

*Toujours pieux, toujours juste, toujours clément
et toujours victorieux:*
The Evolution of Royal Virtue from Bodin to Senault

Polly T. Mangerson

In the *Instructions au duc d'Anjou* (1700), Louis XIV writes to his grandson Philippe V that a king must actively embrace virtue and reject vice: « Déclarez-vous en toute occasion pour la vertu et contre le vice » (Longnon 283). This simple word of advice is number four in a list of thirty-three recommendations that the aging Sun King addresses to the future monarch of Spain. Louis XIV does not elaborate further on the subject of royal virtue in this document, but his earlier *Mémoires* (dated 1661, 1666, and 1668) provide insight into the meaning of this cryptic statement. A virtuous king venerates God and submits himself wholly to divine power in order to provide an example for his subjects to submit themselves to his earthly power in turn. He always considers the public welfare above the individual good. He administers justice fairly as is his sovereign right and uses his keen discernment to decide when to be merciful and when to be severe. A king is master of his emotions: he can temper his anger and withhold vengeance unless it is moderated by prudence. He possesses the ability to make important decisions on his own, but he also knows when and how to seek and listen to wise counsel. He keeps his word and avoids hasty or careless speech. He is a good steward of the finances of his realm, knowing when to spend and when to save, when to be generous and when to use restraint. He does not seize private property or infringe on the liberty of his subjects without just cause. A king must be stronger than his subjects and ultimately stronger than himself in order to resist the influence of passions. Although his noble birth and Christian education sets him on the path towards virtue from an early age, he must always remain vigilant so as not to be overcome by his imperfect human nature.

The origins of Louis XIV's definition of sovereign virtue as articulated in his personal writings can be traced to the beginnings of French absolutism in the late sixteenth century, and specifically to the works of certain *politologues*, including Jean Bodin (1530-1596), Cardin Le Bret (1558-1655), and Jean-François Senault (c. 1601-1672). In order to trace the evolution of the concept of royal virtue into how it was understood by Louis XIV, the present study examines the integration of

virtue into the definition of sovereignty in three consecutive political treatises: *Les Six livres de la République* (1576) by Bodin, *De la souveraineté du roi* (1632) by Le Bret, and *Le Monarque ou les devoirs du souverain* (1661) by Senault. Although these texts span almost a century and were written during the reigns of three different kings, they share a common objective: they all provide a detailed definition of the rights and responsibilities of the absolute monarch. Within this definition, each author addresses the importance of virtue. Bodin, Le Bret, and Senault all raise the question of whether the king must conform to a predetermined standard of virtue, or whether he sets that standard by being king. They discuss whether an absolute monarch is capable of vice, and, if so, to which vices he is most vulnerable. The comparative analysis of these three treatises serves to demonstrate that virtue becomes increasingly ingrained in the definition of sovereignty as the seventeenth century progresses. Bodin recommends that an absolute ruler be virtuous, but he openly acknowledges that virtue is neither a required nor realistic quality in a king. Le Bret considers virtue to be an inherent aspect of sovereignty, inseparable from the monarch himself. Finally, Senault insists that a king must cultivate Christian virtue and shun worldly vice in order to rule equitably and to temper passions.

Les Six livres de la République was published by the jurist Jean Bodin in 1576, during the French Wars of Religion and under the reign of the last Valois monarch Henri III (1551-1589). Although this treatise precedes the seventeenth century, it merits consideration along with the writings of politologues of *le grand siècle* because it announces absolutism in France and creates a template for future European ideas about sovereignty. Julian Franklin confirms in the introduction to his English translation of the *Six livres*:

His [Bodin's] elaboration of the implications of sovereignty through a systematic study of comparative public law helped launch a whole new literary genre, which in the seventeenth century was taken up not only in France and Spain, but in Germany as well. (xii-xiii)

The ideas expressed by Bodin in the *Six livres* create a foundation that will be built upon, replicated, adapted, and developed by political theorists throughout the first half of the seventeenth century. Composed in the wake of the bloody St Bartholomew's day Massacre, Bodin's text is motivated by the desire to bring stability back to the French state,

redirecting the locus of political power away from the volatile church. In order to achieve this objective, he systematically analyzes and weighs several types of *Républiques*, from antiquity to the present, and ultimately advocates for the consolidation of political power into a single absolute sovereign.

Bodin defines a *République* as « un droit gouvernement de plusieurs ménages, et de ce qui leur est commun, avec puissance souveraine » (I.i). Simply put, the state is composed of family units governed by a sovereign power which can be held by one or multiple entities. Bodin formally recognizes and addresses three major types of commonwealths – monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. He defines monarchy as government by a single sovereign agent, aristocracy as government by an elite ruling body, and democracy as government by the people. Bodin accords ample page space in the *Six livres* to acknowledge the benefits of aristocratic and democratic states, but he expresses a clear preference towards monarchy throughout the text. The family has one father, the body has one head, the heavens have one God, therefore a concentration of sovereign authority into a single prince is the most natural and organic system of government.¹ Bodin plainly states in the final book of the *Six livres*: « Toutes les lois de la nature nous guident à la Monarchie » (VI.iv).

Bodin further divides monarchy into three sub-categories based upon the means by which the monarch ascends to the throne. He defines a royal monarchy as a state whose sovereign prince receives his power via hereditary succession or election and rules over free subjects (II.iii). A despotic or seigneurial monarchy is one in which the king fairly wins his crown and his subjects by means of just warfare or conquest (II.ii).²

¹ Bodin's description of the sovereign as the head of the political body echoes the writings of the Languedocian jurist Jean de Terrevermeille (c.1370-1430), who argues in his *Tractatus* (written 1418-1419, translated into French by Jean Barbey in 1983) that the king functions as the *caput* of the *corpus mysticum regni*. Just as Christ is the head of the Church, which constitutes his *corpus mysticum*, so the king is the head of his kingdom in an organic, symbiotic relationship. A body with more than one head is considered a monstrosity, therefore government by more than one entity is likewise monstrous.

² In order to clarify the meaning of “just warfare” as it would have been understood by Bodin, I refer to Ernst Kantorowicz's definition from *The King's Two Bodies*: “When discussing the notion of *bellum instum*, the ‘just war,’ the Canonists, ever since the late twelfth century, pointed out that war was justified, in case of ‘inevitable and urgent

Finally, tyrannical monarchy is characterized by a ruler who has seized his power unjustly or by force, and who holds his subjects as slaves (II.vi). It is important to note that although Bodin recognizes royal monarchy as the most legitimate and stable form, he does not condemn despotic or even tyrannical monarchies. On the contrary, Bodin argues in the first book of the treatise that the entire institution of monarchy owes its existence to violence and war. Ancient kings originally established themselves as such by overpowering weaker nations, taking their wealth, and enslaving their people, before maturing into more equitable rulers (I.vi). As Bernard Vonglis observes in his analysis of the *Six livres*, « Monarchie absolue et tyrannie ne sont donc que deux modalités d'une même conception du pouvoir: le despotisme » (152). The three types of monarchies, while addressed separately in the *Six livres*, remain interconnected. Bodin considers the king, the despot, and the tyrant to be equally endowed with the indivisible rights and responsibilities of sovereignty.

Bodin dedicates two substantial chapters of the first book of the *Six livres* (I.viii and I.x) to the articulation of a definition of sovereignty which would remain virtually unchanged during the next two centuries, and for which he is best known and most frequently studied by modern scholars. First and foremost, sovereignty is absolute and perpetual. « La souveraineté est la puissance absolue et perpétuelle d'une République » (I.viii). True sovereign power is not shared, and it does not end. The indissoluble rights of the absolute and perpetual monarch are to make, change, and interpret the law, declare war and peace, appoint highest ranking officers, coin money, levy taxes, and give mercy. Bodin identifies the making of law as the most important attribute of sovereignty, as it encompasses all the others. « Nous concluons que la première marque du prince souverain, c'est la puissance de donner loi à tous en général et à chacun en particulier » (I.x). The prince is *legibus solutus*, above all human and civil law, however, Bodin insists that the absolute monarch is bound to uphold the laws of God and nature:

Si nous disions que c'est de puissance absolue, qui n'est point sujet aux lois, il ne se trouvera prince au monde souverain ; vu que tous les princes de la terre sont sujets

necessity,' for the defense of the patria as well as for the defense of the faith and the Church, and they repeatedly exemplified such *necessitas* by referring to the wars which the Oriental Christians waged against the infidel in the Holy Land" (236).

aux lois de Dieu, et de nature. » (I.viii)

According to Bodin, the true sovereign does not have to respect his own laws or those of his predecessors. He can make and change laws as he sees fit. However, if he is ruling in accordance with divine and natural law, he will want to observe his own laws, because he will make laws that are just, and that promote the well-being of the free subjects under his command. He will want to be true to his word and maintain his integrity. He will want to protect and defend his subjects and his realm, earning the loyalty of the people in addition to their obedience. If the king truly respects nature and fears God, he will be wise, brave, modest, strong, firm, caring, and fair:

S'il [le Prince] craint Dieu sur tout, il est pitoyable aux affligés, prudent aux entreprises, hardi aux exploits, modeste en prospérité, constant en adversité, ferme en sa parole, sage en son conseil, soigneux des sujets, secourable aux amis, terrible aux ennemis, courtois aux gens de bien, effroyable aux méchants, et juste envers tous. (II.iii)

Adherence to divine and natural law lends itself to the cultivation and practice of virtue in the person of the monarch. Whereas a virtuous character does not figure into Bodin's juricentric definition of sovereignty, it is the ideal fruit of the prince's respect for his position in regard to the laws of the *République*.

Because virtue is a product of just governance, it is not solely accessible to royal, legitimate kings. Just as all three types of monarchs are considered to be fully sovereign, a despot, or even a tyrant, has the potential to evolve if he begins to observe the laws of God and nature, returning liberty and ownership of goods to the people. Bodin argues that tyranny and despotism are not permanent statuses, and that even a thief possesses the potential to become a virtuous ruler: « Aussi souvent on a vu d'un voleur et brigand, se faire un Prince vertueux : et d'une tyrannie violente, se faire une juste royauté » (II.iii). He does admit that such a dramatic transition would be difficult for a tyrant, because, in taking his kingdom by force and holding its people as slaves against their will, he has begun his reign by breaking natural law. More often than not, a tyrannical ruler must continue to use the means by which he assumed power to maintain it, which is where Bodin argues that the original

Greek term “tyrant” obtained its negative connotation: « Le mot de Tyran, qui est Grec, de sa propriété était honorable, et ne signifiait autre chose anciennement, que le prince qui s’était emparé de l’état sans le consentement de ses citoyens » (II.iv). In ancient Greece, a tyrant was simply a king who had seized his throne by force, or a *tyran d’usurpation*. But because they were constantly having to use violence to enforce their rule and maintain their sovereignty, these ancient “good” tyrants became *tyrans d’exercice*, oppressors despised by the people. And even *tyrannie d’exercice* is not black and white for Bodin: he views it in differing degrees. A king can be tyrannical towards some subjects and equitable towards others, and even the most detestable tyrant is not purely evil:

Entre les tyrannies il y en a de plusieurs sortes et plusieurs degrés, de plus ou moins : et tout ainsi qu’il n’y a si bon prince qui n’ait quelque vice notable : aussi voit-on qu’il ne se trouve point de si cruel tyran, qui n’ait quelque vertu, ou quelque chose de louable. (II.iv)

Vice and virtue are fluid qualities among absolute monarchs, and the presence of one does not imply the absence of the other. John F. Wilson characterizes Bodin’s position as a *yin/yang* dynamic:

Perhaps no proposition could be simpler, and yet more perplexing, than this: good contains evil. It means both that evil (or badness, or mischief) is a part of good; and that good, as greater, keeps in (or restrains, or shuts up) evil. (245)

In the same way that Bodin is generous toward the character of the despot and the tyrant, he is realistic in his expectations of the virtue of the legitimate monarch. He does not demand heroic perfection, and he is willing to settle for a king who makes his best effort to take care of his subjects and rule in their interests:

Quand je dis bon et juste Roi, j’entends parler populairement, et non pas d’un Prince accompli de vertus héroïques, ou d’un parangon de sagesse, de justice, de piété, et sans blâme, ni vice aucun : car ces perfections sont trop rares : mais j’appelle bon et juste roi, qui met

tous ses efforts d'être tel, et qui est prêt d'employer ses biens, son sang, et sa vie pour son peuple. (II.iv)

This description stands in opposition to the one from Book II.iii (*supra*), in which Bodin paints a theoretical picture of the ideal sovereign. Inasmuch as Bodin may theorize about the virtuous character of the perfect sovereign, he does not truly expect perfection because he acknowledges the king's humanity. According to Franklin, Bodin's standards for royal virtue "were in no way binding obligations. They were mere recommendations of humanity and prudence" (xxiv). Bodin is content with a monarch who consistently strives for a perfection that he may never fully attain, and that he will inevitably struggle to maintain. He openly admits in Book IV that the chances of a prince being virtuous—and staying virtuous—are slim. There are few good men in the world to begin with (even before the pool is narrowed to kings), and absolute power tends to lure even the strongest away from the path of virtue:

Il ne faut donc pas s'émerveiller s'il y a peu de vertueux Princes : car s'il y a peu de vertueux hommes, et que de ce petit nombre les Princes ne sont pas ordinairement choisis, c'est grand merveille s'il s'en trouve quelqu'un fort excellent entre plusieurs : et quand il se voit si haut élevé qu'il ne connaît rien plus grand que soi après Dieu, étant assiégé de tous les allèchements qui font trébucher les plus assurés, c'est un miracle s'il continue en sa vertu. (IV.i)

Just as a despot or tyrant is not bound to his status and can rise to the level of a royal monarch, a king who comes to the throne by means of hereditary succession as part of a legitimate dynasty can descend into *tyrannie d'exercice*. Since Bodin does not consider virtue to be an inherent element of absolute and perpetual sovereign power, it does not necessarily pass from father to son. Francis Assaf confirms: « La morale suprême du roi n'est donc pas limitée à sa légitimité juridique : un monarque ayant succédé légitimement à son prédécesseur peut très bien être un tyran » (34). Bodin observes that wicked sons often follow virtuous fathers, specifically naming the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius and his tyrannical son Commodus (IV.i). He also cites the example of Nero as proof that a king can start out virtuous in his youth and later adopt evil or oppressive practices:

Et qui fut onc le Prince le mieux nourri, et le plus sage les premières années que Néron ? ... Et néanmoins il devint après avoir goûté la puissance souveraine, le plus détestable tyran qui fut oncques, en cruautés et en sale voluptés. (IV.i)

In the same way that Bodin recognizes that a king who becomes corrupted by power is detrimental to the *République*, the jurist is also critical of a monarch who is excessively generous or lenient. He argues that an unhealthy state, in need of restoration or on the brink of (or recovering from) revolution, may require painful medicine in order to heal, and that a soft king can do more harm than good:

Il advient souvent que pour la douceur d'un Prince, la République est ruinée, et pour la cruauté d'un autre elle est relevée ... Et semble que nos pères anciens n'ont pas dit ce proverbe sans cause : « De méchant homme bon Roi ». (II.iv)

Severity, even cruelty, is sometimes the best course of action for the welfare of the people. To emphasize this point, Bodin departs from his typical Greek and Roman examples to specifically criticize Henri II for squandering François I's fortune due to his excessive generosity and his inability to refuse favors to friends and allies (II.iv).

The vice of *douceur* (or rather, the excess of the virtue of *libéralité*), while discouraged, is not overly troubling for Bodin. The only type of ruler he completely denounces is the tyrant who continually violates natural and divine law by being self-serving in spite of his position. Whether a sovereign has come to power through election, succession, war, or theft, he must henceforth dedicate himself to God, the state, and his subjects. If he uses his authority to act in his own self-interests, manipulates the laws to serve his own purposes, sows dissension among his people, or lets his passions interfere with his responsibility to administer justice, he becomes associated with vices which, in Bodin's opinion, are unacceptable for a king.

And yet, Bodin reminds his reader on several occasions that he is not in a position to judge any ruler or to label him a *tyran d'exercice* without fully understanding the situation, since extenuating circumstances or

states of exception may require sovereigns to make difficult choices for the greater good of the realm, and their logic may not be clear to everyone:

Par ainsi c'est chose de très mauvais exemple, et fort dangereuse, de faire sinistre jugement d'un Prince, qui n'a bien connu ses actions, ses comportements, et sagement balancé ses vices et vertus. (II.iv)

To summarize the somewhat paradoxical position on royal virtue articulated in the *Six livres*, Bodin the jurist contends that absolute sovereignty should be ideally be accompanied by virtue in accordance with divine and natural law, but Bodin the humanist recognizes that such theory is not easily put into practice, and that some vice is to be expected no matter the origins of absolute sovereign power.

Jean-Marie Apostolidès observes in *Le Prince sacrifié* that the portrait of the ideal sovereign changed very little between the reign of Charles V (1364-1380) and the Bourbon dynasty:

Durant cette même époque, l'ensemble des productions des écrivains politiques vise à mettre sur pied une image du « Prince parfait », dont les caractéristiques passeront, presque inchangées, dans la définition du monarque absolue au XVIIe siècle. (14)

Bodin's definition of absolute and perpetual sovereignty as expressed in the *Six livres* left an enduring imprint on the political theorists who would further shape the doctrine of absolutism during the seventeenth century. One treatise that clearly draws upon and references Bodin is the infrequently studied *De la Souveraineté du Roi*, published by the jurist and *Conseiller d'État* Cardin le Bret in 1632 during the reign of Louis XIII. As its title suggests, this four-part text is a great deal more specific than Bodin's *Six Livres*. Whereas Bodin speaks of kingship as one possible (albeit preferred) structure for a well-ordered commonwealth, Le Bret writes from a purely absolutist perspective. Like Bodin, he provides a detailed description of the rights and responsibilities of kingship and traces the evolution of sovereignty from biblical times to the Roman empire and through the history of European monarchies, in order to demonstrate that the king of France is the most sovereign of all. Le Bret addresses topics such as the organization of government, the

distribution of public power, and the role of the church. He demonstrates a solid understanding of Bodin and cites the *Six livres* frequently. But Le Bret's work distinguishes itself from Bodin's, because rather than analyzing these topics within the context of the workings of a broader *état*, he considers the entire state to be within the scope of kingship itself, within the political body of the monarch.

One major development between Bodin's *prince* in 1576 and Le Bret's *roi* in 1632 is that the latter is divinely appointed. Whereas Bodin credits the origins of the institution of monarchy to ancient warfare and conquest, Le Bret argues that the king is the lieutenant of God on earth, and he is accountable to God alone: « Puisque nos Rois ne tiennent leur sceptre que de Dieu seul, ils ne sont obligés de rendre aucune soumission à pas une puissance de la terre » (I.ii). Since the sovereign is chosen by God, his adherence to divine law is no longer a stipulation – it is implied and inseparable from his position, as is his virtue. The benevolent monarch acts as a symbolic father figure to his people, and exercises his absolute power to ensure their well-being, so his subjects must obey him in all things without question. Assaf contends that this insistence on obedience is indicative of Le Bret's belief that the king can only be good: « Le Bret finit par décider que l'obéissance est due au roi virtuellement dans tous les cas. On peut facilement déduire de là qu'il ne conçoit le roi que comme bon » (56). Le Bret does not share Bodin's views on the impossibility of perfection in the king's character.

One aspect of Le Bret's philosophy that does faithfully echo Bodin is his description of sovereign rights and responsibilities. For example, Le Bret specifies that a king's primary duty is to make, change, and interpret the law. He is not bound to uphold any human laws, but since his laws are good and just, he delights in observing them:

Bien que les Rois soient par-dessus les Lois, néanmoins il leur est toujours bienséant de les suivre et de les observer : car si la Loi n'est autre chose, comme dit Platon, qu'une droite raison qui enseigne de faire toutes choses conformes à la vertu, et de fuir ce qui lui est contraire, y a-t-il rien de plus convenable à un grand Prince, que de vivre de la sorte, et d'en donner l'exemple à tous ses sujets ? (I.ix)

In order to fulfill the responsibility of setting the supreme example of virtue for his subjects, a king must personify justice. Since he acts as the final word in judgment, can overturn rulings of his courts, can grant pardons or condemn a subject to death, and can suspend the laws in case of great need, he must prioritize justice above all other virtues:

Comme la plus importante fonction des Rois est de rendre la Justice à leurs peuples ... aussi ne doivent-ils rien rechercher avec plus de passion, que de se rendre recommandables par ce saint exercice, et de s'acquérir le glorieux titre de Juste. (II.ii)

The king can also affirm his virtue through generosity (III.xi) and through clemency (IV.ii-vi), especially towards offenses committed against his own person. He can earn the admiration of his subjects by keeping his word and upholding his promises and treaties (IV.ix), as well as by letting them see him appearing in public assemblies and administering his justice in person, instead of always acting through appointed officers (IV.xiii).

Ultimately, Le Bret's king assures his virtue by being a faithful subject of God. The monarch's devotion will lead him to act in the best interest of his realm, and God will bless his rule. But just as the king is the supreme earthly judge of his subjects, God is the judge of kings, and will exercise divine justice on a ruler who forgets him: « Aussi les histoires saintes et profanes sont pleines d'exemples de cette haute justice, que Dieu exerce sur les Rois, lorsqu'ils se montrent ingrats envers lui, et qu'ils oublient de leur devoir » (IV.xvii). This is the one vice that is singled out in *De la Souveraineté du roi*, and arguably the one vice of which Le Bret thinks a true king is capable—the abuse of God-given sovereign authority by a monarch who considers his own personal interests above those of his subjects. Le Bret warns against this transgression at the very beginning of the first chapter and again at the very end of the last—the king must forget himself and give himself to God and the kingdom:

Le principal office du Prince est de se dépouiller de ses propres intérêts, retrancher de ses plaisirs, se dérober à soi-même, pour se donner entièrement au public. (I.i)

Les Rois ne doivent avoir d'autre but ni d'autres desseins en l'esprit, que de rendre leurs peuples heureux, et de les faire jouir de toutes sortes de félicités. (IV.xvii)

In summary, Le Bret maintains that virtue is an inherent quality of the divinely appointed sovereign, who is « toujours pieux, toujours juste, toujours clément, et toujours victorieux » (IV.xvii). However, he does briefly acknowledge that even France's perfect king runs the risk of falling victim to the particular vice of being human.

The idea of the king denying himself and sacrificing the desires of his physical body in order to fully assume his virtuous political body becomes an increasingly important theme in political treatises published during the early reign of Louis XIV. One excellent example of this developing insistence upon sovereign virtue can be found in the writings of Jean-François Senault.³ Senault was the *Supérieur général de l'Oratoire de Jésus*, was renowned as an eloquent preacher, and was also no stranger to writing about virtue, passions, and kingship. In 1641, he published the essay *De l'Usage des passions*, which serves as a descriptive inventory of inherent human passions, as well as a guide to regulating their destructive effects. Ehsan Ahmed describes Senault's objective as instructing his reader "how one can marshal his passions into the service of virtue" (275). The final chapter of *De l'Usage des Passions* is entitled « Quelle Passion doit régner en la personne du Prince ». Here the author proposes that a king should cultivate the innocent passion of justice in order to bring all other harmful passions into line (157).

Senault would later elaborate on this position in an eight-part treatise entitled *Le Monarque, ou les devoirs du souverain*. *Le Monarque* was published in 1661, the first year of the personal reign of Louis XIV, and addressed in an epistolary format to the young king. The objective of the text is similar to that of *De la souveraineté du roi*: to detail the rights and responsibilities of the King of France. As the title suggests, Senault places much more emphasis on responsibilities than Le Bret, an ideological shift which has been noted by both Assaf (68) and Gilbert Picot (216). *Le Monarque* is written from a more pedagogical

³ Two additional texts from the mid-seventeenth century that address the subject of sovereign virtue are the *Catéchisme royal* (1647) by Philippe Fortin de la Hoguette and *De l'art de régner* (1665) by Pierre Le Moyne.

perspective, as is evident in the preface – this text is intended to respectfully instruct: « J’ai dessin d’y former un parfait Monarque, et de lui représenter toutes les obligations que lui impose la grandeur de son auguste qualité. » Senault’s “letters” address the King’s sovereign responsibilities to God, to himself, to his subjects, to the realm, to his counsel, and to his soldiers.

Le Monarque builds directly upon the works of Bodin and Le Bret, but since Senault was an ecclesiastic rather than a jurist, he takes a different approach to this topic. While both Bodin and Le Bret mention God in their writings (Le Bret much more so than Bodin), their primary concerns are the law and the administration of justice, and virtue is a byproduct of the sovereign prince’s observance of divine and natural law. Senault, on the other hand, prioritizes the king’s morals and character above all. In the *Épître au Roi*, he expresses his desire that the king use his text as a symbolic mirror that reflects his virtues instead of his physiognomy:

C’est un miroir fidèle dans lequel Elle [votre Majesté] pourra voir non pas les traits de son visage, qui donne du respect et de l’amour à tous ceux qui le regardent ; mais les vertus de son âme, et ces rares qualités qui la font si glorieusement régner dans la France.

From the beginning of *Le Monarque*, the reader is aware that virtue plays a leading role in Senault’s interpretation of sovereign responsibility. Whereas Bodin and Le Bret agree that the most important duty of the monarch is to make law and serve as the arbiter of earthly justice in his realm, Senault contends that the primary responsibility of the sovereign is to be good: « La première qualité que doit avoir un Souverain, et sans laquelle il ne peut et ne doit aspirer à la Monarchie, c’est la Bonté » (IV.i). In order to become just, the king must first be good. The entire success of the kingdom radiates from his inner goodness. If he is good, he will make good laws, he will nominate good counsel, he will govern wisely, he will prioritize the needs of his people, and his subjects will love him. According to Senault, *bonté* then produces justice, which he calls « la vertu souveraine » (V.iii) because it encompasses all other virtues and actively combats vice:

Aussi dit-on que cette vertu [La Justice] comprend toutes les autres, et qu’elles ne sont que des Justices particulières

... de sorte que toutes les vertus doivent leur éclat et leur beauté à la Justice, et elles sont obligées de la suivre en son triomphe, comme les soldats suivent leur général ou leur souverain ... Que si elle a cet avantage sur les vertus, elle en a bien encore de plus grand sur les vices. Car c'est elle qui les défait par sa valeur, qui découvre leur injustice, qui résiste à leur violence, et qui donne des forces aux autres vertus pour les combattre. (V.iii)

In addition to justice, Senault also singles out piety (III.i-viii), modesty (IV.iii), wisdom (V.ii), forgiveness (V.iv), generosity (V.vi), and honesty (V.vii) as virtues that the absolute monarch owes to his subjects. Unlike Bodin and Le Bret, Senault argues that leading by example is more effective than leading with laws, because the absolute sovereign embodies the living law. Whatever he does, his subjects will imitate. If he is the paradigm of virtue, his kingdom will inevitably prosper in response. Furthermore, because all people want to feel free to choose instead of being constrained to obey, they will more willingly accept law that they see enacted, rather than law that is dictated to them:

C'est pourquoi le Prince est obligé de si bien régler ses mœurs, qu'elles puissent servir de modèle à ses Sujets, et de vivre avec tant de réserve, que ses actions puissent instruire tout son Royaume. Car c'est une maxime assurée que l'état ressemble à son Prince ; que les domestiques se forment sur lui, et que comme ceux qui sont exposés au Soleil ne peuvent se garantir de sa chaleur, ceux qui approchent le Souverain ne peuvent se défendre de ses vertus, ni de ses vices. (V.viii)

Just as one cannot come closer to the sun without feeling its warmth, the king's subjects cannot help but be influenced by his character. According to Senault, the only thing a monarch has to do is practice virtue instead of vice, and the order of his kingdom will naturally fall into place. In this sense, Senault's philosophy is much simpler than those of Bodin and Le Bret. However, Senault does not consider it simple at all, because it all must be regulated by the prince himself. If he wants to provide the best life for his subjects, he must reject the weaknesses of his human nature. He must learn to become a perfect man if he wants to reign as a glorious king:

Il faut néanmoins qu'il essaye de se former lui-même avant que de former ses Sujets ; qu'il apprenne la Morale avant d'apprendre la Politique, et qu'il se fasse homme de bien, avant que de se faire grand Monarque. (IV.i)

In order to cultivate the virtues that are necessary to rule a kingdom, the king must first rule over himself, and over his passions. If he fails to do so, he becomes a tyrant. This is where Senault's philosophy diverts from that of Bodin: Senault does not distinguish between a *tyran d'usurpation* and a *tyran d'exercice*. A tyrant is no longer a ruler who comes to power by force—he is a monster who cannot control himself. Senault does not define tyranny as an alternate sovereign status, but rather as the antithesis of royal virtue. Whereas Bodin associates tyrannical monarchy with an initial violation of natural law, Senault denounces it as despised by Nature: « La haine que la Nature nous a imprimée contre la Tyrannie, est une preuve si manifeste de son injustice » (I.iii). Tyranny becomes a « peste publique » and « la source de tous les malheurs » (I.iii), invariably associated with injustice, ambition, violence, cruelty, and disorder:

Comme il n'y a point de Gouvernement plus injuste, il n'y en a point aussi de plus cruel, ni de plus barbare ; car le Tyran se conserve par les mêmes voies par lesquelles il s'est établi ; et comme l'injustice et la violence sont les moyens qu'il a choisis pour s'emparer de la Couronne, ce sont ceux aussi qu'il emploie pour la retenir. (I.iii)

The tyrant is a criminal who rules his people by fear and fears them in return. He is the epitome of hatred, insecurity, and greed. Furthermore, Senault vehemently disagrees with Aristotle (and hence, with Bodin) that a tyrant has the potential to change:

Cependant le plus sages des Politiques a cru être obligé de donner des avis à ces monstres, soit qu'il eut dessin de les adoucir, soit qu'il eut espérance de les changer. Car Aristote leur conseille d'imiter la bonté des Rois, d'essayer à se faire aimer du peuple ... Enfin il semble à entendre raisonner ce grand Philosophe, qu'il ne désespère pas de changer les Tyrans en Rois, et de les rendre légitimes en les rendant amoureux de la vertu ... Je tiens que ces métamorphoses sont impossibles. (I.iii)

In Senault's opinion, sovereignty and tyranny are polar opposites, so far removed from one another that there is no possibility of reconciliation. Virtue is reserved for the legitimate king, and even he must struggle daily to maintain it, waging a constant battle against his kingdom's most dangerous enemy—himself.

In the *Réflexions sur le métier du roi* (1679), Louis XIV offers a warning to the Dauphin: « Il faut se garder contre soi-même, prendre garde à son inclination et être toujours en garde sur son naturel » (Longnon 279). Although it cannot be confirmed that *Le Roi-soleil* had ever read Senault, Le Bret, or Bodin, his words carry a trace of the intertwined philosophies that these politologues established in the decades leading up to his personal reign. As the idea of absolute sovereignty gained momentum in France towards the end of the sixteenth century, royal virtue was presented by Bodin as an ideal, and vice was an undeniable reality. Sovereignty and tyranny were fluid. Once sovereign power had been consolidated into the person of the monarch, circa Le Bret, virtue fell within the definition of the divinely appointed monarch, who was never compared to the tyrant. In the mid-seventeenth century, Senault presents a philosophy that is evocative of Bodin's, because it expresses a similar skepticism regarding royal virtue, but from the opposite end of the spectrum of absolutist theory. From Bodin to Senault, the question of royal virtue has evolved from whether the king must be virtuous to how he can maintain his godly virtue while possessing all the power in the world. This is a question that seventeenth-century French literature, among other disciplines, endeavors to answer.

DePaul University

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