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 others, but it is certain that the beauties of virtue were constantly spoken of them; 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

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

† DA I 1.4, 2.6.
‡ Montaigne, "Of Glory," Essays, II 16.
§ The actual phrase "self-interest well understood" was apparently first used by Etienne de Condillac in 1726, see his Traité des animaux, vol. 3, 455.
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 by habit.

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 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-

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*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 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 dissolve 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
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 latitudes 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 besetting 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 tranquility 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.
Chapter 12 Why Certain Americans Display Such an Exalted Spiritualism

Although the desire to acquire the goods of this world may be the dominant passion of Americans, there are moments of respite when their souls seem all at once to break the material bonds that restrain them and to escape impetuously toward Heaven.

In all the states of the Union, but principally in the half-populated regions of the West, one sometimes encounters itinerant preachers who peddle the divine word from place to place.

Entire families, the aged, women, and children cross difficult places and penetrate the woods of the wilderness, coming from very far to hear them; and when they have met them, while listening to them they forget for several days and nights the care of their affairs and even the most pressing needs of the body.

One finds here and there in the heart of American society souls altogether filled with an exalted and almost fierce spiritualism that one scarcely encounters in Europe. From time to time bizarre sects arise that strive to open extraordinary roads to eternal happiness. Religious follies are very common there.

This should not surprise us.

Man did not give himself the taste for the infinite and the love of what is immortal. These sublime instincts are not born of a caprice of his will: they have their inmovable foundation in his nature; they exist despite his efforts. He can hinder and deform them, but not destroy them.

The soul has needs that must be satisfied; and whatever care one takes to distract it from itself, it soon becomes bored, restive, and agitated amid enjoyments of the senses.

If the minds of the great majority of the human race were ever concentrated on the search for material goods alone, one can expect that an enormous reaction would be produced in the souls of some men. The latter would throw themselves head over heels into the world of spirits for fear of remaining encumbered in the too narrow fetters that the body wants to impose on them.

One should therefore not be astonished if, in the heart of a society that thought only of the earth, one encountered a few individuals who wished to 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 find 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 people, from the Tyrians\(^*\) to the Florentines to the English, that has not been a free people. There is therefore a tight bond and a necessary relation between these two things: freedom and industry.

That is generally true of all nations, but especially of democratic nations.

I have brought out above how men who live in centuries of equality have a continuous need of association in order to procure for themselves almost all the goods they covet, and I have shown, on the other hand, how great political freedom perfects and popularizes the art of association within them.\(^1\) In these centuries, therefore, freedom is particularly useful to the production of wealth. One can see, on the contrary, that despotism is its particular enemy.

The nature of absolute power in democratic centuries is neither cruel nor savage, but it is minute and vexatious. Although despotism of this kind does not ride roughshod over humanity, it is directly opposed to the genius of commerce and the instincts of industry.

Thus men of democratic times need to be free in order to procure more easily for themselves the material enjoyments for which they constantly sigh.

It sometimes happens, however, that the excessive taste they conceive for these same enjoyments delivers them to the first master who presents himself. The passion for well-being is then turned against itself and, without perceiving it, drives away the object of its covetousness.

There is, in fact, a very perilous passage in the life of democratic peoples.

When the taste for material enjoyments develops in one of these peoples more rapidly than enlightenment and the habits of freedom, there comes a moment when men are swept away and almost beside themselves at the sight of the new goods that they are ready to grasp. Preoccupied with the sole care of making a fortune, they no longer perceive the tight bond that unites the particular fortune of each of them to the prosperity of all. There is no need to tear from such citizens the rights they possess; they themselves willingly allow them to escape. The exercise of their political duties appears to them a distressing contrivance that distracts them from their industry. If it is a question of choosing their representatives, of giving assistance to authority, of treating the common thing in common, they lack the time; they cannot waste their precious time in useless work. These are games of the idle that do not suit grave men occupied with the serious interests of life. These people believe they are following the doctrine of interest, but they have only a coarse idea of it, and to watch better over what they call their affairs, they neglect the principal one, which is to remain masters of themselves.

\(^*\)Inhabitants of Tyre, an ancient Phoenician city.

\(^1\)DA II 2.5-7.
Since the citizens who work do not wish to think of the public, and the class that could take charge of this care to occupy its leisure no longer exists, the place of government is almost empty.

If, at this critical moment, an ambitious, able man comes to take possession of power, he finds the way open to every usurpation. Let him see to it for a time that all material interests prosper, they will easily release him from the rest. Let him above all guarantee good order. Men who have a passion for material enjoyments ordinarily find out how the agitations of freedom trouble their well-being before perceiving how freedom serves to procure it for them; and at the least noise from public passions that penetrate into the midst of the little enjoyments of their private lives, they wake up and become restive; for a long time, fear of anarchy holds them constantly in suspense and always ready to throw out their freedom at the first disorder.

I shall acknowledge without difficulty that public peace is a great good; but I nevertheless do not want to forget that it is through good order that all peoples have arrived at tyranny. It surely does not follow that peoples ought to scorn public peace; but they must not let it suffice for them. A nation that demands of its government only the maintenance of order is already a slave at the bottom of its heart; it is a slave to its well-being, and the man who is to put it in chains can appear.

The despotism of factions is no less to be dreaded there than that of one man.

When the mass of citizens wants to be occupied only with private affairs, the smallest parties should not despair of becoming masters of public affairs.

At that time it is not rare to see on the vast stage of the world, as well as in our theaters, a multitude represented by a few men. They alone speak in the name of an absent or inattentive crowd; they alone act in the midst of universal immobility; they dispose of all things according to their whim, they change laws and tyrannize at will over mores; and one is astonished at seeing the small number of weak and unworthy hands into which a great people can fall.

Up to now, the Americans have happily avoided all the shoals that I have just indicated; and in that they genuinely deserve to be admired.

There is perhaps no country on earth where fewer idle people are encountered than in America, and where all those who work are more inflamed by the search for well-being. But if the passion of the Americans for material enjoyments is violent, at least it is not blind, and reason, though powerless to moderate it, directs it.

An American occupies himself with his private interests as if he were alone in the world, and a moment later, he gives himself over to the public as if he had forgotten them. He sometimes appears animated by the most selfish cupidities 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 fact, 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 inflamed of the immeasurable 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 turn 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.