

al group – not even that of leader – no hierarchy, ceremony or rituals not determined by the group's orientation towards a common goal, that could not be endangered and changed in the uncertain pursuit of goal. Every mechanism used by the charismatic leader to control the group takes its primary meaning from this. Even though the need to manipulate the central group by balancing the tensions between factions and factions within it – a need which occupies the foreground in the stabilised world of an autocratic monarch – is certainly not entirely absent from unsteady charismatic rule, in this case it plays only a secondary role. In the figuration there are no stabilised groups that can hold each other in equilibrium over long periods. A well-calculated long-term strategy for manipulating people is less important than unpredictable daring and willingness to leap in the dark, coupled with the intuitive belief that this is a leap into the light. Indeed, one can say that this absolute conviction in the midst of social upheaval and general uncertainty, of his own ability to take the decisions that will finally prove right – a conviction that is never open to nor seems to need any rational justification – is one of the basic attitudes of the charismatic leader and one that needs closer investigation. Each of them is skating on thin ice. If he reaches the other shore there are many historians who, showing the common inclination to attribute success with personal greatness, will credit him with an extraordinary gift of doing the right thing in difficult situations. If the ice breaks, drowning and his followers, he is likely to pass into history as an unsuccessful ruler. The ability of such people to transmit to others their unshakable belief in their own gift of taking correct decisions is one of the means by which the central group is cemented together despite all the rivalries and conflicts of interest. This ability and this conviction are the real substance of the belief in his charisma. Success in mastering incalculable crises makes the ruler as 'charismatic' in the eyes of the central group and subjects in the wider dominion. And the 'charismatic' character of the ruler and his followers is maintained only as long as such crisis situations constantly recur or can be created. Often they are created artificially because the tasks of a consolidated rule require other gifts than those that arise on the way to consolidation.

The leader must therefore master the tasks with which he is constantly confronted very much from his own inner resources. An encounter with the lowest member of his central group can become a trial for him. No etiquette, no social aura, no apparatus can protect or help him. His

individual strength and personal inventiveness must prove him superior, legitimise him as leader, over and over again.

5 The situation was quite different for Louis XIV, who can be contrasted with the *arriviste* type of monopoly ruler as a very marked example of the conserving ruler. In his way Louis XIV is undoubtedly one of the 'great men' of Western history, whose influence has been exceptionally far-reaching. But his personal resources, his individual gifts, were by no means outstanding. They were mediocre rather than great. This apparent paradox leads to the centre of the problem.

What we call 'great men' are, briefly, men who by successfully solving certain problems posed by their social situation have achieved a very far-reaching effect, whether briefly but intensely at one period of their lives, or throughout their lives, or even after their deaths. The more far-reaching their effect, usually but not always in terms of space and historical time, the greater appears the person who produced it.

The paradox mentioned just now in connection with the 'greatness' of Louis XIV points to a curious circumstance: there are situations in which the most important tasks are not those which can be solved by people with qualities that we romanticise somewhat as originality or creativity, people distinguished by extraordinary drive and activity, but by people of steady and placid mediocrity. Such was the situation of Louis XIV. His task as a ruler has already been sketched. Unlike the *arriviste* charismatic ruler, he had to prevent the social pressure of his subjects, especially his elite, from acting in a single direction.

6 In his youth Louis XIV had experienced an attempt to overthrow the existing order at the expense of his house during the period of the Fronde.¹⁰ At that time attacks by almost every group were aimed in the same direction, against the representatives of the monarchy. This unity disintegrated relatively quickly. When Louis XIV came of age and ascended the throne, the rule of absolute monarchy had been re-established. Louis XIV inherited his power. The task he took on was therefore not to conquer and create, but to secure and consolidate, or at most to extend the existing structure. He had to supervise and keep alive the tensions between the

¹⁰ Fronde: a series of uprisings by the nobility in France between 1648 and 1653, during the minority of Louis XIV when Mazarin was chief minister (see n. 13 below). – ed.

different estates and classes. An innovating genius might well have founded on this task: he might have guided the machinery wrongly and destroyed the figuration that favoured him. Louis XIV was not an innovator and did not need to be:

Had he been indolent or sporadic, the conflicts of the institutions between themselves would have plunged the monarchy into anarchy, as happened a century later; had he been a man of genius and vigour, the slow, complex machine would have made him impatient, he would have broken it. He was calm and regular; not rich in inner resources, he needed the ideas of others.¹¹

His intelligence, according to Saint-Simon, was below average.¹² That may be an exaggeration, but it certainly was not outstanding.

In addition, his whole education, including that of his intellect, had been rather neglected. The disturbed times when he was young had given his preceptors, above all Mazarin,¹³ little leisure to worry about his education. 'He was often heard to speak bitterly of this time; he even told how one evening he had been found in the basin of a fountain in the garden of the Palais-Royal where he had fallen. He was hardly taught to read or write and remained so ignorant that he knew nothing of the best-known events in history.'¹⁴ Louis XIV himself once said: 'One feels bitter grief at not knowing things that all others have mastered.'¹⁵

Nevertheless he was undoubtedly one of the greatest kings and most influential men in Western history. He was not only equal to his specific task of defending and extending an important power position that he had inherited, he was made for it. And as he performed it to perfection, he acted in fundamental accord with all those who in some way shared the splendour of his rule, even if they were in many respects oppressed by it: 'The great power and authority of Louis XIV come from the conformity of his person with the spirit of his time.'¹⁶

11 Ernest Lavisse, *Louis XIV: La Fronde, Le Roi, Colbert* (Paris: Hachette, 1905), p. 157.

12 Pléiade, iv, pp. 941, 950. – ed.

13 Cardinal Jules Mazarin (1602–61) was born Giulio Raimondo Mazzarino in Pescina, Italy, but after an early career as a papal diplomat became a naturalised French citizen. When his patron Richelieu died in 1642 he succeeded him as chief minister, serving until his own death. When Louis XIII died in 1643, his infant son came to the throne as Louis XIV with his mother, Anne of Austria, as Regent but Mazarin as the effective ruler. – ed.

14 Saint-Simon, *Memoiren*, II, p. 69. [Pléiade, iv, p. 950.]

15 Lavisse, *Louis XIV*, p. 125.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 134. [Quoted in French in the original text.]

It is interesting to see how he himself formulates his task as ruler as being in exact agreement with his own needs and inclinations: 'You need not believe', he once said to his son,

that affairs of state are like the prickly and obscure problems of science that have perhaps bored you. The task of kings consists chiefly in exercising good sense, which always acts of its own accord and without effort . . . Everything that is most necessary for this task is at the same time pleasant; for it consists, in a word, my son, in keeping one's eyes open on the whole world, incessantly learning the news from every province and every nation, finding out the secrets of every court, the whims and weaknesses of every prince and every foreign minister, informing oneself on an endless number of matters of which we are believed ignorant and, likewise, seeing in our own surroundings what is most carefully concealed from us, discovering each of the views and thoughts of our own courtiers.¹⁷

This ruler, in other words, was possessed by curiosity to know everything that went on in his immediate surroundings and in the wider world. To discover their hidden driving forces was to him a kind of sport from which he gained extraordinary satisfaction. But it was also one of the most important tasks arising from his social function as a ruler. Incidentally, one sees in this description how, from the ruler's perspective, the whole world appeared as an extended court, to be manipulated in the manner of the court.

It has already been stressed that 'ruling' is a complex activity, and that the manipulation of people is one of the most important functions in this activity. This is a central function of both charismatic, conquering rule, and of the defensive, conserving rule of Louis XIV.

The *kind* of manipulation practised, however, is very different. Louis XIV's words to his son indicate how the conserving ruler practised it: by an exact calculation of the passions, weaknesses, errors, secrets and interests of everyone. A way of thinking focused on the person, admittedly the 'person in a situation', referred to above as a characteristic feature of court people in general, is found here in the king. If, for the other court people who are exposed to pressure on all sides, such thinking serves as an instrument in the struggle for prestige – 'he who has ambitions must be

17 *Ibid.*, p. 130.

well informed'¹⁸ – for the king who is exposed to pressure only from below, it is an instrument of rule.

The conquering ruler must rely largely on the inner loyalty of the people within his central group. He can do so because their interests coincide very largely with his own. The pressure he necessarily exerts on them is relieved by the meaning and purpose, visible to all his followers, that come from success in their common action within the wider dominion.

The conserving ruler in the situation of Louis XIV, living under the pressure of a possible threat from below, cannot count to the same extent on the loyal support of his followers. For the pressure he must exert to maintain his rule finds no relief in communal outwardly directed actions, at least as long as there are no wars. For him, therefore, the observation and supervision of people is indispensable in defending his rule. Louis XIV performed this task with an intensity that reflected his enjoyment of it. This has already been seen from his stated doctrine. The example of his practice will show still more clearly how the human observation characteristic both of the court aristocracy and the court king is aimed, on the king's side, directly *against* the nobility and serves to control it:

The King's curiosity to know what went on around him constantly increased; he instructed his first valet and the governor of Versailles to engage a number of Swiss in his service. These received the royal livery, were responsible only to those just named and had the secret commission to frequent the corridors and passages, courts and gardens by day and night, morning and evening, to hide, observe people, follow them, see where they went and when they returned, overhear their conversations and report exactly on everything.¹⁹

That the observation of tensions and discord between his subjects is especially important to a conserving king in the situation of Louis XIV scarcely needs to be stressed after what has been said on the structure of this kind of dominion. The unification of his subjects threatened the king's existence. All the same, it is interesting to see how consciously he understood this task, encouraging and even creating breaches and tensions between people in both large and small matters. He told his son:

You must divide your confidence among several. The jealousy of one holds the ambition of the others in check. But although they hate each other, they have common interests and can therefore come to an agreement to deceive their lord. He must therefore obtain information from outside the close circle of his advisers and maintain permanent contact with people who have access to important information within the state.²⁰

7 It is a peculiar form of activity to which the need for security drove this ruler. His attitude could be described as 'passive', measured by the far more active one of the conquering, charismatic leader. But 'active' and 'passive' are concepts which do not do justice to this complex social reality. The conquering leader himself drives his central group to action. In his absence the activity of his group is often broken. The conserving ruler is carried by the jealousy, antitheses and tensions within the social field that created his function; *he needs only to regulate these tensions and to create organisations which both maintain the tensions and differences and facilitate their supervision.*

Such a mechanism of regulation, consolidation and supervision – one among others – is the court and its etiquette as understood by the king. We spoke earlier of a social *perpetuum mobile* within the *ancien régime*. This is again seen very clearly in the contrast with charismatic rule. The central group under charismatic rule decays more quickly the stronger are the tensions arising within it, since it is then less able to perform *its* task. The central group of internally defensive rule, which is not concerned with action and conquest, but with mutual defence and distancing, perpetuates itself – and the king's wide scope for decisions – through the opposed ambitions of the subjects, as long as these can be held in check by the king. From the circle of rivals for prestige – if we may put it somewhat epigrammatically – now one steps forward to whisper into the king's ear how he can harm another, and then a second to tell him how he can harm the first; so it goes on in a circle. But the king decides, and in deciding against a particular person or group he has all the others on his side, as long as he does not disturb the entire system.

Here, therefore, a lively imagination was not needed in the ruler. Once the system had been established, what Louis XIV himself called *bon sens* and himself possessed to a high degree was quite enough to regulate

18 Saint-Simon, *Memoiren*, I, p. 156.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 167.

20 Lavissee, *Louis XIV*, p. 158.

it and maintain it in equilibrium. Above all, however, it was possible for the ruler within this social mechanism to achieve large-scale effects by a relatively small expenditure of personal energy. The energy was generated in the *perpetuum mobile* driven by competition – ‘the jealousy of one puts a brake on the ambition of others’,²¹ to use the king’s own words – and the king needs only to channel it. The machinery functioned like a power station within which the movement of a lever by the controller released many times the force he had himself exerted.

The charismatic leader always confronts people directly, urging them on, intervening actively, pushing through his own ideas. A ruler like Louis XIV always had to be approached. Something was proposed to him; something was requested of him; and when he had listened to the arguments and counter-arguments of various people seeking his favour, he decided. Energy was, as it were, conducted into him; he kept his distance and made use of it. He needed no great ideas of his own and he had none; the ideas of others flowed to him and he made use of them:

No one knew as well as he how to sell his words, his smile, even his glances. Everything in him was valuable because he created differences, and his majesty was enhanced by the sparseness of his words. If he turned to someone, asked him a question, made an insignificant remark, the eyes of all present were turned on this person. It was a distinction that was talked of and increased prestige . . . No one else was ever so polite by nature; no-one paid so much attention to differences of age, status and merit, both in his answers – when he said something more than his ‘I shall see’ – and in his behaviour.²²

Jealousies whirled around the king, maintaining the social balance. The king played on them like an artist. His chief interest in this, apart from simply keeping it in motion, was in being able clearly to overlook the human machinery he had to control, which undoubtedly contained within it a good deal of explosive material. This tendency to supervise and predict at each moment the workings of the machinery of rule is another characteristic of the conserving form of rule. While the charismatic ruler cannot protect himself from the unpredictable, the whole life of Louis XIV was built up in such a way that nothing new or unforeseeable, apart from illness

²¹ In French in the original, and in the 1983 English edition: ‘la jalousie de l’un sert de frein à l’ambition des autres’ – ed.

²² Saint-Simon, *Memoiren*, II, p. 86. [Plèiade, IV, p. 1001.]

or death, should reach the king. It is this difference in the entire figuration, not simply a peculiarity of particular persons, that is referred to when speaking of the ‘rationality’ of this absolutist form of rule and the ‘irrationality’ of the charismatic form: ‘With an almanac and a watch one could tell, three hundred leagues away, what he was doing’, said Saint-Simon of Louis XIV.²³

Every step of both the king and his entourage was predetermined. Every action by a person influenced the others.

8 Everyone within the chains of interdependence was concerned, for reasons of prestige, to ensure that others performed their steps according to precept. Thus everyone automatically controlled everyone else. Any ‘stepping out of line’ injured and disadvantaged others. It was therefore extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the individual to break out. If no such organisation, etiquette and ceremony had existed, the individual would have been able to stay away for periods at will; there would have been larger scope for his initiative. But the court etiquette not only subjected the movements of each individual very largely to the control of the ruler; it made the many hundreds of courtiers visible at the same time, acting as a kind of signalling device that publicly registered any self-will, any outburst or mistake by an individual, since this impinged on the prestige-claims of others, and were therefore reported through all the intermediate links to the king.

In face of so ‘functional’ a structure, the distinction between value-rationality and instrumental rationality loses its clarity.²⁴ The mechanism of etiquette was highly ‘functional’ in conserving and securing the king’s rule. In this sense it too was an instrumentally rational organisation – no less so, at any rate, than the instruments of power produced by societies competing for money and career opportunities. In both cases, though perhaps more nakedly in the case of the king’s rule, ‘rule’ is for its bearer an end and value in itself, or is at least based on values that seem self-explanatory. In this sense the instruments that secure this ‘rule’ are both ‘instrumentally-rational’ and ‘value-rational’.

The position of the king, as it had evolved in the social field of the *ancien régime*, liberated the powers of its occupant in a special way. Not only

²³ Quoted in Lavis, *Louis XIV*, p. 124.

²⁴ Weber, *Economy and Society*, I, pp. 24–6. – ed.

did money flow to the occupant of this position – for example, in the form of taxes or revenues from the sale of offices – without his needing to engage in any work activity, but he was the recipient of other social energies more difficult to quantify, in the form of the human powers that were at his disposal without any formal agreement. He had control of these not only, but mainly, because the structure of social interdependence gave them to him, rather than because he seized them from the social field by his own activity. Moreover, all this human potential at the king's disposal in what his contemporaries themselves called *la mécanique*²⁵ was organised in such a way that it acted as an amplifier of the king's energies so that, if the king merely lifted a finger or spoke a word, far greater energies were set in motion within the social field than he had used himself. For this reason his own energies, however great or small they might be, were liberated to an exceptional degree.

9 In the case of Louis XV, who took over royal power in an entirely secure condition, having personally experienced no direct threat to it and who therefore lacked the permanent exertion of will his predecessor had shown in exercising power, a large part of these liberated energies were dispensed in pursuit of pleasures and amusements intended to dissipate the aimlessness and boredom so often characteristic of the second generation of ruling classes, a boredom produced precisely by this liberation of their energies.

For Louis XIV, by contrast, the maintenance of power was still a demanding task. The threat to his position had lessened in the course of his reign and the really decisive moment had occurred before it began. But as he had known the danger as a young man, the preservation of his function as ruler was a far more immediate concern for him than for Louis XV.

What was said above on the ideas and interests of court people and conserving classes in general applies particularly to him: he had a goal, but not one outside himself, not a future goal. In a rather more limited context he once wrote: 'Beware of hope, a bad guide.'²⁶ That also applied in this broader context: he was a summit. He had a position without hope. So the goal he gave the energies liberated by his position was to secure, defend and above all to glorify his present existence: 'Louis XIV – and this is visible from his first words and his first gestures onwards – places quite simply in

himself the principle and the purpose of things. . . . If he uttered the words *L'État c'est moi* he merely meant to say: "It is I, Louis, talking to you".²⁷

If we regard Louis XIV as a creator of the modern state, we should realise – if this view is not to be entirely misleading – that in his own motivation the state as an end in itself played absolutely no part. That his activity contributed to the development of France as a strongly centralised state is beyond doubt. At the same time we should remember the observation of Jurieu quoted earlier: 'The King has taken the place of the state, the King is everything, the state nothing.'²⁸ Saint-Simon, who sometimes has something of a Whig about him, and at any rate is always secretly in opposition, once said in praise of the dauphin and as an explicit polemic against the attitude of Louis XIV: 'The great and sublime maxim that kings are made for peoples and not peoples for kings, was so deeply imprinted in his soul that it had made luxury and war odious to him.'²⁹

The 'state' as a value in itself is in this case a thoroughly subversive idea. Standing in contraposition to it is Louis XIV's motivation, the king's own claim to prestige, his desire not only to possess power over others but to see it constantly recognised publicly in the words and gestures of others and so doubly assured. That motivation was therefore a decisive impulse in the policies and actions of France in his reign. Even for Louis XIV we find the public confirmation and symbolisation of power becoming a value in their own right. Symbols of power take on a life of their own and the character of prestige-fetishes. The prestige-fetish that best expresses the self-justifying character of the king's existence is the idea of *gloire*.

This prestige-fetish has remained an intermittently powerful influence on French politics up to the present day. But it has been transferred to the nation or to people who believed they embodied it. It is, moreover, closely coupled to economic, utilitarian motives. For Louis XIV himself, the prestige motive had absolute priority over other kinds of motivation for the reasons that have been given. Without his always noticing it, economic factors no doubt often influenced the direction of his actions. But the course of events cannot be properly understood if we ignore the fact that this social structure encouraged the ruler to place prestige far above financial considerations, and to consider the latter as accessories of the former.

25 For example, Saint-Simon, quoted by Lavissee, *Louis XIV*, p. 149.

26 Lavissee, *Louis XIV*, p. 122.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 131.

28 Marion, *Dictionnaire*, article on 'Etat'. [See p. 128 above.]

29 *Pléiade*, III, p. 1184. – ed.