

Aristotle. Aristotle in 23 Volumes, Vol. 21, translated by H. Rackham. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1944.

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Tyrannies on the other hand are preserved in two extremely opposite ways. One of these is the traditional way and the one in which most tyrants administer their office. Most of these ordinary safeguards of tyranny are said to have been instituted by Periander² of [Corinth](#), and also many such devices may be borrowed from the Persian empire. These are both the measures mentioned some time back to secure the safety of a tyranny as far as possible—the lopping off of outstanding men and the destruction of the proud,—and also the prohibition of common meals and club-fellowship and education and all other things of this nature,

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² [20] may not be kept, and also that the people being busy with their daily affairs may not have leisure to plot against their ruler. Instances of this are the pyramids in [Egypt](#) and the votive offerings of the Cypselids,³ and the building of the temple of Olympian Zeus by the Pisistratidae⁴ and of the temples at [Samos](#), works of Polycrates⁵ (for all these undertakings produce the same effect, constant occupation and poverty among the subject people) ; and the levying of taxes, as at [Syracuse](#) (for in the reign of Dionysius⁶ the result of taxation used to be that in five years men had contributed the whole of their substance) . Also the tyrant is a stirrer-up of war, with the deliberate purpose of keeping the people busy and also of making them constantly in need of a leader. Also whereas friends are a means of security to royalty, it is a mark of a tyrant to be extremely distrustful of his friends, on the ground that, while all have the wish, these chiefly have the power. Also the things that occur in connection with the final form of democracy⁷ are all favorable to tyranny—dominance of women in the homes, in order that they may carry abroad reports against the men, and lack of discipline among the slaves, for the same reason; for slaves and women do not plot against tyrants, and also, if they prosper under tyrannies, must feel well-disposed to them, and to democracies as well (for the common people also wishes to be sole ruler) . Hence also the flatterer is in honor with both—with democracies the demagogue (for the demagogue is a flatterer of the people) , and with the tyrants those who associate with them humbly, which is the task of flattery.

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[1314a] [1] In fact owing to this tyranny is a friend of the base; for tyrants enjoy being flattered, but nobody would ever flatter them if he possessed a free spirit—men of character love their ruler, or at all events do not flatter him. And the base are useful for base business, for nail is driven out by nail, as the proverb goes.¹ And it is a mark of a tyrant to dislike anyone that is proud or free-spirited; for the tyrant claims for himself alone the right to bear that character, and the man who meets his pride with pride and shows a free spirit robs tyranny of its superiority and position of mastery; tyrants therefore hate the proud as undermining their authority. And it is a mark of a tyrant to have men of foreign extraction rather than citizens as guests at table and companions, feeling that citizens are hostile but strangers make no claim against him.² These and similar habits are characteristic of tyrants and preservative of

their office, but they lack no element of baseness. And broadly speaking, they are all included under three heads; for tyranny aims at three things, one to keep its subjects humble (for a humble-spirited man would not plot against anybody) , second to have them continually distrust one another (for a tyranny is not destroyed until some men come to trust each other, owing to which tyrants also make war on the respectable, as detrimental [20] to their rule not only because of their refusal to submit to despotic rule, but also because they are faithful to one another and to the other citizens, and do not inform against one another nor against the others) ; and the third is lack of power for political action (since nobody attempts impossibilities, so that nobody tries to put down a tyranny if he has not power behind him) . These then in fact are the three aims to which the wishes of tyrants are directed; for all the measures taken by tyrants one might class under these principles—some are designed to prevent mutual confidence among the subjects, others to curtail their power, and others to make them humble-spirited.

Such then is the nature of one method by which security is obtained for tyrannies. The other tries to operate in a manner almost the opposite of the devices mentioned. And it can be ascertained from considering the downfall of royal governments. For just as one mode of destroying royalty is to make its government more tyrannical, so a mode of securing tyranny is to make it more regal, protecting one thing only, its power, in order that the ruler may govern not only with the consent of the subjects but even without it; for if he gives up this, he also gives up his position as tyrant. But while this must stand as a fundamental principle, all the other measures he may either adopt or pretend to adopt by cleverly acting the royal part. The first step is to be careful of the public funds,

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[1314b] [1] not squandering presents such as the multitudes resent, when tyrants take money from the people themselves while they toil and labor in penury and lavish it on mistresses and foreigners and craftsmen, and also rendering account of receipts and expenditure, as some tyrants have done already (for this careful management would make a ruler seem a steward of the state and not a tyrant, and he need not be afraid of ever being at a loss for funds while he is master of the state; on the contrary, for those tyrants who go abroad on foreign campaigns this is actually more expedient than to leave their money there collected into one sum, for there is less fear of those guarding it making an attempt on power; since for tyrants campaigning abroad the keepers of the treasury are more to be feared than the citizens, for the citizens go abroad with him but the others stay at home) . Secondly he must be seen to collect his taxes and benevolences for purposes of administration and to meet his occasional requirements for military emergencies, and generally must pose as guardian and steward as it were of a public fund and not a private estate. And his bearing must not be harsh but dignified, and also such as to inspire not fear but rather respect [20] in those who encounter him, though this is not easy to achieve if he is a contemptible personality; so that even if he neglects the other virtues he is bound to cultivate military valor, and to make himself a reputation as a soldier. And further more not only must he himself be known not to outrage any of his subjects, either boy or girl, but so also must everybody about him, and also their wives must similarly show respect towards the other women, since even the insolences of women have caused the fall of many tyrannies. And in regard to bodily enjoyments he must do the opposite of what some tyrants do now (for they not only begin their debaucheries at daybreak and carry them on for many days at a time, but also wish to be seen doing so by the public, in

order that people may admire them as fortunate and happy) , but best of all he must be moderate in such matters, or if not, he must at all events avoid displaying his indulgences to his fellows (for not the sober man but the drunkard is easy to attack and to despise, not the wakeful man but the sleeper) . And he must do the opposite of almost all the things mentioned some time back, for he must lay out and adorn the city as if he were a trustee and not a tyrant. And further he must be seen always to be exceptionally zealous as regards religious observances (for people are less afraid of suffering any illegal treatment from men of this sort,

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[1315a] [1] if they think that their ruler has religious scruples and pays regard to the gods, and also they plot against him less, thinking that he has even the gods as allies) , though he should not display a foolish religiosity. And he must pay such honor to those who display merit in any matter that they may think that they could never be more honored by the citizens if they were independent; and honors of this kind he should bestow in person, but inflict his punishments by the agency of other magistrates and law-courts. And it is a protection common to every sort of monarchy to make no one man great, but if necessary to exalt several (for they will keep watch on one another) , and if after all the ruler has to elevate an individual, at all events not take a man of bold spirit (for such a character is most enterprising in all undertakings) ; and if he thinks fit to remove somebody from his power, to do this by gradual stages and not take away the whole of his authority at once. And again he should carefully avoid all forms of outrage, and two beyond all, violent bodily punishments and outrage of the young. And this caution must especially be exercised in relation to the ambitious, for while to be slighted in regard to property annoys the lovers of wealth, slights that involve dishonor are what men of honorable ambition and high character resent. [20] Hence the tyrant should either not consort with men of this kind, or appear to inflict his punishments paternally and not because of contempt, and to indulge in the society of the young for reasons of passion, not because he has the power, and in general he should buy off what are thought to be dishonors by greater honors. And among those who make attempts upon the life of a ruler the most formidable and those against whom the greatest precaution is needed are those that are ready to sacrifice their lives if they can destroy him. Hence the greatest care must be taken to guard against those who think that insolent outrage is being done either to themselves or to those who happen to be under their care; for men attacking under the influence of anger are reckless of themselves, as Heraclitus¹ also observed when he said that anger was hard to combat because it would buy revenge with a life. And since states consist of two parts, the poor people and the rich, the most important thing is for both to think that they owe their safety to the government and for it to prevent either from being wronged by the other, but whichever class is the stronger, this must be made to be entirely on the side of the government, as, if this support for the tyrant's interests is secured, there is no need for him to institute a liberation of slaves or a disarming of the citizens, for one of the two parts of the state added to his power will be enough to make him and them stronger than their attackers. But to discuss each of such matters separately is superfluous; for the thing to aim at is clear,

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[1315b] [1] that it is necessary to appear to the subjects to be not a tyrannical ruler but a steward and a royal governor, and not an appropriator of wealth but a trustee, and to pursue the moderate things of

life and not its extravagances, and also to make the notables one's comrades and the many one's followers. For the result of these methods must be that not only the tyrant's rule will be more honorable and more enviable because he will rule nobler subjects and not men that have been humiliated, and will not be continually hated and feared, but also that his rule will endure longer, and moreover that he himself in his personal character will be nobly disposed towards virtue, or at all events half-virtuous, and not base but only half-base.

Nevertheless oligarchy and tyranny¹ are less lasting than any of the constitutional governments. For the longest-lived was the tyranny at [Sicyon](#), that of the sons² of Orthagoras and of Orthagoras himself, and this lasted a hundred years.³ The cause of this was that they treated their subjects moderately and in many matters were subservient to the laws, and Cleisthenes because he was a warlike man was not easily despised, and in most things they kept the lead of the people by looking after their interests. At all events it is said that Cleisthenes placed a wreath on the judge who awarded the victory away from him, and some say that the statue [20] of a seated figure in the market-place is a statue of the man who gave this judgement. And they say that Pisistratus⁴ also once submitted to a summons for trial before the Areopagus. And the second longest is the tyranny at [Corinth](#), that of the Cypselids,⁵ for even this lasted seventy-three and a half years, as Cypselus was tyrant for thirty years, Periander for forty-four,⁶ and Psammetichus son of Gordias for three years. And the reasons for the permanence of this tyranny also are the same: Cypselus was a leader of the people and continuously throughout his period of office dispensed with a bodyguard; and although Periander became tyrannical, yet he was warlike. The third longest tyranny is that of the Pisistratidae at [Athens](#), but it was not continuous; for while Pisistratus⁷ was tyrant he twice fled into exile, so that in a period of thirty-three years he was tyrant for seventeen years out of the total, and his sons for eighteen years, so that the whole duration of their rule was thirty-five years. Among the remaining tyrannies is the one connected with Hiero and Gelo⁸ at [Syracuse](#), but even this did not last many years, but only eighteen in all, for Gelo after being tyrant for seven years ended his life in the eighth, and Hiero ruled ten years, but Thrasybulus was expelled after ten months. And the usual tyrannies have all of them been of quite short duration. The causes therefore of the destruction of constitutional governments and of monarchies and those again of their preservation have almost all of them been discussed.

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[1316a] [1]

The subject of revolutions is discussed by Socrates in the Republic,¹ but is not discussed well. For his account of revolution in the constitution that is the best one and the first does not apply to it particularly. He says that the cause is that nothing is permanent but everything changes in a certain cycle, and that change has its origin in those numbers 'whose basic ratio 4 : 3 linked with the number 5 gives two harmonies,'—meaning whenever the number of this figure becomes cubed,—in the belief that nature sometimes engenders men that are evil, and too strong for education to influence—speaking perhaps not ill as far as this particular dictum goes (for it is possible that there are some persons incapable of being educated and becoming men of noble character) , but why should this process of revolution belong to the constitution which Socrates speaks of as the best, more than to all the other forms of constitution, and to all men that come into existence? and why merely by the operation of time, which he says is the cause of change in all things, do even things that did not begin to exist simultaneously change simultaneously? for instance, if a thing came into existence the day

before the completion of the cycle, why does it yet change simultaneously with everything else? And in addition to these points, what is the reason why the republic changes from the constitution mentioned into the Spartan form²? For all constitutions more often change into the opposite form than into the [20] one near them. And the same remark applies to the other revolutions as well. For from the Spartan constitution the state changes, he says, to oligarchy, and from this to democracy, and from democracy to tyranny. Yet revolutions also occur the other way about, for example from democracy to oligarchy, and more often so than from democracy to monarchy. Again as to tyranny he does not say whether it will undergo revolution or not, nor, if it will, what will be the cause of it, and into what sort of constitution it will change; and the reason for this is that he would not have found it easy to say, for it is irregular; since according to him tyranny ought to change into the first and best constitution, for so the process would be continuous and a circle, but as a matter of fact tyranny also changes into tyranny, as the constitution of [Sicyon](#)³ passed from the tyranny of Myron to that of Cleisthenes, and into oligarchy, as did that of Antileon⁴ at [Chalcis](#), and into democracy, as that of the family of Gelo⁵ at [Syracuse](#), and into aristocracy, as that of Charilaus⁶ at [Sparta](#) [and as at [Carthage](#)].⁷ And constitutions change from oligarchy to tyranny, as did almost the greatest number of the ancient oligarchies in [Sicily](#), at Leontini to the tyranny of Panaetius,⁸ at Gelo to that of Cleander, at [Rhegium](#) to that of Anaxilaus,⁹ and in many other cities similarly. And it is also a strange idea that revolutions into oligarchy take place because the occupants of the offices are lovers of money and engaged in money-making,

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[1316b] [1] but not because owners of much more than the average amount of property think it unjust for those who do not own any property to have an equal share in the state with those who do; and in many oligarchies those in office are not allowed to engage in business, but there are laws preventing it, whereas in [Carthage](#), which has a democratic government,¹ the magistrates go in for business, and they have not yet had a revolution. And it is also a strange remark² that the oligarchical state is two states, one of rich men and one of poor men. For what has happened to this state rather than to the Spartan or any other sort of state where all do not own an equal amount of wealth or where all are not equally good men? and when nobody has become poorer than he was before, none the less revolution takes place from oligarchy to democracy if the men of no property become more numerous, and from democracy to oligarchy if the wealthy class is stronger than the multitude and the latter neglect politics but the former give their mind to them. And although there are many causes through which revolutions in oligarchies occur, he mentions only one—that of men becoming poor through riotous living, by paying away their money in interest on loans—as if at the start all men or most men were rich. But this is not true, but although when some of the leaders have lost their properties they stir up innovations, when men of the other classes are ruined nothing strange happens; [20] and even when such a revolution does occur it is no more likely to end in a democracy than in another form of constitution. And furthermore men also form factions and cause revolutions in the constitution if they are not allowed a share of honors, and if they are unjustly or insolently treated, even if they have not run through all their property . . .³ because of being allowed to do whatever they like; the cause of which he states to be excessive liberty. And although there are several forms of oligarchy and of democracy, Socrates speaks of the revolutions that occur in them as though there were only one form of each.