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VOCATION
IN THE
AMERICAN IMAGINATION

Reading Packet 2

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VOCATION IN THE AMERICAN IMAGINATION

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WHO ARE WE?

THE CHALLENGES TO
AMERICA'S NATIONAL IDENTITY

SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON

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and the responsiveness of government to the people. Religion in America, as William Lee Miller has observed, "helped to make the creed and was compatible with it. . . . Here liberal Protestantism and political liberalism, democratic religion and democratic politics, American faith and Christian faith, penetrated each other and exerted a profound influence upon each other." Protestant beliefs and the American political Creed encompassed similar and parallel ideas and came together, John Higham has argued, forging "the strongest bonds that united the American people during the nineteenth century." Or as Jeff Spinner observed, "It's difficult to disentangle what is Protestant from what is liberal in the United States."¹⁹ The American Creed, in short, is Protestantism without God, the secular credo of the "nation with the soul of a church."

INDIVIDUALISM AND THE WORK ETHIC

Protestantism in America generally involves a belief in the fundamental opposition of good and evil, right and wrong. Americans are far more likely than Canadians, Europeans, and Japanese to believe that "There are absolutely clear guidelines about what is good and evil" applicable "whatever the circumstances" rather than to believe that no such guidelines exist and what is good or evil depends on circumstances.²⁰ Americans are thus continually confronted by the gap between the absolute standards that should govern their individual behavior and the nature of their society, and the failure of themselves and their society to live up to those standards.

Most Protestant sects emphasize the role of the individual in achieving knowledge of God directly from the Bible without intermediation by clerical hierarchy. Many denominations also emphasize that the individual achieves salvation or is "born again" as a result of the grace of God, also without clerical intermediation. Success in this world places on the individual the responsibility to do good in this world. "Protestantism, republicanism, and individualism are all one," as F. J. Grund observed of America in 1837.²¹

Their Protestant culture has made Americans the most individualistic people in the world. In Geert Hofstede's comparative analysis of 116,000 employees of IBM in thirty-nine countries, for instance, the mean individualism index was 51. Americans, however, were far above that mean, ranking first with an index of 91, followed by Australia, Britain, Canada, the Netherlands, and New Zealand. Eight of the ten countries with the highest individualism indices were Protestant. A survey of cadets in military academies in fourteen countries produced comparable results, with those from the United States, Canada, and Denmark ranking highest in individualism. The 1995-97 World Values Survey asked people in forty-eight countries whether individuals or the state should be primarily responsible for their welfare. Americans (with Swedes) came in close seconds to Swiss in emphasizing individual responsibility. In a survey of fifteen thousand managers in several countries, the Americans scored the highest on individualism, Japanese the lowest, with Canadians, British, Germans, and French between them in that order. The authors of the study concluded: "American managers are by far the strongest individualists in our national samples. They are also more inner-directed. Americans believe you should 'make up your mind' and 'do your own thing' rather than allow yourself to be influenced too much by other people and the external flow of events."²²

The American Protestant belief in individual responsibility gave rise to the gospel of success and the concept of the self-made man. "It was Anglo-Saxon Protestants," as Robert Bellah says, "who created the gospel of wealth and the ideal of success." The concept of the self-made man came to the fore in the Jacksonian years, Henry Clay first using the phrase in a Senate debate in 1832. Americans, countless opinion surveys have shown, believe that whether or not one succeeds in life depends overwhelmingly on one's own talents and character. This central element of the American dream was perfectly expressed by President Clinton:

The American dream that we were all raised on is a simple but powerful one—if you work hard and play by the rules you should be given a chance to go as far as your God-given ability will take you.²³

In the absence of rigid social hierarchies, one is what one achieves. The horizons are open, the opportunities boundless, and the realization of them depends on an individual's energy, system, and perseverance, in short, the capability for and willingness to work.

The work ethic is a central feature of Protestant culture, and from the beginning America's religion has been the religion of work. In other societies, heredity, class, social status, ethnicity, and family are the principal sources of status and legitimacy. In America, work is. In different ways both aristocratic and socialist societies tend to demean and discourage work. Bourgeois societies promote work. America, the quintessential bourgeois society, glorifies work. When asked "What do you do?" almost no American dares answer "Nothing." As Judith Shklar has pointed out, throughout American history social standing has depended on working and earning money by working. Employment is the source of self-assurance and independence. "Be industrious and FREE," as Benjamin Franklin put it. This glorification of work came to the fore during the Jacksonian era, when people were classified as "do-somethings" or "do-nothings." "The addiction to work," Shklar comments, "that this [attitude] induced was noted by every visitor to the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century."²⁴ In the America of the 1830s, the Swiss-German Philip Schaff observed, prayer and work were linked together and idleness was sinful. The Frenchman Michel Chevalier, who also visited America in the 1830s, commented,

The manners and customs are those of a working, busy society. A man who has no profession and—which is nearly the same thing—who is not married enjoys little consideration; he who is an active and useful member of society, who contributes his share to augment the national wealth and increase the numbers of the population, he only is looked upon with respect and favor. The American is brought up with the idea that he will have some particular occupation and that if he is active and intelligent he will make his fortune. He has no conception of living without a profession, even when his family is rich. The habits of life are those of an exclusively working people. From the moment he gets up, the American is at his work, and he is absorbed in it till the

hour of sleep. Even mealtime is not for him a period of relaxation. It is only a disagreeable interruption of business which he cuts short as much as possible.²⁵

The right to labor and to the rewards of labor was part of the nineteenth-century arguments against slavery, and the central right espoused by the new Republican Party was the "right to labor productively, to pursue one's vocation and reap its rewards." The concept of "the self-made man" is a distinctive product of this American environment and culture.²⁶

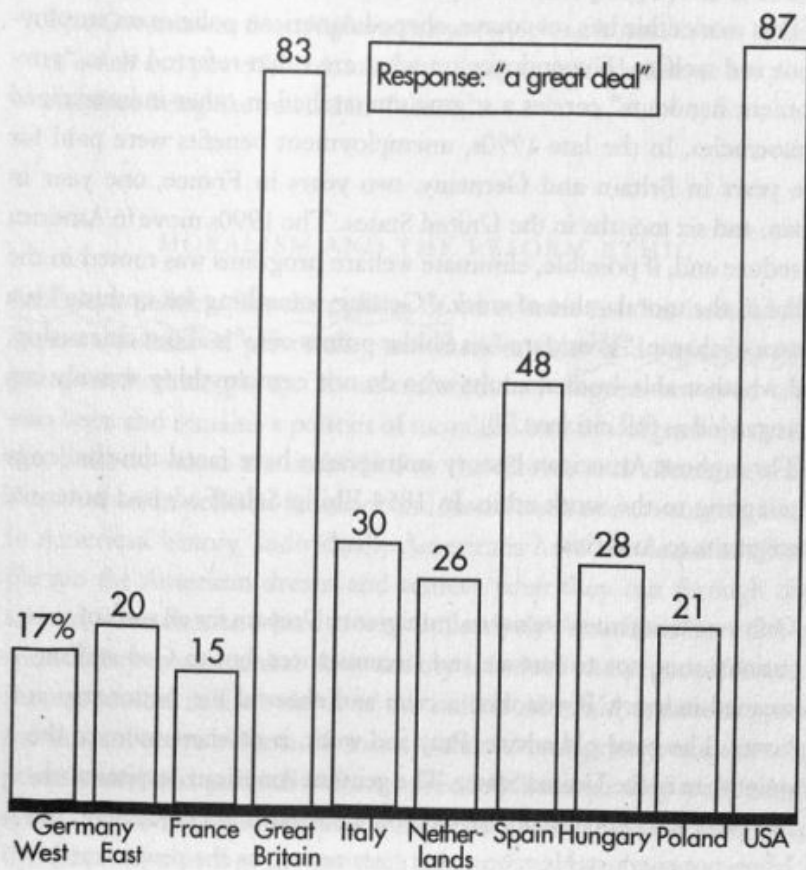
In the 1990s Americans remained people of work. They worked longer hours and took shorter vacations than people in other industrialized democracies. The hours of work in other industrialized societies were decreasing. In America, if anything, they were increasing. Among industrialized countries the average hours a worker worked in 1997 were: America—1,966, Japan—1,889, Australia—1,867, New Zealand—1,838, Britain—1,731, France—1,656, Sweden—1,582, Germany—1,560, Norway—1,399. On average Americans worked 350 more hours per year than Europeans. In 1999, 60 percent of American teenagers worked, three times the average of other industrialized countries. Historically Americans have had an ambivalent attitude toward leisure, often feeling guilty about it, and attempting to reconcile it with their work ethic. As Cindy Aron argued in her book *Working at Play*, Americans in the twentieth century remained prisoners of the "persistent and continuing American suspicion of time spent away from work."²⁷ Americans often tend to feel they should devote their vacations not only to unproductive leisure but to good works and self-improvement.

Americans have not only worked more than other peoples, but they have found satisfaction in and identified themselves with their work more than others have. In a 1990 International Values Survey of ten countries, 87 percent of Americans reported that they took a great deal of pride in their work, with only the British reporting a comparable number. In most countries, less than 30 percent of workers expressed that view (see Figure 4.1). Americans have consistently believed that hard work is the key to individual success. In the early 1990s, some 80

Figure 4.1

Pride in Work

Question to jobholders: "How much pride, if any, do you take in the work that you do? Would you say 'a great deal,' 'some,' 'little,' or 'none'?"



Source: International Values Study 1990; figure from Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, *The Allensbach Institute* (Allensbach, 1998), p. 71.

percent of Americans said that to be an American it is necessary to subscribe to the work ethic. Ninety percent of Americans said they would work harder if necessary for the success of their organization and 67 percent said they would not welcome social change that would lead to less emphasis on hard work. In their attitudes Americans see society as divided between people who are productive and people who are not.²⁸

This work ethic has, of course, shaped American policies on employment and welfare. Dependence on what are often referred to as "government handouts" carries a stigma unmatched in other industrialized democracies. In the late 1990s, unemployment benefits were paid for five years in Britain and Germany, two years in France, one year in Japan, and six months in the United States. The 1990s move in America to reduce and, if possible, eliminate welfare programs was rooted in the belief in the moral value of work. "Getting something for nothing" is a source of shame. "Workfare," as Shklar points out, "is about citizenship, and whether able-bodied adults who do not earn anything actively can be regarded as full citizens."²⁹

Throughout American history immigrants have faced the challenge of adapting to the work ethic. In 1854 Philip Schaff advised potential immigrants to America:

Only one thing must we say to immigrants: Prepare for all sorts of privations; trust not to fortune and circumstances, but to God and unwearyed industry. If you wish a calm and cheerful life, better stay at home. The good old advice: Pray and work, is nowhere more to the point than in the United States. The genuine American despises nothing more than idleness and stagnation; he regards not enjoyment, but labor, not comfortable repose, but busy unrest, as the proper earthly lot of man; and this has unspeakable importance for him, and upon the whole a most salutary influence on the moral life of the nation.

In the 1890s Polish immigrants to America were overwhelmed by the amount of work that they were expected to perform. This was a dominant theme in their letters back to Poland: "In America," as one wrote, "one has to sweat more during a day than during a whole week in

Poland." In 1999 a Cuban-American, Alex Alvarez, warned new Cuban immigrants of what they would confront in America:

Welcome to the capitalist system. Each one of you is responsible for the amount of money you have in your pocket. The Government is not responsible for whether you eat, or whether you're poor or rich. The Government doesn't guarantee you a job or a house. You've come to a rich and powerful country, but it is up to you whether or not you continue living like you did in Cuba.³⁰

MORALISM AND THE REFORM ETHIC

American politics, like the politics of other societies, has been and remains a politics of personality and faction, class and region, interest group and ethnic group. To an extraordinary degree, however, it has also been and remains a politics of moralism and moral passion. American political values are embodied in the Creed, and efforts to realize those values in political behavior and institutions are a recurring theme in American history. Individually Americans have the responsibility to pursue the American dream and achieve what they can through their talents, character, and hard work. Collectively Americans have the responsibility to insure that their society is indeed the promised land. In theory, success in the reform of the individual could remove any need for the collective reform of society, and several great evangelists opposed social and political reforms precisely because they were not directed to the regeneration of the individual soul. In practice, however, the Great Awakenings in American history have been closely related to great periods of political reform in American history. These manifestations of "creedal passion" have been fundamentally shaped by the dissenting, evangelical nature of American Protestantism. Robert Bellah neatly summarizes its role:

Most of what is good and most of what is bad in our history is rooted in our public theology. Every movement to make America more fully

realize its professed values has grown out of some form of public theology, from the abolitionists to the social gospel and the early socialist party to the civil rights movement under Martin Luther King and the farm workers' movement under César Chávez. But so has every expansionist war and every form of oppression of racial minorities and immigrant groups.

Garry Wills concurs: "Religion has been at the center of our major political crises, which are always moral crises—the supporting and opposing of wars, of slavery, of corporate power, of civil rights, of sexual codes, of 'the West,' of American separatism and claims to empire."³¹

Historians identify four Great Awakenings in the history of American Protestantism, each of which was associated with and immediately followed by major efforts at political reform. Many political, economic, and ideational factors came together to create the American Revolution. Among the latter were Lockean liberalism, Enlightenment rationalism, and Whig republicanism. Also of central importance were the Revolution's religious sources, most notably the Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s. Led by George Whitefield and other revivalist preachers and provided with doctrine and justification by Jonathan Edwards, the Awakening swept across the colonies mobilizing thousands of Americans to commit themselves to a new birth in Christ. This religious upheaval laid the basis for the political upheaval that immediately followed. Although a revolution might well have occurred without the Awakening, the Revolution that did occur was grounded in the Awakening and significantly shaped by it. "The evangelical impulse," as the Harvard scholar Alan Heimert said, "was the avatar and instrument of a fervent American nationalism. In the evangelical churches of pre-Revolutionary America was forged that union of tribunes and people that was to characterize the early American Democracy." Substantial proportions of Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Baptists, involving close to half of the American people, "entertained millennial ideas," and these "millennialist denominations were also those that most solidly backed the American Revolution."³²

Although Americans varied in the degree to which they supported or

opposed it, the Awakening was the first popular movement to engage people from virtually all sects and denominations throughout the colonies. The Awakening's charismatic evangelist, Whitefield, preached from Georgia to New Hampshire and was the first truly *American* public figure. It thus created the experience and the environment for the trans-colony political movements that led to independence. It was the first unifying experience for Americans, generating a sense of national, distinct from provincial, consciousness. "The Revolution," John Adams observed in 1818, "was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people; a change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations." Echoing Adams, William McLoughlin concluded in 1973 that the Great Awakening was "the beginning of America's identity as a nation and the starting point of the Revolution."³³

The Second Great Awakening of the 1820s and 1830s was, as Robert Bellah says, "evangelical and revivalist," in effect the "second American revolution."³⁴ It was marked by the tremendous expansion of the Methodist and Baptist churches and by the formation of many new sects and denominations, including the Church of the Latter Day Saints. In the Second Great Awakening the counterpart to Whitefield was Charles G. Finney, who recruited tens of thousands of people into American churches and preached the need to "work as well as believe" and as a result generated a "mighty influence toward reform." Religious revivalism gave rise to multitudinous efforts at social and political improvement. As William Sweet describes it: "Societies were formed to advance the cause of temperance; to promote Sunday Schools; to save sailors at the ports and along the canals; to fight the use of tobacco; to improve the diet; to advance the cause of peace; to reform prisons; to stop prostitution; to colonize Negroes in Africa; to support education."³⁵ The most important child of the Awakening, however, was the abolitionist movement, which in the early 1830s took on new life, placed the slavery issue squarely on the national agenda, and for the next quarter century aroused and mobilized people in the cause of emancipation. When war came over that issue, soldiers from both North and South marched off to fight sure that their cause was God's cause. The depth of the religious dimension in that

conflict is reflected in the immense popularity in the North of the "Battle Hymn" crafted by Julia Ward Howe, which begins with a vision of "the glory of the coming of the Lord" and ends with the invocation of Christ: "As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free. While God is marching on."

The third Great Awakening got under way in the 1890s and was intimately linked with the populist and Progressive drives for social and political reform. The latter were suffused with Protestant morality and, as in the previous reform periods, the reformers stressed the moral necessity of eliminating the gap between institutions and ideals and creating a just and equitable society. The reformers attacked the concentrated power of corporate monopolies and big city machines and, in varying degrees, advocated antitrust measures, women's suffrage, the initiative, referendum, and recall, prohibition, regulation of railroads, the direct primary. Support for these reforms was strongest in the Midwest and far West, the areas of "Greater New England" to which the descendants of the Puritans had migrated and where the intellectual, social, and religious legacy of the Puritans predominated. The participants in the Progressive movement, Alan Grimes observes, generally believed in: "the superiority of native-born, white Americans; the superiority of Protestant, indeed Puritan, morality; and the superiority of a kind of populism, of some degree of direct control over the state and city machines, which, it was alleged, were dominated by the 'interests.'" ³⁶

The fourth Great Awakening originated in the 1950s and 1960s with the growth of evangelical Protestantism. This "Great Awakening," Sidney Ahlstrom argues, "left the human landscape [at least in America] profoundly changed."³⁷ It is associated with two reform movements in American politics. The first, beginning in the late 1950s, focused on the most obvious gap between American values and American reality, the legal and institutional discrimination against and segregation of America's black minority. It then led on to the general challenging of the institutions of established authority in the 1960s and 1970s, focused on the conduct of the Vietnam War and the abuse of power in the Nixon administration. In some cases, Protestant leaders and organizations, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, played central roles.

In other instances, as with New Left organizations, the movement was entirely secular in definition but equally intense in its moralism. The New Left, as one of its leaders said, in the early 1960s, "begins from moral values which are held as absolute."³⁸ The second and later manifestation was the conservative drive for reform in the 1980s and 1990s focusing on the need to reduce governmental authority, social welfare programs, and taxes while at the same time attempting to expand government restrictions on abortion.

Dissenting Protestantism has marked American foreign policy as well as its domestic politics. In conducting their foreign policy, most states give overwhelming priority to what are generally termed the "realist" concerns of power, security, and wealth. When push comes to shove, the United States does this too. Americans also, however, feel the need to promote in their relations with other societies and within those societies the moralistic goals they pursue at home. In the new republic before 1815, America's Founding Fathers debated and conducted its foreign relations overwhelmingly in realist terms. They led an extremely small republic bordered by possessions of the then great powers, Britain, France, and Spain, which were for most of these years fighting each other. In the course of fighting indecisive wars with Britain and France, intervening militarily in Spain's possessions, and doubling the size of their country by the Louisiana Purchase from Napoleon, America's leaders proved themselves adept practitioners of European-style power politics. With the end of the Napoleonic era, America was able to downgrade its realist concerns with power and security and pursue largely economic objectives in its foreign relations while concentrating its energies on the expansion and development of its own territory. In this phase, as Walter McDougall has argued, the purpose of Americans was indeed to make their country the promised land.

At the end of the nineteenth century, however, America emerged as a global power. This produced two conflicting developments. On the one hand, as a great power, America could not ignore the realities of power politics. To maintain its status and security it would presumably have to compete in a hard-nosed manner with the other great powers in the world, as it had not had to do and had been unable to do during most of

the nineteenth century. At the same time, its emergence as a great power also made it possible for America to promote abroad the moral values and principles on which it had aspired to build its society at home and which its weakness and isolation in the nineteenth century had prevented it from promoting abroad. The relation between realism and moralism thus became the central issue of American foreign policy in the twentieth century, as Americans, in McDougall's words, redefined their country from "promised land" to "crusader state."³⁹

Alexis de *Tocqueville*
Democracy **in America**

TRANSLATED, EDITED, AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

HARVEY C. MANSFIELD AND DELBA WINTHROP

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HARVEY C. MANSFIELD is the William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Government at Harvard University. Political philosopher and author, he is acknowledged as a leading translator of Machiavelli.

DELBA WINTHROP is Lecturer in Extension and administrator of the Program on Constitutional Government at Harvard University. Her articles and essays have appeared in numerous publications.

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cannot be confused with the freedom to write: the former is at once less necessary and more dangerous. A nation can set bounds for it without ceasing to be master of itself; it sometimes must do that to continue to be such." And further on I added: "One cannot conceal from oneself that unlimited freedom of association in political matters is, of all freedoms, the last that a people can tolerate. If it does not make it fall into anarchy, it makes it so to speak touch it at each instant."

Thus, I do not believe that a nation is always so much a master as to allow citizens the absolute right to associate in political matters, and I even doubt that there is any country, in any period, in which it would not be wise to set bounds for freedom of association.

Such and such a people, it is said, cannot maintain peace within itself, inspire respect for the laws, or found a lasting government if it does not confine the right of association within narrow limits. Such goods are doubtless precious, and I conceive that to acquire them or preserve them a nation consents to impose great hindrances temporarily; but still it is good for it to know precisely what these goods cost it.

If to save the life of a man one cuts off his arm, I understand it; but I do not want someone to assure me that he is going to show himself as *droit* as if he were not one-armed.

Chapter 8 HOW THE AMERICANS COMBAT INDIVIDUALISM BY THE DOCTRINE OF SELF-INTEREST WELL UNDERSTOOD*

When the world was led by a few powerful and wealthy individuals, these liked to form for themselves a sublime idea of the duties of man; they were pleased to profess that it is glorious to forget oneself and that it is fitting to do good without self-interest like God himself. This was the official doctrine of the time in the matter of morality.

I doubt that men were more virtuous in aristocratic centuries than in

*"Self-interest" translates the French *intérêt* when unmodified.

others, but it is certain that the beauties of virtue were constantly spoken of then; only in secret did they study the side on which it is useful. But as the imagination takes a less lofty flight and each man concentrates on himself, moralists become frightened at this idea of sacrifice and they no longer dare to offer it to the human mind; therefore they are reduced to inquiring whether the individual advantage of citizens would not be to work for the happiness of all, and when they have discovered one of the points where particular interest happens to meet the general interest and to be confounded with it, they hasten to bring it to light; little by little such observations are multiplied. What was only an isolated remark becomes a general doctrine, and one finally believes one perceives that man, in serving those like him, serves himself, and that his particular interest is to do good.

I have already shown in several places in this work how the inhabitants of the United States almost always know how to combine their own well-being with that of their fellow citizens.* What I want to remark here is the general theory by the aid of which they come to this.

In the United States it is almost never said that virtue is beautiful. They maintain that it is useful and they prove it every day. American moralists do not claim that one must sacrifice oneself to those like oneself because it is great to do it; but they say boldly that such sacrifices are as necessary to the one who imposes them on himself as to the one who profits from them.†

They have perceived that in their country and their time, man had been led back toward himself by an irresistible force, and losing hope of stopping him, they no longer dreamed of doing more than guiding him.

They therefore do not deny that each man can follow his interest, but they do their best to prove that the interest of each is to be honest.

I do not want to enter here into the details of their reasons, which would divert me from my subject; it suffices for me to say that they have convinced their fellow citizens.

Long ago Montaigne said, "When I do not follow the right path for the sake of righteousness, I follow it for having found by experience that all things considered, it is commonly the happiest and most useful."<‡

The doctrine of self-interest well understood is therefore not new;§ but among Americans of our day it has been universally accepted; it has become

* DA I 2.4, 2.6.

†The name of Benjamin Franklin is so obvious among these "American moralists" as to obscure all others.

‡Montaigne, "Of Glory," *Essays*, II 16.

§The actual phrase "self-interest well understood" was apparently first used by Etienne de Condillac in 1798; see his *Traité des animaux*, vol. 3, 453.

popular there: one finds it at the foundation of all actions; it pierces into all discussions. It is encountered not less in the mouth of the poor man than in that of the rich.

In Europe the doctrine of self-interest is much coarser than in America, but at the same time it is less widespread and above all shown less, and among us one still feigns great devotions every day that one has no longer.

Americans, on the contrary, are pleased to explain almost all the actions of their life with the aid of self-interest well understood; they complacently show how the enlightened love of themselves constantly brings them to aid each other and disposes them willingly to sacrifice a part of their time and their wealth to the good of the state. I think that in this it often happens that they do not do themselves justice; for one sometimes sees citizens in the United States as elsewhere abandoning themselves to the disinterested and unreflective sparks that are natural to man; but the Americans scarcely avow that they yield to movements of this kind; they would rather do honor to their philosophy than to themselves.

I could halt here and not try to judge what I have just described. The extreme difficulty of the subject would be my excuse. But I do not want to avail myself of that; and I prefer that my readers see my goal clearly and refuse to follow me rather than that I leave them in suspense.

Self-interest well understood is a doctrine not very lofty, but clear and sure. It does not seek to attain great objects; but it attains all those it aims for without too much effort. As it is within the reach of all intellects, each seizes it readily and retains it without trouble. Marvelously accommodating to the weaknesses of men, it obtains a great empire with ease, and preserves it without difficulty because it turns personal interest against itself, and to direct the passions, it makes use of the spur that excites them.

The doctrine of self-interest well understood does not produce great devotion; but it suggests little sacrifices each day; by itself it cannot make a man virtuous; but it forms a multitude of citizens who are regulated, temperate, moderate, farsighted, masters of themselves; and if it does not lead directly to virtue through the will, it brings them near to it insensibly through habits.

If the doctrine of self-interest well understood came to dominate the moral world entirely, extraordinary virtues would without doubt be rarer. But I also think that gross depravity would then be less common. The doctrine of self-interest well understood perhaps prevents some men from mounting far above the ordinary level of humanity; but many others who were falling below do attain it and are kept there. Consider some individuals, they are lowered. View the species, it is elevated.

I shall not fear to say that the doctrine of self-interest well understood seems to me of all philosophic theories the most appropriate to the needs of

men in our time, and that I see in it the most powerful guarantee against themselves that remains to them. The minds of the moralists of our day ought to turn, therefore, principally toward it. Even should they judge it imperfect, they would still have to adopt it as necessary.

I do not believe that, all in all, there is more selfishness among us than in America; the only difference is that there it is enlightened and here it is not. Each American knows how to sacrifice a part of his particular interests to save the rest. We want to keep everything, and often everything eludes us.

I see around me only people who seem to want to teach their contemporaries every day by their word and their example that the useful is never dishonest. Shall I therefore finally discover none who undertake to make them understand how honesty can be useful?

There is no power on earth that can prevent the growing equality of conditions from bringing the human spirit toward searching for the useful and from disposing each citizen to shrink within himself.

One must therefore expect that individual interest will become more than ever the principal if not the unique motive of men's actions; but it remains to know how each man will understand his individual interest.

If in becoming equal, citizens remained ignorant and coarse, it is difficult to foresee what stupid excess their selfishness could be brought to, and one cannot say in advance into what shameful miseries they would plunge for fear of sacrificing something of their well-being to the prosperity of those like them.

I do not believe that the doctrine of self-interest such as it is preached in America is evident in all its parts; but it contains a great number of truths so evident that it is enough to enlighten men so that they see them. Enlighten them, therefore, at any price; for the century of blind devotions and instinctive virtues is already fleeing far from us, and I see the time approaching when freedom, public peace, and social order itself will not be able to do without enlightenment.

Chapter 9 HOW THE AMERICANS APPLY THE DOCTRINE OF SELF-INTEREST WELL UNDERSTOOD IN THE MATTER OF RELIGION

If the doctrine of self-interest well understood had only this world in view, it would be far from sufficient; for there are a great number of sacrifices that can find their recompense only in the other world; and whatever effort of mind that one makes to prove the utility of virtue, it will always be hard to make a man who does not wish to die live well.

It is therefore necessary to know if the doctrine of self-interest well understood can be easily reconciled with religious beliefs.

The philosophers who teach this doctrine say to men that to be happy in life one ought to watch over one's passions and carefully repress their excesses; that one can acquire a lasting happiness only in refusing a thousand passing enjoyments, and finally that one must constantly triumph over oneself to serve oneself better.*

The founders of almost all religions have held to nearly the same language. Without indicating another route to men they have only moved the goal back; instead of placing the prize for the sacrifices they impose in this world, they have put it in the other.

Still, I refuse to believe that all those who practice virtue out of a spirit of religion act only in view of recompense.

I have encountered zealous Christians who constantly forget themselves in order to work with more ardor for the happiness of all, and I have heard them claim that they were only acting this way in order to merit the goods of the other world; but I cannot prevent myself from thinking that they deceive themselves. I respect them too much to believe them.

It is true that Christianity tells us that one must prefer others to oneself to gain Heaven; but Christianity tells us as well that one ought to do good to those like oneself out of love of God. That is a magnificent expression; man penetrates Divine thought by his intelligence; he sees that the goal of God is

*See among others, Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, 41, 48-50; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 15, 30, 31; John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, I 3, II 21; Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, XXI 20; David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, III 2.1; Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, II 3, IV 9, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, III 1, 5.

order; he freely associates himself with that great design; and all the while sacrificing his particular interests to the admirable order of all things, he expects no other recompense than the pleasure of contemplating it.

I therefore do not believe that the sole motive of religious men is interest; but I think that interest is the principal means religions themselves make use of to guide men, and I do not doubt that it is only from this side that they take hold of the crowd and become popular.

I therefore do not see clearly why the doctrine of self-interest well understood would turn men away from religious beliefs, and it seems to me, on the contrary, that I am sorting out how it brings them near to them.

I suppose that to attain happiness in this world, a man resists instinct in all encounters and reasons coldly about all the acts of his life, that instead of blindly yielding to the enthusiasm of his first desires, he has learned the art of combating them, and that he has been habituated to sacrificing without effort the pleasure of the moment to the permanent interest of his whole life.

If such a man has faith in the religion that he professes, it will scarcely cost him to submit himself to the hindrances that it imposes. Reason itself counsels him to do it, and custom has prepared him in advance to suffer it.

If he has conceived doubts about the object of his hopes, he will not easily allow them to stop him, and he will judge that it is wise to risk some of the goods of this world to preserve his rights to the immense inheritance that he has been promised in the other.

"In being deceived by believing the Christian religion to be true," Pascal said, "there is nothing great to lose, but what unhappiness in being wrong about believing it false!"*

Americans do not affect a coarse indifference to the other life; they do not put on a puerile pride by scorning the perils from which they hope to escape.

They therefore practice their religion without shame and without weakness; but one ordinarily sees even in the midst of their zeal something so tranquil, so methodical, so calculated, that it seems to be reason much more than heart that leads them to the foot of the altar.

Not only do Americans follow their religion out of interest, but they often place in this world the interest that one can have in following it. In the Middle Ages priests spoke only of the other life; they scarcely worried about proving that a sincere Christian can be a happy man here below.

But American preachers constantly come back to earth and only with great trouble can they take their eyes off it. To touch their listeners better, they make them see daily how religious beliefs favor freedom and public or-

* See Pascal, *Pensées*, 233 Br., for "Pascal's bet." But the words AT quotes were not found.

der, and it is often difficult to know when listening to them if the principal object of religion is to procure eternal felicity in the other world or well-being in this one.

Chapter 10 ON THE TASTE FOR MATERIAL WELL-BEING IN AMERICA

In America the passion for material well-being is not always exclusive, but it is general; if all do not experience it in the same manner, all do feel it. The care of satisfying the least needs of the body and of providing the smallest comforts of life preoccupies minds universally.

Something like this is more and more to be seen in Europe.

Among the causes that produce these similar effects in the two worlds there are several that come close to my subject and that I will point out.

When wealth is settled by inheritance in the same families, one sees a great number of men who enjoy material well-being without feeling the exclusive taste for well-being.

What attaches the human heart most keenly is not the peaceful possession of a precious object, but the imperfectly satisfied desire to possess it and the incessant fear of losing it.

In aristocratic societies the rich, never having known a state different from their own, do not fear changing it; they hardly imagine another. Material well-being is therefore not the goal of life for them; it is a manner of living. They consider it in a way like existence and enjoy it without thinking about it.

The natural and instinctive taste that all men feel for well-being thus being satisfied without trouble and without fear, their souls transport themselves elsewhere and apply themselves to some more difficult and greater undertaking that animates them and carries them along.

Thus even in the midst of material enjoyments, the members of an aristocracy often display a haughty scorn of these same enjoyments and find singular strength when they must at last be deprived of them. All revolutions that have troubled or destroyed aristocracies have shown with what facility people accustomed to the superfluous can do without the necessary, whereas men who have laboriously arrived at ease can hardly live after having lost it.

If I pass from the superior ranks to the lower classes, I shall see analogous effects produced by different causes.

In nations where the aristocracy dominates society and holds it immobile, the people in the end become habituated to poverty like the rich to their opulence. The latter are not preoccupied with material well-being because they possess it without trouble; the former do not think about it because they despair of acquiring it and because they are not familiar enough with it to desire it.

In these sorts of societies the imagination of the poor is thrown back upon the other world; the miseries of real life repress it, but it escapes them and goes to seek its enjoyments outside of it.

When, on the contrary, ranks are confused and privileges destroyed, when patrimonies are divided and enlightenment and freedom are spread, the longing to acquire well-being presents itself to the imagination of the poor man, and the fear of losing it, to the mind of the rich. A multitude of mediocre fortunes is established. Those who possess them have enough material enjoyments to conceive the taste for these enjoyments and not enough to be content with them. They never get them except with effort, and they indulge in them only while trembling.

They therefore apply themselves constantly to pursuing or keeping these enjoyments that are so precious, so incomplete, and so fleeting.

I seek a passion that is natural to men who are excited and limited by the obscurity of their origin or the mediocrity of their fortune, and I find none more appropriate than the taste for well-being. The passion for material well-being is essentially a middle-class passion; it grows larger and spreads with this class; it becomes preponderant with it. From there it reaches the higher ranks of society and descends within the people.

I did not encounter a citizen in America so poor that he did not cast a glance of hope and longing on the enjoyments of the rich and whose imagination was not seized in advance by the goods that fate was obstinately refusing him.

On the other hand, I never perceived that high-minded disdain for material well-being among the rich of the United States that is sometimes shown even within the most opulent and most dissolute aristocracies.

Most of these rich have been poor; they have felt the sting of need; they have long combated adverse fortune, and, now that victory is gained, the passions that accompanied the struggle survive it; they stand as if intoxicated in the midst of the little enjoyments that they have pursued for forty years.

It is not that in the United States as elsewhere one does not encounter a great enough number of the rich who, holding their goods by inheritance, possess effortlessly an opulence that they have not acquired. But even they do not show themselves less attached to the enjoyments of material life. Love of well-being has become the national and dominant taste; the great current

of human passions bears from this direction; it carries everything along in its course.

Chapter 11 ON THE PARTICULAR
EFFECTS THAT THE LOVE OF MATERIAL
ENJOYMENTS PRODUCES IN
DEMOCRATIC CENTURIES

One could believe, from what precedes, that the love of material enjoyments must constantly carry Americans along toward disorder in mores, trouble their families, and finally compromise the fate of society itself.

But it is not so: the passion for material enjoyments produces different effects within democracies than in aristocratic peoples.

It sometimes happens that the lassitude of affairs, the excess of wealth, the ruin of beliefs, the decadence of the state turn the heart of an aristocracy little by little toward material enjoyments alone. At other times, the power of the prince or the weakness of the people, without robbing the nobles of their fortune, forces them to turn away from power and, closing their way to great undertakings, abandons them to the restiveness of their desires; they then fall back heavily on themselves, and they seek forgetfulness of their past greatness in enjoyments of the body.

When the members of an aristocratic body thus turn exclusively toward love of material enjoyments, they ordinarily gather on this side alone all the energy that the long habit of power has given them.

For such men the search for well-being is not enough; they must have a sumptuous depravity and a brilliant corruption. They render magnificent worship to the material and they seem to want to vie with each other to excel in the art of besotting themselves.

The stronger, more glorious, and freer an aristocracy has been, the more it will then show itself depraved, and whatever the splendor of its virtues has been, I dare to predict that it will always be surpassed by the brilliance of its vices.

The taste for material enjoyments does not bring democratic peoples to similar excesses. There, the love of well-being shows itself to be a tenacious, exclusive, universal, but contained passion. It is not a question of building

vast palaces, of vanquishing and outwitting nature, of depleting the universe in order better to satiate the passions of a man; it is about adding a few toises to one's fields, planting an orchard, enlarging a residence, making life easier and more comfortable at each instant, preventing inconvenience, and satisfying the least needs without effort and almost without cost. [These objects are small, but the soul clings to them; it considers them every day and from very close; in the end they hide the rest of the world from it, and they sometimes come to place themselves between it and God.]

This, one will say, can only be applied to those citizens whose fortune is mediocre; the rich will show tastes analogous to those they used to display in aristocratic centuries. I contest that.

In the case of material enjoyments, the most opulent citizens of a democracy will not show tastes very different from those of the people, whether, having come from within the people, they really share them, or whether they believe they ought to submit to them. In democratic societies, the sensuality of the public has taken a certain moderate and tranquil style, to which all souls are held to conform. It is as difficult to escape the common rule by one's vices as by one's virtues.

The rich who live in the midst of democratic nations therefore aim at the satisfaction of their least needs rather than at extraordinary enjoyments; they gratify a multitude of small desires and do not give themselves over to any great disordered passion. They fall into softness rather than debauchery.

The particular taste that men of democratic centuries conceive for material enjoyments is not naturally opposed to order; on the contrary, it often needs order to be satisfied. Nor is it the enemy of regular mores; for good mores are useful to public tranquillity and favor industry. Often, indeed, it comes to be combined with a sort of religious morality; one wishes to be the best possible in this world without renouncing one's chances in the other.

Among material goods there are some whose possession is criminal; one takes care to abstain from them. There are others the use of which is permitted by religion and morality; to these one's heart, one's imagination, one's life are delivered without reserve; and in striving to seize them, one loses sight of the more precious goods that make the glory and the greatness of the human species.

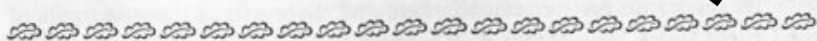
[What I reproach equality for is not that it carries men away in the pursuit of forbidden enjoyments; it is for absorbing them entirely in the search for permitted enjoyments.]

Thus there could well be established in the world a sort of honest materialism that does not corrupt souls, but softens them and in the end quietly loosens all their tensions.

regard only Heaven. I would be surprised if mysticism did not soon make progress in a people uniquely preoccupied with its own well-being.

It is said that the persecutions of the emperors and the tortures of the circus peopled the deserts of the Thebaid;* but I think that it was rather the delights of Rome and the Epicurean philosophy of Greece.

If the social state, circumstances, and laws did not restrain the American spirit so closely in the search for well-being, one might believe that when it came to be occupied with immaterial things, it would show more reserve and more experience and would moderate itself without trouble. But it feels itself imprisoned within limits from which it is seemingly not allowed to leave. As soon as it passes these limits, it does not know where to settle, and it often runs without stopping beyond the bounds of common sense.



Chapter 13 WHY THE AMERICANS SHOW THEMSELVES SO RESTIVE IN THE MIDST OF THEIR WELL-BEING

One still sometimes encounters small populations in certain secluded districts of the Old World that have been almost forgotten in the midst of the universal tumult and that have remained immobile when everything around them was moving. Most of these peoples are very ignorant and very miserable; they do not meddle in the affairs of government and often governments oppress them. Nevertheless, they ordinarily show a serene countenance, and they often let a playful humor appear.

In America I saw the freest and most enlightened men placed in the happiest condition that exists in the world; it seemed to me that a sort of cloud habitually covered their features; they appeared to me grave and almost sad even in their pleasures.

The principal reason for this is that the first do not think of the evils they endure, whereas the others dream constantly of the goods they do not have.

It is a strange thing to see with what sort of feverish ardor Americans pursue well-being and how they show themselves constantly tormented by a vague fear of not having chosen the shortest route that can lead to it.

* A region of Egypt, which was a province of the Roman Empire.

The inhabitant of the United States attaches himself to the goods of this world as if he were assured of not dying, and he rushes so precipitately to grasp those that pass within his reach that one would say he fears at each instant he will cease to live before he has enjoyed them. He grasps them all but without clutching them, and he soon allows them to escape from his hands so as to run after new enjoyments.

In the United States, a man carefully builds a dwelling in which to pass his declining years, and he sells it while the roof is being laid; he plants a garden and he rents it out just as he was going to taste its fruits; he clears a field and he leaves to others the care of harvesting its crops. He embraces a profession and quits it. He settles in a place from which he departs soon after so as to take his changing desires elsewhere. Should his private affairs give him some respite, he immediately plunges into the whirlwind of politics. And when toward the end of a year filled with work some leisure still remains to him, he carries his restive curiosity here and there within the vast limits of the United States. He will thus go five hundred leagues in a few days in order better to distract himself from his happiness.

Death finally comes, and it stops him before he has grown weary of this useless pursuit of a complete felicity that always flees from him.

One is at first astonished to contemplate the singular agitation displayed by so many happy men in the very midst of their abundance. This spectacle is, however, as old as the world; what is new is to see a whole people show it.

The taste for material enjoyments must be considered as the first source of this secret restiveness revealed in the actions of Americans and of the inconstancy of which they give daily examples.

He who has confined his heart solely to the search for the goods of this world is always in a hurry, for he has only a limited time to find them, take hold of them, and enjoy them. His remembrance of the brevity of life constantly spurs him. In addition to the goods that he possesses, at each instant he imagines a thousand others that death will prevent him from enjoying if he does not hasten. This thought fills him with troubles, fears, and regrets, and keeps his soul in a sort of unceasing trepidation that brings him to change his designs and his place at every moment.

If a social state in which law or custom no longer keeps anyone in his place is joined to the taste for material well-being, this too greatly excites further restiveness of spirit: one will then see men change course continuously for fear of missing the shortest road that would lead them to happiness.

Besides, it is easy to conceive that if men who passionately search for material enjoyments desire keenly, they will be easily discouraged; the final object being to enjoy, the means of arriving at it must be prompt and easy,

without which the trouble of acquiring the enjoyment would surpass the enjoyment. Most souls are, therefore, at once ardent and soft, violent and enervated. Often one dreads death less than continuing efforts toward the same goal.

Equality leads men by a still more direct path to several of the effects that I have just described.

When all the prerogatives of birth and fortune are destroyed, when all professions are open to all, and when one can reach the summit of each of them by oneself, an immense and easy course seems to open before the ambition of men, and they willingly fancy that they have been called to great destinies. But that is an erroneous view corrected by experience every day. The same equality that permits each citizen to conceive vast hopes renders all citizens individually weak. It limits their strength in all regards at the same time that it permits their desires to expand.

Not only are they impotent by themselves, but at each step they find immense obstacles that they had not at first perceived.

They have destroyed the annoying privileges of some of those like them; they come up against the competition of all. The barrier has changed form rather than place. When men are nearly alike and follow the same route, it is difficult indeed for any one of them to advance quickly and to penetrate the uniform crowd that surrounds him and presses against him.

The constant opposition reigning between the instincts that equality gives birth to and the means that it furnishes to satisfy them is tormenting and fatiguing to souls.

One can conceive of men having arrived at a certain degree of freedom that satisfies them entirely. They then enjoy their independence without restiveness and without ardor. But men will never found an equality that is enough for them.

Whatever a people's efforts, it will not succeed in making conditions perfectly equal within itself; and if it had the misfortune to reach this absolute and complete leveling, the inequality of intellects would still remain, which, coming directly from God, will always escape the laws.

However democratic the social state and political constitution of a people may be, one can therefore count on the fact that each of its citizens will always perceive near to him several positions in which he is dominated, and one can foresee that he will obstinately keep looking at this side alone. When inequality is the common law of a society, the strongest inequalities do not strike the eye; when everything is nearly on a level, the least of them wound it. That is why the desire for equality always becomes more insatiable as equality is greater.

In democratic peoples, men easily obtain a certain equality; they cannot

attain the equality they desire. It retreats before them daily but without ever evading their regard, and, when it withdraws, it attracts them in pursuit. They constantly believe they are going to seize it, and it constantly escapes their grasp. They see it from near enough to know its charms, they do not approach it close enough to enjoy it, and they die before having fully savored its sweetness.

It is to these causes that one must attribute the singular melancholy that the inhabitants of democratic lands often display amid their abundance, and the disgust with life that sometimes seizes them in the midst of an easy and tranquil existence.

In France one complains that the number of suicides is increasing; in America suicide is rare, but one is sure that madness is more common than everywhere else.

Those are different symptoms of the same malady.

Americans do not kill themselves, however agitated they may be, because religion forbids them from doing so, and because materialism so to speak does not exist among them, although the passion for material well-being is general.

Their will resists, but often their reason gives way.

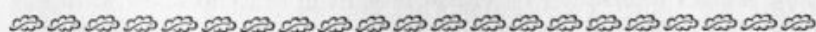
In democratic times, enjoyment is keener than in aristocratic centuries, and above all the number of those who taste it is infinitely greater; but on the other hand, one must recognize that hopes and desires are more often disappointed, souls more aroused and more restive, and cares more burning.

Chapter 14 HOW THE TASTE FOR MATERIAL ENJOYMENTS AMONG AMERICANS IS UNITED WITH LOVE OF FREEDOM AND WITH CARE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

When a democratic state turns to absolute monarchy, the activity previously directed to public and private affairs comes all at once to be concentrated on the latter, and for some time, great material prosperity results; but soon the movement slows and the development of production comes to a stop.

I do not know if one can cite a single manufacturing and commercial

He had forgotten them. He sometimes appears animated by the most selfish cupidity and sometimes by the most lively patriotism. The human heart cannot be divided in this manner. Inhabitants of the United States bear witness alternatively to a passion so strong and so similar for their well-being and for their freedom that it is to be believed these passions are united and intermingled at some place in their souls. In the Americans see in their freedom the best instrument and the greatest guarantee of their well-being. They love these two things for each other. They therefore do not think that meddling in the public is not their affair; they believe, on the contrary, that their principal affair is to secure by themselves a government that permits them to acquire the goods they desire and that does not prevent them from enjoying in peace those they have acquired.



Chapter 15 HOW RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AT TIMES TURN THE SOULS OF AMERICANS TOWARD IMMATERIAL ENJOYMENTS

In the United States, when the seventh day of each week arrives, the commercial and industrial life of the nation seems suspended; all noise ceases. A deep repose, or rather a sort of solemn meditation, follows; the soul finally comes back into possession of itself and contemplates itself.

During this day, places devoted to commerce are deserted; each citizen, surrounded by his children, goes to a church; there strange discourses are held for him that seem hardly made for his ears. He is informed of the innumerable evils caused by pride and covetousness. He is told of the necessity of regulating his desires, of the delicate enjoyments attached to virtue alone, and of the true happiness that accompanies it.

Once back in his dwelling, one does not see him run to his business accounts. He opens the book of the Holy Scriptures; in it he finds sublime or moving depictions of the greatness and the goodness of the Creator, of the infinite magnificence of the works of God, of the lofty destiny reserved for men, of their duties, and of their rights to immortality.

Thus at times the American in a way steals away from himself, and as he is torn away for a moment from the small passions that agitate his life and the passing interests that fill it, he at once enters into an ideal world in which all is great, pure, eternal.

In another place in this work* I sought the causes to which one must attribute the maintenance of Americans' political institutions, and religion appeared to me one of the principal ones. Now that I am occupied with individuals, I find it again and I perceive that it is not less useful to each citizen than to the entire state.

Americans show by their practice that they feel every necessity of making democracy more moral by means of religion. What they think in this regard about themselves is a truth with which every democratic nation ought to be instilled.

I do not doubt that the social and political constitution of a people disposes it to certain beliefs and tastes which then become abundant without difficulty; whereas these same causes turn it away from certain opinions and penchants without working at it and so to speak without suspecting it.

The whole art of the legislator consists in discerning well and in advance these natural inclinations of human societies in order to know when one must aid the efforts of citizens and when it would rather be necessary to slow them down. For these obligations differ according to the times. Only the goal toward which the human race should always tend is unmoving; the means of getting it there vary constantly.

If I had been born in an aristocratic century, in the midst of a nation where the hereditary wealth of some and the irremediable poverty of others equally turned men from the idea of [something] better and held their souls almost numb in the contemplation of another world, I would wish it possible for me to stimulate the sentiment of needs among such a people; I would think of discovering the most rapid and easiest means of satisfying the new desires that I had made to arise, and, turning the greatest efforts of the human mind toward physical studies, I would try to excite it with the search for well-being.

If it happened that some men were inflamed inconsiderately by the pursuit of wealth and displayed an excessive love for material enjoyments, I would not be alarmed; these particular features would soon disappear in the common physiognomy [of men]. why?

Legislators of democracies have other cares.

Give democratic peoples enlightenment and freedom and leave them alone. With no trouble they will succeed in taking all the goods from this world that it can offer; they will perfect each of the useful arts and render life more comfortable, easier, milder every day; their social state naturally pushes them in this direction. I do not fear they will stop.

But while man takes pleasure in this honest and legitimate search for well-

* DA I 2.9.

being, it is to be feared that he will finally lose the use of his most sublime faculties, and that by wishing to improve everything around him, he will finally degrade himself. The peril is there, not elsewhere.

Legislators of democracies and all honest and enlightened men who live in them must therefore apply themselves relentlessly to raising up souls and keeping them turned toward Heaven. It is necessary for all those who are interested in the future of democratic societies to unite, and for all in concert to make continuous efforts to spread within these societies a taste for the infinite, a sentiment of greatness, and a love of immaterial pleasures.

If one encounters among the opinions of a democratic people some of those harmful theories that tend to make it believed that everything perishes with the body, consider the men who profess them as the natural enemies of this people.

There are many things that offend me in the materialists. Their doctrines appear to me pernicious and their haughtiness revolts me. If their system could be of some utility to man, it seems that it would be in giving him a modest idea of himself. But they do not make anyone see that this should be so; and when they believe they have sufficiently established that they are only brutes, they show themselves as proud as if they had demonstrated they were gods.

Materialism is a dangerous malady of the human mind in all nations; but one must dread it particularly in a democratic people because it combines marvelously with the most familiar vice of the heart in these peoples.

Democracy favors the taste for material enjoyments. This taste, if it becomes excessive, soon disposes men to believe that all is nothing but matter; and materialism in its turn serves to carry them toward these enjoyments with an insane ardor. Such is the fatal circle into which democratic nations are propelled. It is good for them to see the peril and restrain themselves.

Most religions are only general, simple, and practical means of teaching men the immortality of the soul. That is the greatest advantage that a democratic people derives from beliefs, and it is what renders them more necessary to such a people than to all others.

Therefore when any religion whatsoever has cast deep roots within a democracy, guard against shaking it; but rather preserve it carefully as the most precious inheritance from aristocratic centuries; do not seek to tear men from their old religious opinions to substitute new ones, for fear that, in the passage from one faith to another, the soul finding itself for a moment empty of belief, the love of material enjoyments will come to spread through it and fill it entirely.

Surely, metempsychosis is not more reasonable than materialism; however, if a democracy absolutely had to make a choice between the two, I would

not hesitate, and I would judge that its citizens risk brutalizing themselves less by thinking that their soul is going to pass into the body of a pig than in believing it is nothing.

Belief in an immaterial and immortal principle, united for a time with matter, is so necessary to the greatness of man that it produces beautiful acts even when one does not join to it an opinion in favor of rewards and punishments, and when one is limited to believing that after death the divine contained in man is absorbed into God or is going to animate another

one. They consider the body the secondary and inferior portion of themselves, and scorn it even as they fall under its influence, whereas they love themselves and a secret admiration for the immaterial part of themselves. Sometimes they refuse to submit to its empire. This is a noble and elevated turn to their ideas and their tastes, and they turn earnestly and almost by themselves toward the immaterial.

The Platonic school had decided opinions about the immaterial part of life; but the sole belief on which they were acting in common with the body and the material was the Platonic philosophy the sort of subjective idealism.

They receive that in the times prior to him, and they who extolled materialism. These writers have not only very incompletely. Thus it has been said that the great literary reputations have been sustained by the taste of the human race sustain this taste. They make the men themselves, and they make the men themselves. One must therefore not believe that, at the present condition, the passion for material enjoyment can be enough for a whole people. The material opposes; it can at once contain a taste for the immaterial of those of Heaven; sometimes it seems to be a mixture of the two; but it is never long before it

is particularly important in times of democracy to say that it is not easy to say what those who govern should do to make them reign.

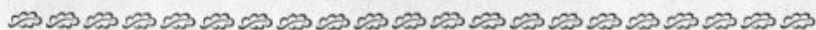
It is not any more than the longevity of official life. In all regions, I have always thought that if some one should serve the interests of political power, they would become fatal to the Church.

Nor am I in the number of those who judge that to elevate religion in the eyes of peoples and to put the spiritualism that it professes in honor, it is good to give its ministers indirectly a political influence that the law refuses them.

I feel myself so sensitive to the almost inevitable dangers that beliefs risk when their interpreters mix in public affairs, and I am so convinced that one must maintain Christianity within the new democracies at all cost, that I would rather chain priests in the sanctuary than allow them to leave it.

What means, therefore, remain to authority to bring men back toward spiritualist opinions or to keep them in the religion that evokes them?

What I am going to say is indeed going to harm me in the eyes of politicians. I believe that the only efficacious means governments can use to put the dogma of the immortality of the soul in honor is to act every day as if they themselves believed it; and I think it is only in conforming scrupulously to religious morality in great affairs that they can flatter themselves they are teaching citizens to know it, love it, and respect it in small ones.



Chapter 16 HOW THE EXCESSIVE LOVE OF WELL-BEING CAN BE HARMFUL TO WELL-BEING

There is more of a bond than one would think between perfecting the soul and improving the goods of the body; man can leave these two things distinct and view each of them alternately; but he cannot separate them entirely without finally losing sight of both.

Beasts have the same senses as we and nearly the same lusts: there are no material passions that are not common to us and them, of which the seed is not as much in a dog as in ourselves.

How, therefore, does it come about that animals know only how to provide for their first and coarsest needs, whereas we vary our enjoyments infinitely and increase them constantly?

What renders us superior to the beasts in this is that we employ our souls in finding the material goods toward which instinct alone leads them. In men, the angel teaches the brute the art of satisfying itself. It is because man is capable of elevating himself above the goods of the body and of scorning

even life—of which beasts do not have any idea—that he knows how to multiply these same goods to a degree that they cannot conceive of.

All that elevates, enlarges, extends the soul renders it more capable of succeeding in the very one of its undertakings that does not concern it.

All that enervates it, on the contrary, or debases it, weakens it for all things, the principal ones as well as the least, and threatens to render it almost as powerless for the latter as for the former. Thus the soul must remain great and strong, if only to be able from time to time to put its force and its greatness in the service of the body.

If men ever came to be contented with material goods, it is to be believed that little by little they would lose the art of producing them, and that in the end they would enjoy them without discernment and without progress, like brutes.

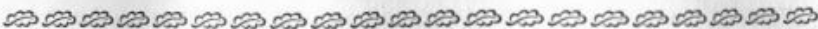
Chapter 17 HOW IN TIMES OF EQUALITY
AND DOUBT IT IS IMPORTANT TO MOVE
BACK THE OBJECT OF HUMAN ACTIONS

In centuries of faith the final goal of life is placed after life.

Men of those times are therefore accustomed naturally, and so to speak without wanting it, to consider for a long succession of years an unmoving object toward which they constantly advance, and they learn by insensible progressions to repress a thousand little passing desires the better to succeed in satisfying the great and permanent desire that torments them. When the same men want to occupy themselves with earthly things, these habits are found again. They willingly settle on a general and certain goal for their actions here below, toward which all their efforts are directed. One does not see them engage in new attempts every day; but they have fixed designs that they do not grow weary of pursuing.

This explains why religious peoples have often accomplished such lasting things. In occupying themselves with the other world they encountered the great secret of succeeding in this one.

Religions supply the general habit of behaving with a view to the future. In this they are no less useful to happiness in this life than to felicity in the other. It is one of their greatest political aspects.



Chapter 18 WHY AMONG THE AMERICANS ALL HONEST PROFESSIONS ARE REPUTED HONORABLE

In democratic peoples, where there is no hereditary wealth, everyone works to live, or has worked, or was born of people who worked. The idea of work as a necessary, natural, and honest condition of humanity is therefore offered to the human mind on every side.

Not only is work not held in dishonor among these peoples, but it is held in honor; the prejudice is not against it but for it. In the United States, a rich man believes that he owes it to public opinion to devote his leisure to some operation of industry or commerce or to some public duty. He would deem himself disreputable if he used his life only for living. It is to escape this obligation of work that so many rich Americans come to Europe: there they find the debris of aristocratic societies among which idleness is still honored.

Equality not only rehabilitates the idea of work, it uplifts the idea of working to procure lucre.

In aristocracies, it is not precisely work that is scorned, but work with a view to profit. Work is glorious when ambition or virtue alone makes one undertake it. Under aristocracy, nevertheless, it constantly happens that he who works for honor is not insensitive to the lure of gain. But these two desires meet only in the depth of his soul. He takes much care to conceal from all regard the place where they unite. He willingly hides it from himself. In aristocratic countries there is scarcely a public official who does not claim to serve the state without interest. Their wages are a detail they sometimes think little of and always affect not to think of.

Thus the idea of gain remains distinct from that of work. No matter that they are joined in fact, the past separates them.

In democratic societies, these two ideas are, on the contrary, always visibly united. As the desire for well-being is universal, as fortunes are mediocre and transient, as each needs to increase his resources or to prepare new ones for his children, all see very clearly that gain is, if not all, at least part of what brings them to work. The very ones who act principally with a view to glory are bound to be tamed with the thought that they do not act solely with this in view, and they discover, despite their wishes, that the desire to live is mixed with the desire to give luster to their lives.

From the moment when, on the one hand, work seems to all citizens an

honorable necessity of the human condition, and when, on the other hand, work is always visibly done wholly or in part for the consideration of a wage, the immense space that separated the different professions in aristocratic societies disappears. If they are not all similar, they at least have one like feature.

There is no profession in which one does not work for money. The wage common to all gives a family resemblance to all.

This serves to explain the opinions that Americans entertain relative to the various professions.

American servants do not believe themselves degraded because they work; for everyone around them works. They do not feel themselves debased by the idea that they receive a wage, for the President of the United States works for a wage as well. He is paid to command just as they are to serve.

In the United States professions are more or less onerous, more or less lucrative, but they are never high or low. Every honest profession is honorable.

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## *Chapter 19* WHAT MAKES ALMOST ALL AMERICANS INCLINE TOWARD INDUSTRIAL PROFESSIONS

I do not know if agriculture, of all the useful arts, is not the one perfected least quickly in democratic nations. Often one would even say that it is stationary because several others seem to run ahead.

On the contrary, almost all the tastes and habits that are born of equality naturally lead men toward commerce and industry.

Let me imagine a man who is active, enlightened, free, at ease, full of desires. He is too poor to be able to live in idleness; he is rich enough to feel himself above the immediate fear of need, and he thinks of improving his lot. This man has conceived the taste for material enjoyments; a thousand others abandon themselves to this taste before his eyes; he himself has begun to indulge it, and he burns to increase the means of satisfying it more. Nevertheless, life passes, time presses. What is he to do?

Cultivation of the earth promises almost certain, but slow, results for his efforts. One is enriched by it only little by little and with difficulty. Agriculture suits only the rich who already have a great superfluity, or the poor who