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.

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Chapter 1 WHY DEMOCRATIC PEOPLES SHOW A MORE ARDENT AND MORE LASTING LOVE FOR EQUALITY THAN FOR FREEDOM

The first and most lively of the passions to which equality of conditions gives birth, I have no need to say, is the love of this same equality. One will therefore not be astonished if I speak of that before all the others.

Everyone has remarked that in our time, and especially in France, this passion for equality holds a greater place in the human heart each day. It has been said a hundred times that our contemporaries have a much more ardent and tenacious love for equality than for freedom, but I do not find that anyone has yet gone back sufficiently to the causes of this fact. I am going to try.

One can imagine an extreme point at which freedom and equality touch each other and intermingle.

Let me suppose that all citizens concur in the government and that each has an equal right to concur in it.

Then with none differing from those like him, no one will be able to exercise a tyrannical power; men will be perfectly free because they will all be entirely equal; and they will all be perfectly equal because they will be entirely free. This is the ideal toward which democratic peoples tend.

That is the most complete form that equality can take on earth; but there are a thousand others, not as perfect, that are scarcely less dear to these peoples.

Equality can be established in civil society and not reign in the political world. One can have the right to indulge in the same pleasures, to enter the same professions, to meet in the same places; in a word, to live in the same manner and pursue wealth by the same means, without having all take the same part in government.

A sort of equality can even be established in the political world although there may be no political freedom. One might be equal to all those like him except the one who is, without any distinction, the master of all and who picks the agents of his power equally from among all.

It would be easy to make several other hypotheses by which a very great quantity [of equality] could easily be combined with more or less free institutions or even with institutions that were not free at all.

Although men cannot become absolutely equal without being entirely

free, and consequently equality in its most extreme degree becomes confused with freedom, yet there is a foundation for distinguishing one from the other.

The taste that men have for freedom and the one they feel for equality are in fact two distinct things, and I do not fear to add that among democratic peoples they are two unequal things.

If one wishes to pay attention to it, one will see that in each century one encounters a singular and dominating fact to which all the others are connected; this fact almost always gives rise to a mother idea, or a principal passion, that in the end attracts and carries along in its course all sentiments and all ideas. It is like a great river toward which each of the surrounding streams seems to run.

Freedom has manifested itself to men in different times and in different forms; it is not attached exclusively to one social state, and one encounters it elsewhere than in democracies. It therefore cannot form the distinctive characteristic of democratic centuries.

The particular and dominating fact that makes those centuries unique is equality of conditions; the principal passion that agitates men in those times is the love of this equality.

Do not ask what unique charm men in democratic ages find in living as equals, or the particular reasons that they can have for being so obstinately attached to equality rather than to the other goods that society presents to them: equality forms the distinctive characteristic of the period they live in; that alone is enough to explain why they prefer it to all the rest.

But independent of this reason, there are several others that will usually bring men in all times to prefer equality to freedom.

If a people could ever succeed by itself in destroying or even diminishing the equality that reigned within it, it would arrive at that only by long and painful efforts. It would have to modify its social state, abolish its laws, renew its ideas, change its habits, alter its mores. But to lose political freedom, it is enough not to hold on to it, and it escapes.

Men, therefore, do not hold to equality only because it is dear to them; they are also attached to it because they believe that it will last forever.

Political freedom in its excesses is able to compromise the tranquillity, the patrimony, the lives of particular persons—and one encounters no men so limited and so flighty as not to realize this. On the contrary, only attentive and clairvoyant people perceive the perils with which equality threatens us, and ordinarily they avoid pointing them out. They know that the miseries they fear are remote, and flatter themselves that they will overtake only generations to come, which the present generation scarcely worries about. The evils that freedom brings are sometimes immediate; they are visible to all, and all more or less feel them. The evils that extreme equality can produce

become manifest only little by little; they insinuate themselves gradually into the social body; one sees them only now and then, and at the moment when they have become most violent, habit has already made them no longer felt.

The goods that freedom brings show themselves only in the long term, and it is always easy to fail to recognize the cause that gives birth to them.

The advantages of equality make themselves felt from now on, and each day one sees them flow from their source.

From time to time political freedom gives a certain number of citizens sublime pleasures.

Equality furnishes a multitude of little enjoyments daily to each man. The charms of equality are felt at all moments, and they are within reach of all; the noblest hearts are not insensitive to them, and the most vulgar souls get their delights from them. The passion to which equality gives birth will therefore be both energetic and general.

Men cannot enjoy political freedom unless they purchase it with some sacrifices, and they never get possession of it except with many efforts. But the pleasures brought by equality offer themselves. Each little incident of private life seems to give birth to them, and to taste them, one needs only to be alive.

Democratic peoples love equality at all times, but in certain periods, they press the passion they feel for it to delirium. This happens at the moment when the old social hierarchy, long threatened, is finally destroyed after a last internecine struggle, and the barriers that separated citizens are finally overturned. Then men rush at equality as at a conquest, and they become attached to it as to a precious good someone wants to rob them of. The passion for equality penetrates all parts of the human heart; there it spreads, and fills it entirely. Do not say to men that in giving themselves over so blindly to an exclusive passion, they compromise their dearest interests; they are deaf. Do not show them that freedom escapes from their hands while they are looking elsewhere; they are blind, or rather they perceive only one good in the whole universe worth longing for.

What precedes applies to all democratic nations. What follows regards only us.

In most modern nations and in particular in all the peoples of the continent of Europe, the taste for and idea of freedom began to arise and to develop only at the moment when conditions began to be equalized and as a consequence of that very equality. It was the absolute kings who worked the most at leveling the ranks among their subjects. In these peoples, equality preceded freedom; equality was therefore an old fact when freedom was still a new thing; the one had already created opinions, usages, laws proper to it when the other was produced alone and for the first time in broad daylight.

Thus the latter existed still only in ideas and tastes, whereas the former had already penetrated habits, taken hold of mores, and given a particular turn to the least acts of life. How be astonished if men of our day prefer the one to the other?

I think that democratic peoples have a natural taste for freedom; left to themselves they seek it, they love it, and they will see themselves parted from it only with sorrow. But for equality they have an ardent, insatiable, eternal, invincible passion; they want equality in freedom, and, if they cannot get it, they still want it in slavery. They will tolerate poverty, enslavement, barbarism, but they will not tolerate aristocracy.

This is true in all times, and above all in ours. All men and all powers that wish to struggle against this irresistible power will be overturned and destroyed by it. In our day freedom cannot be established without its support, and despotism itself cannot reign without it.

Chapter 2 ON INDIVIDUALISM IN DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES

I have brought out how, in centuries of equality, each man seeks his beliefs in himself;* I want to show how, in the same centuries, he turns all his sentiments toward himself alone.

Individualism is a recent expression† arising from a new idea. Our fathers knew only selfishness.

Selfishness is a passionate and exaggerated love of self that brings man to relate everything to himself alone and to prefer himself to everything.

Individualism is a reflective and peaceable sentiment that disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of those like him and to withdraw to one side with his family and his friends, so that after having thus created a little society for his own use, he willingly abandons society at large to itself.

Selfishness is born of a blind instinct; individualism proceeds from an erroneous judgment rather than a depraved sentiment. It has its source in the defects of the mind as much as in the vices of the heart.

*DA II 1.1.

†This is the first occurrence in *DA* of the word "individualism," a new word not coined by AT, but defined and developed by him. See Schleifer, *The Making of Tocqueville's "Democracy in America,"* 251–259.

Selfishness withers the seed of all the virtues; individualism at first dries up only the source of public virtues; but in the long term it attacks and destroys all the others and will finally be absorbed in selfishness.

Selfishness is a vice as old as the world. It scarcely belongs more to one form of society than to another.

Individualism is of democratic origin, and it threatens to develop as conditions become equal.

In aristocratic peoples, families remain in the same state for centuries, and often in the same place. That renders all generations so to speak contemporaries. A man almost always knows his ancestors and respects them; he believes he already perceives his great-grandsons and he loves them. He willingly does his duty by both, and he frequently comes to sacrifice his personal enjoyments for beings who no longer exist or who do not yet exist.

In addition, aristocratic institutions have the effect of binding each man tightly to several of his fellow citizens.

Classes being very distinct and immobile within an aristocratic people, each of them becomes for whoever makes up a part of it a sort of little native country, more visible and dearer than the big one.

As in aristocratic societies all citizens are placed at a fixed post, some above the others, it results also that each of them always perceives higher than himself a man whose protection is necessary to him, and below he finds another whom he can call upon for cooperation.

Men who live in aristocratic centuries are therefore almost always bound in a tight manner to something that is placed outside of them, and they are often disposed to forget themselves. It is true that in these same centuries the general notion of *those like oneself* is obscure and that one scarcely thinks of devoting oneself to the cause of humanity; but one often sacrifices oneself for certain men.

In democratic centuries, on the contrary, when the duties of each individual toward the species are much clearer, devotion toward one man becomes rarer: the bond of human affections is extended and loosened.

In democratic peoples, new families constantly issue from nothing, others constantly fall into it, and all those who stay on change face; the fabric of time is torn at every moment and the trace of generations is effaced. You easily forget those who have preceded you, and you have no idea of those who will follow you. Only those nearest have interest.

As each class comes closer to the others and mixes with them, its members become indifferent and almost like strangers among themselves. Aristocracy had made of all citizens a long chain that went from the peasant up to the king; democracy breaks the chain and sets each link apart.

As conditions are equalized, one finds a great number of individuals who,

not being wealthy enough or powerful enough to exert a great influence over the fates of those like them, have nevertheless acquired or preserved enough enlightenment and goods to be able to be self-sufficient. These owe nothing to anyone, they expect so to speak nothing from anyone; they are in the habit of always considering themselves in isolation, and they willingly fancy that their whole destiny is in their hands.

Thus not only does democracy make each man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants from him and separates him from his contemporaries; it constantly leads him back toward himself alone and threatens finally to confine him wholly in the solitude of his own heart.

Chapter 3 HOW INDIVIDUALISM IS GREATER AT THE END OF A DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION THAN IN ANY OTHER PERIOD

It is above all at the moment when a democratic society succeeds in forming itself on the debris of an aristocracy that this isolation of men from one another and the selfishness resulting from it strike one's regard most readily.

These societies not only contain many independent citizens, they are filled daily with men who, having arrived at independence yesterday, are drunk with their new power: these conceive a presumptuous confidence in their strength, and not imagining that from now on they could need to call upon the assistance of those like them, they have no difficulty in showing that they think only of themselves.

An aristocracy ordinarily succumbs only after a prolonged struggle, during which implacable hatreds among the different classes are ignited. These passions survive victory, and one can follow their track in the midst of the democratic confusion that succeeds it.

Those among the citizens who were the first in the hierarchy that has been destroyed cannot immediately forget their former greatness; for a long time they consider themselves strangers within the new society. They see all the equals that this society gives them as oppressors whose destiny cannot excite their sympathy; they have lost sight of their former equals and no longer feel bound by a common interest to their fates; each, in withdrawing separately,

therefore believes himself reduced to being occupied only with himself. Those, on the contrary, who were formerly placed at the bottom of the social scale, and whom a sudden revolution has brought to the common level, enjoy their newly acquired independence only with a sort of secret restiveness; if they find some of their former superiors at their side, they cast looks of triumph and fear at them, and draw apart from them.

It is, therefore, ordinarily at the origin of democratic societies that citizens show themselves the most disposed to isolate themselves.

Democracy inclines men not to get close to those like themselves; but democratic revolutions dispose them to flee each other and to perpetuate in the heart of equality the hatreds to which inequality gave birth.

The great advantage of the Americans is to have arrived at democracy without having to suffer democratic revolutions, and to be born equal instead of becoming so.

Chapter 4 HOW THE AMERICANS COMBAT INDIVIDUALISM WITH FREE INSTITUTIONS

Despotism, which in its nature is fearful, sees the most certain guarantee of its own duration in the isolation of men, and it ordinarily puts all its care into isolating them. There is no vice of the human heart that agrees with it as much as selfishness: a despot readily pardons the governed for not loving him, provided that they do not love each other. He does not ask them to aid him in leading the state; it is enough that they do not aspire to direct it themselves. He calls those who aspire to unite their efforts to create common prosperity turbulent and restive spirits, and changing the natural sense of words, he names those who confine themselves narrowly to themselves good citizens.

Thus the vices to which despotism gives birth are precisely those that equality favors. These two things complement and aid each other in a fatal manner.

Equality places men beside one another without a common bond to hold them. Despotism raises barriers between them and separates them. It disposes them not to think of those like themselves, and for them it makes a sort of public virtue of indifference.

Despotism, which is dangerous in all times, is therefore particularly to be feared in democratic centuries.

It is easy to see that in these same centuries men have a particular need of freedom.

When citizens are forced to be occupied with public affairs, they are necessarily drawn from the midst of their individual interests, and from time to time, torn away from the sight of themselves.

From the moment when common affairs are treated in common, each man perceives that he is not as independent of those like him as he at first fancied, and that to obtain their support he must often lend them his cooperation.

When the public governs, there is no man who does not feel the value of public benevolence and who does not seek to capture it by attracting the esteem and affection of those in the midst of whom he must live.

Several of the passions that chill and divide hearts are then obliged to withdraw to the bottom of the soul and hide there. Haughtiness dissimulates; contempt does not dare come to light. Selfishness is afraid of itself.

Under a free government, since most public functions are elective, men who by the loftiness of their souls or the restiveness of their desires are cramped in private life, feel every day that they cannot do without the populace surrounding them.

It then happens that through ambition one thinks of those like oneself, and that often one's interest is in a way found in forgetting oneself. I know that one can object to me here with all the intrigues that arise in an election, the shameful means the candidates often make use of, and the calumnies their enemies spread. These are occasions for hatred, and they present themselves all the more often as elections become more frequent.

These evils are undoubtedly great, but they are passing, whereas the goods that arise with them stay.

The longing to be elected can momentarily bring certain men to make war on each other, but in the long term this same desire brings all men to lend each other a mutual support; and if it happens that an election accidentally divides two friends, the electoral system brings together in a permanent manner a multitude of citizens who would have always remained strangers to one another. Freedom creates particular hatreds, but despotism gives birth to general indifference.

The Americans have combated the individualism to which equality gives birth with freedom, and they have defeated it.

The legislators of America did not believe that, to cure a malady so natural to the social body in democratic times and so fatal, it was enough to accord to the nation as a whole a representation of itself; they thought that, in addi-

tion, it was fitting to give political life to each portion of the territory in order to multiply infinitely the occasions for citizens to act together and to make them feel every day that they depend on one another.

This was wisely done.

The general affairs of a country occupy only the principal citizens. They assemble in the same places only from time to time; and as it often happens that afterwards they lose sight of each other, lasting bonds among them are not established. But when it is a question of having the particular affairs of a district regulated by the men who inhabit it, the same individuals are always in contact and they are in a way forced to know each other and to take pleasure in each other.

Only with difficulty does one draw a man out of himself to interest him in the destiny of the whole state, because he understands poorly the influence that the destiny of the state can exert on his lot. But should it be necessary to pass a road through his property, he will see at first glance that he has come across a relation between this small public affair and his greatest private affairs, and he will discover, without anyone's showing it to him, the tight bond that here unites a particular interest to the general interest.

Thus by charging citizens with the administration of small affairs, much more than by leaving the government of great ones to them, one interests them in the public good and makes them see the need they constantly have for one another in order to produce it.

One can capture the favor of a people all at once by a striking action; but to win the love and respect of the populace that surrounds you, you must have a long succession of little services rendered, obscure good offices, a constant habit of benevolence, and a well-established reputation of disinterestedness.

Local freedoms, which make many citizens put value on the affection of their neighbors and those close to them, therefore constantly bring men closer to one another, despite the instincts that separate them, and force them to aid each other.

In the United States, the most opulent citizens take much care not to isolate themselves from the people; on the contrary, they constantly come close to them, they gladly listen to them and speak to them every day. They know that the rich in democracies always need the poor, and that in democratic times one ties the poor to oneself more by manners than by benefits. The very greatness of the benefits, which brings to light the difference in conditions, causes a secret irritation to those who profit from them; but simplicity of manners has almost irresistible charms: their familiarity carries one away and even their coarseness does not always displease.

At first this truth does not penetrate the minds of the rich. They ordinarily

resist it as long as the democratic revolution lasts, and they do not accept it immediately even after this revolution is accomplished. They willingly consent to do good for the people, but they want to continue to hold them carefully at a distance. They believe that is enough; they are mistaken. They would thus ruin themselves without warming the hearts of the population that surrounds them. It does not ask of them the sacrifice of their money, but of their haughtiness.

One would say that in the United States there is no imagination that does not exhaust itself in inventing the means of increasing wealth and satisfying the needs of the public. The most enlightened inhabitants of each district constantly make use of their enlightenment to discover new secrets appropriate to increasing the common prosperity; and when they have found any, they hasten to pass them along to the crowd.

When examining up close the vices and weakness often displayed in America by those who govern, one is astonished at the growing prosperity of the people—and one is wrong. It is not the elected magistrate who makes American democracy prosper; but it prospers because the magistrate is elective.

It would be unjust to believe that the patriotism of the Americans and the zeal that each of them shows for the well-being of his fellow citizens have nothing real about them. Although private interest directs most human actions, in the United States as elsewhere, it does not rule all.

I must say that I often saw Americans make great and genuine sacrifices for the public, and I remarked a hundred times that, when needed, they almost never fail to lend faithful support to one another.

The free institutions that the inhabitants of the United States possess and the political rights of which they make so much use recall to each citizen constantly and in a thousand ways that he lives in society. At every moment they bring his mind back toward the idea that the duty as well as the interest of men is to render themselves useful to those like them; and as he does not see any particular reason to hate them, since he is never either their slave or their master, his heart readily leans to the side of benevolence. One is occupied with the general interest at first by necessity and then by choice; what was calculation becomes instinct; and by dint of working for the good of one's fellow citizens, one finally picks up the habit and taste of serving them.

Many people in France consider equality of conditions as the first evil and political freedom as the second. When they are obliged to submit to the one, they strive at least to escape the other. And I say that to combat the evils that equality can produce there is only one efficacious remedy: it is political freedom.

Chapter 5 ON THE USE THAT THE AMERICANS MAKE OF ASSOCIATION IN CIVIL LIFE

I do not wish to speak of those political associations with the aid of which men seek to defend themselves against the despotic action of a majority or against the encroachments of royal power. I have already treated this subject elsewhere.* It is clear that if each citizen, as he becomes individually weaker and consequently more incapable in isolation of preserving his freedom, does not learn the art of uniting with those like him to defend it, tyranny will necessarily grow with equality.

Here it is a question only of the associations that are formed in civil life and which have an object that is in no way political.

The political associations that exist in the United States form only a detail in the midst of the immense picture that the sum of associations presents there.

Americans of all ages, all conditions, all minds constantly unite. Not only do they have commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but they also have a thousand other kinds: religious, moral, grave, futile, very general and very particular, immense and very small; Americans use associations to give fêtes, to found seminaries, to build inns, to raise churches, to distribute books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; in this manner they create hospitals, prisons, schools. Finally, if it is a question of bringing to light a truth or developing a sentiment with the support of a great example, they associate. Everywhere that, at the head of a new undertaking, you see the government in France and a great lord in England, count on it that you will perceive an association in the United States.

In America I encountered sorts of associations of which, I confess, I had no idea, and I often admired the infinite art with which the inhabitants of the United States managed to fix a common goal to the efforts of many men and to get them to advance to it freely.

I have since traveled through England,† from which the Americans took some of their laws and many of their usages, and it appeared to me that there they were very far from making as constant and as skilled a use of association.

*DA I 2.4, 2.6.

†AT visited England in 1833 and 1835; see his *Journeys to England and Ireland*, J. P. Mayer, ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books [Doubleday], 1968).

It often happens that the English execute very great things in isolation, whereas there is scarcely an undertaking so small that Americans do not unite for it. It is evident that the former consider association as a powerful means of action; but the latter seem to see in it the sole means they have of acting.

Thus the most democratic country on earth is found to be, above all, the one where men in our day have most perfected the art of pursuing the object of their common desires in common and have applied this new science to the most objects. Does this result from an accident or could it be that there in fact exists a necessary relation between associations and equality?

Aristocratic societies always include within them, in the midst of a multitude of individuals who can do nothing by themselves, a few very powerful and very wealthy citizens; each of these can execute great undertakings by himself.

In aristocratic societies men have no need to unite to act because they are kept very much together.

Each wealthy and powerful citizen in them forms as it were the head of a permanent and obligatory association that is composed of all those he holds in dependence to him, whom he makes cooperate in the execution of his designs.

In democratic peoples, on the contrary, all citizens are independent and weak; they can do almost nothing by themselves, and none of them can oblige those like themselves to lend them their cooperation. They therefore all fall into impotence if they do not learn to aid each other freely.

If men who live in democratic countries had neither the right nor the taste to unite in political goals, their independence would run great risks, but they could preserve their wealth and their enlightenment for a long time; whereas if they did not acquire the practice of associating with each other in ordinary life, civilization itself would be in peril. A people among whom particular persons lost the power of doing great things in isolation, without acquiring the ability to produce them in common, would soon return to barbarism.

Unhappily, the same social state that renders associations so necessary to democratic peoples renders them more difficult for them than for all others.

When several members of an aristocracy want to associate with each other they easily succeed in doing so. As each of them brings great force to society, the number of members can be very few, and, when the members are few in number, it is very easy for them to know each other, to understand each other, and to establish fixed rules.

The same facility is not found in democratic nations, where it is always necessary that those associating be very numerous in order that the association have some power.

I know that there are many of my contemporaries whom this does not

embarrass. They judge that as citizens become weaker and more incapable, it is necessary to render the government more skillful and more active in order that society be able to execute what individuals can no longer do. They believe they have answered everything in saying that. But I think they are mistaken.

A government could take the place of some of the greatest American associations, and within the Union several particular states already have attempted it. But what political power would ever be in a state to suffice for the innumerable multitude of small undertakings that American citizens execute every day with the aid of an association?

It is easy to foresee that the time is approaching when a man by himself alone will be less and less in a state to produce the things that are the most common and the most necessary to his life. The task of the social power will therefore constantly increase, and its very efforts will make it vaster each day. The more it puts itself in place of associations, the more particular persons, losing the idea of associating with each other, will need it to come to their aid: these are causes and effects that generate each other without rest. Will the public administration in the end direct all the industries for which an isolated citizen cannot suffice? and if there finally comes a moment when, as a consequence of the extreme division of landed property, the land is partitioned infinitely, so that it can no longer be cultivated except by associations of laborers, will the head of the government have to leave the helm of state to come hold the plow?

The morality and intelligence of a democratic people would risk no fewer dangers than its business and its industry if the government came to take the place of associations everywhere.

Sentiments and ideas renew themselves, the heart is enlarged, and the human mind is developed only by the reciprocal action of men upon one another.

I have shown that this action is almost nonexistent in a democratic country. It is therefore necessary to create it artificially there. And this is what associations alone can do.

When the members of an aristocracy adopt a new idea or conceive a novel sentiment, they place it in a way next to themselves on the great stage they are on, and in thus exposing it to the view of the crowd, they easily introduce it into the minds or hearts of all those who surround them.

In democratic countries, only the social power is naturally in a state to act like this, but it is easy to see that its action is always insufficient and often dangerous.

A government can no more suffice on its own to maintain and renew the circulation of sentiments and ideas in a great people than to conduct all its

industrial undertakings. As soon as it tries to leave the political sphere to project itself on this new track, it will exercise an insupportable tyranny even without wishing to; for a government knows only how to dictate precise rules; it imposes the sentiments and the ideas that it favors, and it is always hard to distinguish its counsels from its orders.

This will be still worse if it believes itself really interested in having nothing stir. It will then hold itself motionless and let itself be numbed by a voluntary somnolence.

It is therefore necessary that it not act alone.

In democratic peoples, associations must take the place of the powerful particular persons whom equality of conditions has made disappear.

As soon as several of the inhabitants of the United States have conceived a sentiment or an idea that they want to produce in the world, they seek each other out; and when they have found each other, they unite. From then on, they are no longer isolated men, but a power one sees from afar, whose actions serve as an example; a power that speaks, and to which one listens.

The first time I heard it said in the United States that a hundred thousand men publicly engaged not to make use of strong liquors, the thing appeared to me more amusing than serious, and at first I did not see well why such temperate citizens were not content to drink water within their families.

In the end I understood that those hundred thousand Americans, frightened by the progress that drunkenness was making around them, wanted to provide their patronage to sobriety. They had acted precisely like a great lord who would dress himself very plainly in order to inspire the scorn of luxury in simple citizens. It is to be believed that if those hundred thousand men had lived in France, each of them would have addressed himself individually to the government, begging it to oversee the cabarets all over the realm.

There is nothing, according to me, that deserves more to attract our regard than the intellectual and moral associations of America. We easily perceive the political and industrial associations of the Americans, but the others escape us; and if we discover them, we understand them badly because we have almost never seen anything analogous. One ought however to recognize that they are as necessary as the first to the American people, and perhaps more so.

In democratic countries the science of association is the mother science; the progress of all the others depends on the progress of that one.

Among the laws that rule human societies there is one that seems more precise and clearer than all the others. In order that men remain civilized or become so, the art of associating must be developed and perfected among them in the same ratio as equality of conditions increases.

Chapter 6 ON THE RELATION BETWEEN ASSOCIATIONS AND NEWSPAPERS

When men are no longer bound among themselves in a solid and permanent manner, one cannot get many to act in common except by persuading each of them whose cooperation is necessary that his particular interest obliges him voluntarily to unite his efforts with the efforts of all the others.

That can be done habitually and conveniently only with the aid of a newspaper; only a newspaper can come to deposit the same thought in a thousand minds at the same moment.

A newspaper is a counselor that one does not need to go seek, but that presents itself of its own accord and that speaks to you briefly each day and of common affairs without disturbing your particular affairs.

Newspapers therefore become more necessary as men are more equal and individualism more to be feared. It would diminish their importance to believe that they serve only to guarantee freedom; they maintain civilization.

I shall not deny that in democratic countries newspapers often bring citizens to make very inconsiderate undertakings in common; but if there were no newspapers, there would almost never be common action. The ill they produce is therefore much less than the one they cure.

A newspaper not only has the effect of suggesting the same design to many men; it furnishes them the means of executing in common the designs they themselves had already conceived.

The principal citizens who live in an aristocratic country perceive each other from afar; and if they want to unite their forces, they move toward one another carrying along a multitude in their train.

It often happens in democratic countries, on the contrary, that many men who have the desire or the need to associate cannot do it, because all being very small and lost in the crowd, they do not see each other and do not know where to find each other. Up comes a newspaper that exposes to their view the sentiment or the idea that had been presented to each of them simultaneously but separately. All are immediately directed toward that light, and those wandering spirits who had long sought each other in the shadows finally meet each other and unite.

The newspaper has brought them nearer, and it continues to be necessary to them to keep them together.

In order that an association in a democratic people have some power, it

must be numerous. Those who compose it are therefore dispersed over a great space, and each of them is kept in the place he inhabits by the mediocrity of his fortune and by the multitude of little cares that it requires. They must find a means of speaking to each other every day without seeing each other and of moving in accord without being united. Thus there is scarcely a democratic association that can do without a newspaper.

There exists, therefore, a necessary relation between associations and newspapers: newspapers make associations, and associations make newspapers; and if it was true to say that associations must be multiplied as conditions are equalized, it is no less certain that the number of newspapers must be increased as associations are multiplied.

Thus in America one encounters at once more associations and more newspapers than any other country in the world.

This relation between the number of newspapers and that of associations leads us to uncover another one between the state of the periodical press and the form of the administration of the country, and tells us that the number of newspapers will diminish or grow in a democratic people in proportion as administrative centralization is greater or less. For in democratic peoples, one cannot entrust the exercise of local powers to the principal citizens as in aristocracies. One must abolish these powers or hand over the use of them to a very great number of men. These then form a genuine association established by law in a permanent manner to administer a portion of territory, and they need a newspaper to come to find them each day in the midst of their small affairs and tell them the state of public affairs. The more numerous these local powers are, the greater the number of those that the law calls to exercise them, and, as this necessity is felt at every moment, the more newspapers proliferate.

It is the extraordinary fragmentation of administrative power, much more than the great political freedom and absolute independence of the press, that so singularly multiplies the number of newspapers in America. If all the inhabitants of the Union were electors under the dominion of a system that limited their electoral right to the choice of the legislators of the state,* they would need only a few newspapers because they would have only some very important, but very rare, occasions to act together; but inside the great national association, the law has established in each province, in each city, and so to speak in each village, small associations having local administration as an object. The legislator has in this manner forced each American to cooperate daily with some of his fellow citizens in a common work, and each of them must have a newspaper to tell him what the others are doing.

*That is, the federal government.

I think that a democratic people[1] that did not have any national representation, but many small local powers, would in the end possess more newspapers than another in which a centralized administration existed next to an elective legislature. What best explains to me the prodigious development that the daily press has enjoyed in the United States is that among the Americans I see the greatest national freedom combined with local freedoms of every kind.

In France and England it is generally believed that to increase newspapers indefinitely, it is enough to abolish the taxes that weigh on the press. This is to exaggerate greatly the effects of a reform like this. Newspapers multiply not only relative to their cheapness, but relative to the more or less repeated need of many men to communicate together and to act in common.

I would equally attribute the growing power of newspapers to more general reasons than those often used to explain it.

A newspaper can only exist on condition that it reproduce a doctrine or a sentiment common to many men. A newspaper therefore always represents an association of which its habitual readers are the members.

That association can be more or less defined, more or less narrow, more or less numerous, but at least the seed of it exists in minds, by which alone the newspaper does not die.

This leads us to a final reflection that will end this chapter.

The more conditions become equal, and the less men are individually strong, the more they easily let themselves go with the current of the crowd and have trouble holding alone an opinion that it has abandoned.

The newspaper represents the association; one can say that it speaks to each of its readers in the name of all the others, and it carries them along the more easily as individuals are weaker.

The empire of newspapers should therefore grow as men become equal.

1. I say a *democratic people.* Administration can be very decentralized in an aristocratic people without making the need for newspapers felt, because local powers are then in the hands of a very few men who act in isolation or who know each other and can easily see each other and agree.

Chapter 7 RELATIONS BETWEEN CIVIL ASSOCIATIONS AND POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS

There is only one nation on earth where the unlimited freedom to associate for political views is used daily. That same nation is the only one in the world whose citizens have imagined making a continuous use of the right of association in civil life, and have come in this manner to procure for themselves all the goods that civilization can offer.

Among all the peoples where political association is prohibited, civil association is rare.

It is hardly probable that this is the result of an accident; and one ought rather to conclude that a natural and perhaps necessary relation exists between these two types of association.

By chance, some men have a common interest in a certain affair. It is a question of a commercial undertaking to direct, of an industrial operation to conclude; they meet each other and unite; in this manner they familiarize themselves little by little with association.

The more the number of these small common affairs increases, the more do men, even without their knowing it, acquire the ability to pursue great ones in common.

Civil associations therefore facilitate political associations; but, on the other hand, political association singularly develops and perfects civil association.

In civil life, each man can, if he must, fancy that he is in a state of self-sufficiency. In politics he can never imagine it. When a people has a public life, the idea of association and the desire to associate with each other are therefore presented daily to the minds of all citizens: whatever natural repugnance men have for acting in common, they will always be ready to do it in the interest of a party.

Thus politics generalizes the taste for and habit of association; it makes a crowd of men who would otherwise have lived alone desire to unite, and teaches the art of doing it.

Politics not only gives birth to many associations, it creates vast associations.

In civil life it is rare that the same interest naturally attracts many men toward a common action. Only with much art can one come to create [an interest] like this.

In politics, the occasion offers itself at every moment. For it is only in large associations that the general worth of associations is manifest. Individually weak citizens do not get in advance a clear idea of the force they can acquire in uniting; for them to understand it, one must show it to them. Hence it is that it is often easier to assemble a multitude for a common goal than a few men; a thousand citizens cannot see the interest they have in uniting; ten thousand perceive it. In politics, men unite for great undertakings, and the advantage they derive from association in important affairs teaches them in a practical manner the interest they have in aiding each other in lesser ones.

A political association draws a multitude of individuals outside themselves at the same time; however separated they are naturally by age, mind, fortune, it brings them together and puts them in contact. They meet each other once and learn to find each other always.

One can be engaged in most civil associations only by risking a portion of one's patrimony; so it is for all industrial and commercial companies. When men are still little versed in the art of associating and they are ignorant of the principal rules, they dread, in associating in this manner for the first time, paying dearly for the experience. Therefore they would rather be deprived of a powerful means of success than risk the dangers that accompany it. But they hesitate less to take part in political associations, which appear to them to be without peril, because in them they do not risk their money. Now, they cannot take part in those associations for a long time without discovering how to maintain order among a great number of men and with what procedure one succeeds in getting them to advance in accord and methodically toward the same goal. They learn to submit their will to that of all the others and to subordinate their particular efforts to the common action—all things it is no less necessary to know in civil associations than in political associations.

Political associations can therefore be considered great schools, free of charge, where all citizens come to learn the general theory of associations.

Even if political association did not directly serve the progress of civil association, one would still do harm to the latter in destroying the former.

When citizens can only associate in certain cases, they regard association as a rare and singular procedure and they scarcely ever dare to think of it.

When they are allowed to associate freely in all things, in the end they see in association the universal, and so to speak the unique, means of which men can make use to attain the different ends they propose for themselves.

Each new need immediately awakens the idea of it. The art of association then becomes, as I said above, the mother science;* all study it and apply it.

When certain associations are forbidden and others permitted, it is difficult to distinguish in advance the first from the second. When in doubt, one abstains from all, and a sort of public opinion is established that tends to make one consider any association whatsoever as a bold and almost illicit undertaking.[1]

It is therefore a chimera to believe that the spirit of association, compromised on one point, will be left to develop with the same vigor on all others, and that it will suffice to permit men to execute certain undertakings in common for them to hasten to attempt it. When citizens have the ability and the habit of associating for all things, they will as willingly associate for small ones as for great. But if they can only associate for small ones, they will not even have the desire and the capacity to do so. In vain will you allow them entire freedom to engage in common in their trade: they will use only half-heartedly the rights that are granted them, and after you are exhausted by efforts to turn them away from forbidden associations, you will be surprised at not being able to persuade them to form permitted associations.

I do not say that there cannot be civil associations in a country where political association is prohibited; for men can never live in society without engaging in some common undertaking. But I maintain that in a country like this, civil associations will always be very few in number, weakly conceived, unskillfully conducted, and that they will never embrace vast designs or will fail when they want to execute them.

This naturally leads me to think that freedom of association in political matters is not as dangerous for public tranquillity as is supposed, and that it could happen that after having shaken up the state for some time, it would consolidate it.

DA II 2.5.

1. That is above all true when it is the executive power that is charged with permitting or forbidding associations according to its arbitrary will.

When the law is limited to prohibiting certain associations and leaves to the courts the care of punishing those who disobey, the evil is much less great: each citizen then knows almost in advance what to count on; he judges for himself in some way before his judges do, and avoiding forbidden associations, he turns to permitted associations. It is thus that all free peoples have always understood that one could restrain the right of association. But if it happened that the legislator charged one man with sorting out in advance which are the dangerous and useful associations and left him free to destroy the seed of all associations or to let them spring up, no one being able to foresee in advance in which case one can associate and in which one must abstain, the spirit of association would be wholly stricken with inertia. The first of these two laws attacks only certain associations; the second is addressed to society itself and hurts it. I conceive that an acknowledged government may have recourse to the first, but I recognize in no government the right to bring on the second.

In democratic countries, political associations form so to speak the only powerful particular persons who aspire to regulate the state. So governments in our day consider these kinds of association with the same eye that the kings of the Middle Ages regarded the great vassals of the crown: they feel a sort of instinctive horror of them and combat them at every encounter.

They have, on the contrary, a natural benevolence toward civil associations because they have readily discovered that, instead of directing the minds of citizens toward public affairs, these serve to distract them and, engaging them more and more in projects that cannot be accomplished without public peace, turn them away from revolutions. But they do not take note that political associations multiply civil associations and facilitate them enormously, and in avoiding a dangerous evil, they deprive themselves of an efficacious remedy. When you see Americans associate freely every day for the goal of making a public opinion prevail, of elevating a statesman to the government, or of taking away power from someone, you have trouble comprehending that men so independent do not fall into license at every moment.

If you come, on the other hand, to consider the infinite number of industrial undertakings that are pursued in common in the United States, and if you perceive Americans on all sides working without relaxation in the execution of some important and difficult design that the least revolution could confound, you easily conceive why people so well occupied are not tempted to trouble the state or to destroy a public repose from which they profit.

Is it enough to perceive these things separately, or must one not discover the hidden knot that binds them? It is within political associations that Americans of all conditions, of all minds, and of all ages get the general taste for association daily and familiarize themselves with its use. There they see each other in great number, speak to each other, understand each other, and in common become animated for all sorts of undertakings. Afterwards, they carry into civil life the notions they have acquired and make them serve a thousand uses.

It is therefore while enjoying a dangerous freedom that Americans learn the art of rendering the perils of freedom less great.

If one chooses a certain moment in the existence of a nation, it is easy to prove that political associations trouble the state and paralyze industry; but should one take the whole life of a people, it will perhaps be easy to demonstrate that freedom of association in political matters is favorable to the well-being and even to the tranquillity of citizens.

I said in the first part of this work:* "Unlimited freedom of association

DA I 2.4. In volume 1 the first sentence in the passage begins "But unlimited freedom of association cannot be *entirely* confused with the freedom to write" [emphasis added].

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 adroit 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.