, and empowerment. It is difficult to empower citizens, for instance, if insecurity continuously saps their energy. But of those three, empowerment is the most crucial. The worst a government can do is to overprotect, to allow it to ignore threats, to believe that threats can be frozen by fences, and recline into passiveness while security forces stand guard. After the terrorist attacks, France and Belgium sent fully armed soldiers to patrol shopping streets and airports. “We want to show citizens that they can go out and that the economy will continue to function,” explained a politician.<sup>6</sup> In a neighbouring state, officials privately called it security populism. They argued that these soldiers were utterly dysfunctional, if only because in crowded environments, they would kill more citizens with their machine guns than a terrorist. It creates an

illusion of security, a general told.<sup>7</sup> What we need more, he continued, is prevention, a well-functioning police force, and solid intelligence. But those are invisible and thus not instantly rewarding for politicians. “The problem with such crises,” a high-ranking former American intelligence officer explained, “Is that few responsible people will admit that they failed, investigate why they failed, throw more money at the problem, and find willing recipients in the different branches of the government.”<sup>8</sup> Panic is rarely followed by introspection.

## **Happiness**

The state must preserve and increase its power. Power remains the best form of security. The subsequent task is to use that security and power wisely, with an eye on the happiness of the people. Power is thus a means to an end and the end is happiness. “For strength is power and happiness is the end,” the ancient Indian writer Kautilya insisted to his emperor. Plato advised his state to “create the most magnificent fabric, a seamless cloth in which he enfolded all his subjects, whether slave or free, and to maximize to the fullest degree the potential for attaining happiness.”<sup>9</sup> Nicolo Machiavelli suggested the ideal of a prince secure in the midst of happy subjects. The care of human life and happiness, Thomas Jefferson said, is the only legitimate object of good government. But what is happiness? Is it up to the state to define happiness?

A state that imposes on its citizens how to be happy is a brute dictatorship. Yet, there is a risk of being one-sidedly critical. As we have seen, there are other formidable forces at work that suggest role models and influence us how to be happy. The continuous stream of publicity, for instance, teaches us that happiness is about

buying goods. Leisure businesses encourage us to testify via social media how happy we are during short bouts of expensive escapism from soul-crushing routine.<sup>10</sup> The game industry offers a virtual path to excitement. Religions still explain that happiness is about getting closer to God. Hence, the state must care. The state could empower the minds of its citizens to handle influence, through education. The very role of a state in education presupposes a notion of purpose. The state, by its size, also has an impact via the way it spends, hires, and legislates. It is important, hence, for the state to have a notion of what happiness is about. Hence, Aristotle's advice: those involved in politics must study the soul.<sup>11</sup>

But what is happiness? Plato wrote that the madness of lovers is the highest form of happiness.<sup>12</sup> No doubt. But that madness, unfortunately, seldom lasts. We know quite well what happiness is when we combine different sources: philosophy, psychology, sociology, and neuroscience. While happiness experts continue to debate about details, two important observations can be made. On the one hand, happiness is undermined by physical hardship and injustice. On the other, happiness is advanced by three balances: between pleasure and virtue, inner and external progress, effort and leisure

Happiness stumbles between pleasure and virtue.<sup>13</sup> Pleasure refers to sensual gratification from food, beauty, sex, and so forth. A life without senses is like a prisoner in a dark cage. Yet, a life dominated by senses is like a shipwreck exposed on an endless ocean. Virtue is the compass. It gives meaning to pleasure, makes sure that we do not drown in it, and that our search for pleasure does not exhaust ourselves. That stumbling is one of the oldest themes. Think of Gilgamesh, the maverick prince from the ancient City of Uruk. His epic is a quest for the full life, first through sensation and



adventure, onwards through devotion. Tombs of ancient Egyptians depict an ideal life of food, paradise gardens, and dancing women, yet also in accordance with harmony.<sup>14</sup> The Mahabharata refers to a cycle. Virtue, or dharma, is what preserves life and pleasure is the reward that incentivizes virtue. In the Old Testament, the tale of Adam and Eva in their Garden of Eden is a powerful warning that the pleasure of paradise cannot be achieved without discipline. Even the Greeks and Romans, despite their intellectual squabbles, display a remarkable consensus: Plato described happiness as the virtue that allows you to sustain the enjoyment of what is good and beautiful. For Aristotle happiness was a soul of virtue, a good spirit or, *eudaimonia*. He differentiated between intellectual virtue, or wisdom, and moral virtue, which is about temperance and generosity.<sup>15</sup> Epicurus saw virtue as the only thing inseparable from pleasure.<sup>16</sup> "True happiness resides in virtue," wrote Seneca.<sup>17</sup> "Men, being slaves to appetite pass through life untaught and untrained, like mere wayfarers, contrary to nature's intent, seeing the body a source of pleasure and the soul a burden," Sallust saw, "For my own part, I consider the lives and deaths of such men as about alike."<sup>18</sup>

Science confirms this philosophical depiction of a happiness as a virtue-pleasure balance. The anatomy of the human brain reflects the pleasure-virtue duality. The functions reside most prominently in the front part of the brain, the prefrontal cortex.<sup>19</sup> The lower part, the orbitofrontal prefrontal cortex is the main pleasure zone, whereas the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex is the centre of consciousness, analysis, and foresight. Both domains give meaning to sensory inputs. Whereas the orbitofrontal cortex rewards pleasant sensory experience, the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex gives interprets them and plans a response.<sup>20</sup> The left side of the prefrontal cortex

generates positive emotions; the right negative emotions. The activation of the left side reduces the release of the stress hormone cortisol and represses the activity of one of the main crisis response zones in the brain, the amygdala. The virtuous and hedonic happiness circuits are thus interlinked.<sup>21</sup>

Happiness is served by a second balance: between internal and external advancement. Very often, the benchmark of success, and, hence, an apparent path to happiness is what we *have* and not who we *are*. In a material society, humans become like molluscs, with a hard shell of outer appearances, superficial beliefs, and material possession, yet weak on the inside. One can argue that external wealth is the consequence of progress and that it allows for the development of a rich inner life. The caveman did not stop his inner development after he discovered how to make a spear. The sensation of killing a prey with bare hands – a rather risky enterprise indeed – gave way to faster ways of hunting, and accordingly more time for other sensations: painting, for instance, singing. So, we are indeed a developing species. Sources of satisfaction and happiness change. But it requires us to balance inner and outer. The caveman's spear should allow him to sit more in the sun, think, and perhaps ripen the idea of perfecting the spear. It should not encourage him to have more spears and or to hunt more than his family can eat. Chapter nine returns to this matter.

Happiness requires self-consciousness before we can truly enjoy material wealth. "An unexamined life is not worth living," Socrates held, "May the outward and the inward man be at one."<sup>22</sup> Without self-consciousness, without knowing our character, we will never be able to fully enjoy external goods.<sup>23</sup> Classical philosophy almost unanimously abhors the effect of luxury, decadence, and avarice on happiness. The outer should not be allowed to

become dominant, for that would lead to a permanent experience of losing oneself. Nor should the outer be disconnected from the inner, because information, belief, and beauty give limited consolation when we forego the capacity to understand and feel. As Petrarch has it:

*“And men go about to wonder at the heights of the mountains, and the mighty waves of the sea, and the wide sweep of rivers, and the circuit of the ocean, and the revolution of the stars, but themselves they consider not... I thought in silence of the lack of good counsel in us mortals, who neglect what is noblest in ourselves, scatter our energies in all directions, and waste ourselves in a vain show, because we look about us for what is to be found only within. I wondered at the natural nobility of our soul, save when it debases itself of its own free will, and deserts its original estate, turning what God has given it for its honour into dishonour.”<sup>24</sup>*

The balance between inner and external advancing applies to the relation between individual and society. Being happens from the inside to the outside. It is about asserting ourselves. Spinoza, for example, remarks that happiness is to be authentic. “The very foundation of virtue is this very striving to preserve one’s own being, and that happiness consists in a man’s ability to preserve his being.”<sup>25</sup> Modern existentialists affirm that the most intense feeling of happiness occurs when we assert ourselves as individuals, not satisfied with the “universal green-meadow happiness of the herd.”<sup>26</sup> An assertion cannot be without acknowledgement, though. Hence, Rousseau’s words: The only way the individual can be happy, is by working so that the whole collective entity is happy.<sup>27</sup> We are through our society, but our society

becomes more interesting when we articulate ourselves. Social surveys have showed that the most important determinants of happiness in rich states are heavily dependent on social interaction: to have a sense of direction in life, not to feel lonely, and accomplishment. One of the leading specialists in the sociology of happiness found that happiness depends on identity integrity and ego-strength, but that those two also build on social skills and openness.<sup>28</sup> Feelings of meaning and purpose are almost always social constructions.<sup>29</sup>

The third balance exists between effort and leisure. Here again, philosophy offers an almost universal advice: leisure is a condition for happiness; laziness is not. In the Chinese Confucian tradition, happiness depends on self-cultivation, and pleasure on the fruits of work, whether intellectual or manual. Happiness is neither complete nor permanent and therefore effort is a necessary condition of happiness, wrote Boethius.<sup>30</sup> Saint Augustine, suggested that happiness is advanced by a balanced combination of leisure and engagement. We can again complement this with insights from neuroscience. While rewarding, the virtuous happiness circuit of the pre-frontal cortex is very energy intensive. It rewards certain behaviour and almost seems to propel action, which is vital for survival. Yet, to avoid exhaustion, the brain shifts from a task-positive to a task-negative mode, the later activating a so-called default mode network in the back of our brain. The brain incentivises a balance between effort and repose as a reward of success.

Balance between pleasure and virtue, inner and external progress, and effort and leisure stimulate happiness. Happiness is no exact science, though. The brain seldom finds a lasting blissful state of equilibrium. It is this challenge that makes us feel human. In any case, happiness looks more like a flower than the traditional

pyramid of needs of the psychologist Abraham Maslow. Indeed, if physiological needs, like water and food, are not fulfilled, one dies. But are there not more ways to die than just physically? What is the use of breathing, if you serve a life-long sentence in a cage? A slave is dead in most of his functions except his vital ones. Yet, the other way around, one can be at the peak of self-actualization, like the hermit that thinks he has unravelled the mysteries, but if his ascetic life of hardship wears out his body, he might already be more a ghost than human. We can think ourselves to be close to God, but when we are not appreciated by fellow-humans, are we still human? You might be an admired pop-star yet end up devastated like Britney Spears. You might be very wealthy, yet mentally enslaved and programmed by external forces like a robot. A happy, dignified, full life then presupposes that all these functions are in balance.

“One human life is deeper than the ocean,” Ben Okri wrote in his *Famished Road*, “Strange fishes and sea-monsters and mighty plants live in the rock-bed of our spirits. The whole of human history is an undiscovered continent deep in our souls. There are dolphins, plants that dream, magic birds inside us. The sky is inside us. The earth is in us.” Happiness is flourishing. It is key for the citadel state to have a sound vision of the attributes of happiness.

### **The state of progress**

When we accept this definition, we can also have a more clear-eyed discussion of what the progress and growth of a state are about. Progress is the capacity to fulfil as many of our needs, by activating as many talents of as many people as possible. The more citizens contribute to the

citadel, the better. This has consequences for how we evaluate growth. Previous chapters stressed that a state must advance power and grow. Growth should be flourishing. The point of departure for assessing the quality growth of is our image of human dignity. If that seems difficult, you can try the following questions. What kind of society would you like to live in? What society do you want to pass on to the next generation? That allows us to define what is valuable. Once you affirm those moral values you can assess the value of what we produce and how we reward those who produce. For instance: if we value nature, we must reward those who respect it; not those who destroy it. Financial value should reflect moral values. Afterwards, we can make the advancing of these values through value productive, so that there is more growth. A society can grow in different ways and they are not limited to material things. And even if we make things, we can make them in a dignified way.

States do have a role in the advancement of happiness. State-level satisfaction and personal happiness interrelate.<sup>31</sup> The success of the state adds to pride, confidence, and positive affirmation.<sup>32</sup> State-level ideals can help develop and affirm a sense of destination. But how can states advance happiness? It is more evident to identify what makes states unhappy. The unhappiest states are politically unstable, corrupt, and violent.<sup>33</sup> Poor states and states suffering from economic decline are unhappier. The most dramatic example is Greece, where happiness levels dropped from around 70 percent before 2009, to 40 percent after the start of the Eurozone crisis. The happiest states, on the contrary, are secure and rich.

Beyond that, it becomes less straightforward to judge what shapes happiness levels of states. The happiest states are quiet states, literally, characterized by

well-designed cities surrounded by generous green spaces, good public services, the rule of law, and social peace. These are all aspects that states play a role in. In Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, citizens have very high levels of feeling of accomplishment in what they do and indicate to enjoy many chances to show how capable they are. In other words, happiness through achievement and self-actualization is more evident. It appears that states are happier when they are democratic. Yet, autocracies like the Emirates - which famously appointed a minister of happiness - and Saudi Arabia are ranked above, for instance, Spain, Italy, and Slovenia. The authoritarian tide in Hungary and Poland coincided with growing happiness.

To advance happiness, states must provide in the basic needs, and preserve security and prosperity. Good governance is vital. They should avoid reckless decisions and decline. The happiness of the one generation should not come at the expense of others. A badly governed state that loses power cannot be happy. There is more. States should repel misleading notions of happiness, notions that undermine human dignity, whether that concerns corporate interest groups that advance materialist expectations, suffocating religious conservatism or the propagation of unhealthy lifestyles. They can do so primarily by offering education that truly emancipates the mind. Chapter six focusses on this theme. Even then, states should go against powerful interest groups exerting intrusive influence through media channels whenever it undermines human dignity and the core values of the state. The state must not impose forms of happiness. Yet, it should have a proper definition happiness. It should safeguard those constitutional qualifications of happiness. It should keep them fresh and relevant though permanent debate and deliberation.

## V

### **Power**

The preservation and expansion of power forms an important task for the state. Power allows the state to make its own choices and to influence those of other states. This chapter insists, however, that states must steer clear of a rigid fixation with economic and military power. Hard power and wealth cannot last without virtue and values. Power is a means to realize values and ideals - to make dreams happen. The remainder of this chapter clarifies the nature of power. It holds that it is comprehensive and broad, that all power is relative, that the pursuit of it requires virtue, and that the subtle realm of low politics is at least as decisive as the realm of high politics. The following chapters discuss the different domains of power in detail.

#### **Power is influence**

Statecraft is the skill to turn resources into power and power into influence. Influence on its turn allows the state to expand its resources and power. This is the positive power cycle that states should aim at. It is not always easy to distinguish these three cardinal elements. The first cardinal element, resources, concern population, territory, raw materials, climate, and so forth. A large territory, for instance, can be an advantage. A large territory endowed with natural ports, fertile land, water, and, hence, hospitable to people is an even larger advantage. Resources are mostly a condition of a territory.



Power is the capacity to change things, to make your own choices and to influence those of others.<sup>1</sup> It is about effectiveness. Political effectiveness depends on qualities like virtue, the ability to set wise objectives, legitimacy, civic duty, and a vision of a common destiny that fosters unity. It is very difficult to be effective and to preserve power in a state that is fragmented and corrupted. Economic effectiveness resides in qualities like entrepreneurship, pioneering, technology, productivity, and education. It is an asset if a state has clever engineers, but those engineers are even more relevant if they employ their skill in projects that are well-chosen. Even the smartest engineer remains a dysfunctional engineer if he devotes his energy to an irrelevant project. The coronation of power is prosperity and prosperity on its turn determines other components of power: military power, diplomatic power, legal power, normative power, soft power, scientific power, and so forth.

Influence, the third cardinal element, is important at home and abroad. It can be soft and subtle. A state can shape expectations and behaviour through its attraction as a society, by conserving its legitimacy as a partner, justice at home and abroad. It can persuade others thanks to the quality of its arguments, its diplomats, and politicians. Persuasion also relates to the wealth of a state. A straightforward option to exert influence is to pay. The state can project influence through regulation and organization, by shaping institutions, rules, standards, communication channels, and market places. It can coerce, force others to do things against their will, by exerting economic and military pressure. The most brutal expression of power is annihilation. If influence is wisely exerted, resistance will be limited. Reckless attempts at influence cause exhaustion. Wise attempts at influence feedback positively into the state's resources and power.

## Power is liberty

Power unnerves. Power can beget tyranny and aggression. One of my first assignments for the European Parliament was to lead an advisory group on the influence of emerging states in the Global South. That was in 2008, when the guiding theme in European foreign policy was the propagation of values. The director of the department suggested me not to look at the so-called dynamics of power and influence. I thought that a curious premise. Ten years later, I briefed a meeting of German ambassadors about multilateralism. Several ambassadors argued that tensions with China and Russia were the consequence of the refusal of the West to give up its dominance in international organizations. I retorted that it was not certain that tensions would dissipate if other states would gain more influence and that we would continue to rival over different values. Moreover, appeasing rising states by abandoning diplomatic power could elicit more assertive behaviour.

It remains difficult to acknowledge the importance of power. European citizens sometimes contend that a discourse on power smacks of neo-colonialism and eurocentrism. Others suggest foregoing property, like apartments and cars, and favour a life of wandering and sharing. Why to enslave ourselves to what we possess? Why not settle for less economic growth? Consider the high-educated Londoner who decided to abandon his office job for a self-sufficient farm in the rolling hills of Wales. Or take the Chinese professional trying to escape from the treadmill of work by opting for a life of lying flat, minimizing needs to minimize obligations. Can we not just lower our expectations instead of incessantly pursuing more power? The fixation with wealth also seems to distract humans

from their inner life, from friendship, from nature, and from so many other things that are free. Power pollutes.

These concerns are projected on states. As much as the relentless pursuit of power exhaust humans, it exhausts states. The more they reach into overseas markets, for instance, the more trade needs to be protected by costly soldiers and warships. The more these military capacities grow, the more they elicit distrust, which again requires more investment in security or more expensive concessions. High trees catch a lot of wind. And is it not power that leads to hubris that expedites decline? Does not dominance give way to complacency: first the feeling of entitlement that the powerless must serve the powerful, followed by the refusal to see how this complacency is exploited by some of the powerless that want to catch up? And why should we have tanks and missiles and fighter jets when all they do is to make others more determined to defeat them? Why the fixation with power?

Moderation is important. But the very scepticism towards power frequently suggests confidence and wealth. In a rich state, even the most ascetic activist benefits from the power of the state that he lives in: its railways, its schools, its security. When he uses money, he benefits from the strength of the state and the fact that his credit card wields enough influence for others to accept it in exchange for labour or natural resources. It is easy to be modest when you are at the top of the food chain. Moreover: should you give up power for ideals, you have no guarantee that those who gain power allow you to pursue those ideals. If you want to shape a green economy, for instance, you should not accept stagnation, but generate wealth to build green factories, acquire the land to plant trees, instead of letting wealth and power slip to states that are less concerned with nature. Power

is often taken for granted by people who have it; yet severely missed by others who lack or lose it. Power is a condition for liberty.

## **Power is comprehensive**

This chapter defines power as the capacity to change things. But what is it exactly that makes people change? Force, would be an evident answer, or as the Chinese leader Mao Zedong put it: power grows from the barrel of a gun. On the other extreme, power can be soft. Power is about ideas and the acceptance of those ideas. What is soft, is strong, advised the Chinese sage Lao Tze.<sup>2</sup> This argument is met with scepticism, like from the leftist thinker Antonio Gramsci. You cannot stop a bullet with a mattress, he said.<sup>3</sup> There are thus many interpretations. Some citizens identify power with the capacity to shape society through social media and global networks. Others prioritize wealth and technology. The definition seems to depend on the circumstances.

But that conclusion is mistaken. We often look at power through a specific lens, through instant expectations. But how much are we aware of the power that shapes our daily life? A rich citizen might think of himself as an idealist but is often supported by an invisible empire of low-wage workers and opaque supply chains. A poor citizen of a state in chaos might look for the hard hand of a strong leader, but does he know about him selling out the state to great powers or multinationals? Or think of the cosmopolitan who fashions that we have ended up in a borderless digital world. Does he recognize how much it depends on computer chips and precious metals? So, power remains comprehensive. You have to have it all: the hard and the

soft, the economic and the political, the visible and the invisible. If you cannot master all these components, you can make yourself so indispensable key domains. So, specialization is relevant. Yet the more comprehensive your power, the more flexibility you can display.

An ancient Chinese strategist put it thus: "The preservation of territory depends on walls; the preservation of walls depends on arms. The preservation of arms depends on men, and the preservation of men depends on grain." <sup>4</sup> Statecraft requires such wide-ranging approach. If the War in Ukraine confirmed the limits of European soft power, the Global War on Terror showed that democracies cannot be erected with military power. During globalization, rich states thought they could lose sight of their industries and specialize in high-tech. The more they lost control over their industry, however, the more other states lured away their high-tech too. Recently, we came to think of environment as the next big thing. But even very old concepts of statecraft gave a prominent place to this, next to military strength, legitimacy, education, and so forth. The king could not survive without his farmers; farmers not without nature.

We go from hype to hype, buzzword to buzzword. Virtual power. Soft power. Connectivity power. It is useful to reconnect with the more comprehensive approach of classical realists like Hans Morgenthau. "Power may comprise anything", he said, "from physical violence to the subtle psychological ties by which one mind controls another." <sup>5</sup> It is in the ancient classical works that one truly finds the most wide-ranging approaches of power. Perhaps those approaches were less rigid and parsimonious, more on the edge of philosophy. In that breadth, however, lay a humility, a humility that statecraft concerns the formidable task of overseeing numerous things.

## Power is relative

State power has an internal and external dimension. Internally it means the influence to preserve support of the people.<sup>6</sup> Next comes the capacity to regulate, to organize, to tax, and to redistribute. If we shift further to the soft end, internal influence is about shaping beliefs, the quality and virtue of governance required to preserve legitimacy and loyalty, as well as the attraction of the way of life and the ideals pursued by the state.

External influence is the capacity to shape the behaviour of foreign actors. Once again, this ranges from hard military power, civilian economic power, normative power, to soft power. A state cannot be strong abroad if it is not strong at home; but it is also difficult to preserve power at home if it cannot shape its external relations. It is intriguing how the classics on statecraft almost always combined these two dimensions. Whether it concerns Sun Tzu, Kautilya or Polybius, they were all as much concerned about the centrifugal forces at home as about the kingdoms next-door.

Power is relative and measured against others. The cock might feel invincible surrounded by his chickens, until the fox arrives, or, worse, until he loses his appeal. The state's internal power is measured against competing actors. States that fail to progress, lose ground, to criminals for instance. In the contest for citizens' loyalty and dedication, they could lose ground to agitators. The state's external power is measured against other states. A rich state can tranquilly consume its moment of fortune, until it realizes that its economy can no longer withstand a new competitor. For citizens in rich states, this is a discomfiting argument. Whether we like it or not, world politics is a relay race. If you pause, you lose and losing is problematic. The gains of other states

will first lead to envy. Consequently, it leads to insecurity. The rise of other states makes it harder to maintain favourable exchanges. It can delegitimize domestic leaders, as citizens will in the end question the stasis, impotence, and dependency. Ultimately, the eternal wisdom remains that the strong do as they please and the weak do what they must.

### **Power is soft at the core**

If idealists downplay the significance of power, neorealists present world politics like a clockwork propelled by material power, including industrial production, technology, and military force. They demote the soft assets that make states rise and fall, like the rule of law, a good constitution, and wise leaders. The narrow neorealist approach ignores how states decline when their hard power on the outside is no longer backed up by the tender tissue of norms on the inside, when wealth is disconnected from virtue and becomes decadence, power detached from prudence and becomes recklessness. It fails to explain how military victory fails to consolidate when it lacks efficiency and legitimacy. Power cannot be sustained without virtue.

Virtue manifests itself in the prudent balance between power and expectations. You can be enslaved by the lack of power, but also by excessive craving for power. Prudence in statecraft is about preserving a balance between expectations and power, between expenses and revenues, gains and losses, assets and debt, pleasure and sacrifice. States can suffer from an Icarus complex, reach for the sun too fast, and crash. Think of Ivory Coast, an African state that in the eighties squandered its growing wealth on prestige projects, such as a new capital and a

vast cathedral, or Brazil that wanted to highlight its position as an emerging power by squandering billions on the Olympic Games of 2016. States can also refuse to prepare for harsh times when the sun shines, like in the tale of the ant and the grasshopper, and live beyond their means. Greece is a good example. After decades of growing external debt, the financial crisis of 2008 made the purchasing power of its citizens shrivel and rendered them at the mercy of external creditors. Excessive expectations are a cage: they destroy liberty. A state that seeks to preserve its power manages expectations.

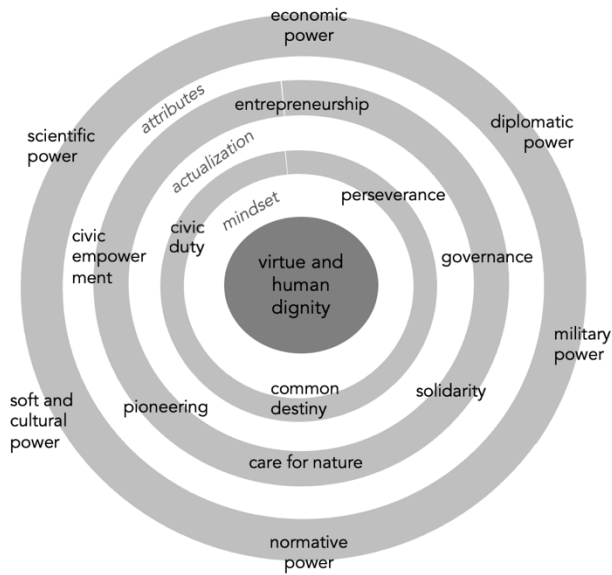


Figure. The attributes of power.

Virtue is found in the prudent management of expectations, but also in the meaning that we give to power. Power is but a means to an end. The ends too need



to be virtuous. What should be the end of power? Security, we discussed in chapter four, but also material wealth, happiness... Classical realists, such as Sun Tzu, Thucydides, Kautilya, and Machiavelli highlighted that a state can only thrive when citizens are happy and dignity prevails. Citizens must be willing to contribute. The state must encourage citizens to develop their individual strength in a way that benefits the collective strength. No project can be more uplifting than when it offers citizens, beyond security and wealth, the prospect of a dignified life, a life that creates a dignified livelihood for their children. Power, we saw, must lead to progress. Power holds a humanist core.

Power that only fulfils basic, material needs cannot last, because it becomes primitive. Power that only fulfils so-called advanced needs cannot last, because it mollifies and becomes decadent. In this regard, it is difficult to establish a hierarchy of needs. Hence the flower model in previous chapter. Indeed, there can be no decent life without security, without shelter, and without the supply of food; but does the capacity to fulfil in these basic needs not depend on the desire of citizens to develop their talents, to aim at self-fulfilment by contributing to solutions for such needs? And can there be self-fulfilment if it is not esteemed, recognized and respected by others? Capitalism in that regard has helped fulfil basic needs, but fell short in most others. It has bred rich primitives.

### **Power is fluid**

A Chinese Ming Dynasty writer saw: "The empire long united must divide, long divided must unite; this is how it has always been."<sup>7</sup> The power of states grows and

declines. This is the result, chapter three elucidated, of the sacrifice-profit balance. Advanced societies estrange from the hard work and struggle that underpins their prosperity. They still talk about freedom, but no longer feel what oppression means. They talk about democracy, but no longer know what tyranny means. Declarations become routine. First the experience of hardship fades. Then, the authority of the surviving generation to pass the memory on to the next disappears. While the credos are recited, the urgency and passion to defend them has long vanished. Morals become credo without passion.

It is also the result of a liberty-dedication balance. As prosperity and opportunities spread, the strong detach in search for opportunities abroad, while the remaining citizens and companies are tied together by an increasingly vague social contract, micromanaging laws, faceless proceduralists, anonymous tax systems without genuine human compassion and care. The power of necessity becomes the power of freedom. Freedom is a gift, but one that entails a difficult search to define what to do with your life. It is like having been in a tunnel, attracted by light at its exit, but once that light is reached and the wide open is noticed, humans suffer and freedom becomes agoraphobia. Many then start to long for a new tunnel and thus accept the pursuit of survival to be supplanted by pursuits that are equally narrow: material wealth, prestige, and so forth.

The distribution of power across our globe exhibits itself like pressure zones. High and low pressure zones are always on the move. The same goes for power. In many cases, power shifts are the result of the steady surge in wealth. While one region reposes after a period of growth, others start their sprint, and still others decline. In many cases, the success in one place facilitates success elsewhere. The ancient Assyrian empire, for instance,

benefitted from the knowhow of civilizations in neighbouring Anatolia. The success of Ancient Egypt, contributed to the flourishing of Crete, which subsequently inspired Sparta and Corinth, while the boom in pottery and ship building of Corinth contributed to the glory of Athens. Or consider Flanders, a centre of textiles in the sixteenth century. Envyng its industry, the French king, Henri IV, prohibited the import of cloth and tapestry while attracting Flemish weavers to share their knowhow. Asian states replaced each other like the head of a formation of flying geese, Japan paving the way for South Korea and Taiwan, who were followed by China. Power shifts are not always a race to the top, though. They can lead to pulverizing defeat, like the destruction of Poland during World War II, or painful economic corrections and poverty. Global history is an upward curve of development, but it knows severe setbacks.

Let us continue the metaphor of pressure zones. When we deal with power shifts, we tend to pay attention to the thunderstorms. Yet, like a weatherman does not wait until the dark clouds pack above his head, the study of power is about monitoring and understanding the subtle changes, how they start in far-flung places, move slowly, dissipate or gather force, and, in the end, culminate into a wrecking storm. The conquest of America and Africa by the Spanish and Portuguese caravels was the results of centuries of divergence between continents, the slow rise of Europe as a centre of science and commerce, and the Turkish Ottomans thwarting trade in the Mediterranean. The dashing of Napoleon Bonaparte into Europe followed over a century of anger that had built up inside France and the relative weakening of neighbouring states. A good leader studies power like the weatherman; not the storm chaser. Sudden changes in the balance of power, defeats and other crises,

or outbursts of energy and leadership: these are milestones in history. But the path between these milestones is important too.

### **Power moves in little bits**

This observation leads us to the realm of low politics. While the high politics of generals and presidents is usually in the spotlight, power shifts are generated at the level of low politics, of entrepreneurs, scientists, and consumers. Continuing one last time the metaphor of pressure zones: the former is about the dramatic storms and thunders; the latter about the slowly changing winds and currents. It is in the domain of low politics that power shifts are prepared; it is in the domain of high politics that they become manifest. Let us try another metaphor: an ant heap. You are used to making the same walk in a forest for years. At some point, you discover a giant ant heap. You wonder: "How is this possible? Why did I not see this before?" This is because when you were making your walks, millions of tiny creatures were busy carrying on needles and leaves. First, their castle of leaves and pine needles remained discrete. Even when it grew and the ants kept carrying on their little construction materials, the process was so slow and discrete that it was hardly noticeable. It is the same with low politics. Power is gained shipload after shipload, container after container, oil barrel after oil barrel, financial transaction after financial transaction, patent after patent, construction site after construction site.

Low politics, in addition, is about work ethics. Remember the soft core of power? Many rising powers depended for their success on wise leaders that scavenged the world for wisdom and brought it to their

state, like ants building their heap. Lycurgus, the lawgiver of Sparta, and Solon, the law maker of Athens, were said to have travelled to Crete, Asia, and Egypt to develop their perfect law. The Russian Tsar Peter the Great travelled through Western Europe, where he roamed in port inns to discover the fundamentals of sea power, and discussed economics with intellectuals. Thomas Jefferson, dispatched in Paris, sent books about philosophy, history, and law to James Madison to craft the perfect constitution. The Japanese government in the nineteenth century dispatched the Iwakura mission to learn from Western statecraft. China has promoted millions of students and researchers to collect wisdom overseas. Let them swim out into the ocean like little turtles, the leadership said, one day they will return with their wisdom to the motherland. Whether we make the comparison with ants or turtles; gains in low politics start with invisible gains in knowledge and wisdom, gains sometimes obtained from abroad, fixed into education and enterprise at home. States tend to win more in the competition for power by sending children to school than by sending soldiers to the front.

Education lays the basis for economic gains; boosts in productivity, growth, and power. The challenge for successful states is not to attract suspicion as a rival in high politics – the domain of military and security matters – by being clever in the domain of low politics. Sun Tzu advised his state to focus on economic growth and to win the war without having to fight. Lao Tze compared effective power with water, which invisibly increases its presence. It is in this logic that Deng Xiaoping advised to put industrialization and economic growth before military expansion. “Observe calmly, secure our position, cope with affairs calmly, hide our capacities and bide our time.” From the eyes of liberal

economists, such politization of trade makes no sense. Yet, all successfully rising states have started by making sure that they gained more from external economic relations than their adversaries. Ancient China did so by banning exports of silk worms. The French Sun King and the Prussian leader Frederick William the Elector discouraged the export of gold. England in the eighteenth century and the United States in the nineteenth century built their empire on industrial protectionism. President Theodore Roosevelt once said that states must talk quietly but carry a big military stick. One could add; they must work and trade diligently before they can fashion themselves to have a say, let alone to wield a stick.

### **Power is deceptive**

Economists have a term to describe the fact that it takes time for changes in the market to trigger adjustment: a response lag. This is also the case with power shifts. "The precise point at which the scales of power turn, is imperceptible to common observation," wrote Lord Bolingbroke, "They who are in the sinking scale do not easily come off from the prejudices of superior wealth, power, skill, courage, or confidence."<sup>8</sup> It takes time for people to realize that the balance of power shifts. This has three explanations. One explanation that changes in terms of financial power are rarely felt immediately. A second explanation is the role of the state and the paradox of collective security; a third concerns the response lag between generations.

*Financial power.* Shifts in the balance of power coincide with the transfer of financial wealth. That transfer is often invisible to most citizens or if visible, not seen as problematic. How many citizens noticed that

many of the container ships from China arrived full in the ports in the West and returned partially empty? The invisible nature of the transfer of wealth is particularly relevant in credit. Citizens are usually unaware of how much their state has borrowed abroad. States that weaken can spend beyond their means, because the government can issue bonds to other states with the sovereign guarantee to pay them back. It promises creditors to collect the borrowed amount by raising taxes or selling assets whenever that would be needed. States can go further in collecting resources to repay loans than private borrowers. Weakness is also profitable for investors – at least for a while. Weak states pay higher interest rates. Interest is an insurance fee for the creditor. The bigger the risk of default, the higher the fee. This leads to a situation in which creditors, eager for high interests, keep lending to weak states. As long as credit is available, the weak state will not “feel” its weakness. It can continue to consume, spend. This way, the need for austerity and reform can be suppressed for years if not decades – until the bubble bursts.

*The paradox of collective security.* The state assumes its role of guardian, so that citizens do not have to bother. This has a downside, however. Consider trade policy. As a private citizen, you will unlikely buy from a store that has child slaves at work and pays a street gang. A state feels less restrained to promote trade with another state that exploits people and funds terrorists, because the problem is more distant and the security consequences less straightforward. As a private citizen, you will try to avoid paying a bully to keep your children safe. A state once again finds it less difficult to pay mercenaries or dictators in other states to ward off external security threats, such as terrorists and migration, even if that policy is self-defeating. Once again, the risks are

formidable but not always felt by the citizens in whose name the state is supposed to preserve security. The very size of the state creates more options to defer and diffuse the threat; and because the timespan of responsibility for decision makers is shorter than the time it takes for the consequences of this imprudence to become clear.

*Generational change.* It takes time for the mind to adjust to new realities. Frugal generations are reluctant to pick the fruits of their labour. Work ethic and the fresh recollection of hardship will lead them to save their wealth instead of consuming it. The generation after World War II continued to live rather frugally. The same happened in China with the second generation who endured the difficult early economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping. "Our generation and our parents were too busy working to realize how much the state was changing and too stressed to taste the fruits of our labour," a Chinese colleague share with me, "My children are still in that pattern, but their children have only seen comfort, wealth and success. For us, we talked about China's rebirth; for them China will be reborn and they will behave accordingly. Their expectations will have no bounds."<sup>9</sup> So, here over a century of change passes between take-off and maturation. Several mechanisms explain the lag between the growth in power and the rise in awareness. Families were just told to work hard and to save a lot. Companies were encouraged to serve foreign consumers first and a lot of the export revenues were invested back in rich states to keep trade going. In other words, the Chinese financial system quietly promoted to produce wealth; much less to consume it.

The opposite also exists. The generation that grew up in wealth instead and benefited from the savings of the previous generation will often not realize that it spends beyond its means. Credit will be cheap and the



propaganda of governments to work hard made place for propaganda of companies to play hard. Entirely opposite to China's recent experience, is the American experience. The American society consumed without limits, seemingly oblivious to the fact that their state's debt was growing while the economy hardly became more competitive, not all too aware either that their government was quietly giving its sovereign guarantee that the next generation would pay that debt back to states like China. Finance, credit and government policy can mask the fundamental power shift for a while. Even if citizens are somewhat aware; there is no urgency to deal with it. This postpones the corrections. Yet, the more economic unbalances grow, the more there will be friction and crises. Gradual small adjustments culminate in devastating big adjustments. Thunderstorms!

## **Conclusion**

This chapter started by reiterating an important proposition: the main business of states is to preserve power. Power is the basis of freedom. Without power, it is not evident to make your own choices. There is no limit to the maximization of power, except one: virtue. Power separated from virtue becomes decadent, complacent, and, hence, self-defeating. Virtue is advanced through both cultivation and checks. Power is comprehensive. The resilience of the citadel state lies in its capacity to mobilize different attributes of power, hard and soft, and across domains, such as the economy, politics, defense, and culture. The more comprehensive the power of the state, the smaller its vulnerability. Specialization brings benefits in terms of efficiency, but also comes at a price. Moreover, efficiency in peace time does not always equal

efficiency in times of crisis. The Covid pandemic, for instance showed us how highly specialized just-in-time supply chains suddenly broke down.

All power is relative. State power is measured with regard to the expectations of its citizens and with regard to other states. Retiring or reposing at a certain level of power almost always heralds decline. The competition for power is an arena without exit. Refusing to play means that you lose and losing is painful. Power, at the core, is soft. The effectiveness of the state to accumulate and preserve power depends on virtue. Power shifts are usually incremental, but their impact manifest itself spectacularly - with a bang. While the "bang" takes place at the level of high politics, between armies or politicians, the incremental changes happen at the level of low politics, in terms of ethics, knowledge, and wealth. States, however, respond to power shifts with a lag. This is because financial power shifts are often opaque and suppressed, because change blurs between generations, and because the state often tends to cover up the change, to protect their citizens against the undesired effects of the change - until it is finally forced to recognize that it no longer has the means to do so.

## VI

### Moral empowerment

Your mind should be a citadel. Yet, the advancement of morality has attracted scepticism. *The Leviathan* of Thomas Hobbes starts with a sceptical analysis of human character. It posits that people are by nature provided of multiplying glasses through which every sacrifice appears a grievance, but lack prospective glasses to recognize the challenges on the horizon that require sacrifices to overcome them.<sup>1</sup> Hobbes thought that humans tilted towards selfish short-sightedness and had no hope that this could be changed. At best, it could be checked by a repressive state. Other realists, like Kenneth Waltz, posited that even if one state aims at virtue, competition with other states compels it to be selfish. This realist notion, we saw, displays a contradiction. It fails to explain how material power is advanced, through entrepreneurialism, pioneering, work ethic, and, most of all, the readiness to deploy those qualities with an eye on the common good. If nothing good is to be expected from the human character, not much is to be expected of the character of the state either, and certainly not that it cleverly governs, as realists prescribe. An effective state, in realist terms, still requires virtue. If virtue is expected in the government, it implies acceptance that it can be pursued more broadly.

This, however, is not the only point of contention. Advancing virtue is like psychotherapy. Mishandling it causes damage. The pursuit of moral empowerment can be a pretext for indoctrination. As it emphasizes perseverance, discipline, and courage, states can use it to mould obedient citizens rather than emancipate them.

One of the oldest maxims about ethics and education in China stresses the importance of persistence and concentration, but the Communist Youth League twists these qualities now in function of loyalty to the Party.<sup>2</sup> Boys in ancient Sparta were taken from their families and forced to survive in troupes, famously captured in the anecdote of a boy bitten to death by a stolen fox he hid under his cloak. It was not different in ancient Babylon. Today, some societies still hold bravery central in their initiation rituals. In the Hamar tribe in Ethiopia, family members flog boys. The strongest token of care for them, it goes, is to harden them in life. Such beating also happens in the Matis tribe in the Amazon. These violent customs are banished from most societies, but live on in Russia, for example, where the Nashi submits children to harsh treatment to prepare them for sacrifice to the state.

Even if they steer clear of physical violence, states can foster docility. Infant industrializing states use education to create patriot-producers: citizens who are prepared to work hard without asking questions. Moral empowerment in those cases comes with rituals of devotion. Turkish youngsters state: "I am a Turk, honest and hardworking. My principle is to protect the younger, to respect the elder, to love my homeland and my nation more than myself. My ideal is to rise, to progress." China has a pledge that is being chanted by over one hundred million members of the Young Pioneers: "I will love the Communist Party of China, the motherland, and the people; I will study hard, strengthen myself, and prepare thusly: to contribute my strength to the cause of communism." So, indeed, moral empowerment is often abused by repressive states or designed to advance one-sided, docile citizens. But these problematic cases do show that the minds of citizens can be influenced, and that there could thus also be positive alternatives.

These positive alternatives, admittedly, are rare. Even rich democracies often fail at moral empowerment. Consider the United States. The pledge of allegiance, liberty and justice for all, is recited every morning by children in most schools in the United States. But their knowledge of the meaning of constitutional values is appallingly modest. An American report from 1983, titled *A Nation at Risk*, found: "If an unfriendly power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war." For all the talk about inclusion, diversity, and open-mindedness the cultivation of civic skills in European schools has remained poor.<sup>3</sup> In several states, initial civic education has eroded.<sup>4</sup> "Education brings victory," Plato wrote, "although victory sometimes brings a loss of education, for many have grown more insolent."<sup>5</sup> These examples show again that moral empowerment is difficult. But that goes for many tasks of the state. It does not mean that they should be shunned.

Even then you could retort that moral empowerment being so sensitive, it is better not to trust it to the state, to demand the state to be neutral, and to leave it to citizens or to schools to interpret what must be taught. But this is one-sided suspicion. If one says no to the risk of political indoctrination, one must fight all other risks of indoctrination, coming from large corporate actors, for instance, religion, pop-stars, and so-called influencers. Herbert Marcuse in that regard warned us about the one-dimensional man, existing in a society of docile consumers in which a few individuals dictate the definition of liberty and offer happiness for sale.<sup>6</sup> True freedom of ideas would require a situation in which not merely different views of life coexist in a state, but a society in which everyone is exposed to a diverse set of ideas, without echo chambers and predispositions. That

free market place of ideas is a utopia. So, if we consider that dominant sources of values will continue to exist, the least a state should do, is to empower citizens to deal with those influences critically and to make them appreciate the values around which the state converges. If the state is not trusted to teach citizens *what* to choose, it should at least make sure that citizens are thought *how* to choose.

Moral empowerment is possible and necessary. The failure to advance morality and virtue in the minds of citizens, the philosopher Edmund Burke wrote is the worst form of tyranny.<sup>7</sup> While Burke had a conservative take on education, Enlightenment liberals agreed that education must strike a balance between individual empowerment and the preparation of citizens to play their role in society. "Constraint is necessary," wrote Kant, "One of the biggest problems of education is how one can unite submission under lawful constraint with the capacity to use one's freedom."<sup>8</sup> Montesquieu asserted: "A democracy educates its citizens to identify their interests with the interests of their country."<sup>9</sup> Education and, more specifically, civic education is indispensable for the survival and flourishing of a state. This chapter explains how it can be organized.

## **Who should be educated?**

In the past, virtue and morals were taught to princes. Yet, in ancient Greece and Rome, a body of political philosophy emerged that addressed a wider public citizens. The ancient Greek notion of education, *paideia*, means as much as acquiring virtue. The Athenian democratic and Roman republican tradition held that citizens participate actively in politics. Each citizen was a politician. The Athenians literally deliberated on a hilltop

overlooking the city. The survival of the state required permanent interest in state affairs. Hence, civic education, aiming at emancipated participants in the public life of a state, remains an essentially European invention. It faded during the Roman imperial period and the consequent Middle Ages, but rekindled with the flourishing of city republics, in Italy and elsewhere in Europe, and it matured after Enlightenment.<sup>10</sup>

The first forms of civic education were exclusive. Slaves, foreigners, and women were not involved. That changed in the twentieth century. Civic education also became a priority for modern democratic state builders outside Europe. America's founding fathers are the best example. The first Indian prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, put emphasis on schools as incubators of democratic values. "Everybody should be a producer as well as a good citizen."<sup>11</sup> The South-Africa leader Nelson Mandela posited: "No country can really develop unless its citizens are educated." He continued: "The power of education extends beyond the development of skills we need for economic success. It can contribute to nation-building and reconciliation... Young people must take it upon themselves to ensure that they receive the highest education possible so that they can represent us well in future as future leaders."<sup>12</sup> The state depends on talents to be deployed with an eye on the common good. A strong state requires strong citizens, in every respect, economically, culturally, politically. Each citizen is a building block of state power.

Civic education is a duty for every citizen, disregarding his origin, religion, ethnicity, gender, and so forth. If a constitution gives you rights and duties, civic education explains them how they came about and can be preserved. In the democratic and republican tradition, citizens take pride in participating, in being a part of the

state, or, at the very least feel responsible. *Gravitas*, the Romans call it. This is the opposite almost of the habit of many rich states to largely ignore civic education and *gravitas* for their natives, but insist migrants study them, states whose citizens hardly know about their history and constitution, but uphold them with vanity towards aliens. In those cases, civic education becomes a disguise for the actual erosion of civic values. Civic education, hence, has to be taken to heart by all citizens so that they become true role models to those who seek to acquire citizenship.

### **What should be taught?**

Civic education starts with *existential questions*. Citizens have to be able to reflect about the purpose of life before they can define the purpose of a state and power. What does it mean to be human? How do we evaluate a dignified life? How to balance between ratio and senses, science and the longing for deep mystic meaning? How to balance having and being, internal wealth and external wealth? How to balance different needs? How to balance between non-changing human needs and ever-accelerating progress in science, technology, and economy? What is the ideal image of a humane society? What is required to build it? What should citizens do to help building it? Who tries to influence our expectations of being human and living together: religions, philosophies, companies, interest groups? How do they do so? What shapes our expectations?

Such questions should make citizens alert: you only have one life. It is your most precious good and there are many external forces trying to shape it, without us even being aware and while our internal expectations are not always articulated. They will most likely lead to a



significant degree of consensus, about what is desired and what is not, yet also to the awareness that while some aspirations are universal, everyone is unique. This existential search can only be a success when it is conducted as a dialogue, in which participants compare different approaches, evaluate them critically, learn to see the valuable parts in different approaches and combine them in a personal synthesis, and, above all, appreciate that one cannot exist in a vacuum.

*History.* Immanuel Kant wrote that citizens must be educated “not only with regard to the present but rather for a better condition of the human species that might be possible in the future; in a manner appropriate to the idea of humanity and its complete vocation.”<sup>13</sup> Hence, the importance of ideals, visions of a good life and a good society. Yet civic education must also look back and requires education about *history*.<sup>14</sup> This includes the history of one’s own state, how it was built, the achievements and the mistakes along the way. This should not only be about its greatness, but also about the difficult moments, when sovereignty was at stake, prosperity threatened, liberty lost. It advises citizens to study the lives of heroes, great men, role models of public service and virtue.<sup>15</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau for instance testified how he was inspired by the library of his grandfather, where he discovered the *Lives* of the Roman historian Plutarch, his political heroes and the republican passion. It also entails learning about history more broadly, to study the constitution of other states, their political philosophers, and to compare what caused their rise and fall. History is about learning how prosperity is advanced and lost. World history propagates powerful patterns and laws, the humiliation of weakness, the universal quest for power, the dynamics of growth, the hubris that follows strength, the abuse, the fall.

*Liberal arts* are another component of civic education.<sup>16</sup> Broad liberal education is important for all citizens. Liberal arts' primary objective is to encourage citizens to explore, to discover their talents, to nurture dedication to learning, to build the right skills and attitudes to develop them - and to show empathy towards the attempts of others.<sup>17</sup> Wilhelm von Humboldt summarized this objective as follows: "To absorb the great mass of material offered to him by the world around him and by his inner existence, using all the possibilities of his receptiveness; he must then reshape that material with all the energies of his own activity and appropriate it to himself so as to create an interaction between his own personality and nature in a most general, active and harmonious form."<sup>18</sup> Liberal arts reflect the humanist aspiration that forms the core of the citadel state. As Pico della Mirandola has it: "We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being,"<sup>19</sup>

The second purpose of liberal arts is to develop citizenship. Liberal arts, the Greek philosopher Isocrates wrote, prepares citizens' minds to receive virtue. Seneca echoed this view. "Why then do we give our sons liberal education?" he asked "Not because it can make them morally good but because it prepares the mind for the acquisition of moral values."<sup>20</sup> If the state is not to impose virtue, it must empower the mind to search for virtue. Plato was radical in this regard and stated that civic virtue was the main task of educators and that any attempt at upbringing that aims at money was unworthy to be called education.<sup>21</sup> Still, liberal arts does help to foster creativity and excellence in profession. "We cannot reasonably expect," David Hume stated, "that a piece of woollen cloth will be wrought to perfection in a nation

which is ignorant in astronomy, or where ethics are neglected.”<sup>22</sup>

The circumscription of liberal arts varies. Ancient writers included music, as an opportunity to learn to appreciate rhythm and harmony by singing together. It included astronomy: a metaphor almost for the importance to look far – to reach for the stars. Mathematics constitute another pillar, alongside logic, geometry, and logic, all aiming at the cultivation of reasoning. Von Humboldt suggested a broad liberal arts curriculum for all students at the start and professional specialization afterwards. Another approach is a common core in education programmes. Teachers, however, often complain that students are hardly interested and that they prefer a quick road to financial profit. That, however, already displays failure and the perversion of young minds. Moreover, important endeavours that are difficult should not be given up, but receive more effort.

*Philosophy* merits to be a fourth pillar of civic education. Schools too easily pretend to advance critical thinking, while at best they show presentations about critical thinkers. They rarely invest in the more intimate coaching that is required to empower critical thinkers. Such coaching poses three important requirements. The first concerns dialogue. Philosophy cannot be preached; it must be nurtured while engaging different texts, other students, and so forth.<sup>23</sup> In addition, it demands an attitude of open-mindedness, the capacity to learn to live with doubt, instead of clinging to dogmas, to show introspection, to deliberate with others, to compare, and to revisit.<sup>24</sup> This on its turn demands both humility and ambition. While absolute truths will seldom be found, virtue is found in the quality of the definition of what is good and the effort to reach it. But while a degree of uncertainty always roams in the philosophical mind,

education, finally, offers the tools to try to overcome this: logic, for instance, or the skill to make a valid argumentation and to recognize fallacies, and dialectics, or the capacity to mould a thesis and antithesis via analysis into a synthesis.

*Aesthetics* is a fifth pillar. Aesthetics has been considered as an expression of effeminacy and decadence, the opposite of frugality and discipline. "The studying of arts makes hearts soft and womanish rather than teaching them to be firm and ready for war."<sup>25</sup> Rationalists have asserted that humans cannot be emancipated unless thought is shepherded away from the senses. Yet, aesthetics does not have to be excessively sensual.<sup>26</sup> Republican aesthetics, for instance, displayed virtue, qualities like courage. Think of bronzes like the Boxer at Rest or Michelangelo's David. Aesthetics helps citizens to appreciate what is good. Immanuel Kant insisted that citizens could not survive on pure reason.<sup>27</sup> His contemporary Friedrich Schiller proposed that aesthetics has the power to moderate passions. Aesthetics uplifts and invigorates our will in the experience of the sublime. It facilitates socialization. It balances our impulses. Aesthetic power makes us receptive to the rays of virtue and truth.<sup>28</sup> It triggers the imagination needed to overcome routine and reach for a better future, to develop a feel for harmony and proportion: both requirements for a society to flourish. This, indeed, comes with another pitfall. Arts can become propaganda. The ideal of republican vigour is dangerously close to Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens*. Yet, then aesthetic education should be as much about learning to appreciate beauty as to create beauty, the freedom of expression, but also the freedom of impression to interpret and re-interpret. As again Schiller has it: aesthetics is part of self-realization, which is itself a form

of beauty that articulates our moral autonomy. Freedom is imagination and imagination is freedom. No dreams no ideals, no ideals no progress.

*Perseverance*, finally, crosscuts these components. "Perseverance is a sign of will power," Lao Tze has it.<sup>29</sup> Isocrates posited that schools should not only focus on neutral skills, such as rhetoric, but on developing citizens with a sound character. "Consider that nothing in human life is stable," he suggested, "Train yourself in self-imposed toils, that you may be able to endure those which others impose upon you."<sup>30</sup> He continued: "A man with a mind capable of learning the truth, of working hard, and remembering what he learns, and also with a voice and a clarity able to captivate the audience, not only by what he says, but by the music of his words, and, finally, with an assurance which is not an expression of bravado, but which, tempered by sobriety, so fortifies the spirit that he is no less at ease in addressing all his fellow-citizens than in reflecting to himself."<sup>31</sup>

The idea that humans have to be strong is sometimes disliked. A politician from a progressive party, for instance, told me: "Why should we always be strong, why can we not be more tender?"<sup>32</sup> But, as we discussed, to show tenderness, you should be able to make your choices, and to preserve power. To preserve power is to be perseverant. Good civic education is not ruthless. It is ambitious. It aims high, yet reckons that the path of progress is never-ending and that merit is as much in trying as in reaching the goal. The tension between expectations and reality, the fact that societies do not change easily, also inevitably lead to discouragement. "There is nothing I can do." Or: "What difference does it make that I try?" It is in this regard that citizens must develop an intrinsic motivation to persevere, appreciate that dignity is in the effort, and that the effort itself can

make life rewarding. Young citizens must be taught to deal with uncertainty, the fact that things are seldom straightforward, to overcome stress, and to straighten their backs when life seems miserable. It implies a certain acceptance of difficulties, but no surrender.

### **How to teach?**

Civic education, we saw, includes existential thought, history, liberal arts, philosophy, aesthetics and perseverance. But how can this be taught? It takes a whole village to raise a child, an African proverb goes. Stand-alone citizenship projects at school do not work.<sup>33</sup> While schools can play an important role, citizenship education should be a broad, life-long effort. Civic education must be supported by parents, not necessarily by becoming teachers, but by serving as a role model. The social and political interest of parents has a decisive impact on the civic engagement of young citizens.<sup>34</sup> “The educating of their children is so much the duty and concern of parents, and the welfare and prosperity of the nation so much depends on it,” John Locke wrote, “that I would have everyone lay it seriously to heart and set his helping hand to promote everywhere that way of training up youth which is the easiest, shortest, and likeliest to produce virtuous, useful, and able men in their distinct callings.”

The raising of children is the most important benchmark of the success of adult citizens. There is no more precious contribution an adult can make to his society than a well-raised child. Some parents, especially the fathers, fashion that career is more important. Yet, neither wealth nor status will ever cover up the tragedy of child that is spoiled, ignored, or both. A state must encourage parents to take their responsibility and even

require a certain involvement at school. It remains symbolical, but it helps. It is also essential to make sure that all parents have time for their children. Parental leave can help to create a bond between parents and children. Basic social rights, including decent working hours should be enforced to guarantee sufficient time for raising children.

It is important to celebrate *role models* as they make virtue tangible. Many civilizations attached importance to heroes. Polybius explained the impact of the eulogies of great men on his perception of self-discipline.<sup>35</sup> States often celebrate role models with medals and titles. But like any formality, they tend to become empty symbols, sometimes misused by the authority to reward friends or to increase their own popularity. President Donald Trump, for instance, bestowed the highest civilian award on golf players that frequented his resorts. Caution is due when role models are formalized. Decoration authorities could therefore be advised by a panel of randomly chosen citizens, keeping an eye on fixed criteria. It is true that a society depends on numerous invisible heroes. It is true also that every civil servant should aspire to be a role model. Close real-life role models inspire as much as distant heroes.<sup>36</sup> Still, it is important for the state to know its superheroes – and anti-heroes.

It is evident to have a wall of fame, but why should there not be a *wall of shame*? What made me think about this, was a powerful monument in the Chinese city of Hangzhou, of a corrupt nobleman and his wife that betrayed the state to the enemy. Passer-by's used to spit at them. This particular monument is very harsh, but monuments for traitors and poor leaders could help young citizens to detect vice. At the same time, it is a powerful punishment for bad leadership. Yes, the short-

sighted politician can have his short moment of fame, his salary, and his pension. Yes, he can keep his state in the illusion of progress while his entire policy undermines it. But what if he knew that his name and his face would be on a wall of shame? What if he knew that his children, for all the wealth they enjoyed, would for ever be related to that name on the wall? Would that not lead to more introspection? If we find it evident that leaders are glorified, why can the same symbols not highlight those who did more damage than good? To be sure, this variant of tar and feathers should not be used frivolously. One could consider a period of several years before it could be considered, and, again a panel that represents society. In any case, thinking about heroes and anti-heroes helps advance civic education.

*Community service* has been looked at with scepticism, partially because several generations remember their military conscription during the Cold war, the loitering in barracks, drinking bad lager beer, and watching American movies. "We do not want conscripts," a general told me once, "They will only feel bored and we have no capacity to handle them anyhow."<sup>37</sup> This does not have to be the case. "I would never have volunteered, but I like it a lot and everyone is equal here," a Norwegian conscript summarized.<sup>38</sup> "Responsibility, adaptability and cooperation," added a member of her platoon, overlooking the border with Russia in a remote, forested outpost of the country. For six months, they were trained to live together in small units, to fulfil their duties, but also to cooperate, to care for themselves, to cook. Supervisors were professional, facilities basic and practical, equipment of high quality. Community service does not have to be military. Service projects should be diverse: care for the weak, care for infrastructure, care for nature...



Community service exists in different forms in more than one hundred states.<sup>39</sup> France re-introduced civil service before high school. In Ghana, students graduating from public university must do one year of civil service. In Rwanda, adult citizens invest time each month in community service. *Umuganda*, it is called, meaning to come together in common purpose. The success of such programmes in terms of civic engagement, care, inclusion, and open-mindedness, depend on clear goals, a good mix, constant contact, duration – at least six months – and professional management.<sup>40</sup> Professional programmes enthuse; improvisation discourages. It can be combined with a life-long programme like *Umuganda*. There can be different ways for adult citizens to remain involved. John Stewart Mill, for instance, highlighted the importance of court jury service. “He is made to feel himself one of the public,” he explained, “Where this school of public spirit does not exist, scarcely any sense is entertained that private persons owe any duties to society except to obey the laws and submit to the government.”<sup>41</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville’s asserted that local political engagement is a form of civic education: “Town meetings are to liberty what primary schools are to science; they bring it within the people’s reach, they teach men how to use and how to enjoy it.”<sup>42</sup>

An important question is whether the state must also aspire civic education through *media*. Citizens spend much time watching television, playing games, or in digital social spheres. These media are not neutral. Interest groups own and use them. Algorithms affirm differences and create echo chambers. Instead of encouraging exploration they contribute to intellectual closure. In this landscape, it is hard for states to exert influence. Who watches a public broadcaster when the virtual world can be much more fun? Why think about

social affairs when there is the temptation of sun-tanned models celebrating carelessness on a tropical beach? Some governments, like China's, have decided not to expose their citizens to perversion, but censorship is rarely effective. There are things a state should do, however. It should break down monopolies. No medium should ever be able to shape the way citizens receive information. No medium should be so powerful that it decisively shapes the expectations of children. Diversity is key. Whenever a medium violates law, it should be banned. Whenever it violates constitutional principles, a public debate is due and regulators must deliberate on sanctions. Even if citizens can access the same content elsewhere, it is a matter of principle for the state to defend its laws and values. States should also invest in quality information and culture. The most important task, however, remains to emancipate the minds, and to cultivate the need for such information.

### **Civic education at school**

All these approaches continue to lead us to a place that is the foremost building ground of the state: *school*. While we cannot exclusively burden schools with the challenge to preserve and advance civic virtues, it remains indispensable. Civic education at school is a delicate balancing exercise. A first balance exists between the need to "mould" and "tame" citizens, as both the Spartan tradition and Confucius have, and the importance of play and exploration in the development of citizens. If Aristotle proposed citizens to be "be moulded to suit the form of government under which he lives", Thucydides found that it was the liberal education of Athens that gave it an edge over Sparta's docile warrior-citizens. "On

education, where our rivals from their very cradles by a painful discipline seek after manliness, at Athens we live exactly as we please, and yet are just as ready to encounter every legitimate danger.”<sup>43</sup> Plato advised young citizens to sport together, to sing, and to play theatre. “No society has ever really noticed how important play is for social stability,” he found. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile* argued that to be a citizen one had to be a man first and to mature as a man meant to explore, try, fail, and resurrect like a man.

A second balance exist between diversity and harmony. Diversity can be a catalyst for renewal, and, in many cases is a given. Yet, diversity without common aspirations and values gives way to a Tower of Babel in which people live in the same place, but live, talk, think, and act alongside one another. Diversity without harmony risks becoming anarchy. Moral absolutism cripples a state but so does an excess of moral relativism.<sup>44</sup> So, at schools it remains important to converge on historically matured values and norms, formal constitutional values, that tend to be changed only when a majority approves of it.

A third balance exists between organic bottom-up deliberation and participation, and more rigid, institutional top-down constraints: laws, authority; between emancipation and discipline.<sup>45</sup> It is important for young citizens to learn to deliberate, analyse evidence, formulate opinions.<sup>46</sup> Student parliaments and debates are indispensable. But it is equally important to understand that institutions have a history, rules have a reason, and that traditions are not always trivial. As much as it is relevant to make young citizens participate and deliberate, to give them a voice, it is important for seniors to explain why things are what they are. As Emmanuel Kant has it: “One of the biggest problems of education is

how one can unite submission under lawful constraint with the capacity to use one's freedom... to make good use of his freedom."<sup>47</sup> This is not evident. Adults must create space for deliberation and take arguments seriously, but so too they must steer clear of laxity.<sup>48</sup> Kant suggests a pragmatic instruction of refinement, civilized interaction, manners, prudence, and good behaviour. "Liberal education urges upon us a reflectiveness, a tentativeness, a humility, a hospitality to other points of view, a carefulness to be open to correction and new insight, that can mitigate the tendencies towards polarity." That kind of instruction still requires authority, authority based on legitimacy, knowledge, merit, life experience and genuine care.<sup>49</sup> The bottom-up-top-down balance ultimately is a balance between old and young, creating room for change without creating a moral vacuum.

Civic education at school, finally strikes a balance between mildness and perseverance. Human dignity is a form of kindness to life, but to be able to be kind, one needs to preserve a degree of strength and resilience. Resilience, courage and perseverance, hence, are important, because the state depends on that energy for its advancement, and because each citizen needs those attitudes to deal with the complexity of life. Civic education cultivates those attitudes through metaphors. Reading remains the most evident metaphor for the complexity of life: to follow a plot line, to discover that it is intertwined with other plots, to understand an argument, to combine different arguments, to combine different sources, and after wandering through the pages, to come to a new vantage point. Exercises in deliberation and debate can help reflect complexity and nurture the tenacity to continue to talk even when positions seem miles apart. Group work and small open-class projects should be considered. Sports, too, helps, physical exercise,

as a metaphor for the marathon that life often is. Meditation and dealing with solitude: that too is a most valuable exercise. Each such aspect demands capable coaches and groups that are small enough to allow for a personal approach.

## **Conclusion**

The hope of a state, Desiderius Erasmus observed, lies in the proper education of its youth (girls included).<sup>50</sup> The previous chapters explained how the pull of place conditions political order, how the state remains an important organizing unit, that its main task is to advance power - the condition for security and happiness - and that the core of power is formed by virtue. The effectiveness of the citadel state hinges not only upon its industriousness, but on its capacity to set the right objectives. Moral empowerment, we saw, is also an important constituent of security.

Better than only to protect citizens is to equip them with the determination and tools to overcome challenges. Consider the so-called efforts of democratic governments against so-called disinformation and propaganda, among others by authoritarian states, by means of artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence can be helpful, but ideas and information cannot be fenced. The critical mind cannot be outsourced to computers and administrations; it must be empowered from inside. The main vulnerability in these cases is probably not even the strength of the authoritarian propaganda and its misleading nature, but the weakness of the dedication to democratic values, the limited awareness of the authoritarian challenge and the low trust in citizens' own government.

Moral empowerment does not discard the scepticism about the stubbornness of human nature. The required investments are significant, the gains not always straightforward. Parents have to be able to spend time raising children. Community service should be developed; schools supported. Civic education and moral empowerment come with risks: the risk of going too far, of not doing enough, of doing the wrong things. The movie *Dead Poets Society* shows this inescapable tension in a dialogue between two teachers. One of them emphasized discipline and perseverance, quoting the poet Alfred Tennyson: "Show me the heart unfettered by foolish dreams, and show you a happy man." The other imagination and idealism: "Only in their dreams can men be truly free. It was always thus and will always be." Balance is therefore advised, balance between teaching and exploration, between harmony and diversity, between deliberation and authority, and between mildness and perseverance. In any case, moral empowerment demands for existential and fundamental ethical questions to be asked, about the purpose of life, society, and the state, about human nature, for liberal arts, advanced philosophy that allows citizens to reason and discover the merit of an argumentation, for aesthetics, and, still, for perseverance: both physically and mentally. Moral empowerment means that citizens aspire the good things in the most difficult circumstances.

## VII

### Governance

The town hall of the Italian city of Siena is called the Palazzo Pubblico, or the palace of the people. In the fourteenth century, amidst political turmoil, Ambrogio Lorenzetti painted an allegory of governance on the three walls of its council room. At the one end of the central fresco sits justice. She is depicted as a queen, her crimson robes contrasting beautifully against the indigo background. Her snow-white face looks up to an angel-like figure just above her, called wisdom. From justice, we can follow a rope that leads down to a second important person: concord. She is equipped with a wooden plane, suggesting the quality of a levelled society, a society without extremes. The rope of concord, onwards, is held by citizens moving in a procession towards the right end of the wall. Here we find a third protagonist. It seems to be a monarch, but it is not a true monarch. It is the depiction of the common good, which for Lorenzetti replaced the authority of the king in the Sienese republic. This person's soul is inspired by three more angels – faith, hope, and charity. He is surrounded by six muses: peace, fortitude, prudence, magnanimity, temperance, and justice. The adjacent two walls offer two panoramas, showing a cityscape of dancing and crafts: the fruits of good governance. The opposite wall shows the consequence of bad governance – a demon, named tyranny.

Lorenzetti's work is a strong depiction of the ideal of good governance. There are more examples. We have reliefs from ancient Assyria, where the king tends the tree of life, receiving light from the goddess of Ashur. In the east corridor of the Congressional Library in Washington

D.C., good and bad governance are depicted in five lunettes. The qualities celebrated are often similar: justice, wisdom, and so forth. But how can we make sense of benign domestic politics? We cannot answer that question without identifying its two most important components. The first concerns the distribution of power and the fundamental values which it is supposed to serve. Governance is the second component and entails law making, institutional organization, taxation, and so forth. The politics of governance is about making big decisions. The third component, administration, deals with how these big decisions are operationalized into rules and actions. The first two components are fundamental and the focus of this chapter.

### **The distribution of power**

How must power be distributed inside a state? This was the central question at a seminar organized under the auspices of the Central Party School of China. Senior officials, company leaders, and military officers go there before taking positions at the top of the state. The school reflects on the doctrine of the Communist Party, the interests of the state, and how to defend them. In that seminar, participants debated what makes a state model superior. It was an insightful debate. Participants cited Western thinkers, as well as the founder of China, Mao Zedong, and the founder of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew. Some praised the tranquil welfare democracy of Europe. But that was before the financial crisis that wrecked the West. Most believed that a harmonious state in the first place requires a strong government. "Democracy is a good thing but we cannot rush it," a participant observed, "Each development stage has its own political needs and



the most important is not the distribution of power but the responsible use of power.”<sup>1</sup> It is easy to be critical from the vantage point of strength

When I heard that argument, my thoughts drifted to Aristotle. He also argued that what mattered was not how power be distributed, but how it is used. What distinguishes a state from one another, he thought, is virtue. A virtuous king, after all, is better than a vicious democracy.<sup>2</sup> Aristotle was sceptical of democracy and the capacity of humans to organize themselves. Still, he held that the masses are better judges than a single man.<sup>3</sup> This was also the reason why Nicolo Machiavelli favoured a republic. Free citizens are like a wild animal, he thought. “Yet, the people commits fewer errors than the prince,” he wrote, “and less serious errors.”<sup>4</sup> John Locke developed on this theme, arguing that it is safer for citizens to face the mischief of foxes than being devoured by a lion. Winston Churchill explained his reluctant embrace of democracy as follows: Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others that have been tried.

The happiest states in recent history are mature democracies, like Finland, Denmark, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. This is a snapshot, though. It does not account for the fact that they had a favourable start, benefitting from a temperate climate, a favourable geographic position, and a compact population. In the marathon of states, democracies lead. But they have built basic wealth through different forms of authoritarianism, incubated democracy through middle class prosperity, and matured their welfare democracy through abundance. Many of the states that grew fast in recent history were authoritarian. So, in the advancing of states, we ought to see democracy as much as an output as an input. It is an argument often heard in poorer states: states need a strong authoritarian fist to create stability

and wealth. A presidential candidate of the Democratic Republic of Congo told me: "You Europeans also have your roots of democracy drenched in blood."<sup>5</sup> Max Weber could not have agreed more. Every state is founded on force, he posited, and violence is needed to emerge from anarchy.<sup>6</sup> Yet, the search for stability can be abused by authoritarian leaders, so that their state remains stuck in the mix of repression and poverty that undermines stability.

We must approach the distribution of power in a dynamic way, consider its past – and its future. Democracies often took root in authoritarianism and they can also relapse back into authoritarianism.<sup>7</sup> Plato witnessed the decay of Athenian democracy. He decried the erosion of moral authority, with teachers pandering pupils, and elders aping the young, "mixing with them on terms of easy and good fellowship."<sup>8</sup> He described citizens as thriftless idlers, unwilling to deliberate unless they are paid-off.<sup>9</sup> Thucydides, a contemporary, wrote that these opportunistic citizens are ultimately destroyed by parties that look like extremist tribes.<sup>10</sup> Isocrates referred to the hurly-burly of the mob.<sup>11</sup> The fall of Athenian democracy is a powerful example of how democracies die. In Rome, Cicero remains the foremost critic of a degenerated republic first giving way to the mob and then to tyranny. Seneca added that such degenerated democracies outdo tyrants in cruelty.<sup>12</sup> Machiavelli, despite his preference for the republic, acknowledged how masses can be aggressive, greedy, and easily played by demagogues. Thomas Hobbes observed that popular assemblies are seduced by flatterers and that an assembly without virtue and education is as much a child as an uneducated king.<sup>13</sup> Those who witnessed the decay of a popular government,

its descent into anarchy or tyranny, were horrified by. Their testimonies, their words of caution still resonate.

America's founding fathers had these concerns in mind when they crafted the constitution. "Are not popular assemblies frequently subject to the impulses of rage, resentment, jealousy, avarice, and other violent propensities?" asked Alexander Hamilton.<sup>14</sup> They were afraid that direct democracy would destroy self-restraint.<sup>15</sup> Had every Athenian citizens been a Socrates, every Athenian assembly would still have been a mob.<sup>16</sup> Hence, they opted for representative democracy instead of direct democracy. They included many different fire retardants in government institutions. Even despite these safety measures, the Americans have damaged representative democracy as the founding fathers had conceived it. Democracy might be a check against abuse; but not a guarantee against abuse. And while an obnoxious king could still be toppled, it is much more difficult for an obnoxious society to heal itself. In the first case, citizens can direct anger at someone else. In the second case, citizens must direct frustration at their own dispositions. A wealthy welfare democracy might be the pinnacle of states' development, but nothing guarantees that to last.

Important lessons emerge. To start with, popular government is no insurance for virtuous government. We tend to consider popular revolutions victories of the common good, but they are often as much about acquiring power for selfish purposes as any other form of government. Democracy without virtue only disperses the tyranny of selfishness. Immanuel Kant warned: a revolution may well end despotism, but not the vice in our thinking. "Instead, new prejudices, like the once they replaced, will serve as a leash to control the great unthinking mass."<sup>17</sup> Giving equal rights to the masses is

no guarantee that it benefits the common good, because the latter requires not only that the masses hold power, but also that they use it wisely. When the masses are narrow-minded, they will be as self-defeating as any other regime.

It is thus important to differentiate between the mechanics of a democracy and the spirit of democracy. The former concerns civic freedom, the right to vote, and the separation of powers. The latter concerns the readiness of citizens to use their freedom responsibly. Popular rule is relevant if it is moral. The German writer Thomas Mann, who lived in turbulent times, supported the Weimar Republic but also cautioned that freedom forms a heavy burden. "Its other name is responsibility." True democracy only functions when every citizen strives to become the king-philosopher of his own life, when that citizen aspires to be an aristocrat, aim to *be* the best, not to *have* the most.<sup>18</sup> True democracy is demanding and almost always remains an ideal.

A second caution is that the pride of being a democracy leads to complacency. This tendency seems irresistible. In young, industrious democracies, the philosophy of dedication can be a vibrant philosophy taught by a hard school of life. It is rooted in the personal experience of evil and the sacrifice to end it. The intensity of this personal experience can never be substituted. But mature democracies can try to substitute it partially, by means of civic education and commemorating the historical sacrifices. Yet, similar to churches: the passion is replaced by routine and then abandoned altogether. The abuse that roused the burning intrinsic desire to fight for freedom fades into a recollection, no longer felt by younger generations altogether, so that passion for democracy is being replaced by the procedures of democracy. Democracy becomes a spiritless machine.

Virtue vanishes. Isocrates observed this among citizens in Athens: "They developed tastes which are in every way contrary to their best interests, while they view those who have some regard for their duty as men of austere and laborious lives."<sup>19</sup> Democratic states like to highlight their merit to the rest of the world, but in that confidence, they lose their rigour, their balance between rights and responsibility. This has been the case of Athens, whose democratic climax coincided with imperialist arrogance and civic recklessness. It was also the case of the United States, whose democratic golden age was wasted because it failed to uphold those things that make popular rule virtuous, and arrogantly took for granted the that democracy would be irresistible in the rest of the world.

This coincides with a third phenomenon: civic involvement being limited to voting and voting surrendering responsibility. Instead of a civic democracy, the state decays into a mechanical democracy. In Athens, it was said that democracy required citizens to be engaged. "We do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business," Thucydides noted, "we say that he has no business here at all."<sup>20</sup> But while the abuse that bred the young democratic spirit was about personal engagement, mature mechanical democracies become estranged. On the one hand, this leads citizens to outsource duties to a class of professional politicians.<sup>21</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville warned for this, and so did John Stuart Mill, who saw a tendency for overgrown government with a labyrinth of administrations.<sup>22</sup> A vicious circle emerges with professional politicians making governance so complex, that citizens find it non-transparent and incomprehensible, which on its turn allows the professional politician to consider himself an indispensable expert. On the other hand, this disappearing of transparency and civic

engagement creates a vacuum filled by private interests. Political parties tend to be bastions of private interests themselves, but private interests also parasitize political parties, so that while citizens still go to vote, the democracy transforms into a plutocracy or oligarchy.<sup>23</sup> Parliaments become the front office of economic power brokers.

The first three considerations focus on mature democracies and how they may wither away. The fourth consideration concerns immature democracies and democratic movements. Mature Western democracy is the result of centuries of reform. Rushing democracy seldom works. After the fall of the Soviet-Union, Russia experimented with democracy, but fell back into authoritarianism. This was because its citizens had no familiarity with democracy, democracy was contested by conservatives, and the new democratic government could not uphold popular support in a context of decline. The Arab spring also led to abortive attempts at democracy, because the popular uprisings could not overcome the hard power of their authoritarian opponents and muster the economic resources to consolidate support. In poor states, democratization is found to typically lead to a short-lived wave of optimism and disappointment, of change in institutional structures, but not in morals and prosperity.<sup>24</sup> There are different explanations. Governments often lack the monopoly of violence. The absence of manufacturing and the dependence on extractive industries lead to a narrow fiscal base that can easily be corrupted. Democratization is also not always supported by mature democracies. Western trade favoured authoritarian states more than democracies. The new elites are also often more populist than democratic. The defining feature of whether such states succeed or fail, is a commitment to development.<sup>25</sup>

Democracy might be the best possible model, but there are very few real democracies. We see a lot of mechanical democracies instead of mature civic democracies. And as democracy is the coronation of development, it holds a risk of smugness. So far, this chapter has formulated many critical comments about democracy. That is natural as democratic spirit is self-investigative. The risk is that it might lead some to embrace authoritarianism. A common justification of authoritarian rule is the preservation of stability.<sup>26</sup> Many intellectuals sang the praises of monarchs and authoritarian leaders. Seneca eulogized Augustus for ending the Roman civil war. Thomas Hobbes embraced the king as a restorer of stability. Immanuel Kant was a fan of Frederick the Great. Georg Hegel admired Napoleon Bonaparte for putting an end to the revolution. "At last a man!" Recently, authoritarian leaders received praise for being more capable of reform than complacent democracies. The head of one of the world's largest car manufacturers told me: "I admire the Chinese president for making unpopular decisions that strengthen the economy."<sup>27</sup> Another corporate leader said about the Saudi crown prince: "He will do what no other country so far has done: to lead the way to a post-carbon economy."<sup>28</sup>

But just like democracies, the reality of authoritarianism is often different from its ideal. Twelve years into his presidency and despite holding more sway over policy than his predecessors, the reforms by the Chinese president Xi Jinping proved disappointing, as growth slowed and productivity decreased. The same was true for the Saudi crown prince, who struggled to diversify the economy away from oil. Like with democracies, again, the beginning of authoritarian leaders can be uplifting, but disappointment often follows. This has several

explanations. Even the strongest leaders are limited by circumstances. Think about Napoleon's statement in chapter one that he was shaped by circumstances, not the other way around. China's leaders referred to a strategic window of opportunity that had opened with the saturation of other Eastern Asian economies, like Japan. There would never be Napoleon the Emperor without the chaos of the revolution. In the same way, they would probably never be such strong rule by the Chinese Communist Party, or by some of the Enlightened monarchs like Frederick the Great without the advancing of the industrial revolution, without advantageous economic circumstances or favourable external conditions that could be exploited. Authoritarian leaders benefit disproportionately during an upward tide, yet also disappoint disproportionately during a lowering tide. Strong leaders also tend to capitalize on a temporary surge of energy, a breakdown of an old order, and the creation of something new, which then slowly institutionalizes and restrains their power. Montesquieu summarized this dynamic as follows: "At birth of societies, leaders create institutions; onwards, institutions form the leaders."

Lee Kuan Yew criticized Western democracy for being obsessed with institutions and suggested that virtuous authority is relevant. "Can you have a good government without good men in charge of government?" he wrote, "I have observed in the last 40 years that even with a poor system of government, but with good strong men in charge, people get passable government with decent progress." Yet, authority is not always virtuous. Very few leaders have the virtue and the discipline of Lee or Frederick the Great, the Prussian king who slept an iron camp bed and woke up before dawn to work. Power tends to breed indolence. It is the case with rich



democracies as much as it is the case with authoritarian leadership. The families of many senior leaders of the Communist Party of China have built commercial empires worth billions of euros. The *intimi* of Viktor Orban, the strong leader of Hungary, were found to have benefitted from subsidies and other economic privileges. Relatives of Donald Trump, the dictator-flirting American president who promised to drain the swamp of unfair economic privileges of the political elite, were also found to have used his presidency for financial gain. A third explanation is that authoritarian rule is about tranquilizing the masses, instead of catalysing their energy and entrepreneurialism. Indeed, there have been examples of enlightened authoritarian rulers that have successfully incited and converted those energies into mass flourishing. Think of the enlightened authoritarian leaders of nineteenth century. Think of Solon, founder of Athens' progress. But many authoritarians are obsessed with control, so that censorship and economic control prevail. Consider how Chinese state capitalism has suppressed entrepreneurialism and favoured national champions. It is true, as we have seen, that rich democracies can also quell ambition, by becoming averse to the sacrifices needed to uphold power. But authoritarian leadership is not necessarily better.

It is common for a government, whether it concerns a democracy or any other form, to sing its own praises. We could witness that in the democratic world after the collapse of the authoritarian Soviet Union, in the same way as Athens considered its democracy superior to the Spartan kingdom. We could also witness it in authoritarian China when the democratic world became less stable, in the same way as the Russian empire despised the liberal revolutionary turbulence in Western Europe. Authoritarians can crush creativity, but they can

also stimulate arts, science, and philosophy. The same can be true for a democracy. For every good king or emperor, there are at least three bad ones. For every Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore, there are many like President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire.<sup>29</sup> For every period of democratic flourishing, there are periods of democratic crisis. The distribution of power does not determine the success of a state. Hence, Aristotle was right: what is most important is not how power is distributed, but how it is used, its connection to virtue. It is difficult to take on this question without an open mind. As I write these sentences, I also feel restraint and discomfort, being so attached to democracy and freedom. The ideal of democracy might be superior, but it is the most difficult one to achieve – and the ideal is never to be taken for reality.

## **Governance**

Benign politics starts with that awareness: the risk of the perversion of power. That is the starting point for any discussion of governance. One cannot rely on the distribution of power alone; neither can one rely on the promise of virtue alone. Hence, throughout history, other important conditions were added. Suspecting that states have a disposition towards predatory behaviour, Mancur Olson considered it vital to limit the state's reach through the rule of law.<sup>30</sup> Francis Fukuyama suggested a good state to depend on centralization, the rule of law, and accountability.<sup>31</sup> These contemporary thinkers follow the footsteps of previous philosophers and scientists. From their work, this section distils nine conditions for good governance: representativeness, clear responsibilities, accountability, harmony, just authority, the monopoly of

violence, protection of property, the rule of law, and oversight and foresight.

*Representativeness* means that state serves and represents the people. An important specification, however, was offered by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He argued that the government represents the general will of the people. The general will is what free people enshrined in a constitution as fundamental values, interests, and ideals. The state is never a morally neutral project and consequently the government can never be entirely morally neutral either. The constitution is always a product of history and liable to change. Yet, citizens are expected to abide by the constitution, until they acquire a majority to change. So, the state represents the general will, protects the general interest, and upholds the constitution. It should be on its guard for those minorities who seek to misuse the general interest for their benefit. Consider the financial crises in the past decades, during which banks claimed to be so systemic that it was legitimate to use public money to save them. Consider social media companies that claimed to help democracy yet profited from algorithms that polarized citizens. Consider the multinationals that told the government that it was in the general interest to preserve smooth relations with rivalling states, while turning their back to the home market. Whenever the state is asked to consider private or minority interests, it must ask itself three simple questions. Do the gains exceed the losses in terms of the overall, long-term power, interests, and security of the state? Does it help uphold the constitutional aspirations? Is it the state's best option? The state should give room and support to private aspirations to the extent that they support and display the general will.

*Good governance demands clear responsibilities.* That seems evident. Still, the dispersion of authority is

indispensable to a democracy. To begin with, a democracy demands separation between legislative, executive, and judicial branches. The dispersion of authority, and this is a second reason, can also help pacify a fragmented society. This is the case with states in which regions are dominated by different language groups. Still, the primary goal should be to overcome fragmentation. A third consideration is that the devolution of authority to regional governments helps preserve peace in the short term. Yet, in this case it can become damaging in the long run when fragmentation undermines the effectiveness of the state. A fourth reason to disperse of authority is that it can be expected to bring governance closer to citizens. We see that sometimes in the representation of local politicians in public utility companies. But when these companies are indispensable to the functioning of the state, even local representatives should set sight on the strategic level. The challenge became manifest in my state when a large Chinese state-owned company wanted to buy itself into a public electricity grid company, which was owned by local governments. When I criticized that this could undermine our security, one mayor retorted that it was not his job “to think geo-strategically”. Only after negative advice of the intelligence services could the deal be cancelled. Dispersion and balances of power must never undermine strategic oversight. They must also not lead to wasteful duplication. If dispersion is said to avoid abuse by the few very big fish, it should likewise not lead to the degree of opaqueness that creates profiteering by many smaller fish. The per capita expenses on the governance of a state with high dispersion of authority should not exceed those of a state with more centralized authority. Whatever the arguments for scattering responsibilities across departments or sub-state layers of governance, or, on the contrary, for pooling responsi-

bilities between states at supra-state level, none of the efficiency gains will make up for the damage done by a lack of transparency. The less transparent governance becomes, the higher the cost of managing it, as it will demand growing cohorts of professional decipherers, and the greater the disconnect with the people.

*Accountability.* Accountability evaluates how well tasks are executed and determines consequent reward or punishment.<sup>32</sup> The quest for accountability has led states to different approaches. Chinese dynasties introduced meritocratic exams to promote the best bureaucrats. Ancient republics selected good leaders by voting. Aristocrats held their class responsible for educating leaders. All approaches come with advantages and disadvantages.<sup>33</sup> All approaches can lead to plutocracy if qualitative governance comes to be identified with things that can be bought: elite education, leisure to study, paid media attention, and so forth.<sup>34</sup> Evaluation without consequence does not make sense either. Evaluation with impunity paves the way for a sophisticated form of self-deception.

States must therefore build in feedback loops. First, they need to define rules for those holding public office. The relevance of reward and punishment in governance is debated. Merit-based pay might cause opportunism and undermine idealism in public services.<sup>35</sup> Professional and accountable governance is about much more than these external factors.<sup>36</sup> Still, bestowing power to people without punishment for bad governance creates a moral hazard. Second, policy responsibilities, as discussed in previous paragraphs, need to be clear. Third, policy objectives must be defined transparently and connected to clear short-term and long-term benchmarks. Good policy documents present clear benchmarks to be able to evaluate their implement-

tation. Fourth, there needs to be systematic reporting about the extent to which these benchmarks are reached. It is important to have a broad range of auditors. The most important auditors are informed citizens, supported by an investigative press and a spirited civil society. Besides civil society, every state requires independent and professional auditors for all domains of governance. Their reporting must be understandable to a broad audience and explain the long-term consequences of policy. Sixth comes enforceability: there must be reward and punishment.

*Authority.* When stripped of its charisma, tradition, force, and ceremony, authority is the trust one enjoys to make judgements. Authority without legitimacy is just another word for tyranny. The authority of a state depends on trust in individual leaders and institutions. It is top-down in a sense that the degree of trust brings respect. It is bottom-up, because no authority can be possible without being perceptive to the wishes of others. Even the king-philosopher of Plato, for all his knowledge, was a perceptive leader. The most revered emperors in ancient China paid as much attention to the insight of a craftsman as to a counsellor at their court. Consultation and deliberation are indispensable. Consultation does not mean that leaders must always consent. It involves empathy towards the interests, feelings and ideas of different parts of society. If consultation is about knowing what the society thinks, deliberation is to think with society, or, at least a representation. Authority includes personal power and collective empowerment. It never pretends that the government can progress alone. It invites and mandates as many people as possible to contribute. Authority stems from achievement, the drive to be the best. But it equally rests in accepting others to become better and a firm

commitment to prepare those others to participate in governing. All authority is temporary.

*States must preserve a monopoly of violence.* People abhor rebellion. This led some to conclude that a state had to be a strong, crushing leviathan, while others emphasized that rebellion should not be repressed but prevented through humane governance. Nevertheless, the right to rebel remained an enduring concern. Ancient Chinese thinking held that a bad emperor be deprived of his heavenly mandate and be overthrown. Today, the Declaration of Human Rights prescribes: "It is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression." Yet, rebellion is not possible when only the state can use violence. In today's China, for instance, it would not be easy to overthrow a regime that permanently monitors dissidence. Hence, the proposal that armed militia are an inherent part of popular government. James Madison, for instance, contended that state militias repel the danger of any oppressive federal government. The right to join a militia and to carry arms is still a part of America's constitution. Moreover, in many states, armed militia are also a second line of defense against external aggression. It is additionally argued that armed citizens make up for state failure, repelling burglars and other villains.

A militia designed to fight foreign aggression and that keeps its weapons in store during peace time can be a useful asset. All other forms of armed citizenship are problematic. Gun ownership does not solve ailing security policies of the state; it merely supplants or even amplifies them. Gun ownership does not lower crime. Armed citizens are no counterforce; they are a nuisance. The rebellion argument makes no sense in this case. The price is too high. A century of gun ownership in the United States has taken more lives than the French

Revolution. Armed militia cause instability and undermine democracy. They can give way to the tyranny of armed minorities, which is as dangerous as the tyranny of the state. If a government must be overthrown, it must involve the full weight of the masses. A true popular uprising overthrows even the most repressive state. Not even the Chinese government, or any other authoritarian regime, will remain standing when the full force of 1.4 billion people turns against it. A final argument against armed militia is they often prove vehicles for crime and extortion. The mafia was a militia too. In sum: if distrust towards the state is so large that citizens must be armed, one better buries the hope for a state and good governance all together.

*Diversity and harmony.* While armed militia must not be tolerated, states should channel the friction that is inborn to every society. Lengthy discussion focussed on how states deal with diversity. Diversity can help renewal and innovation. "Liberty is all-powerful to feed the aspirations of high intellects, to hold out hope, and keep alive the flame of mutual rivalry and ambitious struggle for the highest place," wrote the Roman Philosopher Cassius Longinus, "Moreover, the prizes which are offered in every free state keep the spirits of her foremost orators whetted by perpetual exercise; they are, as it were, *ignited by friction*, and naturally blaze forth freely because they are surrounded by freedom."<sup>37</sup> But diversity is not a merit; it is a reality. The merit of the state regarding diversity is, at least, to pacify friction and, ideally to, to turn friction into a creative force. At the end of his life, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the famous French anarchist, concluded that the state had to be a general director, whose main responsibility exactly lies in this balance.<sup>38</sup> Any failure in that balance, he held, would lead to ruin. But how is that done? Leibniz suggested that



harmony is diversity bound by identity. But what is identity? Language, culture, and religion? Constitutional civicism as Habermas and others proposed? Reason? Harmony can be layered. There can be complete diversity in the personal sphere – as long as it does not harm others. There can be partial diversity in the cultural, economic and political sphere; partial because their still needs to be a common language to interact, commonly accepted forms of respect, and places where people from different walks of life congregate. There should be complete harmony in terms of the constitutional morals, law, and loyalty to the state where one is citizen.

*The state must protect property.* “The first and chief design of every system of government is,” Adam Smith saw, “to prevent the members from encroaching on one another’s property.”<sup>39</sup> The focus of thinkers like Smith on private property is contested, though. Private property seems at odds with the need for virtue and civic duty that figures so prominently in this book. “Private property has made us stupid,” Karl Marx put it, “it is the material perceptible expression of estranged human life.” Yet, socialism and collective ownership proved a disaster. It killed initiative and bred mediocrity. Furthermore, as this book already argued, even if ascetic life is considered morally superior, it will always be politically inferior to those who hold property. In addition, protection of private property stimulates growth. The economist Hernando de Soto demonstrated that poor states flourish more when the informal economy makes place for a just protection of property.<sup>40</sup> As always, it is a matter of balance.<sup>41</sup> In effective states citizens keep an eye on both public goods and private property.

When the state protects private property, it does so for all its citizens. The immediate concern is to protect private property against theft. But then who should we

be expect to be the thief? At the time of Smith, when mobs and brigands roamed the land and pirates the sea, that was rather clear. Today, rich states have other concerns. Consider the following example: Wind energy has become more attractive. Wind power plants are sometimes constructed near houses. States insist that it is in the general interest to have those plants. Still, they trigger protests of owners, claiming that the shadow causes distress, makes the value of their property drop, and that the push for wind power is bad policy, as nuclear energy is both clean and much more compact. In this case, citizens will see the private investor as a thief, or even the government if it lends its support to them. The government, in this case, should be an honest arbitrator. If a bigger private interest is allowed to advance at the expense of the smaller private interest, its profit should help to compensate the latter. The state can also decide to let public property prevail on private property through expropriation. A state only resorts to expropriation as a last resort, with an eye on the long-term general interest, through fixed procedures, with sufficient checks and balances and with proper compensation. The state also has to protect public goods. A first responsibility in this regard is to prevent reckless economic policy, such as debasement, debt, market failures, and the neglect of the overall competitiveness of the economy. Another task is to protect public assets, like buildings, roads, and so forth. It can do so itself, but also by making citizens stakeholders, incentivizing them to guard such assets and to respect public goods themselves.

*The rule of law.* "We are all servants of the laws to be free."<sup>42</sup> The rule of law is the body of rules of justice that knit a community together.<sup>43</sup> The rule of law starts with the spirit of law, the intuitive appreciation of justice, rights and responsibilities. After all, as Plato cautioned,

law is not everything and law disconnected from virtue can be corrupting. Law, subsequently, should be equal, and not be a continuation of vicious power politics with battalions of expensive lawyers: plutocracy by legal means. Legality in such cases becomes the court room equivalent of a mercenary. Next comes the clarity of right.<sup>44</sup> Fundamental, constitutional rules, rights and responsibilities, and the main sources of law should be known to all. Law should be written and practiced clearly. The United States, in this regard, introduced the vagueness doctrine, which renders law void when it is not transparent.

Yet, despite this provision, individual laws might be clear, but while whole body of laws still too murky and complex, a maze in which only expensive lawyers navigate. The rule of law becomes a rule of lawyers. Tacitus cautioned that the most corrupt republics have an overabundance of laws.<sup>45</sup> Friedrich Hayek warned that vague legal formulas increase arbitrariness and paralyze the rule of law.<sup>46</sup> Lawyers, de Tocqueville described, are the masters of a science which is necessary, but risky.<sup>47</sup> "The most self-satisfied class of people," Erasmus called them, "making their profession appear the most difficult of all."<sup>48</sup> This situation certainly threatens the third characteristic of the rule of law: universality. Law must apply equally to all. The fourth characteristic of rule of law is impartiality: laws should be made with an eye on the general good and applied without any other concern than – this general good. The final yardstick of the rule of law is enforceability.

*Oversight and foresight.* After Russia's annexation of the Crimea in 2014, many European states decided to continue to import Russian gas. While intelligence services warned for the risks and environmental movements deplored the impact on climate change,

governments did not want to change track. After all, Russian gas was cheap and favourable for consumers. This is a classic example of obliviousness to indications about long-term risks. Indeed, states must be close to the people and understand their concerns. But states must also stand tall, consider the general interest, oversee the interrelation between different domains, and look ahead. To remain close to the people, we discussed it before, consultation and deliberation are needed. But as the authority of the state primarily resides in its capacity to judge wisely, it must have a vantage point.

This begins with oversight. In the military, fire-guidance radars with a narrow beam direct a weapon to its target. But before that happens, surveillance radars with a much wider beam scan the environment and identify the intruders. Oversight does not only require good sensor, but also the capacity to process information. This was one of the lessons learned from the terrorist attacks on 9/11. Pieces of intelligence were not brought together. It happens very often that data are abundant, but not processed into solid analysis. A state should therefore have dedicated institutions. The United States' president, for instance, is supported by a National Security Council and National Economic Council that collect information from different departments and integrate it into common analysis. Oversight, however, is not only a matter of institutions. It also demands a culture that combines the focus of the fire-guidance radar with the open-mindedness of a surveillance radar. Finally, and related, oversight demands lateral mobility. Officials must occasionally rotate between departments and domains. States can also use "red teams", groups of experts to challenge policy proposals, to offer a different perspective, with an aim to create a solid final result.

Besides oversight, a citadel state needs foresight. Foresight is the equivalent of an over-the-horizon radar. Politics is short-term, but policy should be long-term. One of the evident requirements for good governance is to have independent institutions that audit policy with an eye on its long-term consequences. This is inherent to the principle of accountability that this chapter discussed before. Foresight, however implies a second objective: to identify long-term trends, risks, and opportunities, to explain their consequences for the state, to offer options for response, and, this is important, to track to which the state effectively responds. The best way to respond to long-term challenges, is gradual, but the most common response is deferral followed by shock. A third goal is to scan the horizon for areas that are not sufficiently monitored or understood, the so-called unknown unknowns, or possible black swans. This is not always unscientific, but necessary. It can be compared to future reconnaissance patrols, experts travelling, reading, and interacting widely, bringing trends together, developing scenarios. The sensitivity to *unknown unknowns* makes states alert, quicker to respond, and to appreciate the importance of resilience. Foresight is also a matter of both institutions and culture. States should have foresight groups in different departments, fuse their insights centrally, and report. The culture of foresight depends on the freedom and imagination to explore, the intellect to detect what matters, and the rigidity to clarify the possible consequences for the state. Imagination and freedom are very important. Foresight exercises too often depart from personal fixations. They add very little. There are many ways to organize foresight. In one state, intelligence officers were literally sent out to travel to a poor town in their country, to a place abroad, to a school, or to a tech-company, and to come back answering the

question: "Now tell us about the future." Another state invited experts from around the world to come up with a prediction with a ten-year horizon, yet at the first day of the foresight meeting demanded them to imagine and develop the opposite of their scenario and on the third day to break out in small groups to discuss the possible interplay of scenarios. Again, these exercises are not scientific. But that is the point: accepting that perfect information about the future does not exist.

## **Conclusion**

Political effectiveness means good governance. Distributing political power, to have checks and balances, can be a way to advance good governance. True democracy, in that regard, can be said to be superior. But it is seldom reached. Perverted democracy, in which vice takes hold of the multitude, will be less effective than virtuous despotism. The main question should thus not be how power is divided, but what is done with it. Still, again, true, virtuous democracy, if it can be built, will always be superior. The process of building it should be considered with humility, as it takes much more time for a whole society to acquire the virtue, the mind-set and the skills to become participants in democracy, than for a king to become enlightened. True democracy develops slowly and with setbacks, combines pragmatism with idealism. Whatever the distribution of power, this chapter advanced eight cardinal attributes of good governance: representativeness, clear responsibilities, accountability, just authority, a harmony-diversity balance the monopoly of violence, protection of property, the rule of law, and oversight and foresight.

## VIII

### Nature and its resources

In 2008, I participated in a state visit to India. An official boasted to the delegation that the arrival of the cell phone had fundamentally changed Indian agriculture. Farmers could follow prices real time and connect to buyers. When I travelled the Indian countryside a decade later, I could indeed see farmers with cheap Chinese cell phones. But they were so battered by drought that many of them quit farming altogether. The same happened in Africa. Technology made its entrance, but its expected impact was undone by two basic elements: health and the lack of water. Or consider California. For a long time, the wealthy American state seemed detached from earth, its businesspeople trotting the world in private jets and its multinationals letting poorer states turn minerals, energy, and labour into cleverly branded and highly profitable computers. Capital, creativity, and knowhow: that was California's cocktail of success. Yet, since a few years, earth imposes itself again on *Apple Land*. Wild fires and heat waves cost the State of California 50 billion euros per year.<sup>1</sup> In Belgium, the management of rivers was long neglected. They were for kayaking and fishing. Families could build carelessly in flooding areas. But then a large flood came, leading to many casualties and over 3 billion euros of damage. Experts advised to leave more space to nature as a shock absorber, but that was in vain. For a people that became estranged of the nature, it is not evident to reconnect.

Recent Western literature about statecraft hardly paid attention to natural resources. Hans Morgenthau, one of the foremost thinkers in the field, briefly referred

to natural resources, calling them “another relatively stable factor”.<sup>2</sup> Raymond Aron highlighted: “In the modern world, wealth no longer depends on land and natural resources but on intelligence and good economics.”<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere in the world, natural resources remained much more prominent. Leaders of developing states, from Mao Zedong to Julius Nyerere, all emphasized the importance of a sound basis of resources. It is a challenge, as the Singaporean leader Lee Kuan Yew put it, to build a prosperous state if it does not have any natural resources, wastes them, or if it is challenged by nature. In previous centuries, natural resources were also prominent in Western thinking. In the eighteenth century, François Quesnay published an economic diary that showed wealth literally growing from the soil.

Today, natural resources also regained attention globally. To some extent, that is the consequence of the failure of poor states to benefit from their natural endowment. Natural resources often undermined democracy, enriched autocrats, fuelled conflict, and discouraged industrialization. This is the resource curse. The growing attention for nature in statecraft is also the result of problems in rich states. Global warming causes wild fires, crop failures, the spread of diseases, and summer heat that discourages tourism. If the planet continues to warm up, states like Italy and Spain are set to lose eight percent of their wealth.<sup>4</sup> That has led rich states to rediscover how important their holy trinity of resources is: fertile land, temperate climate, and water. The three of them combined form an important advantage.<sup>5</sup> This chapters discusses land, water, food, energy, minerals and metals, and the importance of a healthy ecosystem. Prosperous and secure states manage nature; prosperous, healthy, and happy states remain close to nature.



## Land

Singapore is a state that sometimes seems to defy the power of land. But that is not the case. Singapore remains heavily dependent on land and its resources and has one of the biggest environmental footprints in the world. The land surface of Singapore is about 71,000 hectares. That equals 0,01 hectares per inhabitant. The environmental footprint, however, is 8 hectares per inhabitant. Singaporeans live in small apartments, yet rely on a vast surface of land for their needs. Singapore aims at securing its resources supply in different ways. Most important is to generate sufficient wealth to pay for its imports. Singapore also aims at ownership of foreign land. Through state-related investors it exploits millions of hectares of land overseas. <sup>6</sup> Recently, the city state decided to increase its domestic agricultural production through greater efficiency, urban farming on unused roofs and crops with a higher yield. Hence, rich cities generate a lot of value, but also require a lot of resources – and land – to do so.

Rich states are sometimes ignorant of the surface of land they rely on abroad, while they do not value their land at home. Poor states, on the contrary, appreciate the value of their land, but are forced to work it at the behest of the ignorant consumers in rich states. Land is precious and access to it depends on power: the state must make its citizens conscious of that. On the one hand, the state and its citizens must be mindful of the true footprint of their needs and its consequences for relations with other states. Rich consumers, for instance, have become accustomed to instant fashion, clothing that is cheap and disposable. Despite its low price, fast fashion relies on vast cotton fields, for example in Africa, that upset traditional farming systems and contribute to instability.

A wealthy family in Western Europe relies for its meat on about a hectare of soy fields in Latin America, soy fields that often came at the expense of tropical rain forest.

On the other hand, the state must value its own land. "The earth is my mother," a native American leader stated, "and on her bosom I shall repose."<sup>7</sup> Land is the cradle of life and the state has stewardship over the lands inside its borders, stewardship that should reach beyond economic calculation. Land is the cradle of so many things: identity, culture, security,... Imagine Rome without its River Tiber, its hills, its travertine; the civilizations of the Sahel without the typical clay that shapes its Mosque, the lure of its water sources in a vast arid area. The land shapes us, our character, our way of life. Reverence does not suffice, though. The land must be defended, against foreign aggressors or private land grabs. Many states limit the possibilities for foreign ownership. Most of all, land must be protected against domestic carelessness: degradation, pollution, tasteless construction. Private ownership of land can stimulate growth, when its owners show genuine care. How shameful are those citizens that expect the state to defend its territory, yet turn their own plot in a fenced wasteland of pebbles, plastic grass, and bad taste. Land ownership should come with respect and care.

The state must optimize the value of land. As land is limited and precious, priority should be given to activities that add value. In 2007 a caravan manufacturer in a small town went bankrupt. It employed 240 people. For years, the government searched an alternative investor for the well-located property. All it could find was a warehousing company that filled the whole 5 hectares with a tall concrete building were hardly 10 people found a new job. Such decisions are symptomatic for decline and opportunism. Governments often pride

themselves with the opening of large companies, but hardly calculate the balance between the value of land and the value of companies' activities. Consider another example. In 2018, a city proudly announced the opening of another large warehouse in its port. The company operated about 130 hectares of warehouses, employed 1009 people, and had a gross margin of 65 million euros. That same port also hosted a car factory. It had a built surface of 26 hectares, 6500 employees and a gross margin of 500 million. Factories are of course supported by logistics companies and the two are part of a broader ecosystem, but it remains very important to assess the current economic returns and the trend of returns when allocating land to private owners. Sometimes, it is relevant for the state to retain ownership. Private land owners use strategically located assets to strengthen their bargaining position towards the state, forcing it to pay more attention to private interests than to the public good. Strategic locations, like ports, industrial zones, water fronts, transportation corridors, areas around railway stations, are best kept in public hands. Foreign control should certainly be checked. Recently, states like Canada, Australia, and France all replaced their open-door policy towards foreign investors with ownership restrictions.

Likewise, economic value must be assessed critically. Consider agriculture. Large-scale, intensive agriculture was long the pedigree of efficiency. Yet, even on fertile soil, its added value is limited. A hectare of wheat or corn can yield a harvest worth about 3,000 to 4,000 euros. The cost of the inputs, however, such as fertilizer, crop protection, machines, and transportation amounts to about 2,000 euros per hectare. Subsidies can be as high as 250 euros per hectare. The cost of greenhouse gasses of crops like corn can reach 200 euros per hectare.<sup>8</sup> The cost of intensive agriculture in terms of

soil depletion and erosion is also significant. In other words, the land efficiency of such intensive agriculture is low.

There are alternatives. Agriculture coexisting with nature is more efficient. Smaller fields, alternated with nature, is a kinder landscape that attracts tourism. Tuscany for example, has about 800,000 hectares of farmland, generating 3 billion euros, or 3,400 euros per hectare. Each year, however, its rural regions attract close to a million visitors, generating about the same amount in value added in tourism. Georgia is another example. Its agriculture was anaemic, encouraging it to stimulate agritourism. With about 310,000 hectares of farmland, the country generates 1,1 billion euros in agricultural valued added; agritourism 350 million euros. One can still deduct some external costs, but benefit of agriculture balanced with nature is substantial. Moreover, farmland combined with trees offsets the costs in terms of greenhouse gasses. It improves the long-term soil quality and biodiversity.<sup>9</sup> Hybrid green spaces, where nature coexists with culture and production, have tremendous value. They contribute to the resilience of the state, its prosperity, and its wellbeing. Diverse landscapes are also more adaptive to environmental distress.

A similar discussion applies to housing. The ideal house for many is a free-standing building, with some private open space around it, eventually fenced and gated. This brings security and a feeling of independence. This form of housing, this spatial individualism, however, has downsides. While it seems to bring security, it tends to weaken interaction and cohesion, and, hence, social resilience and security. It leads to a society where families retreat in little fortresses, but in which the social space around risks decay. There is more. Urban sprawl is economically dysfunctional. Providing large plots of land

for independent building could be popular, and cheap, especially if local governments are ready to sacrifice open space. But in the long run, it is expensive, as diffuse building requires vast investment in terms of “public” infrastructure. It is much more expensive to connect households scattered over a large area, by means of roads, energy grids, telecommunication, and many other services, than people living in a more compact way. It is also true, indeed, that too cramped forms of housing and megacities are detrimental for wellbeing and security. States, to the extent that they have space available, should aim at density, yet always with open space in the vicinity, density also on a humane scale. It could consist of units of about 50,000 people, whether compact towns or city quarters, each with their own sources of internal cohesion and each with access to – and a close relationship with – green, open space. Land is the cradle of everything. People must remain close to it. That is not a matter of chauvinism or nationalism, but a matter of self-preservation, as a state and as a human species.

## **Water**

In the dry summer of 2022, the water of the River Elbe was so low that it laid bare an engraved pebble from the seventeenth century. “When you see me, cry,” it said. Even in states where freshwater has long been considered a ubiquity, global warming renewed attention for water security. Low river levels interrupted shipping in Germany and forced France to close nuclear power plants because they lacked cooling water. Governments are more often forced to ration freshwater and to discourage swimming pools. In other places of the world, freshwater has never been a ubiquity, to the point that states, tribes,

and clans threatened to go to war for it. India and China, bicker over the transboundary rivers of the Himalaya; Egypt and Sudan over the River Nile. Conflict over wells has led to numerous skirmishes between farmers and pastoralists in Africa. Rich states, like Saudi Arabia and Israel have spent heavily on desalination, which provides half of their freshwater. Water security has returned as a point of attention to every state. Water security entails the supply of freshwater for direct consumption, agriculture, industry, and energy generation.

The Louvre Museum has an engraved stone that is 2600 years old. This Cone of Enmetena tells about a conflict over a territory, called the Edge of Paradise.<sup>10</sup> This area was a large oasis, and the locus of the first documented water war between two neighbouring towns. Since, polities all over the world, have tried to control water as a source of life – and power. Water security, however, also involves the disposal of waste water. Ancient Rome thanked its rise to a sewerage, the Cloaca Maxima, that helped draining the swampy soil.<sup>11</sup> Water security, finally, is about preserving land and its wealth against the sea. Today, the Netherlands are credited for being the first to protect land against the sea. Its combination of dams and flood gates cost billions of euros. Without them, the Netherlands could lose half of its territory. But it is in China, in Fengxian, that we find the remains of a much older sea dike, that has its origins in the seventh century BCE. Today, rising sea levels are expected to affect 1 percent of the world's land surface, 3 percent of its population, and over 15 percent of its assets.<sup>12</sup>

Water is transient and difficult to control. If one contains it, it becomes a formidable force, leaks away, or evaporates. Water security requires a combination of control and adjustment, of intervention and accepting its

natural cycle. Water, in any case, is an attribute of power. The state must be aware of its supply, demand, and role in international relations. A person consumes on average 1200 cubic metres water per year. In the United States, this is two times more; in Congo two times less. Globally, 90 percent of that volume is used for farming, 5 percent for industrial products, and 4 percent for direct consumption.<sup>13</sup> 78 percent of that volume is consumed domestically; 22 percent is consumed indirectly through imported goods. An imported cotton T-shirt for instance requires 2,600 litres of water for its production. Yet, many states also rely for their direct internal consumption on water that comes from abroad, from transboundary rivers, from aquifers, from underwater lakes, and even from clouds.<sup>14</sup> Supply depends thus on neighbours “upstream”. In the Gulf, for example, states have taken issue with each other’s attempts at harvesting rain by spraying aerosols into clouds. This would deprive states farther from the sea. Even desalination can cause conflict, as the salty residue, called brine, harms the wider maritime environment.<sup>15</sup>

Fresh water is an indispensable form of natural wealth. It must be appreciated – and priced accordingly. Fresh water consumption should be limited. By far the most important way to save water is efficient irrigation. Dripping irrigation instead of flooding or sprinkling could save about 45 percent of the world’s water consumption. Households can cut direct consumption by changing habits, taking more often a shower than a bath, installing dual flush toilets and a rain shower. Freshwater should also be protected. Pollution makes about one third of the world’s freshwater unsuitable for human consumption and farming. Pollution is most often caused by farmers use of fertilizers and crop protectors, by untreated wastewater, and industrial waste. There are

encouraging examples. Chile treats almost all wastewater for agricultural reuse.<sup>16</sup> Jordan's newly built wastewater treatment plants provide 20 percent of its water.

Water is part of the broader ecosystem. It moves in a cycle of evaporation, precipitation, and infiltration. In the past, water has been retained behind dams, but that had many negative consequences. Ten percent of water in the lake behind the Aswan Dam, which nearly caused Egypt and Sudan to go to war, evaporates. Water has also been kept in underground reservoirs, like the famous one built by the Umayyad Dynasty in Istanbul, but these are very expensive. Hence, governments have rediscovered a most important storage: their soil. In Peru, a state depending on seasonal rainfall, the government replaced traditional dams with an ancient native practice of buffering water into wetlands.<sup>17</sup> Less folkloristic, the city of Rotterdam encouraged infiltration of rain water by allowing citizens by replacing some of the pavement with tiny gardens. Jakarta decided to dissuade households from depleting groundwater with private pumps, installed vertical drains for infiltration, enhanced correctly-priced distribution, and protected coastal nature as a buffer. Trees help manage water supply. They evaporate water, but the shadow from their foliage also reduces evaporation. Their organic material does the same and enhances infiltration.<sup>18</sup>

Water management has long been a source of political power. In a world of persistent tension between people and their planet that will continue to be the case. Securing water supply starts with respect for it as a bringer of life, to price it properly, and to punish wasting it. Control, through reservoirs, dams, dikes, and canals only helps to a point. Many of these forms of management coincide with waste, pollution, and new forms of vulnerability, as the force of water is not



predictable and changes over time. States must therefore balance control with resilience, allowing water to flow, tides to rise and to fall. Nature, we have again come to appreciate, remains a very useful shock absorber. When there is place for nature, there is place for water. Water also matters in external relations. States must see to it that they – and others – get a fair share, agree on how to manage trans-border sources, like rivers, lakes, aquifers, and, it seems – clouds.

## **Food**

Growing food is magic. Combine a hectare of fertile, mineral-rich land, with water, and about 5 trillion of calories of free sunshine (the same as half a million litres of oil), and the average farmer will generate about 10 million calories of food per year. This can be sufficient to feed 10 adults.<sup>19</sup> These are rough metrics. Conditions and yields vary. Still, this is the fundament of food production: A basic diet requires 0,2 hectares per person. Today, about 0,5 hectares of farmland is available for each person on our planet. There is enough arable land, but it will become scarcer as the population grows.

Food security is the capacity to provide sufficient and healthy food. It requires fifty times more farmland to produce proteins in the form of beef than in the form of seeds like soy. That instantly brings about a first challenge: defining what is “sufficient” and what is “healthy”. Food consumption reflects the balance of power. Rich people eat more meat, fat, and other things. They do so at the detriment of poor people who see their land being used to export luxury products, their water drained into avocado orchards, and their forest cleared for soy farms.

Excess is always unfair. It leads to tension and damage. An average citizen of the United States takes 30 percent more calories than he should. Reducing this would save the United States about 260 billion euros in food expenses and another 200 billion euros in healthcare spending.<sup>20</sup> Cultivating balanced food habits is not a trivial effort. This leads us to a second challenge: avoiding waste. About 30 percent of all food is wasted: sometimes bad logistics prevents it from reaching the consumer; sometimes it is just thrown away. Evidently, the direct economic impact of waste reduction is significant. In many rich states, a balanced and sober diet would save expenditures equalling 5 percent of GDP.

Food is a strategic asset and it should be treated as such. Every state should maximize its own food production. Yet, sophisticated agricultural economics is not only concerned about the outputs, but also about inputs and costs. Intensive farming, it was mentioned before, has a large output, but also requires vast inputs: fodder, fertilizers, machinery, and so forth, so that the value added often remains limited. Moreover, intensive farming is less labour intensive, but comes with external costs, including long and polluting supply chains, growing estrangement between farmer and consumer, less attractive landscapes, and more limited resilience regarding supply security and environmental shocks. Integrated agriculture is a far more resilient alternative. It can be more labour intensive, indeed, but the farmer also fulfils a greater variety of functions: food producer, landscape keeper, educator, tourism facilitator, and environmental protector. Integrated farming, in which different farming activities rotate and coexist, animals with plants, trees with crops, tend to be more attractive, better for biodiversity, and still quite productive.

Citizens must be close to agriculture. It is most relevant to integrate farming and food production in and around cities. It helps preserve open spaces, increases resilience, and shortens supply chains. Even advanced cities seek to improve food security by bringing farming back. Singapore expects to produce about one third of its food in high-tech *farmlabs*, but also in artisanal vegetable gardens. Urban gardens and orchards were traditionally a source of affordable food, and still are in and around many cities in the developing world. During a financial crisis, citizens of Greece and Italy rediscovered the vegetable gardens of their grandparents. So, food is more than biofuel for the body. It has a strong cultural and social meaning. Whenever I stayed with families in poor African villages, my hosts would enthusiastically tell about their crops and animals, take me to the garden, invite other villagers, and, however poor they were, send me back on my motorbike with plastic bags full of fruits, sugar cane, and cassava. In China, a state that sometimes struggles to provide enough food and came to rely increasingly on mega-farms, citizens remain fond of eateries specializing in local cuisine and using specific local ingredient.

Food warms a society, displays generosity and identity. A society that estranges from it, Waldo Emerson wrote, becomes like an amputated trunk. Nothing shows this more than the craving of rich urbanites for cooking books that return to the farm, reconnect with the garden and the different terroirs. So, food security cannot be reduced to calory efficiency, for that would lead us to science-fiction-like solutions, such as astronaut food and protein blocks made of insects. It must take these different dimensions into consideration: sufficiency, sustainability, and identity.

## Energy

In 1285 a royal commission investigated how coal stoves affected health in London. Its growing population had chopped large areas of forest so that fuel wood became expensive. The king banned its export. Coal became a popular alternative. The conclusion of the commission was clear. "The air is infected and corrupted."<sup>21</sup> Yet, despite its toll, coal became more important.<sup>22</sup> The history of energy unfolds like a sedimentation. Timber remains an important source of energy in poor states. Coal is indispensable for industrializing states. Oil, combined with gas, remains a preferred energy source of rich states. Today, a new energy revolution is in the making, with renewable energy, hydrogen, and advanced nuclear power. Yet, though new energy sources emerge, the most basic sources of energy, like fuel wood, will still be used. The history of energy teaches us another lesson: states must balance the imprudent fixation on instant needs with a broader vision for energy security. After all, the reckless pursuit of energy can come at tremendous cost.

The pollution in London is only one example. The early Maya state Copan destroyed itself because the rush for fuel wood for stoves and lime mortar ovens caused desertification. The pottery industry in some Greek city states devoured so much wood that the surrounding land became drier.<sup>23</sup> This could explain why Plato was an environmentalist, suggesting forests be preserved around cities. Coal pollution is still responsible for the early death of millions of people every year.<sup>24</sup> Nuclear power does not lead to deforestation. But nuclear incidents are dramatic. The disaster at Chernobyl in 1986, killed about sixty people and forced the evacuation of 300,000 people.<sup>25</sup> The radiation that followed the damaging of the Fukushima power plant by a tsunami, in

2011, killed one citizen and caused the evacuation of 24,000 people.<sup>26</sup> This danger led Germany to close its nuclear power plants. The former director of the International Energy Agency told me about a conversation he had with the German prime minister: "I suggested her that she better avoided rushed decisions and that after the disaster with the Fukushima power plant in my country only one person died as a result of radiation. She answered: You do not have to convince me. I am a physicist. But my people cannot be convinced."<sup>27</sup>

The choice to ban nuclear power increased pollution by coal and gas-fired plants. It had more lethal effects than the nuclear disasters in Chernobyl and Fukushima combined.<sup>28</sup> It also caused dependency on imported Russian gas and economic damage when that import was severed during the war in Ukraine. Many European states, for instance, banned a method that injects chemical substance into rock formations that hold oil and gas. This so-called fracking pollutes underground drinking water reserves. The United States did not ban fracking. That drove down American energy prices and benefitted manufacturing. It made the United States almost energy-independent, whereas Europe increasingly relied on imports from competitors, like Russia. There are no optimal forms of energy security. Hard choices must be made.

To make these choices, energy policy should strike a balance between six important factors: quantity, affordability, sustainability, security, efficiency, and technology. Quantity and affordability are important to preserve social stability and economic competitiveness. Globally, households spend about ten percent of their budget on energy.<sup>29</sup> Manufacturers spend around fifteen percent of their total production expenses on energy. Consumers and producers expect the state to provide

cheap and abundant energy. This can give way to energy populism. In India, politicians tried to win elections by keeping prices low and subsidizing energy, but at the detriment of investment in energy infrastructure. Long-term energy affordability depends thus on three other factors: sustainability, security, and efficiency.

Sustainability, on the one hand, considers the financial impact of energy consumption in the long run. What is the lifetime of energy sources? Over how much time are energy sources written off? How much investment would be required to replace them? A provident state factors takes these replacement costs into account. While benefiting from existing sources of energy, it creates financial buffers that help researchers develop alternatives, acquire the materials needed to build them, to clean up the waste of current sources, and to start the construction of new ones whenever necessary. On the other hand, sustainability concerns the environmental impact. Besides the sun, no source of energy is entirely clean. Fossil fuels pollute the air. Dams damage river systems. Solar and wind energy spoil the landscape and produce waste. Nuclear energy is dangerous because of its radiation. Nuclear radiation is a quiet killer, but fossil fuel emissions are so too. A nuclear power plant in a failed state is more dangerous than a coal power plant, but a coal power plant in a densely populated but stable state is probably more damaging. Sustainability is a complex matter in which different costs and ethics must be carefully weighed.

Energy supply security is the capacity to sustain production and distribution, to prevent and weather setbacks. Few states can produce their energy domestically. Energy autarchy is hard to achieve, though, and often undesirable. Still, it is relevant for states to produce a part of their energy at home. The very visibility of

energy projects can help to keep both citizens and decision makers aware of their importance – although the Belgian case shows that this is no guarantee. The shorter the supply lines, the smaller the risk of hiccups. Energy import dependence often contributes to unsustainable deficits on the balance of trade and external debt. If energy is imported, states must create reserves. These help influence energy prices in case of volatility, to flatten out price difference between peaks and lows in demand, and help survive shortages. In some states, for instance, tidal lakes are a buffer, filled during the night when demand is low and opened during the day when demand is high. Gas reserves proved vital for European states to mitigate the effects of the war in Ukrainian.

A state can try to offset the risks of import dependence by investing in energy projects abroad, so that the cost of import is partially compensated by investment incomes and the state preserves a degree of control. Consider a state that eyes a fixed annual import of 10 Terawatt (TW) of solar energy from another, sunny state. 10 TW is about the electricity consumed by 1 million households in a rich state. The annual cost for 10 TW of electricity will be around 2 billion euros plus a transmission cost of about 200 million euros. That can be spent entirely on a foreign supplier. But the state can also decide to become its own “foreign” supplier. First, it can invest in the international network. Estimating the cost of an undersea cable at 2 million euros per kilometre, a stretch of 1,000 kilometres costs about 2 billion euros. Second, the state can pay for the solar power project itself. The capital expenditure, for 10 TW of solar energy is about 20 billion euros. So, the capital expenditure for the total project is 22 billion euros. It can very well be earned back in a little more than 10 years, while the lifetime of the facility could be 20 years. This approach requires a

sacrifice, but it is financially sound and could strengthen energy security.

Yet, this simplified example also holds risks. Large investments in foreign energy projects increase the exposure to instability. A host state can nationalize assets. Moreover, energy security is never enhanced by depending on a limited number of large assets. It is better to diversify them, to build networks with different suppliers and different energy sources. The more diverse, the greater resilience in case of interruption. But states intervene even in transnational energy networks. Consider the European energy market. For a very long time, France obstructed connectors across the border with Spain lest its nuclear power producers would be outcompeted by cheap solar energy. While the international oil market is very flexible, as a lot of oil is transported by flexible ships, times of uncertainty weak states vulnerable to the dominant position of strong states that can pay more to divert the energy to their consumers. Hence, even in an interconnected market, energy security prescribes states to build reserves, a degree of control, and bargaining power. It is not sufficient for a state to be part of energy networks as a consumer or distributor; it must also be a producer.

The management of demand is indispensable to improve energy security. This can happen through pricing. From a short-term political viewpoint, low energy prices help curry favour with the population. Low energy prices also help companies compete with other states. Such energy price populism is damaging, though. The price advantage of nuclear energy often does not consider the cost of storing waste for many centuries. The price advantage of shale oil and gas does not account for its damage to nature. So, ideally, the energy price reflects the real cost. Demand can also be limited through



efficiency. Consider the industrial sector, still representing about half of the global energy consumption. Proper energy pricing can simulate factories to become more energy-efficient. But the condition remains that states guard against the relocation of industries to states with low energy pricing. The European Union, for instance, tried to offset this by taxing greenhouse gasses emitted by industries at home, but also the greenhouse gasses emitted by imported products, like steel and cement. Efficiency gains can also be made in transportation. Transport intensity can be reduced through urban planning: compact living, close to work, smart logistics, and so forth. Residential energy consumption can be economized, again through good urban planning, isolating homes, and advanced heating systems. None of this is straightforward. In the short term, this makes housing less affordable for the poor. But states can help the transition through cheap loans, subsidies, and organizing poor families in cooperative structures to collectively obtain good deals from contractors.

Energy security, finally, demands the state to contribute to technological innovation, provide investment and space for researchers to develop better and new forms of energy. Like primitive tribes achieved an advantage over others perfecting ways to make and transport fire, like ancient states gained power over others by improving the use of horse power by means of the stirrup, the bridle, and plough harness, like Medieval states first became global powers by improving the use of wind power at sea, and like Europe achieved its dominance over the rest of the world by converting heath into the movement of engines, so will leadership in energy technology continue to affect the balance of power. Miniaturized nuclear power, hydrogen,... many avenues are explored. Knowhow, however, is insufficient. In the

fifteenth century, China was ahead of Europe in navigating the oceans with its giant five to nine-masted treasure ships, but due to conservatism at the court the initiative of ocean exploration was left to Europe. In the twentieth century, Europe led the development of clean energy technology, but the lack of sound economic policy made it lose most of its manufacturing to China. Technology must be part of a broader policy, that factors in the other five elements of energy security.

### **Basic industries**

If it cannot be grown, it must be mined. The production of inorganic materials, minerals and metals forms about six percent of the world economy. The world around us is shaped by these materials: buildings, streets, cars, computers, and phones. Minerals are the bricks of a society. The most advanced products cannot exist without the basic industry of mining and processing. This sector of minerals and metals has a bad reputation. In poor places, mining and processing, often lead to corruption, limited jobs, and the discouragement of other industries. In rich places, mining and processing are considered dirty and undesirable. There is still iron ore underneath Manhattan, gypsum underneath Paris, and high-grade coal underneath Beijing, but the more citizens grew wealthy, the more mining and processing were relocated. When that relocation starts, states often try to retain control, supporting national mining industries to go abroad to find minerals. Like the rich states of the West relied for a lot of their steel and metals for electronics on mines and processing plants in China, China itself now seeks to relocate some of these activities to poorer states.

Yet, this chain effect has important disadvantages. Dependence on other states can lead to vulnerability. In the sixteenth century, for instance, the Turks often threatened to interrupt the supply of alum, a mineral to dye textiles, to Europe. More recently, China refused to export its large reserves of rare earths, required for advanced electronics and weapons, to exert pressure on Japan and other states. Dependence on imports, particularly if one other state dominates them, is dangerous. Leaving mining and processing to poor states can pose a threat to international stability. When governments position themselves as gate keepers and little of the revenues benefit their people, this gives way to civil war, state failure, and broader insecurity. Moreover, this chain of outsourcing to poor states has important environmental consequences. It discourages the search towards solutions for environment-friendly alternatives. It allows rich states to pretend to be clean, while their economy relies on dirty industries abroad, or even beyond. A next bonanza beckons: minerals and metals in oceans and even on the moon.

It is important for the state to secure supplies of metals that cannot be found domestically. This can be done through diversification and strategic reserves. Norway, for instance, has built up strategic reserves of rare minerals and metals for high-tech industries. Yet, states should mind the security consequences of mining and processing overseas. European states have long tried to encourage mining companies and partner states to be more responsible. As they came to depend on non-European mining companies, however, their influence decreased. The loss of control over the upstream part of supply chains leads to the loss of political influence. It also can mean that opportunities are missed to make industries more efficient. Basic industries are not

necessarily backward industries. States should not automatically consider mining and processing as a sunset industry. Finland, for instance, has allowed the opening of a nickel-cobalt-copper mine, but with compensations for the neighbourhood and demanding environmental standards. The steel industry used to be very polluting. A Swedish company, however, built a steel plant in Lulea that runs on hydrogen gas generated with renewable energy. It vows to circularity, keeping the metals in a cycle. That is a third role states can play, to simulate circularity. The state is a giant warehouse of minerals and metals. If their use allows them to be separated from other materials, like Lego, the materials never disappear and can be used again and again. Avoiding waste remains the most evident form of resource security. That on its turn requires regulation. The hydrogen-powered steel plant in Lulea, for example, would never have been built without regulation that makes polluting steel more expensive. The baseline remains that basic industries should not be backward industries.

## **Conclusion**

Never accept the myth that the state must no longer care about natural resources. Either it enjoys an abundance of them or it has become so rich that it can buy them. Even then, natural resources should not be taken for granted. Conditions can change: because of population growth, climate change, environmental disasters, or war interrupting supplies. For twenty years, Europeans carelessly allowed themselves to become more dependent on Russian gas, until Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. It sent a price shock through Europe. Hundreds of billions of euros were needed to reduce reliance on

Russian gas. The same happened with water. Freshwater was considered evident in rich states until climate change caused drought. More and more efforts are made to include natural resources in the way we approach wealth and power. Natural capital now figures alongside traditional and human capital. New methods are developed to compute natural wealth and its destruction into our overall wealth, the availability of wind and sun for energy, for instance.<sup>30</sup> This chapter discussed some important natural resources. Overall, it is important for the state to remain connected to them and to be aware of their importance, whether they are found domestically or abroad. Recklessly using them is a waste of wealth and power in many ways. Statecraft demands knowledge of the land: its natural endowments and its scarcity. From that knowledge, states must balance short-term availability and affordability with other factors like sustainability and security. A citadel state should relentlessly aim at efficiency and preservation.

## IX

### The economy

In a television debate, the chief economist of a European bank and I discussed climate change. The economist suggested that it was positive that the United States and China subsidized their clean energy industries. That way, she argued, they made clean energy affordable for the rest of the world. "What we should mind, in this case, is the global good, and that is the fight against climate change, not the protectionist interest of some state. There will be no wealth if the planet continues to warm up."<sup>1</sup> In the following week, a strategist of an industrial association argued the opposite: "We need government support if we do not want to replace our dependence on Russia for gas with a dependence on others for batteries."<sup>2</sup> Earlier on, an official also argued against a free trade line. "It is time for our own industrial policy," she said, "We need to protect our industries and mind both environmental and economic concerns."<sup>3</sup>

Economics and politics are inseparable. States have always played a central role in economic affairs through taxation, spending, and regulation. Early testimonies of that involvement are clay tablets found in the Middle East and Southern Asia. They are over five thousand years old. The state, through temple administrators, used these tablets to draw up accounts of the grain that entered and left their granaries. This was bookkeeping *avant la lettre*. Grain reserves were indispensable to preserve security. Clay tablets were also used to publicize interest rates, fines, and rules for the market places. Some tablets calculated the efficiency between farmers' inputs and outputs. Other tablets explained

peasants how to till their land. The state, from the outset, was responsible for five crucial tasks: preserving economic power, including reserves for bad times, making sure that demand was met by supply, maintaining strategic infrastructure, encouraging productivity gains, and regulating exchanges.

An important role of the state was – and remains – to expand economic power, or wealth. As difficult as it is for states to escape from poverty, we saw this before, it is likewise difficult for rich states to preserve prosperity. Criticizing the tilt towards luxurious ease, an ancient Chinese court advisor writes: “I have observed among the lower people, that where the parents have diligently laboured in sowing and reaping, their sons often do not understand this painful toil, but abandon themselves to ease, and to village slang, and become quite disorderly.” Greek and Roman historians praised frugal leaders and warned against the tendency of powerful states to spend beyond their means. Polybius stated that states decay in two ways: as a result of external threats and internal mollification. “Prosperity takes its seat in that community and life turns towards luxury,” he put it. “When idleness seizes the place of toil,” Sallust, another Roman historian, summarized, “then fortune undergoes the same change as do the habits of life.” Hence, power can only be conserved by the same qualities it was obtained with.<sup>4</sup>

It is well established how victors go down, but less how weak states often fail to pull themselves up by the bootstraps. That failure is often attributed to foreign exploitation, dependency, and unbalanced economic relations. The rich pillage, the poor are pillaged. But this struggle cannot only be attributed to external factors. Poverty makes it harder for a state to mobilize resources with an eye on productivity. This is because resources are more limited, but also because economic distress gives

way to corruption and unrest. Poverty undermines the functioning of the state. Instead of trying to keep wealth inside the state, the leaders themselves often expatriate wealth, spend it on foreign luxury, and allow themselves to be incorporated by other states to preserve access to such luxury. The decadence of the rich and the impotence of the poor have thus one thing in common: the failure to overcome short-sighted instincts.

This chapter therefore suggests - once again - balance. A citadel state should maintain a proper balance between private and public initiative. The degree of state control is not so defining for economic dynamism, but the extent to which efficiency is advanced by mechanisms that reward those who contribute to the long-term power of the state. Those mechanisms can be established in both the private market and the public sector. Second, the state should find a balance between extrinsic material and intrinsic humane progress. The yardstick of growth is not only the production of goods and services, but also the capacity for furthering self-actualization and identity. Third, states should balance domestic and external interests. States will always trade and depend on other states. Yet, to be able to make sovereign choices, economic exchanges should be equitable and external dependencies should either be avoided or diffused so that it is less evident for others to exploit them. States, and this is another task, need to balance ends and means, and guarantee that eventual debt helps to make the economy stronger in the long run. States must preserve a healthy balance between sectors: primary activities, manufacturing, commercial services, and public services. A market, finally, requires transparency so that consumers can make rational choices and the state can retain oversight in order to assess the benefits of international economic exchanges.



## Public and private

Do states run the economy or does the economy run the state? Old Chinese, Greek, and Roman sources described the efforts of states to control trade, yet also the failure to influence speculators and creditors. In early modern times, states used money to gain power and power to gain money, like the Venetians put it. But states were also hostages of private bankers.<sup>5</sup> The rise of absolute monarchy rekindled that debate. Monarchs relied on mercenaries to fight wars and bankers to finance them. Statesmen like Jean-Baptiste Colbert in France and Thomas Mun in England urged the state to strengthen its grip: through taxation, trade barriers, and capital reserves. Mercantilism, it was called. But when Colbert asked traders what the state could do for them, they answered: "Laissez-faire, laissez-passer!"<sup>6</sup> It was against that backdrop that liberalist thinkers, like Adam Smith and Robert Turgot, called for the market to be run with an invisible hand. As a bourgeois liberalism developed in the nineteenth century, a new generation of intellectuals claimed that the state had transformed from a cash cow for monarchs into a goose with golden eggs for the bourgeoisie. They saw the state guarding the privileges of the rich.<sup>7</sup> "With the development of commerce and industry, individuals grew richer while the state fell ever more deeply into debt," Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels posited, "the state has to beg from the bourgeoisie."<sup>8</sup>

The collapse of the Soviet Union led many to believe that states needed to retreat from economics. Yet, every economic model has failed us in some way. Communism and state capitalism failed because states forced labour to unproductive collectivist activities. Capitalism failed because consumers and speculators sent capital to unproductive extravagance. The Third

Way, a combination of capitalism and social correction, sometimes failed because the public sector was not effective and the private sector failed to support it. The degree of government intervention is no useful yardstick for success. State capitalism was effective during the industrialization in the West, where it incubated scientific progress. But it became dysfunctional recently in China, where large investments fail to boost productivity. The Third Way was successful in Denmark and Sweden, but less so in Belgium and France.

It is not just the excess of state power that can be detrimental to the economy, but the excess any form of power. A good economy, we saw it already in chapter seven, needs both openness and government guidance. It needs to be a market. Historically, the market was a place, founded, maintained, and protected by a community where sellers could meet buyers. A market is to economics what democracy is to politics. It rests on the assumption that the individual knows best what is in his interest and that the multitude of individuals knows better than a despot or monopolist. The role of the state has historically been to provide protection, to enforce standards, and to facilitate trade, through minting, for instance. It monitors the mechanics of the market. It articulates the morals of the market.<sup>9</sup> A good example in this regards is the pioneering spirit propagated by the American government. "We choose to go to the Moon," John F. Kennedy said, "not because it is easy, but because it is hard; because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills."<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the difference between public and private is not always obvious. The public sector can be rigid and dysfunctional. But it can also be organized like a market almost, in which the government manages its financing, with an eye on redistribution and fairness, and

makes sure that good service providers are rewarded and that there is sufficient diversity. Consider the healthcare sector. The American healthcare sector is mostly private, costs about 12,000 euros per citizen per year and is mediocre. In the Nordic states, healthcare is mainly public, costs about 4,000 euros per citizen per year and is excellent. Nordic governments created transparency in the quality of hospitals. Let us discuss another example. Passenger trains and railway stations in the Netherlands are mostly public, modern, and clean. In Belgium, they are also public and about as expensive. Yet, in Belgium they are shabby and dirty. The Dutch railway company is professionally run by managers, whereas the Belgian company is mismanaged by politicians who milk it for prestigious infrastructure projects in their communities.

States must work towards an effective allocation of production factors. Their first responsibility in this regard is to guard the values behind the financial value and reflect with citizens about the goals of progress. "Private interest, reason, and moral sense," should drive the market<sup>11</sup> Diversity is indispensable. Apart from a few strategic sectors that require scale, fair competition remains the best stimulus for excellence. The state should prevent market failures, like monopolies, damaging pollution or speculation, and avert government failures, like excessive debt and ill-judged subsidies. Finally, the state should, as John Rawls put it, provide in a fair equality of opportunity, to offer protection to citizens, yet with the aim to emancipate and not to incapacitate.

"The wise and virtuous man," Adam Smith observed, "is at all times willing that his own private interests should be sacrificed to the public interest."<sup>12</sup> The public should support the private interest as long as the private interest supports the public good. As John Maynard Keynes described, one could perfectly burry

old bottles filled with money and ask companies to compete for the most solutions to dig them up. They would produce, generate jobs, but the whole endeavour would be pointless. Besides, if jobs and production were the only benchmark, drugs trafficking would be virtuous, and communism would be superior.

Before supporting a private company, the state must ask itself two cardinal questions. Does the company align its interests with the values and interests of the state? Does it contribute to the power of the state in terms of net-revenues, productivity gains, and technology? If it goes abroad, does it remain connected to the home economy and repatriate its earnings? In the seventeenth century, Thomas Mun praised companies that invested overseas and returned with profit. He compared such investors with a hunting dog, with the state, the hunter, being well assured that in this course of trade it would return again with a duck in the mouth. A company that seeks to shape state policy but outsources most of its activity, transfers precious technology to competitors, and repatriates little income from abroad does not meet those requirements. A company that hires workers but whose role is limited to bringing imported goods from states that hold antagonistic values to consumers at the detriment of local producers, is not much different from a drug trafficker. It incapacitates the economy as much as the dealer incapacitates his addict. Napoleon Bonaparte said: money knows no fatherland. He was right and it is therefore the duty of the state to make money serve the fatherland.

## **Intrinsic and extrinsic progress**

Socrates describes a dialogue between the Egyptian pharaoh Thamos and the god Thoth. After Thoth praised the invention of writing, the pharaoh laments: "This invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them." This conversation reflects an important tension between the solutions that humans develop for their problems and the fear that these solutions make humans redundant. When Europe discovered the printing press, some humanists deplored that it replaced copying by hand as an act of meditation. During the industrial revolution, workers feared to become useless and smashed weaving machines.

This threat of redundancy has two components. On the one hand, humans can become redundant as workers, which possibly leads to greater inequality. On the other hand, humans can become redundant as – humans. Instead of wealth contributing to their empowerment, it only does so partially, on the outside, through possession instead of personality, through information instead of knowledge. Wealth, chapter four discussed, offers an exoskeleton. When does material progress support life and when does it undermine it? As Adam Smith suggested: we sometimes value the means more than the end. Or, as Martin Heidegger put it: we view humans technologically – that is, as raw material for technical operations.<sup>13</sup>

The idea has long been that work would allow for material progress. This on its turn would lead to more leisure. Leisure would then allow to fulfil higher needs.

Leisure could subsequently become the domain of noble activities. Yet, as the industrial revolution saturated the West with mass consumption, fears grew that it would no longer be considered a means to aim at human dignity, but as an end. In the early twentieth century, Theodore Roosevelt cautioned: "The life of material gain, whether for the nation or the individual, is of value as a foundation, only as there is added to it the uplift that comes from devotion to higher ideals." Roosevelt expressed a timeworn concern, but mass consumption made it regain attention. A while later, John Maynard Keynes warned in his letter to his grandchildren, that if a material basis were to be created, it would be difficult to overcome "the disgusting morbidity of love of money as a possession, as distinguished from the love of money as a means to the enjoyments and realities of life." Keynes had doubts about the noble leisure of Aristotle. If the pursuit of material gain is the all-powerful driver of an all-present economy, it will hang over leisure too. Keynes' contemporary, Thorstein Veblen, made a similar argument and predicted no shift to virtuous leisure but consumerist leisure and a lot of so-called conspicuous waste.

Hence, the yardstick of growth should be firm: to fulfil as many needs as possible by activating as many talents as possible from as many people as possible. In that regard, the economy should as much as leisure be the domain of noble things. Work should contribute to a positive expression of identity. When working becomes being, it will be less felt as working. Work should contribute to a higher goal of a proud society, comradeship, and identity. As a civil servant, you should lead the way. The following five points can offer guidance:

1) Know yourself. Character is fate. Ask yourself once every week when you look in the mirror who hides behind the face. Is it still you?

2) Life is the time you have to do something with your talents.<sup>14</sup> You can buy a lot, except time. Take at least one day a year off into the quiet to meditate on how to use it wisely. Try to stick to your choices.

3) Try to live life to the full and to avoid a one-sided life. A good, healthy life balances between physical, sensual, intellectual, ethical, and emotional fulfilment.

4) You are unique, so are others. Your fulfilment depends on others. Respect them and encourage them to develop their talents. Express your appreciation. It will make your life more interesting.

5) Fulfilment is reached through virtue: thoughtfulness, fortitude, and fairness. Be courteous, but push back in a measured way when your dignity is violated.

### **Domestic and external interests**

States do not act in isolation. They interact with others. That interaction limits their freedom to make normative choices. A state will find it difficult to advance its values if it depends economically on states with opposite aspirations. Hence, states traditionally aim at economic autonomy. Autonomy should not be confused with autarchy or self-reliance. Self-reliance is difficult to achieve and tends to replace external with internal

vulnerability. Autonomy allows economic exchanges, but in a balanced way. This is not evident. Weak states that try to catch up can benefit from foreign capital and technology, but this requires a careful balance between allowing rich states to profit from your cheap labour or land in the short term and making sure that those exchanges transfer technology and capital so that you profit in the long run. For rich states, hence, the challenge is to balance between profiting from weaker states, yet to make sure that their own economy continues to hold the capital and technology required to prosper. In any case, states must consider external exchanges as a means to advance their own prosperity, not an end itself.

But what does that imply? First of all: balanced financial flows. If a state pays more to foreigners than it earns, external debt grows. Short-term deficits and debt increases can be accepted, if the state invests foreign goods and capital to ramp up its productivity. They become problematic if the goods and capital are simply consumed. The French economist Jacques Rueff referred to this as deficits without tears. External debt not supported by growing productivity will lead to painful corrections as lenders will increasingly high interest or other compensation. A second balance concerns control. It is no problem that foreigners control parts of the domestic economy as long as your state also wields similar influence. It is fine accepting foreign companies to come and invest, as long as your state has companies that invest abroad and repatriate earnings. A third balance concerns concentration and diffusion. In the age of globalization experts assumed that states could afford gains or reciprocity to be diffuse. In other words: states can have a deficit with one state if they have surpluses elsewhere, and so forth. Realists also argued that it is better to diversify relations, so that no state can affect you



unilaterally with sanctions. As regards the economic influence of others: the state must make sure that it is diffuse so that it is felt less. As regards its own economic influence: the state better makes sure that it is sufficiently concentrated, so that it is felt more by the partner. Evidently, a large state can afford more than a small state.

Can we still separate the internal from the external? The production in a state often consists of activities of domestic and foreign companies. If the gross national product, for instance, excludes those foreign-invested activities, the gross domestic product includes it. The idea of the second calculation is of course that foreign-invested activities are good for the local economy. Whether people are employed by a domestic or a foreign company does not matter. Still, states can sometimes depend on foreign-invested companies to the point that it renders them vulnerable.

How can they coop with that situation? Keeping the previous paragraph in mind, a state that hosts a lot of foreign-invested companies should ideally have domestic companies going abroad. Second, such foreign dependency is not a problem in the short run if it helps strengthen the national economy in the long run and creates benefits for domestic companies. Third, if a state is very productive and has key sectors still dominated by foreign companies, it might reveal its inability to scale up new firms or excessive dominance of large companies. This is unhealthy. So, a lot of foreign investment can be indicative of attractiveness, but also failure for the state to be an incubator of new entrepreneurship. Sometimes, activities, such as building aircrafts or computer chips, require such a scale and so much capital, that they cannot be supported by small states. Yet, it remains important to have companies that are or become indispensable in parts

of the supply chain. One-sided dependency is dangerous. Finally, dominance of foreign investors in strategic industries is always a source of vulnerability, particularly if it reflects the inability of states to finance and develop those strategic activities internally.

One important argument in favour of openness is that it lowers transaction costs and allows companies to trade efficiently. This is true. But it can also serve as a convenient argument for states not to take their responsibility. Next to transaction costs, there are also complacency costs. When states are too lax, when the attraction of foreign investments comes in the place of proper domestic economic policy, they risk losing their autonomy, power, and capacity to steer those external relations in function of internal prosperity. Such lax openness, indeed opportunism, is often defended with references to the free market. But when external dependency is pushed to the limits, it harms a free market. When it leads worries about prosperity in the long run, it almost invariably causes a protectionist backlash against the free market. As often, excess is replaced by excess. Openness is relevant when it is fair, when rules are applied to both internal and external trade. In the same way that it is legitimate to restrain the freedom of swindlers and criminals, it is legitimate to deny access to states or companies that threaten interests and values.

Powerful states are confident states and that confidence, we have seen, often leads to overconfidence and laxity. Power is no guarantee that external relations are managed properly. Still, power is a requirement to defend values and interests. Most states face a very difficult exercise in reconciling domestic goals with external expectations. Weak states must often compromise in the short-term to gain in the long-run. No partnership is lasting. Self-interest will continue to guide

the action of both states and companies. So, in judging the relevance of external economic cooperation, the state should aim at: 1) the absence of negative short-term or long-term security consequences, such as major power shifts, military aggression, dependency, and vulnerability arising from that dependency, 2) convergence in terms of constitutional values: at least a will and progress to converge, 3) relative economic gains in terms of technology transfer and the influence on supply chains, and 4) instant financial gains in terms of trade revenues or investment income.

### **Ends and means**

Ends and means; desires and scarifies must be balanced. One the one hand, there is the extravagant state that spends beyond its means. On the other hand, there is the oppressive state that makes its citizens work hard yet without profiting much from their labour. The United States has been an example of the first; China an example of the second. In the first case, consumer demand was insufficiently supported by production; in the second production was insufficiently absorbed by consumers. Yet, it is more evident for a state that has suppressed the consumption of the fruit of investment to become more generous than for extravagant states to become frugal.

The state, the previous section argued, must monitor the external balance of payments. Fluctuations in the external balance of payments are normal, but large sustained imbalances should be avoided. The same goes for the national account. If the total national account – all assets and liabilities, so savings and debt – is unbalanced, it automatically implies imbalances on the external balance of payments. The external balance reflects the

internal account. An excess of savings is reflected by a current account surplus; a shortage by a deficit. Brief and modest fluctuations left aside, states must aim at a balanced national account.

The national account itself consists of the wealth of households, companies, and the government. In many states, the government's wealth or net financial worth is negative. It has thus more liabilities than assets. That must not be alarming if, again, the government's debt helps improve the productivity of the state. If that is not the case, the government will most likely have to pay more interest and debt becomes more expensive. Some economists argue that government debt is no problem when households have significant savings. Yet, there is no guarantee that a government can dispose of those assets. Household savings are concentrated at the top, among the rich, and those rich people's assets are fluid and can exit the state quickly. High government debt combined with private capital flight is detrimental to economic stability. So, also in this case, balance is advised.

The American scholar Robert Gilpin offered clues about how imbalances between ends and means affect power shifts. He highlighted work ethics, patriotism, and frugality of rising powers, and an inevitable downward spiral of rising consumption; declining investment in rich stagnant societies, a spiral that puts a brake on productivity and causes unproductive debt.<sup>15</sup> Gilpin took the argument a step further and asserted that such change in domestic economic priorities follows a deeper moral transformation. While young indigent states tend to be focussed on sovereignty and power, the objective of economic activity in affluent, powerful states is not to enhance the power and security, but to please consumers.<sup>16</sup> Rich states pay less attention to balanced trade and accounts. Explaining it as interdependence,

they accept greater exposure to external influences.<sup>17</sup> Hence, Gilpin concluded, one of the most important internal changes that weakens the state is the corrupting influence of affluence.<sup>18</sup> Gilpin struck a balance between economics, neorealist power politics, and the moralist notion of power that characterizes the work classical writers about power politics.

Paul Kennedy, in his study of the rise and fall of great powers, also concluded that instability and power shifts are born from eras of peace. "The coming of peace does not stop the process of continual change, and the differentiated pace of economic growth among the great powers ensures that they will go on, rising and falling, relative to each other."<sup>19</sup> Like Gilpin, he argues that rich powers tend to forget to preserve the balance between ends and means, between military spending, consumer needs, and productive investment. John Kenneth Galbraith also pointed at the downside of what he called an affluent society based on luxury goods and wants, less on the means to fulfil these wants: "The new demands are created by advertisers and the machinery for consumer-demand creation," he said, "pushes out public spending and investment." The combination of extrinsic materialism and unbalanced economic policy is lethal.

### **Balancing between sectors**

In the age of globalization, the idea grew that states were moving through a standard trajectory of advancement. They start off as rural societies. Subsequently, they grow in basic industries, such as steel and textiles, and slowly shift to advanced industries, like aviation, automotive and precision electronics. From this stage, states then specialize in services, such as research and development,

and finance. Each step advances productivity. Each step reduces hazards, from pollution to unhealthy labour conditions. This specialization in advanced activities supports clean, creative cities. "People like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs have all the upsides of Carnegie and Ford without the downsides."<sup>20</sup>

Yet, there are downsides. Advanced commercial services remain a small part of the global trade and insufficient to pay for imports of manufactured goods or raw materials. A lot of advanced services, like research and product design, are part of longer supply chains and difficult to separate from the more basic industries. The utopia of a green city where engineers and creative minds provide their services from their living room to industrial states on the other side of the world is challenged by reality. As industrial states advance, they tend aim at broad ecosystems of production and design. The engineers will go where the factories are.

There is a another reason for states not to aim at advanced services alone. At times of crisis, the basic is indispensable: food, fuel, and so forth. States can still try to secure external supply, but those will come at a cost. A final and more fundamental reason for states to aspire a sufficiently diverse economy is that productive gains can also be made in basic industries. Basic industries, we discussed in the previous chapter, do not have to be backward industries. Even if the production is not necessarily taking place on a state's territory, basic industries, such as mining, are indispensable for creating a more sustainable and resilient supply chain. There are thus strategic, economic and ethical reasons for paying attention to basic industries. The ideal is to create an ecosystem in which the various sectors support each other in becoming productive and in furthering the interests and values of the state.

That is true for large states, but also for small states. Consider Switzerland. This landlocked state is known mostly for its world-class and rather pragmatic financial sector. This sector, however, contributes only about 10 percent of its GDP, while manufacturing represents 20 percent of its GDP. It is specialized in a broad range of products, such as medicine, food, machinery, and, of course, watches. Agriculture, while representing not even one percent of Switzerland's GDP still provides in half of its food. Switzerland shows a diversified economy also not stand in the way of gains in productivity. It shows that a diversified economy can be a green and attractive place that pays high wages. Hence, states must aim at productivity and accept specialization, yet balance specialization with diversification.

### **Transparency and complexity**

Intoxication can cause a deceitful state of happiness. Intoxication is often related to drugs and alcohol, but it can also be caused by ideological zeal, the madness of crowds – and economics. Opaque economic policy can bring citizens in a harmful state of hallucination. Many dimensions of economic policy remain invisible and incomprehensible to most citizens. States can borrow enormous amounts with the promise on behalf of their citizens to pay it back, often without citizens being aware. Companies can do the same, creating hypes that cause their stocks to be overvalued or creating speculative bubbles elsewhere. In this regard, it is the combination of the complexity of financial markets, the distance between investor and the asset, as well as the madness of the hype that overrules sound economic thinking.

The lack of transparency and the self-defeating economic choices that are its consequences have been discussed since ancient times. The ancient compilers of Chinese records, frugal Greek democrats like Demosthenes and Roman republicans, like Cicero, criticized excessive debt and speculation. Religious texts warn against it. The prophet Muhammad told followers not to sell the birds in the sky, the fish in the water, or the unborn calf in the mother's womb. "Do not trade in what is not with you." In the seventeenth century, opaque finance was referred to as wind trade. More recently, a renowned economist concluded: "Whenever information is imperfect, which is to say always, and especially in developing states, then the invisible hand works most imperfectly."<sup>21</sup> Hence, if the idea of a market supposes citizens to make rational choices, the market fails to function when those choices cannot rely on transparent information - and a sober mind.

It is for that reason that accounting was invented, to provide in transparency. The problem, however, is that not all citizens are accountants, and that state accounting is complex. States like Greece managed to make their finances so unclear that European auditors were kept in the dark for several years before a major crisis broke out. States, hence, on the one hand need to invest in economic education. All citizens, whatever their profession and calling, should understand the basics of their national economy like their own private finance. On the other hand, the state needs to explain the economic choices honestly and clearly. It should clarify the consequences of economic policies, in the short-term and in the long term, assuming that average economic knowledge is indeed basic. It could even specify what that means to each citizen on his tax form, for example: "The state has a current debt of 40,000 euros on your behalf. This was



38,000 euros last year and now equals 200 days of your salary." This requires one or two auditors, *cours des comptes*, that operate completely independent from the government. If companies are expected to be transparent to their shareholders, the state should go even further.

A more difficult challenge is transparency in daily economic choices. Adam Smith puts next to the self-interest the love for the neighbour as an important factor in making choices. "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him."<sup>22</sup> But what if that neighbour is thousands of miles away, separated from us by complex supply chains? What if he is faceless and contact limited to an anonymous contribution made to a product that we buy from an e-shop is delivered by and equally anonymous courier.

In Smith's world, still, producer and consumers would stand face to face: the tailor, the shoemaker, the baker. Now that face is replaced by the weird smile on an Amazon cardboard box. And while the consumer often senses, knows, that the business model is at loggerheads with his long-term interest; the anonymity, the murkiness of the supply chain, is like a smoke screen that stands between him and the droves of modern slaves in sweatshops in Bangladesh. Even less than in the time of Smith, the consumer no longer needs to face the rudeness of his behaviour. He does not even have to look away anymore or find moral justifications, like superiority; he can just leisurely ignore it. Sometimes, that works in his favour, sustaining a tranquil life on a lifeline of cheap goods and services. But usually it undermines his position in the long run. It would certainly be detrimental to the state that pretends to aspire lofty values, such as dignity and sustainability, because its actual behaviour

will most likely empower companies and other states that care less about those things.

Here arises the dilemma between the complexity of supply chains and the transparency required for a market to thrive. Supply chains are a complex form of specialization. In making a product, many companies and states contribute what they can do best. A mobile phone, for instance, includes design from San Francisco, semiconductors from Japan, and cameras from Germany. Global supply chains are more efficient than production at home. But they also have perverse consequences. The increasingly sophisticated supply chains demand increasingly sophisticated international rules, which states pretend to shape, but which more often influence their own internal rules. The compass in policy therefore risks to become a shallow common denominator between many states, instead of the fundamental constitutional values of the state.

International politics requires compromise, but also clarity. If a state wants to curb climate change, it must not accept parts of its supply chain to do the opposite. If a state wants to preserve its values, it must not enrich states that seek to undermine them. If there is an argument to be made for the efficiency with which global supply chains can make things there are also arguments to be considered about the efficiency with which other interests and values are defended. So, states must avoid that complex supply chains cause diffuse negative consequences on their interests. They must not tolerate international trade law to come at the detriment of fundamental interests. They must ban suppliers that harm fundamental interests. They must permanently explain to citizens what is at stake and why economic convenience sometimes need to make place for other concerns.

## Conclusions

The market should be a mirror of the morals of a state. Morality implies that nobody dies from deprivation, but also goes beyond the basis of Maslow's pyramid. What and how a state produces should also fulfil other needs. Having should not replace the importance of being. But as chapter six already signalled, states face a complex context. They deal with powerful actors, like companies, labour unions, and other interest groups. States rely on other states and cannot set their moral standards unilaterally. They must consider the expectations of others. The foremost objective of economic policy is to maximize the economic power make independent choices. A citadel state should not take over the economy, but retain the commanding height, regulate and avoid dependency in vital sectors. Wealth, is indispensable to preserve its internal legitimacy, towards citizens and companies, and to enhance its leverage abroad.

Economic power is advanced through a properly functioning market and a balance between ends and means. A morally sound market demands the state to set clear standards and objectives, and to steer clear of a deification of material and financial wealth. Citizens should be empowered, as producers but also as responsible consumers. A good market rewards those who help to fulfil the state's aspirations. Whether it concerns the public sector or the private sector, the quality of goods and services should be clear. Excellence should be encouraged; freeriding discouraged. The market should be diverse: there should be choice and competition. It should be transparent. It should be clear to all citizens how choices affect their position in both the short and the long run. If economic reality is complex, the state must not use it as a smoke screen that estranges

citizens from the economic reality, or cushions them against the negative consequences of reckless choices. Invisible costs, so-called external costs, such as pollution, subsidies, and insecurity should be known to citizens. A government that prioritizes short-term consumer confidence above long-term wellbeing and security is a reckless government. A good leader, Cicero has, plants trees for use of another age.<sup>23</sup>

Ends should be supported by means. This is a red line through the book: values require power to be articulated and defended. It is normal that desires are always a couple of steps ahead of capabilities, but this must not lead to careless behaviour. States often try to fill the gap with faulty fixes, like debt, creative accounting, or unbalanced external trade relations. Debt is useful only as long as it allows for productivity gains, so that it can be repaid. It is damaging if it is consumed while the economy weakens. The same goes for trade imbalances. Deficits are acceptable, if the excess of imports helps to rebalance trade by more exports in the long run. From the moment that debt and deficits occur, the state should have a transparent plan to manage them in the longer run and explain it to its citizens. It is a myth that states can specialize in consumption, or that states can pay for large expenses on goods by means of high-end services. A good economy is diversified. It sets high targets, in terms of morality, sustainability, technology, and so forth. But it does not ignore the basic activities, such as mining, resources, and so forth. Instead, it tries to make them more productive and sustainable. If these requirements are fulfilled, the growth of wealth can become a virtuous circle. Growth will contribute to both the state's security and its happiness. Growth will become flourishing.

## X

### Diplomacy

My first encounter with diplomats was a lecture in the American Embassy in Brussels. I was in my early twenties. I no longer recall the topic, but I do remember the impression left by the authoritative voice of the speaker, the suits, and the silver trays, generously dressed with canapés. It was the first time that I tasted caviar. I had to become like them, diplomats, I thought. Diplomacy speaks to the imagination. That is a part of its task. And it has always been: even the food. "Come and eat and drink with me," an official at the Babylonian court bade to an Egyptian envoy in a letter over three thousand ago.<sup>1</sup> Later, I discovered Zhang Qian, who journeyed along the Silk Road for the Chinese emperor, Pieter Paul Rubens, the Belgian baroque painter, was also one of the most influential diplomats of his time, using his art to open the doors of many a royal castle. There was Talleyrand, the mastermind of France around the time of Napoleon Bonaparte and Metternich, his Austrian counterpart, who seemed to be manipulating the balance of power like a play of chess. Both inspired Henry Kissinger, who manipulated power politics during the Cold War, skilfully like a technician, cajoling China out of the Soviet camp and exploiting the divisions between states in the Middle East. Kissinger was a ruthless diplomat, but getting the chance to talk to him in my thirties, was like approaching a rock star of world politics.

These are the celebrities. What about the hundreds of thousands of other diplomats that do not make it to this hall of fame? Many try hard to pretend, surrounding themselves with at least the myth and the

pomp of celebrities, the travel frenzy, and the stories. Yet, most of the time, diplomacy is a humbling pursuit of attention, a struggle with powerlessness. That also happens to some at the top. An American Secretary of State deplored how little progress he achieved in pushing for human rights: "After consuming their sweet rolls, representatives of American companies took the floor and blasted me." A Defence Secretary avowed that he could not overcome short-sighted business people either. "They only care about the economy."<sup>2</sup> The biographies of the Secretary Generals of the United Nations, in theory the most senior diplomat in the world, list numerous situations in which they watched powerlessly how crises escalated.<sup>3</sup> A former NATO Secretary General shared a similar experience: "We mattered when Washington wanted us to matter."<sup>4</sup> The special envoy of the United Nations to Libya confided: "I meant nothing to them."<sup>5</sup> A European envoy to Myanmar remarked: "In the shadow of China and America, I was invisible."<sup>6</sup> Once more, these are testimonies from diplomats who attained a position that many others envied. If they already feel powerless, to expect from all other diplomats?

What is diplomacy in the first place? This chapter argues that the main task of diplomacy is to use the power of the state to influence foreign relations so that they benefit the power of the state, to contribute to the power cycle introduced in chapter five. Diplomatic power is shaped by the power of the state, combined with superior knowledge and superior bargaining skills. The first section asserts that a sense of realism and humility is key. The task of diplomats at the service of the state is not to change the world, but to allow their state to preserve power. State diplomats must heed the escapism of internationalism, as well as the lure of going native in the states where they are posted. This sense of realism is no

pretext for opportunism. Virtue is to be displayed in diplomacy. Deceit will always be punished and while the pursuit of gains is natural for states, the excess of greed will also come at a cost. Diplomacy must display respect, prudence and moderation.

### **The duties of diplomacy**

“Most diplomats are there to fill positions,” a retired diplomat formulated, “They do not have a specific mission but manage the unexciting routine duties of an embassy or a desk.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, most of the hundreds of thousands of diplomats slowly rise through the ranks and ideally conclude as ambassador in a large embassy. Abroad, the diplomat is a reporter and a skilful manager of formalities like consular matters, assistance to mistreated companies, and official exchanges. After each posting abroad they spend anonymous years in the headquarters. Here, the diplomat is a diligent processor of information, with a knack for distilling policy advice from large volumes of cables, and the authority to push this advice through many ranks to the highest level.

Some diplomats see themselves as servants of the noble cause of international peace and international cooperation. “The business of a diplomat is peace,” Bernard du Rosier, a diplomat from the fifteenth century remarked, “An ambassador works for the public good.” That is not correct. Diplomacy pursues power, security, and interests. The business of the diplomat, at least if he works for a state, is the security of the state, not world peace. The self-preservation of the state with all means at any price, as Nicola Machiavelli put it. The business of the diplomat is the good of his state, not the good of the world. Al the better if security and the state’s interests can

be pursued through world peace and global harmony, but that is not always the case. An early expression of this scepticism is found in the Chinese Spring and Autumn. "Envoys rush along the roads in such haste that the hubs of their carriage wheels bumped against each other. Bound by each other by means of conversations, they form alliances, specious ministers in collusion cleverly gloss their artful schemes," it recounts, "The official documents are numerous but obscure. There are arguments by scholars in their strange dress, but wars do not cease." Diplomatic efforts, hence, are but variations on top of the fundamental changes in the world's balance of power.<sup>8</sup> Metternich or Henry Kissinger could not only manipulate the balance of power because of their cunning, but because their state had power. Diplomacy, as Hans Morgenthau defined, is thus the skill of handling the different elements of state power to bear the maximum effect abroad.

This realist notion is contested, though. Whereas realists blame idealists for naively aspiring peace, Immanuel Kant, for instance, criticized the fact that realists ignored how diplomats too often put their careers at the service of mad leaders. He suggested that realism naively takes for granted the image of a rational diplomat labouring for a rational government.<sup>9</sup> Diplomacy is not rational. Emotion and fear play an important role. Think of the seasoned head of Russia's foreign policy, Sergei Lavrov, who suddenly had to defend the revanchist, suicidal crusade of his president against Ukraine. Consider the American Secretary of State, Colin Powell, who had to present fake evidence to the United Nations in the run-up to an invasion in Iraq, mainly because the neoconservatives in the White House believed to be waging a war against evil. "One must conceal the follies



of the fatherland as one would those of a foolish mother," observed an ambassador three hundred years ago.<sup>10</sup>

Realism is also questioned because diplomacy frequently appears to be driven by short-sightedness and opportunism instead of the pursuit of power, security, and interests. "Nobody who has not actually watched statesmen dealing with each other," wrote a British diplomat during World War II, "Can have any real idea of the immense part played in human affairs by such unavowable and often unrecognisable causes as lassitude, affability, personal affection or dislike, misunderstanding, deafness or incomplete command of a foreign language, vanity, social engagements, and momentary health."<sup>11</sup> Yet, as we have seen, bad governance and the lack of virtue are in fact symptoms of weakening. A strong state led by a weak elite and served by ill-judged diplomacy will become less strong; a weak state led by capable elites and served by effective diplomacy stands a chance overcome its inferiority. Realism says that diplomacy is the skill of bringing the different elements of state power to bear with maximum effect.

The effect of the balance of power can be mitigated, as the European Union demonstrated, by regional integration. European states accept to cooperate at the level of low politics, in trade, energy, or other rather technical matters, through concrete action, as one of the Union's founders expressed it.<sup>12</sup> If there are a lot of these concrete actions, states have to sit together to regulate them, to lower barriers to trade, to cooperate in energy security, and so forth. This creates a spill-over from low to high politics. After a while, there can be so many initiatives that the discussions between states will be supplanted by institutions above the states. International governance is followed by supranational governance. When this lasts long enough, diplomats and even

politicians undergo a process of positive socialization. They will replace their image of diplomacy as an arena dominated by states with that of a global village, change the pursuit of the interests of the state with the pursuit of the common good.<sup>13</sup> This idea is not recent. Supranational governance already existed among small states in ancient Greece and India. In the sixteenth century, a Spanish philosopher summarized the ideal as follows: "The sovereignty of the individual state is limited because it is part of a community of nations linked by solidarity and obligations." Yet, the role of the European Union in international politics has diminished and around it rude power politics continues.

The same limits reside in international organizations. The hope for international organizations to bring peace and prosperity between states is not new either. In the seventeenth century, the philosopher Émeric Crucé dreamt about an association of states with an assembly of ambassadors located in Venice, like the United Nations today has in New York. Optimists insist that if states work long enough together, they make rules and organizations that temper the effects of power politics. In such context, small states can tie down the strong, like Gulliver in Lilliput. The strong could also have an interest in such cooperation. An American foreign minister explained that as follows: "We are every day in a sense, accepting limitations upon our complete freedom of action. Yet, law is also a process by which we increase our range of freedom by being able to predict what others are going to do."<sup>14</sup> Hence, it is more easy to advance interests for a large state, when small states are at ease. Cooperation legitimizes power and lowers so-called transaction costs. Politics is not merely a struggle for power, but also a contest for legitimacy.<sup>15</sup> Still, as an American scholar observed: "A dominant great power

acts essentially alone, but embarrassed at the idea and worshipping at the shrine of collective security, recruits a ship here, a brigade there, and blessings all around to give its unilateral actions multilateral sheen.”<sup>16</sup> Strong states use institutions in ways that suit them and stop using them when they are no longer suitable.<sup>17</sup>

Connecting one’s fate too much to regional or international organizations is risky. I recollect how often European diplomats turned against me when I argued that the World Trade Organization was dead and that European states had to find different ways to protect their commercial interests. A couple of years later, Europe found itself fighting American economic nationalism on the one hand and Chinese protectionism on the other, without being able to rely on the World Trade Organization for support. Even if the *corps diplomatique*, becomes habituated to collaborate, it can be easily overruled. If large states lose power, they will almost always retreat and become more nationalistic. How hurt were British diplomats when their capital decided to leave the European Union. When Donald Trump decided to scupper an agreement with Iran, a diplomat who had long worked on the file avowed: “I am no longer able to work for this government.” He resigned. So, even if diplomats socialize into cooperation, their cosmopolitanism only lasts as long as the state finds it in its interest. This brings us again to the main responsibility of diplomacy: helping to avoid that it loses power, helping to keep it strong and confident enough, so that it does not have to take extreme positions in its external relations.

Should there than not be a larger role for norms and values in diplomacy? Values and norms have always been prominent in diplomacy. The leitmotif has been that the strong impose them on the weak, the so-called barbarians, whereby the strong considered their order a

place of harmony compared to the wilderness around. Religion, civilizational superiority, superior political organization: many different arguments can be used, but the pattern is always the same. The strong impose their values on the weak. This can be done aggressively, through conquest and regime change, or less brutally, through conditional engagement. The latter implies the readiness to cooperate in exchange for adjustment. The disadvantage of such strategy is that it elicits resistance. The weak will try to pull up normative defences against the strong. Proselytism seldom pays off in diplomacy. The most important duty of the state, it cannot be repeated enough, is to preserve the power that is required to fulfil values and ideals domestically. If the state is successful in that endeavour, emerges as a citadel, so to say, if it combines power with virtue, if its values and ideals are praiseworthy, it might inspire other states. The best way to propagate values and ideals, is to radiate them inside-out, to lead by example. In that case, the diplomat can ride on a wave of good-will. All he must do is to expose as many foreigners to it as possible – and, as always, guard against complacency. If this is not the case, attempts at spreading values and norms will be fruitless.

### **The character of the diplomat**

“Ambassadors have no battleships,” asserted a Greek orator, “Their weapons are words and opportunities.”<sup>18</sup> Realism does not call for cynical diplomats. It calls for diplomats that are humbled by the powers they face at home and abroad, yet incessantly deploy their skill, wisdom, and charm to leverage those powers towards the good of the state. Diplomacy was humble at its origin. Ancient diplomats were letter bearers between states.

Hence the “diploma” in “diplomacy”. Their main task was to pass the message along dangerous roads. “Let me pass through thy land,” the Book of Numbers has, “we will not turn into the fields of the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the well: but we will go along the king’s highway, until we past thy borders.”<sup>19</sup>

If it was not by means of letters that diplomats had to relay messages, it was by means of their rhetorical skills. As some ancient Greek cities had a democracy, the diplomat had to convince as many citizens as possible, advancing the interest of his state by playing the sentiments of the public, exploiting both its fear and pride. This was public diplomacy *avant la lettre*. Thucydides’ account of the Peloponnesian Wars puts numerous diplomats at the centre stage of assemblies and councils. If he missed his target, criticism at home could be blistering. “An ambassador who acts in a dilatory manner and causes us to miss our opportunities,” Demosthenes found, “is not only missing opportunities, but robbing us of the control of events.”<sup>20</sup> Diplomats do not search for heroism in scheming the big power shifts, but in many small breakthroughs that might be achieved in a life of service. Power, we saw, moves in little bits. “It is very important to be careful in choosing ambassadors and other representatives, and one cannot be too severe in punishing those who exceed their powers, since by such errors the interests of states are compromised.”<sup>21</sup>

There are no shortcuts. Some diplomats try getting close to politicians as a fast track to promotion. In that case, the diplomat, as Emmanuel Kant observed, takes the role of a political pleaser, or, to use the words of a practitioner, protocol-compliant conformist.<sup>22</sup> That role corrupts. It makes the ambitions of politicians the standard of merit and not the interest of the state. It infects the foreign service with short-sightedness. Other

diplomats try to escape state politics by becoming a globalist, believing that they can work for the global good, take an international organization as their main objective, or identify work with the solving of a global problem. The state diplomat however, should identify himself primarily with the state and approach global problems through the lens of the state. He should try to approach common problems from the viewpoint of others, but never without losing sight of the viewpoint of his own state. A third pitfall for diplomats is to become a fixer for private interest groups. A diplomat has to guard private interests of compatriots abroad. Not all companies ran by compatriots serve the interest of the state, though. Sometimes, they are completely disconnected. Yet, large and well-connected as they are, they can play the diplomat and use his prestige, having him to organize cocktails and pay for it too. In Uganda, I spent some time at an embassy. I kept asking who the slick flatterers were that circled around the ambassadors like oxpeckers accompany a wildebeest. "They still hold our passport," the ambassador explained, "but that's the only thing Belgian about them."<sup>23</sup> When a company asks for help, the diplomat should be open to it, but always ask what the company does to help the state.

Diplomats sometimes "go native". This risk exists particularly when diplomats from rich states find a welcoming home in poorer states, where locals show more admiration than ever happens at home. Rock star status within reach, the diplomat identifies himself with his new habitat and even becomes critical towards his home state. T.E. Lawrence, for instance, turned his back on Great Britain and became an Arab freedom fighter: "The effort for these years to live in the dress of Arabs, and to imitate their mental foundation, quitted me of my English self, and let me look at the West and its

conventions with new eyes: they destroyed it all for me." Host states can expedite this, trying to make you feel like a hero, a true friend, and one of theirs. Sometimes this is genuine; sometimes not. Often, it is difficult to tell. During my first trips to China, still in my twenties, officials treated me sometimes like a star. "Tom Cruise," they said when I arrived at the airport during one of the first visits. Nice women escorted me in nice cars to nice dinners with nice people. Resisting the incorporation was not easy. One of the European ambassadors I befriended had already gone native. I could sense that China had become his new home, daydreaming about a farm he would run in a remote mountain village. His love for the Chinese people was sincere and I could relate to it. But behind the Chinese people stood a state and a government that did not spare my state. A civil servant cannot have it both ways. Rotation is therefore important. Diplomacy should not be a form of escapism.

These are the pitfalls. Avoiding them requires a special character. A diplomat must be a cosmopolitan, but also a patriot. It is true, as a scholar remarked, that not even a head of state walks around all day feeling like a state.<sup>24</sup> Still, the devotion of the diplomat should be with the state that pays for his cosmopolitan lifestyle. "The diplomat is not only sent by the state," wrote Alberico Gentili, tutor of Queen Elisabeth I, "but also in the name of the state, and as the representative of the state." This is also the interpretation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations: the diplomat represents the sending state, its government, its nationals, its firms, and their property. The sending state can instruct him to negotiate and sign agreements, and to gather information by all lawful means. These tasks are put upfront. Only afterwards, the Convention pays attention to the promotion of friendly relations.

The ideal diplomat is a fox in sheepskin. Ernest Satow's *Diplomatic Practice*, lists the following qualities: Good temper, good health, good looks, rather more than average intelligence, straightforward character, devoid of selfish ambition, mind trained by the study of the best literature, knowledge of history, capacity to judge of evidence. "In short, the candidate must be an educated gentleman." <sup>25</sup> Another authority added: "He is conciliatory and firm, eludes difficulties which cannot immediately be overcome only in order to obviate them in more favourable conditions, he is courteous and unhurried, he easily detects insincerity, he has a penetrating intellect and a subtle mind, combined with a keen sense of honour, he has an intuitive sense of fitness and is adaptable, he is at home in any society and is equally effective in the chanceries of the old diplomacy or on the platforms of the new."

Numerous variations exist on this list of qualities, but some qualities are mentioned very often. Diplomats must have a keen interest in foreign and domestic affairs. Their curiosity for distant places must be matched by good insight into the state, its strengths and weaknesses, its aspirations, its decision making, and so forth. A good diplomat is faithful to his ideals and his state, yet a pragmatist in identifying ways to benefit from relations with other states. He is inquisitive and analytical, detects challenges and opportunities. A diplomat is usually the good cop, the facilitator. He is amicable, generous and very empathic. He is extrovert and a very good communicator, both in closed door negotiations and on the centre stage of public events. He knows secrecy, but never at the expense of his integrity. Secrecy must never hide mistakes or abuse. The diplomat is also an efficient organizer: of his own duties and of his subordinates.



## Diplomatic knowledge

In 2018, it was revealed that China had installed bugs in the headquarters of the African Union, which it had financed and built. In 2009, revelations did not cause a surprise, but led to a shock in the diplomatic world nonetheless: One of the American intelligence services had eavesdropped delegations ahead of an important summit about climate change. In a leaked memo, it vowed “to provide policy makers with unique, timely, and valuable insights into key states’ preparations and goals for the conference, as well as deliberations within states on climate change policies.” It also became clear that it spied on many government leaders.

Access to diplomatic secrets has been an advantage throughout history. The Persians are reported to have had an intelligence service, called the king’s eye. Herodotus describes how a task force was sent to spy on the kingdom of Ethiopia. Since the sixteenth century, the service responsible for intercepting, unsealing, copying, and reposting diplomatic dispatches was called the Black Cabinet. Large sums were invested to recruit spies. “The ablest ambassador can do nothing without spies,” a French commentator wrote in 1790, “Taken from the higher ranks of society they are necessarily more expensive.”<sup>26</sup> As espionage developed, so did counter-espionage. The Persian spies sent to Ethiopia were caught. Francis Walsingham, the advisor of Queen Elisabeth I, put so much emphasis on counter-intelligence, that it was said that not even a mouse could creep out of any ambassador’s chamber.”<sup>27</sup> Yet, effective spying can lead to an information advantage in diplomatic exchanges. French spies penetrated the Dutch provincial governments. That allowed them to benefit from internal divisions during negotiations that tried to end the Thirty

Years War in 1648. The United States broke the encryption used by the Japanese delegation during a naval disarmament conference in 1921, saw its red lines, and could consequently optimize its bargaining strategy.

Napoleon Bonaparte argued that diplomats were essentially spies. Spies sometimes operate as diplomats to recruit informants, or to bug places that are frequented by officials. This is illegal when the host state is not informed. Still, good diplomats can be intrusive and gather a lot of information. They are chameleons. As they identify relevant sources, they adjust. Obviously, there is the diplomat that meets his counterparts in formal settings: during courtesy calls, routine meetings, focussed conversations, or negotiations, about which he duly reports back to his capital. But a capable diplomat goes beyond. The reserved, cultured director-general is approached through cultured conversations, a patient and refined display of knowledge, whereas the young, ambitious cabinet member is invited to exclusive parties and offered to meet important visiting officials.

Sometimes, meetings just happen. During a security conference in Singapore, for instance, I found myself in the toilet next to the Chinese minister of defense and we got a conversation going. In a hotel in Northern Uganda, I could develop a most interesting relationship with a general. It was only after he introduced himself at the bar that I discovered who he was. Diplomats can also work around high-flyers or departments, building a network of indirect contacts, and puzzling slivers of information into an analysis. In those settings, subtlety is imperative. If at an international meeting, you are suddenly approached by a very good-looking participant, it is usually too good to be true. If at a cocktail party, someone coincidentally bumps into you, quickly appears to have a similar interest in Raphaelite drawings, yet

suddenly switches to a highly technical trade issue about which you happen to know a bit, you better return to the Raphaelite drawings or go to the bar for a drink. Even more broadly, day-to-day exchanges, walks, and excursions can complement in-depth analysis with assessments about the social context in which political decisions are made, and reading into the history and culture of a state can provide even more background.

These insights need to be processed. Diplomats abroad write formal cables. They include personal insights but are usually reviewed by colleagues, at least if the embassy is large enough. Cables can be divided in three categories: buzz, hot news, and seminal analysis. The first category, routine news mostly meant to signal the diplomat's diligence to the headquarters, constitutes the bulk of the tens of thousands of cables that reach the headquarters on a yearly basis. They are largely ignored, even by the junior desk officers. Hot news, from negotiations, for instance, already gets more attention. But the rarest kind of cables, the one that every diplomat quietly dreams to write yet almost never achieves: the seminal insight cable, like the famous long telegram of the American diplomat George Kennan. That cable displayed a rare gift for synthesis. It captured the state of the Soviet Union and the distrust of its government, yet it also captured the growing distrust in Washington. The long telegram did not start the Cold War, but it remains the best description of the start of the Cold War.

Information superiority not only depends on cables of diplomats. It also depends on what the government does with them. The warning of the American ambassador in Japan for sudden strikes remained unanswered. Soon after, American troops were massacred in Pearl Harbour. The Belgian ambassador in Rwanda warned his headquarters that the ethnic Hutus

were preparing the total extermination of the Tutsis. When the genocide started, two years later, the international community was paralyzed. In the nineties, diplomats cabled that the Gulf States forwarded money earned from oil exports to the West to terrorist groups that sought to attack the West. Little was done in response, until the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The diplomat's responsibility to inform ends when his cable is sent. Afterwards, it is the headquarters that handles the information and the leadership that decides. Diplomacy builds on a synthesis of many different considerations. That demands some humility from individual diplomats, but also requires a policy process with a clear eye on the long-term aspirations of the state.

This has important consequences. First of all, the aspirations need to be clear and specified into objectives for diplomacy. This can be part of a national security strategy or white papers for diplomacy. In addition, it demands a balanced mechanism of clearing important information and assessing its consequences. This mechanism should bring together different viewpoints of different stakeholders. Inside the diplomatic service, this happens between different branches. At a higher level, it can happen in a security council that also introduces the perspective of other departments. That on its turn, requires a balance between diplomats and politicians. Diplomats should have the authority to present their analysis autonomously and even communicate key issues to the public, to the extent that it does not endanger the security of the state and individual diplomats. The American State Department does so, for instance, about terrorism and human rights. Diplomatic services often publish rough assessments of the situation in other states or at least travel advise. The politician, the foreign or prime minister, has the authority to decide what to do

with that analysis, but should at the very least offer a justification when they decide not to follow it. So, the authority of the diplomat resides in information superiority, the authority of the minister in the responsibility to decide. Tension in that regard is inevitable. Never must information be developed with an eye on the private interest of the minister.

### **Diplomatic bargaining**

Diplomatic bargaining is one of the three important components of diplomatic power, besides the power of the state and information. It is about applying the best ways to extract advantages out of the relations with other states. There are the lions of world politics, with sufficient power to dominate others and resist competitors as long as they remain in good shape. Jackals opportunistically try to benefit by following the leading powers. Hyenas much less powerful than a lion, but can still outmanoeuvre them if they work together. In the shadow of these big predators, weasels can survive by staying in the shadow and accepting smaller gains. All these animals are even strong, smart or a combination of both. But the diplomatic behaviour of states more often resembles that of ostriches, sticking their neck in the sand and recklessly ignoring the predators, or, worse, chicken, foraging carelessly and noisily, and flying up in panic when a challenge arrives. There are a lot of different animals and while every diplomat would like to work for a lion-like state, they more often work for a chicken-like state.

Diplomatic bargaining is not evident. In 2020, the British government appointed a new lead negotiator for a final agreement to leave the European Union. Several years of grinding negotiations in a turbulent economic

context had failed, so that the United Kingdom risked leaving the European Union without an agreement about how the states would manage relations afterwards. Several diplomats resigned. The Brexit negotiations were complex and stormy, involving exchanges at many different levels, from prime minister to file manager, in an ever-changing political context. That is how negotiations often unfold. A good negotiator is a manager of chaos, keeping his eyes on the ball, while the whole stadium is in flames. The main challenge in diplomatic negotiations often comes from inside. While diplomats want to play chess or poker, their professional context might force them to play the game of the goose.

Bargaining power demands clear objectives: offensive interests, or concessions you want to obtain as a state, and defensive interests: things you do not want to give away. Indeed, it is relevant to keep channels open, even if there are no direct rewards. Yet, the end goals should be clear. The evaluation of so-called sectoral dialogues that the European Union had with its foreign partners, already mentioned in chapter seven, led to the conclusion that most of them had not yielded results. But the leadership insisted that this was part of constructive engagement. The dialogue as such was important. "We get them to learn to play by our rules."<sup>28</sup> Only ten years later, it was quietly avowed that those dialogues looked more like occupational therapy for diplomats. China had a knack for using diplomacy to bide time. It could drag on trade talks for years, only to make concessions when its companies had become competitive enough to bear the consequences. It also applied that tactic to negotiations about the contested South China Sea. While its diplomats kept talking to other claimant states, it expanded its navy and fortifying islands.

The diplomatic service should retain oversight of gains and losses, sacrifices and the benefits in different domains. The sum of the exchanges should be positive. In 2022, a Swedish diplomat explained how agonizing he found bargaining with Turkey to approve its accession to NATO. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Sweden craved the collective defense provided by NATO and to be integrated in its military structure. Turkey's demands were painful: Stockholm had to extradite dozens of refugees that allegedly had ties with the Kurdish resistance movement in Turkey. "It is pest versus cholera, security versus values," the diplomat explained, "We now try to persuade America to pressure Turkey by reconsidering arms deliveries and financial support, but this is very painful."<sup>29</sup> In 2021, a meeting was convened by a European member state to reflect about trade negotiations with India. We need an alternative market for China, the chairperson remarked, but are we not risking the same mistake with India: "Opening up to a market that becomes more authoritarian and protectionist?"<sup>30</sup> That was a pertinent question, because European states had indeed failed to develop a beneficial partnership with China.

The next step is to decide how to maximize the weight that can be thrown into the scale, to decide on the best possible method of bargaining to obtain something in international politics, a state must always be willing to give something up. *Quid pro quo*. This can be a sacrifice of sovereignty by signing up to international rules, giving access to the domestic market, or a financial sacrifice. In all these occasions, this weight depends on domestic consent, the readiness of citizens, companies, and other stakeholders to accept a deal. States can decide to shore up their internal capabilities, prioritize negotiations, allocate more resources to it - in terms of political

involvement, dedicated officials, and so forth – and try to close the ranks to be more credible. One solution is the appointment of a lead negotiator with a strong mandate. China attempted to join the World Trade Organization in 2001. The deal was fiercely resisted by state-owned companies, yet Zhu Rongji, the lead negotiator, visited many of them to explain the advantages, and carefully addressed internal criticism from hard-liners in the Party that considered the accession as a selling-out. Such examples are rare, though. Another option is to first muster the support of the parliament. This avoids a situation in which the executive is being called back by the legislative branch. In the run-up to the Paris Climate Summit in 2015, the American President failed to enlist the Republic opposition, so that tremendous political capital had to be spent on drafting the treaty in a way that it did not need Congressional approval.

Referenda have also been used, by Costa Rica, for instance, with the eye on a possible trade agreement. In Switzerland, the government first probed the public opinion about a trade agreement with Indonesia. That referendum also allowed to use the public opinion to extract concessions. States can use their own public opinion to exert pressure, but they can also use the public opinion of other states. Public diplomacy seeks to influence the opinion of citizens of other states. In a benign way, it involves the use of different forums – from lectures in conference rooms to social media – to explain viewpoints. More sensitively, states can release information directly to citizens of another state, to constrain the manoeuvrability of their government. In the pushback against China, for instance, the United States sometimes released information, via proxies, to journalists about Chinese spying and so forth. Sometimes this information also compromises the government and



aims at replacing it with a more lenient one. Public diplomacy can also take the form of fake information.

States can work with other states to shore up their bargaining power. Sometimes, this leads to ad-hoc bilateral partnerships. Switzerland and Luxemburg, for instance often coordinated about the banking sector. It can lead to ad-hoc multilateral formations. Those multilateral formations can become lasting. Some have loose relations, with limited binding arrangements, such as the BRICS, the G20, the G8, or OPEC. Others have a larger weight and have binding founding treaties. At a regional level, the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and NATO are examples of this. At the global level, the United Nations and the World Trade Organizations can be mentioned. Inside these institutions, alliances are formed and abandoned. This can happen on an ad-hoc basis. In the UN Human Rights Council, for instance, authoritarian states have aligned in altering constellations against Western democracies. States can also decide to set up more durable multilateral formations. Sometimes, these formations inside international organizations can be more durable. In the United Nations, poorer states allied in different constellations, like the G-77 and the G-24, to withstand the influence of the strong states. In the European Union, Central- and Eastern European member states united themselves in the Visegrad-group to resist proposals of Western-European states with regard to migration. Multilateralism remains a continuation of power politics with different means.

Pressure can be exerted by presenting a window of opportunity. "This is your moment. When my minister and I are gone, there will be no readiness on our side anymore. If you want a deal you have to do it with us," a senior Indian diplomat remarked with a reference to

ongoing trade negotiations with the European Union.<sup>31</sup> The Iranian President Hassan Rouhani referred to elections in 2017 and stressed that he needed a breakthrough in the nuclear negotiations if the hard-line opponent was to be prevented to win. This is related to another bargaining technique: good-cop-bad-cop. “You have to give me something, or I never get this through my parliament,” is a sentence very often used in international negotiations, the official or minister presenting himself as a voice of reason committed to an agreement, yet struggling with the legislators that have the final say. This is similar to using public opinion. During the many negotiations between Greece and the other European member states at the time of the financial crisis, Greek negotiators often said that they understood the demands, but required concessions to avoid public unrest and riots.

*Divide et impera*, pitting the barbarians against the barbarians, divide and rule: weakening the internal cohesion of a counterpart is another common negotiation practice. This is sometimes applied for issues as trivial as protocol. In 2015, the Chinese president visited Belgium and the Netherlands. In the run-up to that visit, Chinese diplomats relentlessly played the two states to maximize the honour with which he would be received. When one promised to send a minister, they asked the other for the prime minister. When one promised a large motorcade, they suggested the other a larger one. It has also been applied for more weighty matters. In 2014, Russia watered down European sanctions by pressuring states with large economic interests, like Germany and Greece against hard-line states like Poland. When Southeast Asian states at first refused a collective trade deal with China, in the late 1990s, Beijing started negotiations one by one, offering small concessions, so that in the end, the deal was done and, unsurprisingly, favoured China the

most. In trade negotiations, the partner state will almost always reach out to dependent corporate interest groups to exert pressure. A state can also exploit differences inside other states and enlist allies to lobby for its cause. This can be relevant with regard to specific negotiations. When a trade agreement with New Zealand was opposed by labour unions, in 2011, the South Korean government made more efforts to approach members of parliament via economic interest groups, like exporters of agricultural goods. If an economic agreement with another state is desirable, for instance, diplomats reach out to companies, cities, regions, and associations that have an interest in it, and subtly nudge them to encourage their government to sign the deal.

If a state lacks power in one domain, it can compensate this by linking negotiations to another in which it is powerful. In 1965, the United States persuaded Germany and Japan to support the position of the dollar by presenting that as a condition to protect them against the Soviet Union. In 2021, Morocco wanted Spain to recognize its claim over the Western Sahara by threatening to allow more African immigrants to pass through to enclaves like Melilla. These are straightforward *quid pro quos*. In multilateral settings, linkage can be much more diffuse. Said a member state ambassador to the EU: "In our meetings everything is linked. If today we make a concession in negotiations about climate, this goes into our institutional memory, and we might use that gesture to suggest another member state to be somewhat more lenient when we need something in the next year or even later. If all member states act like this in many different domains, you create more scope for compromise."<sup>32</sup> In the climate change negotiations, emission reduction, a demand of the rich states, was linked to financial support for adjustment, a demand of

the poorest states, and to the avoidance of green trade barriers, an important demand of the industrializing states. Retain oversight is key.

Brinkmanship is a negotiation form that threatens to create a negative situation and to display to the other side its readiness to accept the risk. An extreme form of brinkmanship is the threat of war. North-Korea used it during negotiations with the United States, threatening war or nuclear attack if sanctions were applied. An American negotiator stated: "There were times you would not know how serious they were. They often forced us into emotional highs and lows by putting everything at stake. It was all or nothing."<sup>33</sup> Iran applied the same method, threatening to accelerate its nuclear weapon production if sanctions were not lifted. A most famous example of nuclear brinkmanship is the so-called Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. When the United States discovered Soviet nuclear missiles at Cuba, it imposed a naval blockade around the island, risking a showdown with Soviet ships that were on their way.

The art of brinkmanship, is a balance between the threat and subtle exits to avoid a collision. Besides the threat of a – violent – confrontation, states can threaten to cause other forms of damage. Turkey, threatened sending refugees towards Europe if it did not receive more financial support. Walk out and, hence, the risk of a diplomatic collapse is also commonly used. This is what the British government did in 2020 during the Brexit negotiations. An important part of brinkmanship is unpredictability, the capacity to scare the other side by conventional, reckless, and emotional behaviour. The frequent use of brinkmanship leads to isolation and estrangement, the danger also that if the state does not act up its threats, it becomes seen as a barking dog that does not bite.

There are other tactics. Consider Janus face diplomacy. If partner states want to constrain your freedom of action and affect your interest with a deal that is not in your interest yet hard to completely object, you can pretend to accept negotiations, invest diplomatic capital in them, yet to keep the final agreement as vague and non-committal as possible. Dishonesty comes at a price, though. "It is a fundamental error and one widely held, that a clever negotiator must be a master of deceit," advised François de Callières, "Honesty is here and everywhere the best policy."<sup>34</sup> States can also pull up a technocratic smoke screen, refer talks to committees with specialists and lawyers, guising sharp offensive interests into long deliberations about details, technicalities, and law. Technical committees can be a means to exhaust negotiations, but, if well-orchestrated, also an occasion to outclass states that lack the resources and expertise to oversee the details.

States can act as honest brokers. Small states can try to do so in between large states, so as to create specific agreements or procedures for interaction that favour their interests. Belgium tried this in the context of NATO and the EU, and so did Austria in the EU. Finland assumed that role in the Cold War, between the Soviets and the United States. Singapore became a very active facilitator of regional cooperation, in the framework of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, for example, but also in different other multilateral formations. "A small country must seek a maximum number of friends," Lee Kuan Yew said, "while maintaining the freedom to be itself as a sovereign and independent nation."<sup>35</sup>

States can apply salami tactics. The United States first tried to have the member states of NATO pledge to spend two percent of their GDP on defense, consequently made this target binding, then pushed for the two percent

to become a minimum requirement, and started suggesting three percent. States might also offer a golden bridge to their counterparts, as Sun Tzu suggested, extracting a concession while offering the other side to make it look like their diplomatic victory. Write your opponent's victory speech. The Oslo Accord between Israel and the Palestinian leadership was a golden bridge, symbolically giving the later a victory of recognition of the Palestinian government, but not the Palestinian state. "However basic truths in diplomacy may be commonly recognized and agreed tacitly," Thucydides observed, "myths and postures have often to be maintained even when the majority can see through the fiction."

One important question is how participants in negotiations can be influenced by the setting. Sometimes, diplomats are intimidated. The Amarna correspondence and numerous other sources report how diplomats were kept waiting for days. The same goes for political leaders trying to show off, such as Mao Zedong who received his Soviet counterpart while swimming, knowing well that his counterpart could not swim, or Vladimir Putin who received the German prime minister with a dog in the room, knowing that his guest was afraid of them. This can help to showcase power, but rarely helps to gain bargaining power. Secret and backdoor diplomacy also remains relevant, as it reduces the chance of losing face. States can also create an environment where it is convenient to talk in a different way, hosting delegates for a longer time at a nice venue, while treating them with nice food and side-events. High officials of the city of Babylon tried to coax a visiting delegation from Assyria into a brotherhood. "I am your brother and you are my brother:"<sup>36</sup> Klemens von Metternich tried this during the peace conference of Vienna: "The tongue is untied, the heart opens and the need to make oneself understood

often takes over from the rules of cold and severe calculation." Yet, meetings like Vienna can also become so large and opulent, that negotiations move to the margins. Indeed, the most important objective of hosts of large diplomatic summits seems to be to display their prestige. The conference at Vienna, it was said, did not advance; it waltzed. This criticism was not new. Philippe de Commines called such a meeting a market.<sup>37</sup> More recently, a bright Indian diplomat saw: "Multi-country meetings at the head of government-level are enjoyable extravaganzas and the media plays up such spectacles. Presidents and prime ministers are complicit in such self-promotion as their names and videos are splashed all over newspapers and television."<sup>38</sup>

Summit diplomacy is probably as old as the first tribal leader that hosted his neighbours roasting their catch on a campfire. We often think diplomacy to take a new turn, whereas nothing changes fundamentally. Today, social media are seen as a new phenomenon, shaping opinions and making it difficult to negotiate in secrecy. Initially, the diplomat abroad quietly struggled with the uncertainty that his cables be read. Today he can brandish his activities via social media, post pictures of meetings and share some of his observations. They collect a lot of their "likes" from colleagues who are in the same business. Yet, pamphleteers have been reporting about diplomatic business since centuries. In ancient times, diplomats had to race to stay ahead of the news that spread through networks of traders. This was not real time, of course, but the impact of media and social media, "l'éloquence des rues", as Napoleon Bonaparte called it, has always been substantial. In the nineteenth century, the American diplomat called for "people diplomacy". "Those people", the French statesman Dominique de Pradt, had already stressed, "have acquired a knowledge

of their rights and dignity.”<sup>39</sup> Lord Salisbury admired the telegraph for “assembling all mankind upon one great plane, whence they can see everything that is done and hear everything that is said and judge of every policy that is pursued at the very moment those events take place.”<sup>40</sup>

The influence of a state on others depends mostly on its power. Not just its material power, but also its other qualities, which should add up to legitimate power. The task of diplomacy is to help converting power into external influence, to bargain efficiently. That requires clear objectives, overview of gains and losses, however diffuse they are, and internal cohesion. Diplomacy can be mutually beneficial, but is not always necessarily so. There are many ways to bargain: using public opinion, cooperation with other states, dividing the other state, linkage, creating windows of opportunity, and so forth. Tricks like *janus face* diplomacy, golden bridges, and neutralization by committee can be tried, but deceit always comes at a price.

## Conclusions

“Diplomacy is not the unquestionable influence of the personal element, the product of either goodwill or evil intentions, the blunders or masterstrokes of individual nations,” a Latvian scholar of diplomacy observed, “It is at the root the result of objective causes, the international play of forces compounded, within each country, of such factors as national history and tradition, domestic politics, strategy, the fluctuations of public opinion, and the whole social and economic structure.”<sup>41</sup> This chapter highlighted the importance of clear objectives and knowledge of gains and losses, however diffuse they might be. In an ideal situation, both sides gain, but that



is not always possible. States can increase their bargaining power in many different ways, by shoring up their internal unity and power, by forming alliances with others, by influencing the public opinion of another state, creating an enabling atmosphere, and so forth. There are many different bargaining techniques, which we cannot describe in detail in this book, from honest brokering to brinkmanship.

Diplomats are handlers of power and chaos. The handling of chaos is a condition to arrive at their core task: gaining information about external relations and bending them through skilful bargaining into the advantage of the state. Still, diplomacy is not served by cynicism. It demands a degree of resignation, yet also a tireless effort to shape the conditions to preserve his state's power and its capacity to realize its aspirations. Diplomacy does not require crooks either. While external relations bring difficult dilemmas, deceit and opportunism are not rewarding in the long run. The ideal diplomat combines virtue with realism. He displays respect, prudence and moderation.

## XI

### Military Power

Chapter three offered a metaphor for the fluctuating interest of states in security. It described how one of my neighbours was proud not to close his door until that one night. Nobody takes interest in me, he said. The same happens in the military domain. As the saying goes: you may not be interested in war, but war may be interested in you.<sup>1</sup> This is what Europe experienced when Russia invaded Ukraine. For decades, many European states assumed that they could preserve their security with soft and economic power. They supposed, until the day of the invasion, that such savageness would not happen again on their doorstep. Russia, after all, was dependent on Europe. The resolve of the Ukrainian people and military support from the United States prevented a quick Russian victory. As Russian and Ukrainian troops pounded each other, Europe grappled with depleted arsenals. The war in Ukraine forced the Europeans to acknowledge hard military power as a priority.

Universal peace does not exist.<sup>2</sup> Times in which states celebrate peace are often times in which it attains such dominance that nobody dares to attack them. Recently, peace was celebrated mostly in rich Western states. Here, only 14 percent of the people worried about war. In states elsewhere, this was on average 45 percent.<sup>3</sup> Peace reflects security through military superiority. The British strategist Liddell Hart called this euphemistically the better peace.<sup>4</sup> Thoughts of universal peace reflect imperial hierarchy.<sup>5</sup> Those moments do not last. For it is in the dominance of the one party that others see the need to modernize their military capabilities. It is dominance that leads to arrogance, the careless display of military

power, and exhaustion. Peace does not exist for everyone at the same time. Armed forces should therefore not aspire universal peace, but make the state secure in the absence of universal peace.

This chapter clarifies what that means. The first section explains that military power remains a double-edged sword. It is indispensable but can be abused by military commanders and civilian leaders. The next section sheds light on how best to evaluate military power and finds that the quality and quantity of capabilities are equally important. Subsequently, it explains why states will never have the luxury to stick to their own territory in trying to preserve their security, or to limit themselves to a purely defensive posture. Measured and gradual military balancing is the best chance to preserve the state's security. It is crucial to possess the tools to make decisions about war and peace: a clear compass in terms of interests and morals, a sound strategy, good intelligence, and checks and balances between decision makers.

### **A double-edged sword**

Military power matters. In case of the war in Ukraine, other European states were not directly threatened by the Russian invasion. Ukraine, as it did several times in history, acted as their shield against Eurasian aggressors. Ukraine also had the luck of being prepared and equipped by the United States. Other states, however, did not have that advantage. In 2016, I travelled to Vukovar, a city in Croatia, on the border with Serbia. In 1991, Croatia was invaded by Serbian militia and regular forces. Vukovar was in the front line. Less than 2,000 lightly armed soldiers defended the city against a force that was

ten times larger and pounded the city for weeks with heavy artillery. When Vukovar fell, Croatian defenders were executed, women raped, and thousands of people deported.<sup>6</sup> Few experiences are more gruesome than defencelessness against foreign invaders. Borders mean nothing when they are not defended.

The armed forces remain one of the most trusted institutions in most states. Globally, average trust in the armed forces is 67 percent, compared to 41 percent for the government and 34 percent for the parliament.<sup>7</sup> Like any weapon, though, military power can be dangerous. Every year, at least one country suffers from a military coup.<sup>8</sup> Many wars are internal wars in which armed forces do not protect citizens but turn against them. In several states, the military controls politics and acts as a gatekeeper in the economy. These garrison states might look stable, but behind that façade, the military is engaged in repression and extortion. Egypt is a clear example of a state in which the armed forces repress dissent, yet fail to address the root causes of that dissent.<sup>9</sup> Even in solid democracies, the relation between the government and the military can be complex. President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned: "Whether sought or unsought, the potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced by the military-industrial complex power exists and will persist."<sup>10</sup>

The military can abuse its role with regard to civilians, but civilians can also misuse their role regarding the military. Many wars are still initiated by civilian leaders. Consider the Russian invasion in Ukraine. First president Vladimir Putin made sure that his key generals were puppets, then he ordered the war, ignoring calls of senior military staff not to do it.<sup>11</sup> When the American President George W. Bush explored options to attack Iraq, the Pentagon was sceptical, but

ordered by the president to deploy and to do so with much less capabilities than requested. "I should have had the gumption to confront him," a general avowed, "The right thing to do was to confront, and I did not."<sup>12</sup> As a historian summarized, American generals had become useful idiots, captives of the obsessions of politicians.<sup>13</sup> Civilians gave the orders for many military tragedies. In peace time, too, they sometimes instrumentalize the military, to shore up their prestige. "Politicians fight one-up each other in flattery for the military."<sup>14</sup> They use the military as an opportunity for economic patronage, to create jobs in their electoral constituencies, or, worse, to take bribes. Many big corrupted arms deals were signed by civilians, not soldiers.<sup>15</sup> Besides the imposing generals, we also have to acknowledge the image of the obedient general, the star-laden lackey, the officer who comfortably settles in the principle that civilians tell them what to do, to evade responsibility himself, to keep his career opportunities smooth. For a long time in Europe, this was the rule rather than the exception.

So far, we have come to the point that we accept military power to be indispensable for a state to defend its borders and its sovereignty, yet also recognize that military power can harm the state if it is exploited by crooks. Those crooks sometimes wore uniforms; sometimes not.

### **Evaluating military power**

States cannot define military power as they like. Military power is relative. On the one hand, it is measured against other actors. On the other hand, it depends on how fast a state can keep pace with military innovation. In ancient times, armies equipped with weapons of bronze were

overcome by armies with weapons of iron. China's gun powder was used at its own detriment when it faced European navies that combined cannon with superior navigation techniques. Neorealists would call that the primacy of the world system, states being locked in unescapable competition with other states for superior military technology, fire power, speed, accuracy, and so forth. This is like a boxing ring that you cannot exit.

Military power can be used in many ways, for the support of humanitarian objectives, territorial defense, conquest, and so forth. Even pacifists acknowledge the importance of military power to protect innocent civilians and to enforce international rules. There can be no international law without enforcement. Military power remains indispensable to protect the state, its territorial integrity and its sovereignty. There is not much controversial about military power so far. That changes when we consider military power as a tool to preserve domestic stability. It becomes even more controversial, yet not less important, as a tool to influence partnerships with other states, to protect interests overseas, to assert territorial claims in disputed areas, to deny rivals access to a sphere of influence. Still more offensive is the use of military power to open borders for trade, like the gun boat diplomacy in the nineteenth century, the pursuit of control over disputed areas, the expropriation of foreign natural resources, and outright conquest, or the annihilation of adversaries. This spectrum has not much changed throughout history. Humanitarian concerns were invoked in the past and that is still the case today. Wars of conquest occurred throughout the centuries and in every region.

The spectrum of utility is similar to the spectrum of force in operations. Low-intensity operations include peacetime presence and surveillance. Deterrence is built

with an eye on high-intensity conflicts, but expects to avoid them. A show of force, by deploying military assets near a threat, moves the marker significantly, and so does brinkmanship. Brinkmanship uses military force to threaten adversaries to the brink of war, yet, again with the expectation to pull back just on time and to avoid war. Graduated reprisal accepts the use of force, but with moderation and only in response to the violence committed by the other party, and again with the expectation to avoid the escalation and war. Pre-emptive attacks are carried out to destroy a non-imminent military threat; while preventive attacks aim at long-term threats. Evidently, such attacks carry a very large risk of counter-attacks and escalation is very difficult to control. At the highest level of the force spectrum, we find conventional wars, regional nuclear conflicts, and strategic nuclear war, and, hence, the destruction of most of the planet.

But what shapes military power? Military power is ultimately demonstrated on the battlefield. The causes of victory and defeat on the battlefield have been extensively studied by military experts. Yet, as the cliché goes, winning the battle does not mean winning the war, leave alone preserving the gains. Think of Alexander the Great after the conquest of Persia, the British after Bunker Hill, Napoleon after Leipzig, Japan after Pearl Harbor, Hitler after the Blitzkrieg, and so forth. Military power prepares for an ultra-run, not a sprint. Moreover, even if the ultimate proof of military power is delivered in combat, the best victory is often the one you do not have to fight for, victories won by non-military means, or by military means that are so intimidating that just their appearance deters adversaries.

Some academics argue that democracy is an important quality of military power.<sup>16</sup> Democracies, it is

held, deliberate more cleverly about when to go to war and tend to be less reckless. America's interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, however, demonstrated that democracy does not necessarily put a check on recklessness. Did the United States and its allies not lose most of its wars since World War II? So, even if academics are statistically right that democracies win more often, they have also suffered very expensive and avoidable defeats.

"Skill" is said to be another dimension of quality and nothing shows that more clearly than combined arms operations.<sup>17</sup> In such operations, capabilities in air, land, sea, and space are combined in one organic, networked battle force.<sup>18</sup> The such operations demand extreme skill in terms of strategy, doctrine, command, training, the integration of technology, mobility, and so forth.<sup>19</sup> The textbook example of a successful combined arms operation is Desert Storm, the invasion in Iraq in 1991. But even this no longer suffices. Sensors, computers, and data links have become much more powerful. Weapons have become faster and increasingly autonomous. More than ever, cyber interconnects everything.

Hence, strategists now highlight so-called multi- or all-domain operations as the pinnacle of fighting. It is the continuation of combined arms, but real-time, faster, with a longer long-range, often unmanned, and increasingly autonomous. Multi-domain operations are about the capacity to conduct "simultaneous and sequential operations using surprise and the rapid and continuous integration of capabilities across all domains... to gain physical and psychological advantages and influence and control over the operational environment."<sup>20</sup> The battlefield takes the shape of a cloud-like environment that connects the sensors of all weapons into a superfast unified network.



Quality and skill are indeed crucial. Technology, organization, and tactics, that allows for faster, stealthier, more manoeuvrable, and more accurate weapons, evidently give an advantage. But also these attributes mean different things in different contexts. The tanks of Nazi-Germany that proved so capable in Western Europe, struggled with the ice and snow in Russia.<sup>21</sup> The American infantry units that had been decisive in Europe, after D-Day in 1944, they were exhausted by the guerrilla wars in Korea and Vietnam. If Iraq of Saddam Hussein had no defense against American tanks, cruise missiles, and combat aircraft; that superiority in technology and speed, was much less decisive two decades later against Iraqi insurgents. The latter acquired stealth not so much through high-tech, but by primitively blending with civilians and using night as a cover. They lent their mobility not to supersonic aircraft or attack helicopters, but to small units that moved rapidly and unpredictably by means of cheap Toyota pickup's and dilapidated Mercedes sedans. Despite their vast combat experience, degrees at the best defense academies of the world, the most sophisticated doctrines, and unmatched intelligence, America's four star generals lost most of their wars against ragtag rebellions. During the Russian invasion in Ukraine, the defenders could long ward off waves of Russian troops by means of more accurate fire power. Yet, that technology still depended on the hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian citizens that were prepared to die for their country.

This brings us to quantity as a quality. The wars in Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq showed us that not all parties attach the same value to human life. They accept the conduct of total war and typically treat soldiers as cannon fodder. Russia also did that during its invasion in Ukraine. It sent its soldiers as waves of flesh upon

Ukrainian positions. However poorly trained, commanded, and equipped they were, the sheer quantity of these forces required immense volumes of ammunition to stop them. Russia has always tended to compensate inferiority in terms of technology and command with brutality.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, states averse to losses are required to risk lives. Long-range, unmanned and autonomous weapon systems can overwhelm the enemy, but victory stills hinge upon the capacity to gain ground on the enemy – and to hold it. To achieve that, boots on the ground remain, for now, indispensable.

An important cause of failure in recent wars against terrorist groups has been that technologically superior states assumed they could win by means of drones, aerial attacks, and small units of special forces. Yet, that form of remote-control intervention signalled to enemies the aversion to risks, that they stood a chance by wearing the enemy out, and by making clear to the local population that the intervening party was not to be counted on in the long run.<sup>23</sup> In the war on terror, the United States tried to make up for that reality by sending more soldiers to patrol on foot. The father of the new counter-insurgency doctrine, General David Petraeus, told me: “We paid a price for politicians being too much estranged from the battlefield and too much obsessed with technology.”<sup>24</sup>

Some states integrate attrition as an element in their strategy. Expecting adversaries to be risk-averse and to put emphasis on high-tech precision strikes, expect brutal attacks to wear out the enemy, to demoralize its citizens, and to force it to surrender. When I started a policy review of the conventional missile capabilities of Russia and China, I was surprised to discover that they did not only expect their advanced cruise missiles to be decisive, but also highlighted the

importance of merciless barrages of less advanced missiles to force the enemy to surrender. While American aircraft used Paveway laser-guided bombs against targets in Iraq, costing about 25,000 euros a piece, Russia still saw no problem in dropping much cheaper unguided bombs against its targets in neighbouring Syria. As an intelligence officer explained it to me: for the price of one high-precision Himars-missile, a Russian Smerch battery launches six to seven missiles. Even if collateral damage is to be avoided, quantity and mass fire remains important. The destruction of infrastructure also demands a lot of expensive ammunition. For a long time, I assumed that a missile could sufficiently destroy an airbase, until a war game taught me that twenty to fifty cruise missiles were needed. To offset the impact of mass fire, armed forces put their hopes on disposable unmanned weapon systems. Yet, those too must be deployed in large quantities. Enter the combat swarm: hundreds and even thousands of drones, flying grenades, that will descend on the enemy and engage their targets autonomously, powered by artificial intelligence.

The future battlefield will more and more resemble scenes from science fiction movies. War will be increasingly unmanned and autonomous. But states cannot put all their hopes on technology. Soldiers will still be in demand to occupy contested ground. The enemy can also decide to counter technologically superior adversaries by means of brutal campaigns. War is a beast with a big belly. Even if the deployment of soldiers is limited, states need significant quantities of weapons to stand a chance. The capacity to sustain long wars, to replenish stocks of ammunition, the readiness of citizens to defend their state in large enough numbers are quantitative qualities that should be considered. Quality and quantity, so much is clear, cannot be separated.

## Defense and offense

The same is true for offense and defense. It is often held that armed forces should limit their scope to the defense of the territory. Practice, however, is different and the state can seldom be defended by staying inside its borders. Strict territorial defense is unrealistic. Moreover, the defense of the state is sometimes not possible without offensive military operations. What if the hostile actor is a terrorist group that operates from abroad? Then, you might assume, the state fortifies its borders. Yet, what if that group, from a sanctuary in a distant country, continuously enlists more followers, via social media, and diasporas? What if the hostile actor is a state that unleashes the one cyber-attack from the other, typically channelling it via numerous third states and trying to sneak closer to critical target by corrupting computers in its orbit: companies, universities? What if pirates threaten vital shipping routes on which the economy depends? The state will have to wage a costly war, day after day. To do so, it will increasingly have to infringe on personal freedoms and the privacy of its citizens. So, what should be done? What if attempts at negotiations fail? Should the state be able to retaliate outside its borders? Should it be able to eliminate the masterminds of the pirates and terrorists? Should it conduct cyber-attacks against cyber-enemies abroad? Should it dissuade new cyber-attacks by showing the capacity to infrastructure in the hostile state? Again, in these cases, we must imagine that diplomacy and prevention have failed.

Even without giving a decisive answer, the cases reveal that the desired clarity about terms of engagement seldom exists. The notion of offence as defence and distant strikes to protect the state are a slippery slope towards recklessness. That is certain. Still, the division

has only continued to blur. We witness ever more powerful weapons, such as hypersonic missiles that can strike targets thousands of kilometres away. We see states developing strategies in which they expect to saturate their enemy with large-scale strikes. In these cases, it is not possible to wait for the threat to near the border. It is even not always possible to defend the state. It is very hard to build fortresses in the sky to keep out hypersonic missiles or combat swarms of drones.

Hence, offensive capabilities once again become relevant. Instead of aiming at defense against an effective attack, military capabilities could be developed to deter an attack. Deterrence implies that the state builds up long-range strike capabilities to show eventual hostile actors that the cost of aggression will be very high. Deterrence is an attempt prevention through force. Yet, deterrence can also be a slippery slope: towards arms races and incidents. Whenever offensive capabilities are developed, other states might fear preventive strike, and respond by modernizing their capabilities. Worse even: such tensions can spiral out of control as growing fear triggers more offensive posturing, preventive attacks, and so forth.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, deterrence must come with efforts at arms control, transparency, and, eventually, efforts to try to address the causes of enmity.

Nuclear weapons are the most frightening form of deterrence. They are inherently offensive and fit for distant strikes.<sup>26</sup> Since their horrendous effects became clear in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in 1945, more and more states have built such weapons. After the Cold War, Russia and the United States reduced their stocks of warheads. Yet, there are still over 12,000 nuclear warheads in the world. Nuclear weapons become faster, heavier, and more survivable. Sometimes, it appears that the world is stuck in a nuclear death spiral. The military

benefits of nuclear weapons have only become more compelling. Israel's nuclear weapons have given it superiority over other regional powers. North Korea can provoke Japan and the United States in ways that would be difficult to imagine without its nuclear weapons. During its invasion in Ukraine, Russia imposed on the West a degree of self-restraint that also would be unimaginable without nuclear deterrence. The other way around, the question arose whether Russia would have attacked Ukraine if Ukraine would have kept and modernized the nuclear weapons that were stored on its territory during the Cold War. To surrender nuclear weapons and to become a nuclear-weapon-free-zone does not mean that others will surrender them, leave alone to relinquish their nuclear umbrella to carry out conventional attacks with impunity. That remains the tragedy: nuclear weapons are a slippery slope towards Armageddon, but unilateral steps at disarmament could render states more prone to aggression from other states.

It is not always possible to make the difference between offence and defense, or to limit defense to the borders of the territory. This is not a new phenomenon. Tsarina Catherine the Great famously argued that Russia needed to expand its borders to be able to defend them. The American president Monroe called for a sphere of influence to protect the United States from interference. The Chinese Emperor Qianlong also favoured a policy of active defense. "What's this about inner and outer being divisible?" Offensive, the German General von Molke advised, is the best defence.<sup>27</sup> It is a dangerous illusion that military strategy can limit itself to territorial defense. But it is also a dangerous illusion that interventionism makes the state secure. So, how do we decide on the use of military power?

## Tasks

“Perhaps the greatest task of the prudent statesman is to be able to judge when appeasement will and will not lead to peaceful resolution of disputes.”<sup>28</sup> Appeasement is the attempt to avoid war by giving the threatening state what it wants, by accommodation. Appeasement clearly does not stop the belligerence of a state that intends to build dominance or hegemony.<sup>29</sup> It also does not prevent war if the threatening state is driven by paranoia, nationalism, or militarism, and certainly not if it deals with a combination of these factors. Important examples are response to the rise of Nazi Germany and to Iraq’s threat to invade Kuwait. What complicates the situation, however, is that the threat is not determined by intentions alone and that intentions can also be ambivalent.

Consider the clever revisionist: the state that avoids confrontation as long as it is weak, quietly expands its military power in disputed areas, uses its peaceful posturing to undermine influence of its rivals, yet strikes from the moment it feels strong enough. China’s interaction with its neighbours has been an example of this. For decades, its neighbours hoped pursued a policy of engagement to keep China on the track of peaceful development, only to see its military capabilities growing. The question to appease or not to appease relates not only to imminent threats, but also to long-term threats.

States can also seek to reduce their exposure to military threats. Isolationism is one example. Yet, as we have seen, isolation is an open invitation for threatening forces to move closer to the border and to seize the vacuum to expand their power. Military isolationism does not improve the state’s security. Yet, it is sometimes

relevant to evaluate how other forms of exposure to threats weigh up against the cost of security. Consider a state that depends heavily on maritime supply lines that pass through dangerous choke points. Should it invest in more naval capabilities to protect them, or has it other options, such as diversifying these routes or reducing its economic dependence on maritime trade? Sometimes, these choices can be extreme. In the 1940s, the United States imposed a ban on Asian immigration and incarcerated over one hundred thousand of people of Japanese descent, lest they would act as a fifth column and threaten the state from inside. Some of the Baltic states expelled Russian citizens who openly supported the regime of Vladimir Putin, fearing that they could incite Russian opposition inside the borders. Terrorist attacks led to debates about the loyalty of Muslim communities, questioning whether they were on the side of the terrorists or the state they lived in, and for a short while made American and British migration services to limit access to Muslim visitors.

The most effective way to deal with military threats is to preserve military power. It is no guarantee against aggression, but it is the most effective way to deter it, to prepare for defense, and to show resilience in case of war. There are different ways to balance against military threats. States can decide to limit the exchanges that contribute to the rise of an adversary, preventing trade gains, technology transfers, and so forth. This is what the United States started doing regarding China in the 2010s. Such policies can make it difficult for a hostile force to become more powerful, but not prevent aggression. States can balance against threats by modernizing their own military capabilities, with an eye on defense and deterrence. This is called internal balancing. This raises the cost of aggression and expands



the options to respond, but is no guarantee against war either. States can also balance against rising threats by working with other states. This external balancing creates dependency on allies. "Alliances are certainly good, but a force of one's own, that one can confidently rely on, is better," Frederick William of Prussia stated, "A ruler is not treated with respect unless he has his own troops and resources." Moreover, external balancing can give way to free riding. The comfort of collective security could make states less dedicated. And, like with the other responses, external balancing, however formidable the coalition, is still no guarantee against aggression.

This is also the case with so-called offshore balancing, which can be considered a specific form of external balancing. It implies that a state hides behind other states and supports them to engage a threat. The reasoning is usually that a first line of partners acts as a shock absorber. The distant state provides military support from a distance, which can involve the supply of weapons or long-range strikes: anything that minimizes the risk of direct involvement. On the first glance, offshore balancing has many advantages. But it also has downsides. Like with external balancing in general, the state risks the illusion of balancing without sacrifice. In addition, it signals to its adversary a degree of restraint and fear to intervene, which, on its turn can encourage aggression. Offshore balancing will also come across as opportunistic, undermine the confidence of the partners in the first line, and encourage them to pursue a more independent and sometimes more opportunistic policy. In extreme cases, the outsourcing of first line balancing can empower partners to the point that they too become arrogant. Offshore balancing, finally, reduces the capacity to respond. Hostile forces can create a *fait accompli* and strike suddenly. If the state that tries to

balance from a distance is not ready and does not have the capacity to transport troops quickly, or to breach through the positions of its enemy to support its partners, it once more sends a signal of weakness and likely increases the threat.

Ambition is the best form of balancing. If a state has the intrinsic motivation to work towards prosperity, if it increases its power with an eye on its ideals, and if it uses that power wisely, the state naturally expands its capacity to respond to threats. It will have means to modernize its military, the alertness to challenges, and the courage to stand its ground. Moreover, a state that combines a steady growth of power with moderation and alertness will less likely find itself surprised by rivals and less likely elicit hostility.

Military balancing will not cost much effort, when the modernization of its military capabilities keep pace with advancing of its prosperity. Yet, as we have seen at several points in this book, states that enjoy prosperity often become decadent. They ignore the preservation of their wealth and happily outsource activity to poorer states. It takes time for those in the sinking scale of the balance of power, Bolingbrook said, to realize that they are sinking. At the same time, their wealth leads to a combination of arrogance and complacency that exacerbate frustration elsewhere. Usually it takes a while for a prosperous state to realize its mistakes, how they undermined their security, and made military adversaries more powerful. When they that happens, balancing efforts are usually hurried and confrontational.

Hence, measured proactive balancing is better than reactive balancing. When reactive balancing is unescapable, it must be comprehensive. States have to address the interactions at the level of low politics - trade, investment, technology transfers, bad policy, and so forth

- to be capable of balancing militarily. It is no use trying to stop a military threat with one hand, when it is empowered by the other. However urgent the challenge, military balancing efforts must be measured and coincide with efforts at dialogue with the adversary. From the moment that balancing efforts give way to dominance and arrogance, it creates the opposite effect and will prompt other states to try to undermine that dominance. This is the most important challenge in reactive balancing: controlling panic, hatred, and excess. Indeed, that will always be easier said than done. The kind of rational cool-blooded balancing, the way Henry Kissinger described it, the sort of balancing conducted by statesmen as if they are masters over a chessboard, that kind of balancing seldom exists or at least not for long. Still, attempts at moderation must be made to limit escalation and recklessness.

Balancing does not lead to peace and it should not be expected to do so. It offers no guarantee for security. All balancing does is to prevent that the state becomes defenceless and to deter aggression by being capable to retaliate. Balancing is risky. But under-balancing is riskier. For carelessness is as much a cause of war as strength. It leads to difficult adjustment shocks and emboldens hostile actors to strike.

### **Military strategy**

If there is a cardinal quality of military power, it is the capacity to pick your fights. No campaign can be effective when the initial objectives are problematic. To determine such objectives, however, a state must have the capacity to reflect on war and peace. That capacity does not always exist. Sometimes, states are so dependent on

external protection that they almost always follow the leader, lack the intelligence to make proper choices, are dysfunctional in terms of governance, or suffer from a combination of these constraints. Hence, to guide military engagement, states must have proper mechanisms to reflect and decide.

This starts with threat analysis. There can be no proper preparation of military engagement if the state does not possess independent intelligence. The armed forces themselves should be capable to gather intelligence from possible theatres of deployment. Compared to the diplomatic services, they should have a broader mandate and set of options to collect information through spies, cyber, and different sensors. If they depend on foreign intelligence, the least the armed forces should be able to do, is to verify and compare with other sources. Once a threat assessment is developed inside the armed forces, the state must have a clearing mechanism to compare it with assessments of other branches of the government, including diplomacy and civilian intelligence services. In many states, this is the national security council. It is important here to have a diversity of opinions and to challenge assessments. Group think has proven to be most dangerous in deliberation about war and peace. Yet the state also has to have the capacity to oversee the different parts of the puzzle, or to connect the dots. Fragmented information is another threat to sound decision making. This is often the role of a national security advisor or a national director of intelligence.

One of the difficult questions at this level is how outspoken soldiers must be. In several states the armed forces have a formal mandate to reflect about threats, but are practically outflanked by politicians and their private office. I have seen several four-star generals being very much intimidated by politicians, inexperienced

politicians prohibiting senior officers to communicate about threats, and politicians dropping loyal party soldiers at key positions. The chief of defense of a European state often joked that he had to go to Pyongyang whenever a certain minister summoned him. Armed forces should obey to political leaders, who ultimately also decide whether to deploy. Yet, they also should have a clear mandate to make threat assessments. The regular release of public threat assessments is necessary to keep the society alert. If politicians disagree with them, they can explain their viewpoint. That all contributes to a permanent deliberation about security. Again, this is not evident. I have seen several ministers obstructing efforts at such communication. When deployment is considered, the specific threat assessments should also be shared, with parliament and with the public more broadly, evidently without compromising intelligence sources or the chance of success of military operations. To that end, some states have select committees that consist of members of parliament with a special security clearance. The armed forces should be checked, but they are also part of the checks and balances that are required for proper reflection. Remind at this point that recklessness is as common among civilian decision makers as among soldiers.

Based on a diverse set of perspectives and an integrated threat assessment, the government should reach a conclusion about the relevance of armed force. This requires it to formulate the objectives of engagement. For each objective, it should articulate the relevance with regard to national security interests, constitutional values, and international law. For each objective, it should also identify the operational options. What kind of operation is required? A show of force? Peacetime presence? A combat operation? What military and non-military

capabilities? How long will it last? What are the chances of escalation? Which partners? With what mandate? The armed forces take the lead in this. For each of those options, they should assess the feasibility, the likelihood of success, and the degree to which it is proportional in comparison to the objectives of engagement. The result of this exercise should be submitted to the political decision makers. The government can decide on the preferred option and propose it to parliament for approval.

Such deliberation is slow, yet the more imminent and important a threat, the easier it will probably be to arrive at a consensus. That more time is taken for less urgent threats, is not problematic as such. This process should never be sidestepped, even not when decisions are made by international organizations or alliances. In the same way as a diversity of opinions makes the deliberation process more reliable, different perspectives make sure that international efforts reflect the parties involved. If no consensus is possible at that level, it also shows that the engagement will likely be very complex and that careful deliberation is even more imperative.

The reactive choice on whether and how to deploy, however, depends on proactive choices made in terms of organizing the state's military power. It is not only in times of imminent threats that important decisions are made. At every moment, the state should scan the horizon for long term threats in every direction. The watchful state, we have seen, continuously reflects on its core mission: its values, its ideals, its interests, as well as on the security threats. Indeed, it approaches military power with restraint and humility. It is a last resort. Still, military power remains important.

For a very long time, efforts have been made at prescribing how military strategy could help the state to identify the proper ends, ways, and means to ready for

different threats. Sometimes this is just called strategy, but sometime strategy claims to be “grand”, in a sense that goes beyond the military realm and encompasses all the attributes of the state.<sup>30</sup> Developing strategy is easier said than done. A state should have a good notion of the ends or objectives of military power, but the ways and means often depend on threat variables that the state does not control. Hence, strategies are often contingent. In the United States, for instance, the security strategy changes every couple of years and the armed forces adjust their strategy every four years. In the nineties, it claimed that there were hardly any rivals left and focussed on humanitarian intervention. Soon afterwards, it shifted on combating terrorism and combating a so-called axis of evil, to be followed by a strategy of restraint, which on its turn made place for a strategy that sought to balance against China’s rise. The same happened in Europe. Geopolitically, the European Union has long claimed to be a global military actor, but its posture in reality shifted back and forth between the checking Russian in the East and handling instability in the South.

A strategy must connect ends, means, and threats. To prepare for threats, the state must look ahead and identify them. This is called strategic foresight. Strategic foresight has two important objectives: it deduces possible threats from existing trends and it envisions possible surprises, also called black swans or unknown unknowns. Strategic foresight does not have to highly advanced and is even not necessarily exclusively scientific. Deducing threats requires common sense and, more importantly, the courage to name them and act upon them. Western intelligence services knew very well that that war was coming to the Former Yugoslavia, but governments failed to respond.<sup>31</sup> It was not the case, for instance, that the West was oblivious to the Islamic

terrorist threat before 9/11. It knew the its masterminds, its sponsors, and its runners, but for many years it refused to go after the sponsors, because they were usually states that provided oil and bought American weapons. It was also not the case that the West underestimated the risk of a rising China. Intelligence services and diplomats warned about that already in the late 1980s. But China too was an important business opportunity. In the same way, we know today that the demographic explosion in the South will cause instability and that climate change will exacerbate that. But little is done to address it, to prevent it, and to prepare for future security risks.

Foresight often has little impact, because it is impeded by the short-sighted fixation with business opportunities or current challenges. Decision makers tend to be reluctant to name long-term threats, because they demand discipline and narrow their freedom of action. Another argument that is often invoked against foresight is that naming long-term threats turns them into a self-fulfilling prophecy. The very fact that there exists no science of unknown unknowns and that it partially relies on imagination makes that part of strategy very prone to allegations of exaggeration and doom saying. Strategic foresight, finally, is discomfiting because it often offers little guidance, except for the fact that states must be ready for everything and sometimes even do not have the luxury to choose their fights.

Knowledge is no guarantee for wisdom. Foresight is not guarantee for sound policy. Strategy is only relevant if knowledge and foresight about threats can shape choices about ways and means. To facilitate this, armed forces should have a strong capacity to foresight, but also to communicate transparently about their findings to the public. These findings are no dictate, they



are an assessment. It is up to the public and the politicians they allow to rule to make choices. But the fact that foresight stimulates reflection and debate, that it triggers counter-arguments, and that it contributes to the alertness of the state, will make it more likely that knowledge gives way to wise strategy.

The most important characteristic of sound military strategy is that it accepts that specialization is impossible in a world in which so many different threats build up at the same time, and that the best strategy is one of versatility. Versatility depends on power, but also on the organization and equipment of the armed forces. They should be organized so as to maximize the freedom of action of the state and to be able to make independent choices, also inside alliances and partnerships. The closer to home armed forces are expected to deploy, the more independence should be preserved. The more distant the mission, the more interoperability and specialization are relevant. Armed forces should be designed to engage across the full spectrum of violence. Instead of ordering a large number lightly armed patrol ships, for example, it is better to order limited number of frigates that can handle a broad range of tasks, and to buy more when there is a great need for them.

## **Versatility**

The best military strategy is versatility, to preserve freedom of action, to be able respond to the full spectrum of threats, and to flexibly engage into partnerships with other states. Versatility means power. Every age comes with its own specific requirements in terms of technology and organization. It goes beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss them. What suffices for this book, is to accept

that military power is an ultima ratio, a means that is used when other options have failed or could not be tried. Those failures and missed opportunities, for all the knowledge and intelligence, have been numerous. Military power is not meant to advance world peace but to contribute to the security of the state. Like any weapon, it must be handled with care. In that regard, excessive influence of the military forms as much a risk as the recklessness of politicians who in most states command the armed forces. Quality and quantity, we also concluded, are both important. A state cannot choose between technology and soldiers, for instance. It needs both. Similarly, it is also an illusion for states to be able to choose between offense and defense, between territorial and foreign operations. States must preserve enough military power in comparison to their foes. Ideally, such balancing happens in a gradual and measured way, combined attempts at transparency and dialogue. Sudden and aggressive balancing is often the consequence of a period of ignorance and the lack of balancing. A precondition for measured and gradual balancing is that the state remains alert to threats. To that end, the armed forces must have the capacity to gather intelligence, to reflect, to carry out strategic foresight, and to communicate their findings transparently. While civilians should keep a check on eventual military recklessness, the military certainly should keep a check on civilian recklessness.



## Conclusion

When you reach this point of the book, you have likely endured a rather taxing journey. The scope was very broad. I hope you forgive me the many sorts of balances. They were probably tiring and repetitive, but they were also inescapable. After all, statecraft cannot succeed without a measured and integrated approach. Having reached this conclusion, means that you qualify for at least two important assets required to serve the state: perseverance and curiosity. The approach of statecraft in this book is complex, as it combines many different components, ranging from philosophy and theory to applied science, practical experience, and years of personal observation.

The main reason for this approach, it was spelled out in the introduction, is my observation that a narrow technocratic and outward oriented approach of statecraft brings an risk for the future the state and Europe more broadly. We increasingly try to build a fortress on the outside, while our society fractures on the inside, to be strong abroad while we are weak abroad, to suggest that the state provides security while citizens are not prepared to bring the sacrifices needed to uphold that security. Reducing our society to a *shopping mall state*, having reduced citizens to mere consumers, they now wake up, panic, and expect security without effort, power without sacrifice, protection without power. The result is an empty fortress. So, instead of only strengthening the state on the outside, we must fortify it primarily on the inside. We must build a citadel state.

States remain important actors in world affairs. But they wax and wane. No state is a given. Statecraft is the skill to advance the power of the state with an eye on

its long-term happiness and security. At the core, state power is soft. The citadel state depends on virtue and values, which on their turn instigate citizens to do what is right. If pleasure is drawn from a feeling of achievement, deep pleasure comes from achieving something larger than ourselves, such as a secure, dignified, and happy state. Statecraft, especially in Europe, should be humanist at its heart.

Our main task, the main condition to evolve from this stage of fracturing to a state of flourishing, is to explain why the state matters, why power remains important, and to invest in moral empowerment. While it is important that citizens acquire professional skills, economic advancing without moral compass leads to recklessness. It is vital to pay attention to existential questions, history, philosophy, aesthetics and perseverance. It is equally vital give time to parents to raise their children with mildness and perseverance, to have opportunities for civil service, to identify role models, and equally those persons who hurt the dignity and interests of the state. It is through moral empowerment that we can pursue unity through diversity.

Diversity as such is not a merit; it is a reality. It only becomes a merit when we turn it into harmony. In the same way, we must be cautious in singing the praises of democracy. Democracy is a valuable ideal, but difficult to maintain. In the last decades, the pride of being a democracy has led to complacency and the neglect of many different conditions to preserve it. Our democracy has become a mechanical democracy. The functions of voting and the separation of powers still exist, but the spirit of democracy has dissipated. This reaffirms the need for civic empowerment. But this is not sufficient. As Europe has become a multi-layered government, the division of responsibilities need to be clearer. It is also

indispensable to have clearer evaluation mechanisms. A democracy in which politicians thrive on empty promises cannot survive. Policy has to be audited. Furthermore, good governance demands oversight and foresight. While specialization is relevant, the government must retain the overview of policy domains and the impact of specific policies on the long-term general good.

If we are to transform our state into a flourishing citadel, wealth is indispensable. Wealth or economic power consists of both immaterial qualities, like innovation and welfare, and more material qualities, like infrastructure, capital, and natural resources. While natural resources are often taken for granted, they must be protected and preserved. A state cannot function without food, water, energy, minerals, and a healthy nature. In the organization of our economy, the main difference exists not so much between private and public, but between economies where societies can discern and reward entrepreneurs that contribute to the common good and economies where capital is sent to dysfunctional and irrelevant activities. The benchmark of that relevance remains happiness and progress.

This book defined progress as the capacity to fulfil as many of our needs by activating as many talents of as many people as possible. Economic progress should never be confined to material progress. *Being* remains more important than *having*. The state needs to guard a proper balance between domestic and external interests. States trade, but trade has to be balanced in the long-run and the merit of external exchanges must always be evaluated with an eye on the general good of the state. In the same way, balance is due between the state's expenses and revenues, and between different sectors. A state can never specialize in consumption alone. The idea of the market has its roots in Enlightenment. It entails

openness, but also transparency and conscious participants that make economic decisions with an eye on their long-term good.

State power has a soft core and can have a soft appearance towards the outside. The most enduring form of influence is legitimate influence. International organizations are instrumental in that regard. The standing of a state in international organizations, however, depends on its power. International organisations are a continuation of power politics by different means. All attempts at external legitimacy are in vain if a state squanders its legitimacy internally, as a result of bad governance, for example, or decline. It is fine for diplomats to charm, but it rarely stays unnoticed when charm disguises incapacity. The main mission of diplomacy is to convert the state's power as efficiently as possible into external influence. This is the power cycle mentioned in chapter five: internal power allows for external influence and external influence allows for additional gains in internal power. That requires a diplomat to be a patriot first, to know the strengths of his own state and the weak spots of other states to extract concessions, and to apply the most effective bargaining tactics to that end. Diplomacy stays soft as long as it is possible, yet remains capable of becoming hard and ruthless whenever it is needed.

Military power constitutes the ultimate resort of the state. Like diplomacy, it is most effective when it is legitimate. And like diplomacy must never lose sight of the state's interest in a context of international cooperation, the armed forces must not confuse the pursuit of national security with the ideal of world peace. Military power is a double-edged sword that is best handled when both political and military judgements are articulated towards the public. Military power depends

on quality and quantity, defensive and offensive capabilities. It is an illusion to assume that a state's military posture can be confined to its borders. Restrained and gradual balancing is the best option to preserve security. That leads us back to the guiding advice in this book: prosperity and security, necessitate power combined with wisdom and virtue.

So, how do we go from here? Great visions of statecraft remain at best intellectual entertainment when they do not invite the reader to at least some small actions. Abstract visions only become compelling when they are translated in specific suggestions. Like we conceived statecraft inside-out, the approach for whoever seeks to serve the state should also be inside-out. It starts with building our own inner citadel. We need to be human first. Only then can we thrive as a citizen – and a patriot – and meaningfully develop our professional skills. The power of the state depends on the power of its citizens and there is no better way to serve the state than to become an example. So, at the very end, benefiting from a vantage point overseeing the vast scope of statecraft, yet wondering what to do next, this book offers you some tangible stepping stones to continue your journey.

## **Be humane**

Meditate in the mirror. The construction of your inner citadel starts with introspection. Allow yourself every day a moment of mirror meditation. Yes, your looks too are important, but when you start the day brushing your teeth and, eventually, doing your hair, ask yourself the question: “Who are you?” “What has shaped me through genetics and circumstances, and how can I develop my



personality, passion and talent through intentional effort? What is the difference I can make today?"

Celebrate life in little things. Whatever we pursue with an eye on the state, the state's final end is dignified happiness. There is no heroism in becoming a machine, a powerbroker without a soul or ideals, a Macbeth, a Machiavelli (at least not the shallow vision that we often have of him). However hectic our schedule, it is relevant to plan a couple of such celebrations every week. Take a moment every day to cultivate your senses, half an hour watching the seasons change, listening to wind rustling in the trees, enjoying the sun on your face, enjoying music, art, poetry,... Find a moment every day to have a profound interaction with someone close to you: listen, laugh, love. We are through others. Above all: expect to live life to the full and encourage others to do so.

Maintain the fundamentals. Build your inner citadel on solid fundamentals. Your body remains your temple: take care of your health, take the time to eat, drink, and rest well, take time to strengthen your body. Your body and soul can endure a lot, as long as you have a sense of purpose and progress. From the moment that this sense vanishes, take a break for an azimuth check: recharge, reorganize, and reorient. Take care of your household. Look after your family members. If you have a partner and children, they should be the essence of your life. Even if the world is in flames and everything around seems to fall apart, you draw strength from little victories at home: doing the laundry, cleaning the kitchen top. Try to find yourself one or two proper practical challenges every week: trimming the lawn, cleaning the sidewalks before your door, fixing a lamp, or even making fresh pasta. Little practical victories are encouraging and help maintain the fundamentals.

Go to the pub. Aim for the stars, but never detach. Stay close to people around you and do not shy away from different viewpoints. Try to understand the mood around you, listen, and share your ideas. Try to have a deep conversation with your family and friends at least once a week, and another meaningful conversation with someone you know less. Do not stay in your bubble. Try to walk through different parts of your city, town, or village. Observe. Listen. Go to a popular pub now and then. Volunteer once a month among the most vulnerable. Immerse yourself regularly into antagonistic views and try to understand where they come from. However high you reach, keep both feet on the ground.

Build your utopia. Have a heart to love and the courage to show it, William Shakespeare wrote. Take a moment once every month to imagine paradise: what is the image of the society in which you imagine your children happily grow up and in which you can happily grow old? Ideals also give direction. Articulate these ideals, but do not allow them to become dogmas and continue to listen to those of others. Accept that ideals are distant and that your merit is in the trying, in every step that you help to realize them or in every step back that you prevent. Be idealist in your objectives, but realistic about the road towards them. For every two books that you read about the problems of this world, read one about possible solutions.

Avoid meaningless distraction. Accept that it is normal to get distracted during the day, but don't allow social media and advertisers to hijack it. Spend at least an hour a day disconnected from your digital media, one to invest in your beloved ones, and one in your personal study and meditation. Whenever you are connected, only allow your social media to intrude a few times a day. When you feel that you lose focus, go out,

have a walk and engage with real people instead of with your screen. If you work in office, do some sit-ups and have some dumbbells nearby for light exercises

### **Be a citizen and a patriot**

Travel inside your state. Make a bucket list of ten places that you want to visit inside your country: evident ones and less evident ones. Prepare these visits by reading about the places. Invite family or friends to join you.

Start local. It is an illusion to strengthen the cohesion of the state in abstract terms if you do not contribute to it in concrete terms locally. The local community is usually more a reflection of diversity than an elite club, an association or a professional place. Local engagement forces you out of your ideological and social comfort zone. Make sure that you know your neighbours; invest in friendship however apathetic they are. Good neighbourship should be your first victory in building a better state. Whenever there is an opportunity to build projects and parties with your street: join them. Yes, you will meet other people and sometimes difficult people: that is the point. Participate in at least one social initiative in your commune and consider at least a bit of local politics. That also helps you keep both feet on the ground.

Know the state of your state. Read its constitution. Try to understand its development. Watch your state from outside. Read what foreign newspapers write about it; track its development in international statistical databases.

Be consequent. If you want your state to flourish, devote your resources, your money, your energy, and your enthusiasm to those actors that make that possible, instead of supporting actors that undermine such efforts

or align their interests more with other states. If you want a strong economy, buy from inspiring local entrepreneurs. If you want a sustainable future, invest in sustainable producers near your home. If you want your state to be beautiful, support artists, travel domestically, and participate in cultural events. Remember that, like with the ant hill, power shifts start with small transactions, payment per payment, order by order, container by container. There is no more tangible way to build prosperity than in the daily expenses with your own money. Every Euro matters.

### **Be a professional**

Prepare for an ultra-trail, not a sprint. There is no need to rush to the top, for you might find yourself at the wrong top because of your hurry, get bored if you spend there too much time, and in your boredom deny other enthusiasts the opportunity also to make a difference at the top. It helps that you divide your professional life in a steady project of about forty years. Between 25 and 35, you explore, find yourself a plot to cultivate, study it thoroughly, and start the hard work of tilling it. It is a time of sacrifice without much certainty. Between 35 and 45, you start planting your ideas and your initiatives, and tend them carefully when they start to grow. You might need to try this a couple of times, though. Between 45 and 55, you hopefully see your garden bear its first fruits and harvest some success. Between 55 and 65, you might enjoy harvest of a mature garden, pass on some of the seeds to the next generation and teach them how to cultivate theirs.

Do not become a salary slave. Most organizations, whether companies or bureaucracies, claim to be

mission-driven but are in reality inward-looking bastions of narrow-minded interests, which mostly prioritize their own survival above the public good of the state. Such organizations are best considered as a vehicle for personal opportunism. "The fear of losing salary," Max Weber thought, "is the final and decisive basis for solidarity between the executive staff and the power holder."<sup>1</sup> The task of the true servant of the state is to prevent them from drifting off too far and steering them towards the general good. In that regard, loyalty should always remain with the general good, values, and ideals, and with the organization and its people to the extent that they are loyal to the general good. Do not tie yourself to an organization too early. Make sure that you keep the options open by developing relations outside the organization. Avoid becoming a salary slave by making your standard of living lag a couple of stages behind your pay scale. Make sure that you can quit. Compromise when the short-term evil as a result of it remains smaller than the long-term good that you might achieve. Confront whenever you have the power to do so and your sacrifice does not make the threat stronger. Quit when you find no solution, but do not quit too early. Above all: build the power to pursue your ideals.

Become powerful. Like with the state, profession demands you to acquire to power to do what is right. This also means that others in the organization will likely see you as a competitor, not a partner. That situation is rarely overcome by trying to acquire power too fast. It is better to take it calm. Power is best served by steadily enhancing your professional skills and aiming at excellence. Make yourself useful to the current superior and find allies. Know how to use protocol and procedure into your advantage. Make sure that you can help – or pressure the organization and its leaderships from the outside, by

building external partnerships. Organizations are often more sensitive to impulses from outside than from inside. Use important moments, like elections, institutional reviews, or key meetings to build leverage.

When a clown enters a palace, a Turkish proverb goes, he does not become a prince, but the palace becomes a circus. Aspire to be a real leader. Chapter one listed several flawed forms of leadership, from the lord of the flees to the wizard. Avoid becoming one of these circus creatures. Remember that leadership is not alone about fame, wealth, and status, but about what you do with it, about whether you can use it to influence others to do what is right. The technocrat and the soldier know how to execute a task. The manager, the director and the general know how organize the executors. A leader is able to muster support and passion for a good cause.

Reward patriotism, not opportunism. True patriots seldom get medals. Whenever you obtain a position of responsibility, be on your guard for opportunistic flatterers. Interest groups will try to obtain the support the state for private gains, but your task is to make private gains support the state. "Do not ask what the state can do for you, but what you can do for the state."

When you want to be a helmsman, check the engine room. It is tempting for talented people to try to be in the pilot house on the upper deck, to handle the wheel and to set course. Yet, the engine room is as important. Spend time in the lower decks, check whether the engine runs smoothly, and encourage the engine engineers. Without them, the ship will not advance. Whenever the ship makes water, a leader does not try to climb even higher, but descends to the lower decks to find the holes in the hull and encourage the machine engines to remain at their post. Above all: avoid self-

deception when it comes to this mission. Remain honest to yourself.

The most important reservoir of strength of the citadel state resides in its citizens. Statecraft's most important obligation is to cultivate that strength. Nothing does that more than to lead by example. Serving the state is uplifting yet humbling at the same time. Merit is in the trying, in the relentless attempt to work towards ideals in a challenging reality. Never blame yourself for trying. Remember the words from the introduction: "It is sometimes said that statecraft is the art of the possible. But how can the possible be art? Art overcomes the limitations of the possible. You cannot overcome the possible without ideals."





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## Crafting the state

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## **Patriotism and cosmopolitanism**

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## **The Purpose of the State**

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## Governance

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## **Nature and its resources**

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## **The economy**

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## Diplomacy

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## **Military Power**

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