

Democracy in America, Readthrough V

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Chapter 11: How Equality of Conditions Contributes to Maintaining Good Mores in America

There are philosophers and historians who have said or let it be understood that women are more or less severe in their mores according to whether they live more or less far from the equator. This is getting out of the difficulty cheaply, and by this account a globe and a compass would suffice to resolve in an instant one of the most difficult problems that humanity presents.

I do not see that this materialist doctrine is established by the facts.

The same nations have shown themselves to be chaste or dissolute at different periods in their history. The regularity or disorder of their mores therefore depended on some changing causes and not only on the nature of the country, which did not change.

I will not deny that in certain climates the passions that arise from the reciprocal attraction of the sexes are particularly ardent; but I think that this natural ardor can always be excited or contained by the social state and political institutions.

Although travelers who have visited North America differ among themselves on several points, they all agree in remarking that mores are infinitely more severe there than everywhere else.

It is evident that on this point the Americans are much superior to their fathers, the English. A superficial view of the two nations suffices to show that.

In England as in all other countries of Europe, public ill will is constantly exercised over the weaknesses of women. One often hears philosophers and men of state complain that mores are not regular enough, and every day literature makes one assume it.

In America all books, not excepting novels, assume women chaste, and no one tells of gallant adventures in them.

This great regularity of American mores is doubtless due in part to the country, race, and religion. But all these causes, which are encountered elsewhere, are still not enough to explain it. For that, one must have recourse to some particular reason.

That reason appears to me to be equality and the institutions that flow from it.

Equality of conditions does not produce regularity of mores by itself alone; but one cannot doubt that it facilitates and adds to it.

In aristocratic peoples, birth and fortune often make man and woman such different beings that they can never come to be united to one another. Passions bring them together, but the social

state and the ideas it suggests prevent them from bonding in a permanent and open manner. Hence a great number of passing and clandestine unions necessarily arise. Nature compensates itself in secret for the constraint that the laws impose on it.

One does not see this same thing when equality of conditions has brought down all the imaginary or real barriers that separate man from woman. Then there is no girl who does not believe she can become the wife of the man who prefers her, which makes disorder in mores before marriage very difficult. For whatever the credulity of passions may be, there is scarcely a means by which a woman may be persuaded that you love her when you are perfectly free to marry her and do not do it.

The same cause operates within marriage, although in a more indirect manner.

Nothing serves better to legitimate illegitimate love in the eyes of those who feel it or of the crowd that contemplates it than unions that are forced or made haphazardly.

In a country where a woman always exercises her choice freely, and where education has put her in a state to choose well, public opinion is inexorable toward her faults.

The rigor of the Americans arises in part from that. They consider marriage as an often onerous contract of which one is nonetheless strictly held to execute all the clauses because [the parties] were able to know them all in advance and because they enjoyed the complete freedom of not obligating themselves to anything.

What renders fidelity more obligatory renders it easier.

In aristocratic countries, marriage has the purpose of uniting goods rather than persons; so it sometimes happens that the husband is picked while in school and the wife at the wet nurse. It is not surprising that the conjugal bond that keeps the fortunes of the two spouses united leaves their hearts to wander about aimlessly. This flows naturally from the spirit of the contract.

When, on the contrary, each always chooses his companion by himself without having anything external to hinder him or even direct him, it is ordinarily only similarity of tastes and ideas that brings man and woman together; and that same similarity keeps and fixes them beside one another.

Our fathers conceived a singular opinion in regard to marriage.

As they had perceived that the few marriages by inclination that were made in their time had almost always had a fatal issue, they resolutely concluded that in such a matter it was very dangerous to consult one's own heart. Chance appeared to them to be more perceptive than choice.

It was not very difficult to see, however, that the examples they had before their eyes proved nothing.

I shall first remark that if democratic peoples accord to women the right to choose their husbands freely, they take care in advance to furnish to their minds the enlightenment, and to their wills the force, that can be necessary for such a choice; whereas among aristocratic peoples, girls who furtively escape paternal authority to throw themselves into the arms of a man whom they have

been given neither the time to know nor the capacity to judge lack all these safeguards. One cannot be surprised that they make a bad use of their free will the first time they use it, nor that they fall into such cruel errors when they want to follow the customs of democracy in marrying, without having received a democratic education.

But there is more.

When a man and a woman want to come together across the inequalities of the aristocratic social state, they have immense obstacles to overcome. After having broken or loosened the bonds of filial obedience, they must escape the empire of custom and the tyranny of opinion by a last effort; and when they have finally come to the end of that harsh undertaking, they find themselves almost strangers amid their natural friends and near relations: the prejudice they have overstepped separates them. This situation does not take long to bring down their courage and embitter their hearts.

If it therefore happens that spouses united in this manner are at first unhappy, and then guilty, one must not attribute it to their having freely chosen each other but rather to their living in a society that does not admit such choices.

One ought not to forget, moreover, that the same effort that makes a man violently take leave of a common error almost always carries him beyond reason; that to dare to declare a war, even a legitimate one, on the ideas of one's century and one's country, one must have a certain violent and adventurous disposition of spirit, and people of this character, whatever direction they take, rarely come to happiness and virtue. And it is this, one may say in passing, that explains why so few moderate and honest revolutionaries are encountered in the most necessary and holy revolutions.

Thus if in an aristocratic century a man by chance takes it into his head to consult no other propriety than his particular opinion and taste in a conjugal union, and afterwards disorder of mores and misery are not slow to be introduced into his household, one must not be surprised. But when this same manner of acting is in the natural and ordinary order of things; when the social state facilitates it; when paternal power is lent to it and public opinion recommends it, one ought not to doubt that the internal peace of families will become greater and that conjugal faith will be better kept.

Almost all men in democracies follow a political career or exercise a profession, and, on the other hand, the mediocrity of fortunes obliges a woman to confine herself inside her dwelling every day in order to preside herself very closely over the details of domestic administration.

All these distinct, compulsory tasks are like so many natural barriers which, by separating the sexes, make solicitations from the one rarer and less lively and the resistance of the other easier.

It is not that equality of conditions can ever come to make man chaste; but it gives a less dangerous character to the disorder of his mores. As no one then any longer has the leisure or the occasion to attack virtues that want to defend themselves, one sees at once a great number of courtesans and a multitude of honest women.

Such a state of things produces deplorable individual miseries, but it does not prevent the social body from being fit and strong; it does not destroy family bonds and does not enervate national

mores. What puts society in danger is not the great corruption of some, it is the laxity of all. In the eyes of the legislator, prostitution is much less to be feared than intrigue.

This tumultuous and constantly vexed life, which equality gives to men, not only turns them away from love by taking away the leisure to indulge in it, but it also diverts them by a more secret, yet surer path.

All men who live in democratic times contract more or less the intellectual habits of the industrial and commercial classes; their minds take a serious, calculating, and positive turn; they willingly turn themselves away from the ideal to direct themselves toward some visible and proximate goal that presents itself as the natural and necessary object of their desires. Equality does not destroy imagination in this way, but limits it and permits it to fly only while skimming the earth.

None are less dreamers than citizens of a democracy, and one scarcely sees any of them who want to abandon themselves to the idle and solitary contemplation that ordinarily precedes and produces great agitations of the heart.

It is true that they put much value on procuring for themselves the sort of profound, regular, and peaceful affection that makes up the charm and security of life; but they do not willingly run after the violent and capricious emotions that trouble and shorten it.

I know that all the preceding applies completely only to America and for the present cannot be extended in a general manner to Europe.

In the half century in which laws and habits have pushed several peoples of Europe toward democracy with unequalled energy, one has not seen the relations of man and woman in those nations becoming more regular and more chaste. The contrary is even perceived in some places. Certain classes are better regulated; general morality appears more lax. I shall not fear to remark on it, for I do not feel myself more disposed to flatter my contemporaries than to speak ill of them.

This spectacle ought to be distressing, but not surprising.

The fortunate influence that a democratic social state can exert on regularity of habits is one of those facts that can only be discovered in the long term. If equality of conditions is favorable to good morals, the social travail that renders conditions equal is quite fatal to them.

In the fifty years that France has been transforming itself, we have rarely had freedom, but always disorder. In the midst of this universal confusion of ideas and general shaking of opinions, amid this incoherent mixture of just and unjust, of true and false, of right and fact, public virtue has become uncertain and private morality unsteady.

But all revolutions, whatever their object and their agents might have been, have at first produced effects like these. The very ones that have ended by tightening the bond of morals have begun by loosening it.

The disorders to which we are often witness therefore do not seem to me to be a durable fact. Some curious indications already announce it.

There is nothing more miserably corrupt than an aristocracy that preserves its wealth while losing its power and which, though reduced to vulgar enjoyments, still possesses immense leisure. The energetic passions and great thoughts that formerly animated it then disappear, and one encounters scarcely more than a multitude of gnawing little vices that attach themselves to it like worms to a cadaver.

No one disputes that the French aristocracy of the last century was very dissolute, whereas old habits and aged beliefs still maintained respect for morals in the other classes.

Nor will one have any trouble reaching agreement that in our time a certain severity of principles is displayed amid the debris of that same aristocracy, instead of the disorder of morals that appears to have spread in the middle and inferior ranks of society. In such a way the same families that showed themselves to be the most lax fifty years ago show themselves to be the most exemplary today, and democracy seems to have made only the aristocratic classes more moral.

The Revolution, by dividing the fortunes of the nobles, by forcing them to occupy themselves assiduously with their affairs and their families, by confining them with their children under the same roof, finally by giving their thoughts a more reasonable and serious turn, prompted in them, without their having perceived it themselves, a respect for religious beliefs and a love of order, of peaceful pleasures, of domestic joys, and of well-being; whereas the rest of the nation, which naturally had these same tastes, was carried along toward disorder by the very effort that had to be made to overthrow laws and political customs.

The old French aristocracy has suffered the consequences of the Revolution, and it neither experienced the revolutionary passions nor shared the often anarchic transports that produced it; it is easy to conceive that it feels the salutary influence of this revolution in its morals before the very ones who made it.

It is therefore permissible to say, although the thing appears surprising at first sight, that in our day it is the most antidemocratic classes of the nation that best display the species of morality that it is reasonable to expect from democracy.

I cannot prevent myself from believing that when we have obtained all the effects of the democratic revolution, after having left the tumult to which it gave birth, what is true only of a few today will little by little become true of all.

Chapter 20: On the Industry in Place-hunting in Certain Democratic Nations

In the United States, as soon as a citizen has some enlightenment and some resources, he seeks to enrich himself in commerce and industry, or better, he buys a field covered with forests and makes himself a pioneer. All that he demands of the state is that it not come to trouble him in his labors, and that it assure him the fruits of them.

Among most European peoples, when a man begins to feel his strength and to extend his desires, the first idea that presents itself to him is to obtain a public post. These different effects, issuing from the same cause, merit our stopping here for a moment to consider them.

When public offices are few, poorly paid, unstable, and when, on the other hand, industrial careers are numerous and productive, it is toward industry and not the administration that the new and impatient desires born daily of equality are directed on all sides.

But if, at the same time that ranks are being equalized, enlightenment remains incomplete or spirits timid, or if commerce and industry, hindered in their development, offer only difficult and slow means of making a fortune, citizens, despairing of improving their lot by themselves, rush tumultuously toward the head of state and demand his aid. To be put more at ease at the expense of the public treasury appears to them to be, if not the sole way they have, at least the easiest and the best way open to all to leave a condition that no longer suffices for them: the search for places becomes the most practiced industry of all.

It will be so above all in great centralized monarchies, where the number of paid offices is immense and the life of officials assured enough so that no one despairs of obtaining a post and of enjoying it peacefully like a patrimony.

I shall not say that this universal and immoderate desire for public offices is a great social evil; that it destroys the spirit of independence in each citizen and spreads a venal and servile humor in the whole body of the nation; that it suffocates the virile virtues; nor shall I have it observed that an industry of this kind creates only an unproductive activity and agitates the country without making it fruitful: all that is easily understood.

But I want to remark that the government that favors a tendency like this risks its tranquillity and puts its very life in great peril.

I know that in a time like ours, when one sees the love and respect that were formerly attached to power being extinguished, it can appear necessary to those who govern to chain each man more tightly by his interest, and that it seems convenient for them to make use of his very passions to hold him in order and silence; but it cannot be so for long, and what can appear to be a cause of strength for a certain period surely becomes a great subject of trouble and weakness in the long term.

In democratic peoples as in all others, the number of public posts in the end has bounds; but in these same peoples the number of the ambitious has none; it increases constantly by a gradual and irresistible movement as conditions are equalized; it is bounded only when men are lacking.

Therefore, when ambition has no outlet but in administration alone, the government in the end necessarily encounters a permanent opposition; for its task is to satisfy with limited means desires that multiply without limits. One must indeed be convinced that of all peoples of the world, the most difficult to contain and direct is a people of place-hunters. Whatever efforts its chiefs make, they can never satisfy it, and one should always be apprehensive that it will finally overturn the constitution of the country and change the face of the state solely out of the need to make some places vacant.

Princes in our time who strive to attract to themselves alone all the new desires that equality sparks, and to satisfy them, will therefore end, if I am not mistaken, by repenting of having engaged in such an undertaking; one day they will discover that they have risked their power in rendering it so necessary, and that it would have been more honest and more sure to teach each of their subjects the art of being self-sufficient.

Chapter 21: Why Great Revolutions Will Become Rare

A people that has lived under the regime of castes and classes for centuries comes to a democratic social state only through a long series of more or less painful transformations, with the aid of violent efforts and after numerous vicissitudes during which goods, opinions, and power change place rapidly.

Even when this great revolution is ended, one still sees the revolutionary habits created by it endure for a long time, and profound agitations succeed it.

As all this takes place at the moment when conditions are becoming equal, one concludes that a hidden relation and secret bond between equality itself and revolutions exists so that one cannot exist without giving rise to the other.

On this point reasoning seems in accord with experience.

In a people in which ranks are nearly equal, no apparent bond unites men and holds them firm in their places. None of them has either the permanent right or the power to command, and none has to obey because of his condition; but each, finding himself provided with some enlightenment and some resources, can choose his path and proceed separately from all those like him.

The same causes that render citizens independent of one another push them every day toward new and restive desires and spur them constantly.

It therefore seems natural to believe that in a democratic society, ideas, things, and men must change forms and places eternally and that democratic centuries will be times of rapid and incessant transformations.

Is that in fact so? does equality of conditions bring men in an habitual and permanent manner to revolutions? does it contain some disruptive principle that prevents society from establishing itself and that disposes citizens constantly to renovate their laws, their doctrines, and their mores? I do not believe it. The subject is important; I beg the reader to follow me well.

Almost all the revolutions that have changed the face of peoples have been made in order to consecrate or to destroy equality. Put aside the secondary causes that have produced the great agitations of men and you will almost always arrive at inequality. It is the poor who have wanted to rob the goods of the rich or the rich who have tried to put the poor in chains. Therefore if you can found a state of society in which each has something to keep and little to take, you will have done much for the peace of the world.

I am not ignorant of the fact that in a great democratic people, very poor and very rich citizens are always to be found; but the poor, instead of forming the immense majority of the nation, as always happens in aristocratic societies, are few, and the law has not attached them to one another with the bonds of irremediable and hereditary misery.

The rich, for their part, are scattered and impotent; they do not have privileges that attract regard; their wealth itself, no longer incorporated in the land and represented by it, is elusive and almost invisible. Just as there are no longer races of the poor, there are no longer races of the rich; the

latter issue from within the crowd each day and return to it constantly. They therefore do not form a separate class that one can easily define and despoil; and besides, as they adhere to the mass of their fellow citizens by a thousand secret threads, the people can scarcely strike at them without hitting themselves. Between these two extremes in democratic societies is found an innumerable multitude of almost similar men who, without being precisely either rich or poor, possess enough goods to desire order and do not have enough of them to excite envy.

These latter are naturally enemies of violent movements; their immobility keeps in repose all who are above and below them and secures the social body in its seat.

It is not that they themselves are satisfied with their present fortune or that they feel a natural horror for a revolution in which they would share in the spoils without experiencing the evils; on the contrary, they desire to enrich themselves with an unequalled ardor; but the trouble is knowing from whom to take. The same social state that constantly suggests desires to them confines these desires within necessary limits. It gives men more freedom to change and less interest in change.

Not only do men of democracies not naturally desire revolutions, but they fear them.

There is no revolution that does not more or less threaten acquired property. Most of those who inhabit democratic countries are property owners; they not only have property, they live in the condition in which men attach the most value to their property. If one considers attentively each of the classes of which society is composed, it is easy to see that there is none in which the passions to which property gives rise are more fierce and more tenacious than in the middle classes.

Often the poor scarcely care for what they possess because they suffer much more from what they lack than they enjoy the little they have. The rich have many other passions to satisfy than that for wealth, and besides, the long and painful employment of a great fortune sometimes in the end renders them almost insensitive to its sweetness.

But men who live in an ease equally distant from opulence and misery put an immense value on their goods. As they are still very near to poverty, they see its rigors from close by and they dread them; between it and them there is nothing but a small patrimony on which they immediately fix their fears and their hopes. At each instant they become more interested in it by the continual worries it gives them, and they become attached to it by the daily efforts they make to augment it. The idea of yielding the least part of it is intolerable to them, and they consider its entire loss as the ultimate misfortune. Now, the number of these eager and anxious small proprietors is constantly increased by equality of conditions.

Thus in democratic societies the majority of citizens do not see clearly what they could gain by a revolution, and they feel at each instant and in a thousand ways what they could lose from one.

I have said in another place in this work how equality of conditions naturally pushes men toward industrial and commercial careers and how it increases and diversifies landed property; finally I have brought out how it inspires in each man an eager and constant desire to augment his well-being. There is nothing more contrary to revolutionary passions than all these things.

It can happen that a revolution serves industry and commerce by its final result; but its first effect will almost always be to ruin the industrialists and businessmen, because it cannot fail to change the general state of consumption right from the first and to overturn momentarily the existing proportion between production and needs.

Moreover, I know of nothing more opposed to revolutionary mores than commercial mores. Commerce is naturally the enemy of all violent passions. It likes even tempers, is pleased by compromise, very carefully flees anger. It is patient, supple, insinuating, and it has recourse to extreme means only when the most absolute necessity obliges it. Commerce renders men independent of one another; it gives them a high idea of their individual worth; it brings them to want to handle their own affairs and teaches them to succeed at them; it therefore disposes them to freedom but moves them away from revolutions.

In a revolution, the possessors of movable goods have more to fear than all others; for on the one hand, their property is often easy to seize, and on the other hand, it can disappear completely at every moment; landed proprietors have less to dread; while losing the revenue of their lands, they at least hope to hold on to the land itself through vicissitudes. Thus one sees that the former are much more frightened than the latter at the appearance of revolutionary movements.

Peoples are therefore less disposed to revolutions as movable goods are multiplied and diversified among them and as the number of those who possess them becomes larger.

Besides, whatever may be the profession that men embrace and the kind of goods they enjoy, one feature is common to them all.

None is fully satisfied with his present fortune, and all strive daily to increase it by a thousand diverse means. Consider each one among them in whatever period of his life, and you will see him preoccupied with some new plans whose object is to increase his ease; do not speak to him of the interests and rights of the human race; that little domestic enterprise absorbs all his thoughts for the moment and makes him wish to put off public agitations to some other time.

Not only does that prevent them from making revolutions, but it diverts them from wishing for them. Violent political passions have little hold on men who have so attached their whole soul to the pursuit of well-being. The ardor they put into small affairs calms them in great ones.

It is true that from time to time in democratic societies there arise enterprising and ambitious citizens whose immense desires cannot be satisfied by following the common route. They love revolutions and call for them; but they have great trouble in giving rise to them if extraordinary events do not come to their aid.

No one struggles to advantage against the spirit of his century and country; and a man, however powerful one supposes him, only with difficulty makes his contemporaries share sentiments and ideas that the sum of their desires and sentiments repels. One must therefore not believe that when equality of conditions, once having become an old and uncontested fact, has impressed its character on mores, men will easily allow themselves to be rushed into taking risks by following an imprudent chief or bold innovator.

It is not that they resist him in an open manner with the aid of studied combinations or even by a premeditated design of resisting. They do not combat him energetically, they sometimes even

applaud him, but they do not follow him. To his impetuosity they secretly oppose their inertia; to his revolutionary instincts, their conservative interests, their homebody tastes to his adventurous passions; their good sense to the leaps of his genius; to his poetry, their prose. He arouses them for a moment with a thousand efforts, but soon after they get away from him, and, as if dragged down by their own weight, they fall back. He exhausts himself in the wish to animate this indifferent and distracted crowd, and finally he sees himself reduced to powerlessness, not because he is defeated, but because he is alone.

I do not claim that men who live in democratic societies are naturally immobile; I think, on the contrary, that an eternal motion reigns in the heart of such a society and that no one knows repose in it; but I believe that men in it are agitated within certain limits that they scarcely ever exceed. They vary, alter, or renovate secondary things every day; they take great care not to touch the principal ones. They love change, but they dread revolutions.

Although the Americans constantly modify or abrogate some of their laws, they are far indeed from displaying revolutionary passions. It is easy to discover, in the promptness with which they stop and calm themselves when public agitation begins to become threatening and at the very moment when passions seem the most excited, that they dread a revolution as the greatest of misfortunes and that each of them is internally resolved to make great sacrifices to avoid it. There is no country in the world where the sentiment for property shows itself more active and more restive than in the United States, and where the majority evinces less inclination to doctrines that threaten to alter the constitution of goods in any manner whatsoever.

I often remarked that theories that are revolutionary by their nature, in that they cannot be realized except by a complete and sometimes sudden change in the state of property and of persons, are infinitely less in favor in the United States than in the great monarchies of Europe. If a few men profess them, the mass repels them with a sort of instinctive horror.

I do not fear to say that most of the maxims that one is accustomed to calling democratic in France would be proscribed by the democracy of the United States. That is easily understood. In America they have democratic ideas and passions; in Europe we still have revolutionary passions and ideas.

If America ever experiences great revolutions, they will be brought about by the presence of blacks on the soil of the United States: that is to say, it will not be the equality of conditions, but on the contrary, their inequality, that will give rise to them.

When conditions are equal, each man willingly isolates himself within himself and forgets the public. If the legislators of democratic peoples did not seek to correct this fatal tendency or favored it, with the thought that it diverts citizens from political passions and thus leads them away from revolutions, it could possibly be that in the end they themselves would produce the evil that they want to avoid, and a moment might arrive in which the disordered passions of some men, aided by the unintelligent selfishness and pusillanimity of the greater number, would in the end compel the social body to undergo strange vicissitudes.

In democratic societies there are scarcely any but small minorities that desire revolutions; but minorities can sometimes make them.

Therefore I do not say that democratic nations are sheltered from revolutions, I say only that the social state of these nations does not bring them to revolutions, but rather moves them away from them. Democratic peoples, left to themselves, do not easily engage in great adventures; they are only carried along toward revolutions without their knowing it; they sometimes undergo them but they do not make them. And I add that when they are permitted to acquire enlightenment and experience, they do not allow them to be made.

I know very well that in this matter public institutions themselves can do much; they favor or constrain the instincts that arise from the social state. Therefore I do not maintain, I repeat, that a people is sheltered from revolutions by the sole fact that within it conditions are equal; but I believe that whatever the institutions of such a people may be, great revolutions will always be infinitely less violent and rarer in it than one supposes; and I easily glimpse such a political state that, when it comes to be combined with equality, would render society more stationary than it has ever been in our West.

What I have just said of deeds applies in part to ideas.

Two things are astonishing in the United States: the great mobility of most human actions and the singular fixity of certain principles. Men move constantly, the human mind seems almost immobile.

When once an opinion has extended over the American soil and has taken root, one would say that no power on earth is in a position to extirpate it. In the United States, general doctrines in the matter of religion, of philosophy, of morality, and even of politics do not vary, or at least they are modified only after a hidden and often insensible travail; the coarsest prejudices themselves are effaced only with inconceivable slowness in the midst of this friction of things and men repeated a thousand times.

I hear it said that it is in the nature and in the habits of democracies to change their sentiments and thoughts at every moment. That can be true of small democratic nations, like those of antiquity, that gathered as a whole in the public square and were then agitated at the will of an orator. I saw nothing like this within the great democratic people that occupies the opposite shores of our ocean. What struck me in the United States is the trouble one experiences in disabusing the majority of an idea it has conceived and of detaching it from a man whom it adopts. Writings or discourses can scarcely succeed at this; experience alone overcomes it; sometimes it must be repeated.

That is astonishing at first; a more attentive examination explains it.

I do not believe that it is as easy as one imagines to uproot the prejudices of a democratic people; to change its beliefs; to substitute new religious, philosophical, political, and moral principles for them once they have been established; in a word, to make great and frequent revolutions in intellect. It is not that the human mind there is idle; it is constantly agitated; but it exerts itself in varying to infinity the consequences of known principles and in discovering new consequences rather than seeking new principles. It turns on itself with agility rather than dashing ahead by a rapid and direct effort; it extends its sphere little by little with continuous and precipitate small movements; it does not displace it all at once.

Men equal in rights, in education, in fortune, and to say it all in a word, of similar condition, necessarily have needs, habits, and tastes barely unlike. As they perceive objects under the same aspect, their minds naturally incline toward analogous ideas, and although each of them can diverge from his contemporaries and make his own beliefs for himself, in the end, without knowing it and without wishing it, all meet each other in a certain number of common opinions.

The more I consider attentively the effects of equality on the intellect, the more I persuade myself that the intellectual anarchy to which we are witness is not, as some suppose, the natural state of democratic peoples. I believe that one must consider it rather as a particular accident of their youth, and that it is shown only in that period of passage when men have already broken the old bonds that attached them to one another, and still differ tremendously in origin, education, and mores; so that, having preserved very diverse ideas, instincts, and tastes, nothing any longer prevents them from producing them. The principal opinions of men become alike as conditions become alike. Such appears to me to be the general and permanent fact; the rest is fortuitous and transient.

I believe it will rarely happen within a democratic society that a man comes to conceive in a single stroke a system of ideas very far removed from that which his contemporaries have adopted; and if a such an innovator presented himself, I imagine that he would in the first place have great trouble in making himself heard, and more still in making himself believed.

When conditions are almost alike, one man does not easily allow himself to be persuaded by another. As all see each other from very close, as they have together learned the same things and lead the same life, they are not naturally disposed to take one among them for a guide and to follow him blindly: one scarcely believes one's like or one's equal at his word.

It is not only confidence in the enlightenment of certain individuals that is weakened in democratic nations; as I have said elsewhere, the general idea of the intellectual superiority that any man whatsoever can acquire over all the others is not slow to be obscured.

As men resemble each other more, the dogma of the equality of the intellect insinuates itself little by little into their beliefs, and it becomes more difficult for an innovator, whoever he may be, to acquire and exercise great power over the mind of a people. In such societies sudden intellectual revolutions are therefore rare; for if one casts a glance over the history of the world, one sees that it is much less the force of reasoning than the authority of a name that has produced great and rapid mutations in human opinions.

Remark, moreover, that as men who live in democratic societies are not attached to one another by any bond, one must convince each of them. Whereas in aristocratic societies it is enough to be able to act on the minds of a few; all the others follow. If Luther had lived in a century of equality, and if he had not had lords and princes for listeners, he would perhaps have found more difficulty in changing the face of Europe.

It is not that men in democracies are naturally very convinced of the certainty of their opinions and very firm in their beliefs; they often have doubts that in their eyes no one can resolve. It sometimes happens in those times that the human mind would willingly change its position, but since nothing either pushes it powerfully or directs it, it oscillates within itself and does not move.

When one has acquired the confidence of a democratic people, it is still a great affair to get its attention. It is very difficult to make men who live in democracies listen when one is not talking to them about themselves. They do not listen to the things that are said to them because they are always very preoccupied with the things they are doing.

One encounters, in fact, few idle men in democratic nations. Life goes on in the midst of motion and noise, and men are so busy acting that little time remains to them for thinking. What I want to remark above all is that not only are they occupied, but they have a passion for their occupations. They are perpetually in action, and each of their actions absorbs their soul; the fire they put into affairs prevents them from being inflamed by ideas.

I think that it is very difficult to excite the enthusiasm of a democratic people for any theory whatsoever that has no visible, direct, and immediate relation to the daily practice of its life. Such a people does not easily abandon its old beliefs. For it is enthusiasm that precipitates the mind of man beyond beaten paths and that makes great intellectual revolutions as well as great political revolutions.

Thus democratic peoples have neither the leisure nor the taste to go in search of new opinions. Even if they come to doubt those they possess, they preserve them nonetheless because they would need too much time and examination to change them; they keep them not as certain, but as established.

There are still other, more powerful reasons opposed to working a great change easily in the doctrines of a democratic people. I have already pointed to them at the beginning of this book.

If, within a people like this, individual influences are weak and almost nothing, the power exercised by the mass on the mind of each individual is very great. I have given the reasons for this elsewhere. What I want to say at this moment is that one would be wrong to believe that this depends uniquely on the form of government and that the majority would lose its intellectual empire with its political power.

In aristocracies, men often have a greatness and a force that are their own. When they find themselves in contradiction with the greater number of those like them, they withdraw into themselves, and sustain and console themselves. There is nothing like this among democratic peoples. Among them, public favor seems as necessary as the air that one breathes, and to be in disagreement with the mass is, so to speak, not to live. [The mass] does not need to use the laws to bend those who do not think like it. It is enough for it to disapprove of them. Their sense of isolation and their impotence immediately overwhelms them and drives them to despair.

In all times when conditions are equal, general opinion puts an immense weight on the mind of each individual; it envelops it, directs it, and oppresses it: that is due to the very constitution of society much more than to its political laws. As all men resemble each other more, each feels himself more and more weak in the face of all. Not discovering anything that elevates him very much above them and distinguishes him from them, he distrusts himself when they are at war with him; not only does he doubt his strength, but he comes to doubt his right to it, and he is very near to recognizing that he is wrong when the greater number affirms it. The majority does not need to constrain him; it convinces him.

In whatever manner the powers of a democratic society are organized and however they are balanced, therefore, it will always be very difficult to believe in what the mass rejects and to profess what it condemns.

This marvelously favors the stability of beliefs.

When an opinion has gotten a foothold in a democratic people and has established itself in the minds of the greater number, it then subsists by itself and perpetuates itself effortlessly because no one attacks it. Those who had at first rejected it as false in the end receive it as general, and those who continue to war with it at the bottom of their hearts make nothing visible; they take good care not to engage in a dangerous and useless struggle.

It is true that when the majority of a democratic people changes its opinion, it can work strange and rapid revolutions at will in the world of the intellect; but it is very difficult to change its opinion and almost as difficult to ascertain that it has changed.

It sometimes happens that time, events, or the individual and solitary effort of intellects in the end shakes or destroys a belief little by little without anything appearing on the outside. They do not combat it openly. They do not unite to make war on it. Its sectarians quit it one by one without a sound; but each day some abandon it, until finally it is no longer shared except by the few.

In this state it still reigns.

As its enemies continue to be silent or to communicate their thoughts with each other only furtively, for a long time they themselves are unable to assure themselves that a great revolution has been accomplished, and in their doubt they remain motionless. They observe and stay silent. The majority no longer believes; but it still looks like it believes and this vain phantom of a public opinion is enough to chill innovators and to keep them in silence and respect.

We live in a period that has seen the most rapid changes work on the minds of men. Nevertheless, it could soon happen that the principal human opinions are more stable than they have been in previous centuries of our history; this time has not come, but perhaps it approaches.

As I examine the needs and the natural instincts of democratic peoples more closely, I am persuaded that, if equality is ever established in a general and permanent manner in the world, great intellectual and political revolutions will become more difficult and rarer than one supposes.

Because men in democracies always appear excited, uncertain, breathless, ready to change will and place, one fancies that they are suddenly going to abolish their laws, to adopt new beliefs, and to take up new mores. One does not consider that if equality brings men to change, it suggests interests and tastes to them that need stability to be satisfied; it pushes them and at the same time it stops them, it spurs them and attaches them to the earth; it inflames their desires and limits their strength.

This is what is not discovered at first: the passions that turn citizens away from one another in a democracy make themselves manifest. But one does not perceive at first glance the hidden force that holds them back and keeps them together.

Dare I say it in the midst of the ruins that surround me? What I dread most for the generations to come are not revolutions.

If citizens continue to confine themselves more and more narrowly in the circle of small domestic interests, there to become agitated without rest, one can apprehend that in the end they will become almost inaccessible to those great and powerful public emotions that trouble peoples, but develop and renew them. When I see property become so mobile and the love of property so anxious and so ardent, I cannot prevent myself from fearing that men will arrive at the point of looking on every new theory as a peril, every innovation as a distressing trouble, every social progress as a first step toward a revolution, and that they will altogether refuse to move for fear that they will be carried away. I tremble, I confess, that they will finally allow themselves to be so much possessed by a relaxed love of present enjoyments that interest in their own future and that of their descendants will disappear, and they will rather follow the course of their destiny weakly than make a sudden and energetic effort when needed to redress it.

People believe that the new societies are going to change face daily, and I am afraid that in the end they will be too unchangeably fixed in the same institutions, the same prejudices, the same mores, so that the human race will stop and limit itself; that the mind will fold and refold itself around itself eternally without producing new ideas, that man will exhaust himself in small, solitary, sterile motions, and that, while constantly moving, humanity will no longer advance.