

*Give Me Imagination*

*Or*

*Give Me Death!*

*On the ideological foundations of democracy in the  
United States via Tocqueville and Pascal*

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How does democracy establish a conviction among its people regarding good and evil, so that it may maintain peace and order? In his prophetic introduction to *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville predicts that the ‘equality of conditions’ will also be established in the rest of the Christian universe (Intr., p. 3<sup>1</sup>). He says: “The gradual form of development of equality of conditions is therefore a providential fact, and it has the principal characteristics of one: it is universal, enduring, each day it escapes human power; all events, like all men, serve its development.” (Intr., p. 6)

However, according to Tocqueville, this inevitable movement comes with many problems in his mother country France and the rest of Europe because “the democratic revolution has taken place in the material of society without making the change in laws, ideas, habits, and mores that would have been necessary to make this revolution useful.” (Intr., p. 7) These laws, ideas, habits, and mores of European nations were once useful, and even good, when the people possessed the *imagination*<sup>2</sup> that they are just. For, “It is not the use of power or the habit of obedience that depraves men, but the use of power that they *consider* illegitimate, and obedience to a power they *regard* as oppressive.”<sup>3</sup> (Intr., p. 8) In other words, as long as people have an *imagination* of justice of the society, they willingly obey the ones in power and accept the miseries that come with it.

Now, in the Old World, there was a time that “royal power, leaning on the aristocracy, peacefully governed the peoples of Europe [and] society, amid its miseries, enjoyed several kinds of happiness one can conceive and appreciate only with difficulty in our day.” (Intr., p. 8) It is hard to empathize with these ‘several kinds of happiness’ because we lack the

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<sup>1</sup> Page numbers relate to the Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop translation of *Democracy in America*. University of Chicago Press, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Pascal, *Pensées* 304, 307, and 308 which is discussed below.

<sup>3</sup> Italics are added.

*imagination* that the people living under that government had. We do not believe that a God appoints a king, and therefore we see him merely as a man. However, in the past, men were not considered to be equal by nature;<sup>4</sup> instead serfs regarded themselves inferior to the aristocracy “as an effect of the immutable order of nature.” (Intr., p. 8) According to Tocqueville, when an aristocratic government<sup>5</sup> establishes the good of the society in the minds of the people, it produces “[material] goods, force, leisure, and with these, pursuits of luxury, refinements of taste, pleasures of the mind, and cultivation of the arts; on the other hand, work, coarseness, and ignorance. But in the hearts of these ignorant and coarse crowd there were energetic passions, generous sentiments, profound beliefs, and savage virtues. Thus organized, the social body could have stability, power, and above all, glory.” (Intr., p. 8) Therefore, when the aristocracy has established an imagination of justice of society, there are clearly goods that can be attained by such a society, despite the difficulty that democratic people have in appreciating the qualities like the ‘savage virtues.’

Without the imagination of justice, any movement—even the movement towards democracy—creates worse governments. In the Old World, “the prestige of royal power has vanished without being replaced by the majesty of the laws; in our day the people scorn authority, but they fear it, and fear extracts more from them than was formerly given out of respect and love.” (Intr., p. 9) Thus, “The poor man has kept most of the prejudices of his fathers without their beliefs; their ignorance without their virtues; he has taken the doctrine of interest as the rule of his actions without knowing the science of it, and his selfishness is as lacking in enlightenment as was formerly his devotion.” (Intr., p. 10) So, the destruction of

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<sup>4</sup> Nothing expresses this *belief* more than the *United States Declaration of Independence*: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

<sup>5</sup> I mean with an ‘aristocratic government’ or ‘aristocracy’ the same as what Tocqueville calls a “royal power, leaning on the aristocracy.” (Intr. p.8)

the old regime in Europe had not been replaced with a government that was capable of creating an imagination of justice in the people.

Hence, now “the idea of rights does not exist, and force appears...as the sole argument in the present and the only guarantee of the future.” (Intr., p. 10) Now, force without (the imagination of) justice is, in a sense, tyrannical,<sup>6</sup> because, as stated, people then *consider* the power that they obey as illegitimate and *regard* their obedience to that power as oppressive (see p. 2). Thus, as long as the imagination of justice does not exist the use of power depraves man and makes him miserable.

Therefore, it is necessary that these new forms of government, which this democratic movement inevitably produces, are able to form an imagination of justice that will make people hope for goods that the new form of government will bring. Moreover, although these goods might be different from the goods incurred in an aristocracy (see p. 3), it is clear that every form of government has its own virtues once that form of government is well-established. So, it is important to see how the government of a democratic nation can form such an imagination.

Tocqueville’s prediction that “sooner or later we shall arrive, like the Americans, at an almost complete equality of conditions” (intr., p. 12) appeared to be right. However, the problem of democracy is that its principle of equality makes it impossible to create that imagination of the good of society in a similar manner to monarchies or aristocracies which establishes it through the imagination of godlike superiority of the ones in power who govern

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Blaise Pascal’s *Pensée* 298: “La justice sans la force est impuissante : la force sans la justice est tyrannique. La justice sans force est contredite, parce qu’il y a toujours des méchants ; la force sans la justice est accusée.” (“Justice without force is unpowerful; force without justice is tyrannical. Justice without force is contradicted because there are always wicked people; force without justice stands accused.”) (The translations are my own.) I will make more references to Pascal, for it is not hard to see that Tocqueville is very influenced by Blaise Pascal. Tocqueville, himself, claimed then also to read some Pascal every day for inspiration: “There are three men with whom I live a little every day; they are Pascal, Montesquieu, and Rousseau.” (*Letter to Louis de Kergorlay of August 8, 1838*, in p. xxx of the editors’ introduction of Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop)

the society. How do monarchies and aristocracies established that imagination? There are plenty of ways for a king to create an imagination of his sovereignty for his people. He could adorn himself with an army and drummers while sitting atop a golden carriage. He could build wondrous palaces with luxuries that would mesmerize the people. Moreover, he could force people to bow to him when he passes by. Such policies imprint respect and terror of the king in his subjects. With the continual exposure to such signs of power, the imprint of his majesty will be solidified within the people. People will start to believe that he is not one of them, but that “le caractère de la Divinité est empreint sur son visage.”<sup>7</sup> (Pensée 308) Such conditioning will lead to a successful establishment of a theocracy—divine-kingship—which will naturally authorize his justice. Similarly, the aristocratic class can make the serfs believe that they are inferior to the aristocrats as an immutable effect of nature (see p. 3). However, a democracy constituted on the fundamental belief that all men are created equal would contradict itself if it claims that some people are by nature better than other people.

Therefore, it is the goal of this essay to investigate how a democracy retains its validity and support since it cannot appropriate ‘the imagination of the divinity’ of the ones in power. In other words, *what does democracy require to establish a universal conviction among its people regarding good and evil so that it may maintain peace and order?*

To answer this question one could wonder if it is proper to examine a specific example, and why that would be America. But, America is a great example for “the emigrants who came to settle in America at the beginning of the seventeenth century in some fashion disengaged the democratic principle from all those against which it struggled with the old societies of Europe, and they transplanted it alone on the shores of the New World. There it could grow in freedom, and advancing along with mores, develop peacefully in laws.” (Intr.,

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<sup>7</sup> “The divine character is imprinted on his countenance.”

p. 13) Thus, not having a history of an aristocratic nation, America has almost no remnants of monarchical or aristocratic principles, laws, and customs that could cause abruptions in the inevitable development towards democracy. Hence, it is easiest to see how democracy developed in America and created its imagination in the people; one does not have to consider the anomalies that exist in the aristocratic principles which the European nations had in their movement towards democracy.

Furthermore, Tocqueville believes that you need to examine a man from his birth in order to “understand where the prejudices, habits, and passions that are going to dominate his life come from.” (Vol. 1, P. 1, Ch. 2, p. 28) Likewise, he says: “If it were possible for us to examine the elements of societies and to examine the first monuments of their history, I do not doubt that we could discover in them the first cause of prejudices, habits, dominant passions, of all that finally composes what is called national character; we would come to encounter the explanation of usages that today appear contrary to the reigning mores” etc. (Vol. 1, P. 1, Ch.2, p. 28)

But, European nations are unaware of their origins, or at least there are not many accounts of it and the sources are often obscure. In the Middle Ages, besides copying the Bible and doing theology, people did not feel the need to leave written records about their prejudices, habits, etc. Moreover, even if such accounts were written, they might be lost because there was no printing press to spread them, and it was also not of such importance to copy it by hand as with the Bible.

However, “America is the only country where one has been able to witness the natural and tranquil developments of a society, and where it has been possible to specify the influence exerted by the point of departure on the future of states.” (Vol. 1, P. 1, Ch. 2, p. 28) When Europeans started to emigrate to America, civilizations were more developed. They

found interest and use in giving accounts of the prejudices, habits, etc. of men and were able to distribute them with the invention of the printing press. So, the national character of America at its birth was like a 16<sup>th</sup> century European (or specifically Puritan<sup>8</sup>) whose character is very well known to us.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, although it is easiest to examine the consequences of the democratic movement through America, one could still wonder if the examination can be generalized to other countries. However, Tocqueville says: “I do not conclude from this that we are destined one day necessarily to draw the political consequences the Americans have drawn from a similar social state. I am very far from believing that they have found the only form of government that democracy can give itself; but it is enough that in the two countries the generative cause of laws and mores be the same, for us to have an immense interest in knowing what it has produced in each of them” (Intr., p. 12) Thus, we are validated in relating some observations of ‘America’ to other countries.

Therefore, let us see how America managed to create this imagination of justice and of the good of society in the people as a democratic nation. Then, we hopefully can make an absolute claim for what instruments democracies can use in general. We must first get a clearer picture of the implications of the equality of conditions to the American individual. We already established that the American individual will not believe in the *natural* superiority of other individuals. However, there could still be differences in attributes that are

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<sup>8</sup> See Vol. 1, P.1, Ch. 2, p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> In my own travels through America and talks with several of its citizens, I found it remarkable that Americans envy the amount of history we have in Europe. For, I, myself, envy the great care of Americans of preserving their knowledge of their history. Where Europeans give obscure accounts of their history, Americans seem to have created a more enormously vivid understanding of their own history. So, Americans embraced, at least, the centuries of historical content that they have, which you cannot say of most European nations.

valued in a democratic society such as wealth and intelligence.<sup>10</sup> Thus, if there are still significant differences in elements like wealth and intelligence, which lead to differences in one's tangible position in a society, America's imagination of the good of society could in theory have been built around such qualities.

Nevertheless, according to Tocqueville,<sup>11</sup> America's equality of conditions also applies to their material conditions and, somewhat more surprisingly, to intelligence. First, if we look at American's material conditions, we see that there can be considerable differences among people. But, such difference does not translate to a relationship of subjugation because in a meritocracy everyone is given the freedom and right to enter the competition for social wealth and positions. Anyone can cherish the hope of becoming the wealthy, the powerful, and the intelligent. There is no longer a concept of the divine-born and divinely appointed that distances us from the ones in power and forces us to exalt them and subjugate ourselves to them. There is no longer someone who possesses a godlike superiority.

Moreover, even if he attained a significant amount of money that might bring him to this position, he will not be able to create a dynasty of rich, powerful people that increases its power over generations. The belief that all people are equal also rendered the idea of the superiority of the first-born obsolete and unfair. Therefore, in America there exist "estate laws that made equality take its last step."<sup>12</sup> For, "by virtue of estate law, the death of each property owner brings a revolution in property; not only do goods change masters, but they

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<sup>10</sup> There are more 'primitive' attributes by which people legitimized someone's privileges and power. For example, strength and courage (in battle) gave some rulers the legitimate right to rule. However, the need for these traits became so much more obsolete in developed societies, and through the invention of the canon that I do not see the need to explain why it is insufficient to build an imagination of justice around these traits.

<sup>11</sup> I want to stress that I talk about Tocqueville's America and *not* modern-day America. For, although I think, myself, that most of what follows still mainly applies in modern-day America, some might argue that the inequality in material conditions and intelligence did exceed the democratic bounds.

<sup>12</sup> Tocqueville defines estate laws in the following way: "I understand by estate laws all laws whose principal goal is to regulate the fate of goods after the death of the property owner." (Vol. 1, P. 1, Ch.3, p. 47, note 1)



change, so to speak, nature; they are constantly fragmented into smaller portions.” (Vol. 1, P. 1, Ch. 3, p. 47) Thus, in aristocratic nations, the oldest son inherited all his father’s goods so that he could stay as powerful or increase it and become more powerful. But, in America, estate laws forced the father to divide his goods among his sons<sup>13</sup> and eventually his daughters as well. Hence, after the death of a rich man, the inequality of wealth gets decreased often to such an extent that it becomes impossible to found a dynasty or great house, certainly nothing that would last more than a generation.

Furthermore, in America, Tocqueville says: “to a certain point equality extends to intelligence itself. I do not think that there is a country in the world where, in proportion to population, so few ignorant and fewer learned men are found than in America. Primary instruction there is within reach of each; higher instruction is within reach of almost no one.” (Vol. 1, P. 1, Ch. 3, p. 50-51) Thanks to the equality of material conditions mentioned above, there are not many wealthy people; thus, many need to practice a profession and could not afford to live a contemplative life. Thus, almost no American transcends “the general cultivation of intelligence,” and “If it is pursued beyond this, it is then directed only toward a special and lucrative matter; one studies a science as one takes up a trade; and one takes from it only the applications whose present utility is recognized.”<sup>14</sup> (Vol. 1, P. 1, Ch. 3, p. 50-51).

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<sup>13</sup> It is well known that John Locke has a great influence on the American spirit and its laws. It seems to me that this view extended to America’s view on inheritance: “Every man is born with a double right. First, a right of freedom to his person, which no other man has a power over, but the free disposal of it lies in himself. Secondly, a right before any other man, to inherit, with his brethren, his father’s goods.” (*Second Treatise of Government*, Ch. 16, §190) To name inheritance in one breath with individual freedom shows the importance of it.

<sup>14</sup> Tocqueville famously claims that Americans are Cartesians: “America is therefore the one country in the world where the precepts of Descartes are least studied and best followed. That should not be surprising. Americans do not read Descartes’s works because their social state turns them away from speculative studies, and they follow his maxims because this same social state naturally disposes their minds to adopt them.” (Vol. 1, P. 1, Ch. 1, p. 403) That their Cartesian nature becomes apparent by their focus on utility and their degeneration of speculative studies is supported by Descartes’ works. See, for example: “I had achieved some general notions about physics... they have satisfied me that it is possible to reach knowledge that will be of much utility in this life; and that instead of the speculative philosophy now taught in schools we can find a practical one... and so make ourselves masters and possessors of nature.” (*Discourse on Method*, P. VI, translated by Laurence J. Lafleur)

Americans are always at work in order to satisfy “the least needs of the body and of providing the smallest comforts of life.” (Vol. 2, P. 2, Ch. 10, p. 506) Thus, they have no class of idle men that possess the penchant for intellectual pleasure resulting from leisure time.<sup>15</sup> In America, the aristocratic element of intellectual inequality is dramatically weakened, “so that it is difficult to assign it any influence whatsoever in the course of affairs.” (Vol. 1, P. 1, Ch. 3, p. 50-51).

Therefore, the difference in wealth and intelligence is not enough to create an imagination of justice of the person who owns a significant amount of it. When we speak of equality of conditions, we speak of equality in all matters. Thus, in a democracy, “each individual is *supposed* to be as enlightened, as virtuous, as strong as any other of those like him.”<sup>16</sup> (Vol. 1, P. 1, Ch. 5, p. 61)

If everyone is considered equal and we cannot form the imagination of the godlike superiority of an individual, why is someone willing to obey society? “He obeys society not because he is inferior to those who direct it or less capable than another man of governing himself; he obeys society because union with those like him *appears* useful to him and because *he knows* that this union cannot exist without a regulating power.”<sup>17</sup> (Vol. 1, P. 1, Ch. 5, p. 61) So, according to the democratic man, it is in his self-interest to be a subject of society.

However, although he is content with being a subject to authority, it does not mean that he delegates his will to society. Only “in all that concern the duties of citizens among

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<sup>15</sup> The necessity of leisure time for thinking is very apparent in the works of Aristotle. See, for example, *Metaphysics* Book 1, 981b, 21-25: “Hence when all the discoveries of this kind were fully developed, the sciences which relate neither to pleasure nor yet to the necessities of life were invented, and first in those places where men had leisure. Thus, the mathematical sciences originated in the neighborhood of Egypt, because the priestly class was allowed leisure.” (Translated by Hugh Tredennick)

<sup>16</sup> Italics are added.

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themselves, he has become a subject. In all that regards only himself he has remained master: he is free and owes an account of his actions only to God. Hence this maxim: that the individual is the best as well as the only judge of his particular interest, and that society has the right to direct his actions only when it feels itself injured by this deed or when it needs to demand his cooperation.” (Vol. 1, P. 1, Ch. 5, p. 62) Thus, he does not want to live in a country where the government decides how he should live since “no one has the right to force one like himself to be happy.” (Vol. 1, P. 2, Ch. 10, p. 359)

But, if everyone is their own counselor, how can there be a common interest? In order to retain order and peace, a society needs to be built upon a common interest that upholds the well-being of their citizens and governments. Hence, in aristocracies, in order to create a common interest, 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.” (Vol. 2, P. 2, Ch. 8, p. 500) However, the democratic man does not consider it ‘glorious to forget oneself’ because he is the judge and master of his own happiness. So, democracy has to rely on another doctrine for creating such common interest.

Now, as we stated, the poor European man uses the doctrine of interest without knowing the science of it (see p. 3). Moreover, although it is not the case that a European is more selfish than an American, “each American knows how to sacrifice a part of his particular interest to save the rest. We, [French], want to keep everything, and often everything eludes us.” (Vol. 2, P. 2, Ch. 8, p. 503) Do Americans actually know that science of self-interest which the Europeans cannot grasp?

The answer to this question is affirmative, for the Americans combat the dangers of individualism caused by the belief that the best judge is oneself by the so-called ‘doctrine of

self-interest well understood.’<sup>18</sup> Thus, “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.” Therefore, American moralists “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.” And somehow, “they have convinced their fellow citizens.” (Vol. 2, P. 2, Ch. 8, p. 501)

Thus, the doctrine of self-interest well understood indicates an understanding that it is in men’s self-interest that their fellow citizens live in prosperity and that there is a good government. In other words, the interest of men and nation are in harmony.

Americans are so convinced of this doctrine that they do not conceal their hidden self-interest in any actions, even seemingly altruistic ones. Instead, they even proudly claim that their “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.”<sup>19</sup> (Vol. 2, P. 2, Ch. 8, p. 502) Tocqueville even believes that they are so fond of their pure self-interest that they often “do not do themselves justice.” Even when “abandoning themselves to the disinterested and unreflective sparks that are natural to man,” they would rather do honor to their philosophy of rational self-interest than to themselves (see Vol. 2, P. 2, Ch. 8, p. 502). So, one could claim that it is part of the *American imagination* to think that they always act out of self-interest even when they do not. For self-interest is rational.

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<sup>18</sup> ‘La doctrine de l’intérêt bien entendu.’

<sup>19</sup> Italics are added.

Tocqueville claims that this ‘doctrine of self-interest well understood’ that unites people’s separate interest to a common one is of “all philosophic theories the most appropriate to the needs of men in our time.” And that “The minds of 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.” (Vol. 2, P. 2, Ch. 8, p. 502-503) In other words, the doctrine of self-interest well understood excellently fits, at least, into the needs of democracy and is of vital importance for the creation of a universal conviction among its people regarding good and evil.

But how can one create a shared understanding of the doctrine of self-interest well understood? How was it created in America? The answer is twofold: through enlightenment and religion. So, let us first examine enlightenment. The method of enlightening people is quite contradictory to the method of imbuing *imagination* in people. The method of enlightenment finds its basis in *reason* and not imagination. It is necessary to use reason, because “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 will not be able to do without enlightenment.” (Vol. 2, P. 2, Ch.8, p. 503)

However, is it even possible to show that the doctrine of self-interest well understood is supported by reason? At least, Tocqueville says: “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.” (Vol. 2, P. 2, Ch. 8, p. 503) Reading these words, one cannot but be full of hope that it is easy to convince people of this doctrine if many truths seem as true as a mathematical proof.

Nevertheless, it is not strange to think that Tocqueville is deceiving us here in claiming that there are a great number of ‘truths’ that are ‘so evident’ which support the

doctrine of self-interest well understood. For, he refrained from delving deeper into the accounts of the moralists that argued for this doctrine but rather saying that “it suffices for me to say that they have convinced their fellow citizens.” (Vol. 2, P. 2, Ch. 8, p. 501) Furthermore, he stated that even when moralists judge the theory as imperfect, they still must support it (see p. 13). Lastly, Tocqueville often openly questions the validity of American views in his book. For instance, he says, “I do not say that all opinions are correct, but they are American.” (Vol. 1, P. 2, Ch. 10, p. 359)

Besides, even if Tocqueville believes that there are ‘a great number of truths so evident,’ reason alone may not be sufficient to render them self-evident. As a fervent student of Pascal (see note 6), he probably will agree that “Nous connaissons la vérité, non seulement par la raison, mais encore par le cœur ; c’est de cette dernière sort que nous connaissons les premiers principes, et c’est en vain que le raisonnement qui n’y a point de part essaye de les combattre.”<sup>20</sup> (Pensée 282) This doctrine of self-interest well understood is based on first principles as well, so it requires more than deductive reasoning in testing its validity.

Therefore, it does not seem unlikely that Tocqueville is acting like the good moralist here, which he requires in passionately defending and supporting the doctrine of self-interest well understood (see p. 13). For, the democratic man prefers reason to accompany his actions that he might not accept a doctrine whose principles are devoid of deductive foundation. Hence, it is of vital importance that the moralists be aware of this fact and that they present their arguments, in such way as if they were entirely supported by reason.<sup>21</sup> Thus,

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<sup>20</sup> “We know the truth, not only by reason but also by the heart. It is by this last sort that we know the first principles, and it is in vain that reason, who has nothing to do with it, tries to combat it.”

<sup>21</sup> The Americans should be thankful that John Locke was so great in giving the first principles a ‘rational veil.’ See, for example: “The State of Nature has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one: And Reason, which is that Law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, and being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions. (*Second Treatise of Government*, Ch. 2, §6) Or: “*The like natural inducement, hath brought Men to know that it is no less their Duty, to love others than themselves...*” (*Second Treatise of Government*, Ch. 2, §5)

enlightenment also utilizes imagination, like aristocracies and monarchies, yet a different one: imagination of the rationality of the arguments.

Once the moralist has found a way to convince the democratic man that the first principles of his arguments are rational, he only needs to keep from contradicting himself in the rest of the argument. Then, the conclusion of the argument will be reached through chains of arguments that are validated by reason. And in reasoning, the validity of the argument can be established without all the principles being true as long as the reasoning itself is correct. Plenty of philosophers and moralists have been capable of supporting the doctrine of self-interest well understood in an entirely rational-appearing way. They do that so convincingly that it is not even clear if they are themselves deluded or not.<sup>22</sup>

Now that we have shown how the doctrine of self-interest well understood is supported through enlightenment with some element of imagination, it remains to show how religion can support it. Tocqueville claims that religion is an essential element to get a broad support for this doctrine, “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.” (Vol. 2, P. 2, Ch. 9, p. 504) It is essential in the doctrine of self-interest well understood that one gets rewarded in the future if one sacrifices his current desires by serving his fellow citizens and nation. Thus, the fact that many religions promise the rewards of afterlife and heaven for loving God and one’s neighbor renders those religions compatible and even supportive of this doctrine.

Hence, although Tocqueville claims that the interest for the afterlife is not the only component for religious fervor in man, he says: “I think that interest is the principal means

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<sup>22</sup> A book that attempted this project are, for example: John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*.

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.” (Vol. 2, P. 2, Ch. 9, p. 505) Therefore, a religious man utilizes reasoning similar to that of any ordinary follower of the doctrine of self-interest well understood. The only difference is that the religious man’s ‘first principles’ are based on faith (and maybe reason as well<sup>23</sup>), whereas the non-religious man is deluded that his first principles are based on reason alone, which is also in a sense, nothing more than faith.

The view that it is in your self-interest to be religious is very apparent in the American spirit. “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.” (Vol. 2, P. 2, Ch. 9, p. 505) So, it is just as if many Americans are reasoning in the same way as ‘Pascal’s wager’ (see *Pensée* 233) to which Tocqueville rightfully refers.<sup>24</sup>

However, that does not mean that American Christians are following the Middle Ages’ maxim, ‘memento mori.’<sup>25</sup> In the past, philosophers criticized Christianity when the maxim

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<sup>23</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas seems to argue that God endowed us with the possibility of understanding the natural law by reason: “Now among all others, the *rational creature* is subject to divine providence in a more excellent way, in so far as it partakes of a share of providence, by being provident both for itself and for others. Therefore, *it has a share of eternal reason*, whereby it has a *natural inclination* to its proper act and end; and *this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law*.” (*Summa Theologica*, First Part of the Second Part, Question 91, Second Article) (The italics are added.) On the other hand, Pascal, as a Jansenist (which has some similarities with the more renowned doctrine of Calvinism) believes that because of original sin (see *Pensées* 338, 430) our reason is corrupted: “Il y a sans doute lois naturelles ; mais cette belle raison corrompue a tout corrompu...” (*Pensée* 294) (“There are without a doubt some natural laws, but this beautiful corrupted reason has corrupted all...”)

<sup>24</sup> Tocqueville does not quote ‘Pascal’s wager’ directly, but summarizes it quite to the point: ““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!”” (Vol. 2, P. 2, Ch. 9, p. 505)

<sup>25</sup> ‘Remember (that you have) to die.’



was fervently followed by many Christians. They saw Christianity as an obstacle to improving the material conditions since they claimed that Christians are only concerned with the afterlife.<sup>26</sup> However, in Tocqueville's and our days in America, "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 order, 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."<sup>27</sup> (Vol. 1, P. 2, Ch. 9, p. 505-506) Thus, American Christians regard it as their duty and self-interest to strive for the material well-being, development, and the good of their nation. Thus, there are almost no other nations than America that observe, with both reason or faith or both, the following words of Paul with an uniform spirit: "(1) I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people—(2) for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."<sup>28</sup> (*1 Timothy* 2:1-2, NIV)

Therefore, through enlightenment and religion, America is capable of formulating this common belief in the doctrine of self-interest well understood. The general acceptance of this

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Machiavelli's *Discourse on Livy*: "Thinking then whence it can arise that in those ancient times peoples were more lovers of freedom than in these, I believe it arises from the same cause that makes men less strong now, which I believe is the difference between our education and the ancient, founded on the difference between our religion and the ancient. For our religion, having shown the truth and the true way, *makes us esteem less the honor of the world*, whereas the Gentiles, esteeming it very much and having placed the highest good in it, were more ferocious in their actions... This mode of life thus seems to have rendered the world weak and given in prey to criminal men, who can manage it securely, seeing that the collectivity of men, *so as to go to paradise*, think more of enduring their beatings than of avenging them." (II, 2.2, Harvey C. Mansfield & Nathan Tarcov translation, italics are added)

<sup>27</sup> I, myself, was astonished, at first, when I talked with some American Christians. They had such an 'earthly' understanding of Christianity that I wondered if they even believed in an afterlife.

<sup>28</sup> I attended several services of different Christian denominations in America, and there is one thing that they all had in common: there was an American flag (if they had the means) in the church and they prayed for the American people in power (even referring to the president, governor, and mayor by name). In the Netherlands, and insofar as I know, in many other European countries as well, there are no national flags in the churches and they only pray for the people in power during special occasions. In the Netherlands, for example, we pray only for our king the Sunday after 'Kingsday.'

doctrine incites most Americans to strive for the well-being of their fellow citizens and their nation. So, if other democracies want their people to possess the science of self-interest like the American man, it is of vital importance that they use similar means as the Americans to create this conviction.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, this imagination is not everlasting. For, as we stated, it finds its foundation in reason or faith, or both (see p. 13, 16). Now for the religious democratic man, the foundation is only faith, and yet he *reasons* from the principles that are based on faith (see p. 16). So, the religious democratic man elevates the principles that are based on faith to a divine position in something like the way the aristocratic man elevated royal prestige. The non-religious democratic man who reasons from principles that are seemingly rational elevates his reason itself to a godlike position. Thus, the the non-religious democratic man believes that “the most formidable weapon against errors of every kind is reason.” (Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason*, Intr.) Thus, the imagination of the good of society is formed through the imagination of the divine superiority of reason and not divine superiority of the one in power like in aristocracy and monarchy. Perhaps then, just as the aristocratic man loses reverence for royal prestige once he realizes that that royal prestige finds its legitimation only

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<sup>29</sup> It is important to stress here that the doctrine of self-interest well understood ‘merely’ indicates a goal one strives for, i.e., in the good of not only himself but also his fellow citizens and his nation to serve himself. It does not indicate anything, however, about the way how that goal is attained. Hence, in America, “They do not always agree on the means to take in order to govern well, and they differ on some of the forms suitable to give to government, but they are in accord on the general principles that ought to rule human societies. From Maine to Florida, from Missouri to the Atlantic Ocean, they believe that the origin of all legitimate powers is in the people. They conceive the same ideas about freedom and equality; they profess the same opinions about the press, the right of association, the jury, the responsibility of agents of power” So, “the dangers by which the American Union is threatened arise no more from the diversity of opinions than from that of interests. One must seek them in the variety of characters and in the passions of Americans. (Vol. 1, P. 2, Ch. 10, p. 358-359) As Tocqueville states, the variety of characters and passions that one finds in America are caused mainly because of slavery. For, the lack of slaves gave the North a so-called ‘middle class character,’ whereas the abundance of slaves gave the South an ‘aristocratic character’ (see Vol. 1, P. 2, Ch. 10, p. 358-361). As we all know, the vast difference of the South and North are the main cause of the civil war (1861-1865) which breaks out just 31 years after the Tocqueville’s publication of Volume 1. However, it is the goal of this essay to examine *what democracy requires to establish a universal conviction among its people regarding good and evil so that it may maintain peace and order*. It is clear that, although the disagreement about the ‘means to govern well’ caused a terrible war, they wonderfully managed to create such a universal conviction. I hope that this justifies the possible criticism that my essay ignores the vast differences between Americans that caused the civil war, i.e., that it is clear that these differences are not caused because there was no common *American imagination*.

in *imagination*, the democratic man loses reverence for the laws, customs, mores, etc. once he realizes that he *imagined* that these were altogether rational. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate how a democratic man might come to such a realization so that it might be prevented or to alleviate the subsequent harm.

First, the realization that the arguments are not entirely rational come from the first principles and not the argument itself. As stated, the validity of an argument can be established without the principles having to be true (see p. 15). In fact, first principles can never be proven by deduction;<sup>30</sup> it is merely possible to judge their ‘quality’ by induction. Hence, the validity of an argument stands or is rejected with the *rationality* of the first principles. Thus, it follows that the ‘rational veil’ on which the ‘democratic imagination’ relies, is uncovered once the first principles show themselves incapable of being deductively established by reason. Besides, it can also happen that faith in religion, which upholds these first principles, weakens. Thus, we must find out how such events can happen.

Let us start by examining how the first principles lose their rational validity. Sometimes a man feels a need to ruminate about the rationality of his beliefs. Since this man cannot undertake this venture with only his own mind, he will seek recourse to authority, respected men, and books. The authority, which in America can be the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and John Locke, will testify that the first principles are truly

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<sup>30</sup> Although I refer here to the first principles of political philosophy, I am sceptical that first principles in the other sciences can be established deductively. For, in mathematics, the purest of the sciences, it seems to be even impossible to prove its first principles deductively. Immanuel Kant famously argues that mathematics’ first principles are a priori established by means of the nature of intuition: “Mathematics can accomplish nothing with mere concept but hastens at once to intuition, in which it contemplates the concept only in an intuition that it exhibits *a priori*—i.e., an intuition that it has constructed—and wherein what follows from the construction’s universal conditions must also hold universally for the object of the constructed concept.” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, P. 2, Sect. 2, A 716, B 744, translated by Werner S. Pluhar, italics are added) However, because of the discovery of Non-Euclidean geometry, which does not contradict itself and is therefore rationally valid, one can only doubt if we can legitimately trust our intuition. Let alone that our intuition is capable of proving the first-principles a priori.

rational since otherwise they delegitimize their own power.<sup>31</sup> So, we should not fear that authority will destroy the rational veil of the first principles.

However, respected men and books may cause great problems. First, the respected men might regard telling the truth as more important than not harming society. Besides, they might have earned their respect for the wrong reasons and find interest in ‘reforming’ the nation. So, when the man seeks recourse to these respected men, they might unveil the fact that the first principles are not rational by proving that they are not supported by deductive reasoning. Hence, as a result, in a certain sense, these respected men will “corrupt the youth.”<sup>32</sup>

Thus, it is important that these respected men be, first of all, ‘true friends’ of the nation. They are ‘true friends’ of the nation either if they are themselves fooled that the first principles are rational, or they *act* like ‘true friends’ when they know that it is most often the case that retaining the ‘noble lie’ is their duty. Those who act like ‘true friends’ see it as their duty to uphold the noble lie because they know that “Il est dangereux de dire au peuple que les lois ne sont pas justes, car il n’y obéit qu’à cause qu’il les croit justes.”<sup>33</sup> (Pensée 326) Thus, if there is no sufficient reason to incite the people against authority, he will refrain from revealing the truth.

There is almost never sufficient reason to incite people against authority, since “la guerre civile est le plus grand des maux”<sup>34</sup> (Pensée 320) and peace is “le plus grand des

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<sup>31</sup> In not democratic governments, the authority might not testify that the first principles are rational by reason, but that they are rational because their ruler is appointed by God, etc.

<sup>32</sup> The most famous defense of this kind of accusation, one can find in Plato’s *Apology*.

<sup>33</sup> “It is dangerous to say to the people that the laws are not just, for they only obey them because they believe that they are just.”

<sup>34</sup> “Civil war is the greatest of evils.”

biens.”<sup>35</sup> (Pensée 319) Now, clearly, John Locke and liberal democracy disagree with Pascal, even so far as to include a right of revolution.<sup>36</sup> And Tocqueville himself is accepting the new society based on democratic revolutions. But, at the same time, Tocqueville is being careful not to undermine the democratic imagination. Lest his ruminating reader do harm to society, Tocqueville only indirectly tells him the truth about the nature of the first principles.

Now, when we turn to books, we see that a similar procedure is required. At first, the man who is seeking justification for his beliefs should surround himself with books that support the principles of the society’s foundation rather than the ones that weaken them. In other words, it would be wise for the American man to read John Locke, who supports America’s first principles (see note 21), but dangerous to read Karl Marx. After having read works such as Locke’s *Second Treatise of Nature*, he will probably be compelled to adhere to it because of its well-founded and irrefutable reasoning. So, through the help of such books and the ‘respected men,’ he will most likely quench his curiosities and become a peaceful member of society.

However, one should rightfully feel upset here. Why cannot the man that starts questioning his beliefs end up like Tocqueville, i.e., a man who presents the doctrine of self-interest well understood as having ‘many truths’ that are ‘so evident’ even when he does not believe in the rational nature of the first principles (see p. 14)? Acting in such a way implies that he can judge things with a so-called ‘pensée de derrière’ (secret thought<sup>37</sup>) (see Pensée 337). People that judge by such means are aware that the foundation of a society relies on

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<sup>35</sup> “The greatest of goods.”

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, the following passage in John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*: “...when by the Miscarriages of those in Authority, [the legislative] is forfeited...[the legislative] reverts to the Society, and the People have a Right to act as Supreme, and continue the Legislative in themselves, or erect a new Form, or under the old form place it in new hands, as they think good.” (Ch. XIX, § 243)

<sup>37</sup> A literal translation would be: “thought from behind.”

many follies, but they do not abstain from being observant of them. They might even feel a certain joy at the thought that others believe in the follies of society, for example, that “so many grown men, bearded, strong, and armed, who were around the king...should submit to obey a child.”<sup>38</sup> (Montaigne, *Essays*, “Of Cannibals”) But, at the same time, they realize that this illusion preserves the tranquility of society. In other words, they act like the peasants in the famous Ethiopian proverb: “When the great lord passes, the peasants bow deeply and silently fart.” So, why can we not all become like these wise peasants that joyfully see through the noble lie that a society is founded on?

To answer this question, first, one can easily understand that it is unreasonable that an infant-king is more fit to rule than an old learned man. Even the uneducated peasant could understand that such a claim is unreasonable through reason. Hence, it is not uncommon that a peasant is capable of action accompanied by a ‘*pensée de derrière*’ in monarchies or aristocratic government, which inevitably contain such evident absurdities. It follows that there is quite an enormous difference between what is reasonable and what is unreasonable in such governments.

However, the difference between what is rational and irrational decreases to a great degree in a democracy. As stated, in democracies, people are only willing to accept arguments that seem reasonable to them (see p. 12). Hence, a lot of society’s doctrines, such as the doctrine of self-interest well understood, are rational except for the first principles. For, as stated, in reasoning there is this remarkable feature that the validity can be established without all the principles being true (see p. 15). Thus, only the first principles are irrational and any argument deduced by reason afterwards are rational because reason itself is valid.

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<sup>38</sup> Translated by Donald M. Frame.

Hence, it is way more challenging to discover the irrational element in these arguments and to act with ‘*pensée de derrière*’ as a result. Being so used to having a rational argument behind everything, people will find it hard to accept that there is an inevitable irrationality in the first principles (see p. 19). Thus, people also feel a significant desire to overthrow certain doctrines if they encounter such irrationality in the first principles, for they tend to believe that everything can be established by reason. To get rid of this belief requires more enlightenment than to see that an infant-king is not more fit to rule than a learned man. Therefore, in a democracy it is way more uncommon that people possess the capability of acting with a ‘*pensée de derrière*’ as in other forms of government, let alone that ‘uneducated’ peasants possess it. So, although it is, at least, as important that some people in a democracy can act accompanied by a ‘*pensée de derrière*,’ the blurry difference between the irrational and rational elements of an argument make it way more difficult to possess this skill.

Furthermore, we must note that Americans “believe that at birth each has received the ability to govern himself” (Vol. 1, P. 2, Ch. 10, p. 359). But, ‘the ability to govern [oneself]’ does not translate to an ability to act accompanied by a ‘*pensée de derrière*.’ If one looks at an infant, it is quite clear that he is in a state of ‘pure natural ignorance.’<sup>39</sup> Now, if one can act with a *pensée de derrière*, it implies that he realized that humankind is unable to build a society on true justice since the first principles contain irrationality. In other words, such a one has obtained a ‘learned ignorance.’<sup>40</sup> ‘Learned ignorance’ implies that one understands that he cannot deductively establish first principles. Thus, he also does not have the desire to reform society because he knows that humankind is unable to build a society on pure reason. However, in order to go from the state of ‘pure natural ignorance’ to ‘learned ignorance,’ one

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<sup>39</sup> ‘Pure ignorance naturelle’ (see Pascal’s *Pensée* 327).

<sup>40</sup> ‘Ignorance savante’ (see Pascal’s *Pensée* 327).

needs to first reach the state of ‘learned ignorance.’ In the process, he realizes that many of his beliefs were arbitrary, but at the same time encounters many other new beliefs with the mask of truth. Confusing the images of truth for real truth, he thinks that he has acquired sufficient knowledge to be an ethical reformer. Believing that the world could be a better place if people listen to him, he starts telling the people that their society is unjust. But this will only weaken people’s belief and weaken the foundation of a democracy. So, it would be only wise to let people to explore their beliefs if they can attain the state of ‘learned ignorance.’ Now, we know that Tocqueville managed to do that, but does that immediately imply that everyone can do that?

Sadly, one has to possess the same means and disposition as Tocqueville in order to become like him, but one probably will not. And, although with a specific individual it might be possible, it is impossible that a successful journey from ‘pure natural ignorance’ to ‘learned ignorance’ can happen on a mass scale. For, “It is impossible, whatever one does, to raise the enlightenment of the people above a certain level. It will do no good to facilitate approaches to human knowledge, to improve the methods of teaching and to make science cheap; one will never make it so that men are instructed and develop their intelligence without devoting time to it.” (Vol. 1, P. 2, Ch. 5, p. 188) As stated, in order to devote time to the studies that allow one to transcend “the general cultivation of intelligence,” one needs leisure time, i.e., one should not be concerned with petty matters that distract the mind such as obtaining the basic necessities (see p. 10). Hence, “The greater or lesser the facility the people encounter in living without working, therefore, forms the necessary limit of their intellectual progress. This limit is placed further in certain countries, less far in certain others; but for it not to exist, it would be necessary that the people not have to occupy themselves with the material cares of life, that is to say, that they no longer be the people.” (Vol. 1, P. 2,



Ch. 5, p. 188) Since most men cannot afford to dedicate their life to contemplation like Tocqueville, we cannot expect them to act with a ‘*pensée de derrière*.’

However, could we not obtain the amount of wealth that allows everyone to dedicate their life to contemplation?<sup>41</sup> But Tocqueville does not seem to think that ‘the people’ care for the material cares of life mainly because they have a lack of it. Instead, the richest man in the world could also belong to the so-called group of ‘the people,’ in the sense that he does not use his riches to pursue intellectual studies but merely for enjoying the bodily pleasures of life. For, ‘the people’ have a certain disposition towards life.<sup>42</sup> This disposition makes them value the material goods over the intellectual so that they are forced to primarily occupy themselves with the material cares of life instead of contemplation.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, it feels unnatural for a democratic man, who believes in equality, to think that only some people have ‘the natural disposition towards the contemplative life.’ But do we not all love different things? Some love to hunt, others to cook, to play games, etc. So, why do we want to make everyone into philosophers if they do not even love to philosophize? Why would one bestow upon another the pains that come with realizing that many of his beliefs are not rational? If he does not have a ‘true desire’ to know the truth, is it not cruel to bestow upon him the many pains the truth possesses? Is it not arrogant to elevate ‘contemplative life’ above the others? For, the boxer could argue and elevate his occupation

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<sup>41</sup> One sees that this belief has some serious support in the fact that there is a stronger and stronger call for the so-called ‘universal basic income.’

<sup>42</sup> I want to stress that I do not intend to make any value judgment; if you get that sense, I deserve to be called a servant of vanity. Furthermore, I also do not want to claim that people that have a disposition to thinking are more intelligent. I know many people that have clearly the intellectual capacity to pursue a life full of contemplation, but who would not enjoy themselves if they should pursue the required studies for that.

<sup>43</sup> How Tocqueville uses ‘the people’ (‘le peuple’) is similar how the ancients used ‘οἱ πολλοί’ (‘hoi polloi,’ ‘the many’) which is often encountered in the works of Aristotle. Reading through such works, it is not difficult to understand that it rather refers to the opinions, passions, and character of a big group of people than the ‘working class.’

in the same way as the philosophers do. He could say, “I belong to the best group of society: the fighters who are ‘naturally disposed to’ caring for their bodies and use them in the most virtuous ways. Then there is ‘the people’: all the others who are concerned with thinking about petty notions or with misusing their bodies by corrupting it with leisure.” We could make the same argument for people that are disposed to do other things. These arguments are not often encountered in books, mainly because pursuers of a vocation as, for example, boxing do not express their self-love in the written word. So, we must not naïvely try to make everyone a philosopher but, instead, imitate the Enlightenment philosopher David Hume:

“...there are in England, in particular, many honest gentlemen, who being always employ’d in their domestic affairs, or amusing themselves in common recreations have carried their thoughts very little beyond those objects, which are every day expos’d to their senses. And indeed, of such as these I pretend not to make philosophers, nor do I expect them either to be associates in these researches or auditors of these discoveries. They do well to keep themselves in their present situation; and instead of refining them into philosophers, I wish we cou’d communicate to our founders of systems, a share of this gross earthly mixture, as an ingredient, which they commonly stand much in need of, and which wou’d serve to temper those fiery particles, of which they are compos’d. (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, B. I, P. IV, Sec. VII)

Therefore, in democracies people should be enlightened to be able to reason with the doctrine of self-interest well understood, but not beyond that because not all citizens need to be philosophers. It is not the case that democracies should keep their citizens in the state of blissful ignorance as aristocracies did. Such ignorance would be detrimental because the people would lack the knowledge of the doctrine of self-interest well understood. But, once the democratic man possesses the science of self-interest, he will have the right beliefs to live in a democracy, and the state then fulfills its responsibility to enlighten him. If it would take up the responsibility to make everyone philosophers, the consequences will probably be even more detrimental than not educating them at all. For, by making everyone think of moral

relativity, which necessarily happens in one's philosophical development (see p. 23-24), they will accuse society of being a mere 'power structure' because the imagination of the justice and of the good of society is destroyed. Hence, they will think that they have the right to act in opposition to society because society's justice is not 'their justice.' They would even enjoy opposing their community because, by doing that, they can elevate themselves above the 'petty and silly rules' of society.

Despite these stated precautions, a man may still question his beliefs without having the right means and disposition to be a philosopher. In such a scenario, society must contain entities or people that act in a manner which Pascal accuses Plato and Aristotle of acting in. In *Pensée* 331, Pascals says that "quand ils se sont divertis à faire leur *Lois* et leur *Politique*, ils l'ont fait en se jouant."<sup>44</sup> Hence, when reading Plato's *Laws* and Aristotle's *Politics*, a lover of truth should not be fooled that Plato and Aristotle believed in everything that they wrote. However, it makes no sense that they wrote it for only self-joy, for then there would be no reason why they have published it. For Pascal, the philosophers publicized their books for propaganda. They shared them in order to bring order to an 'insane asylum.'<sup>45</sup> The sort of people who believe that they are enlightened see themselves as the potential kings and emperors that should reform society since they know that society's beliefs are not (entirely) rational. Discerning that they pose a significant threat to the maintenance of peace and prosperity of a society, Aristotle and Plato sought a way to subdue them. Hence, "Ils entrent dans leurs principes pour modérer leur folie au moins mal qu'il se peut."<sup>46</sup> Thus, Aristotle and Plato used charming rhetoric, beguiling deductions, etc. to make their political work 'worthy

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<sup>44</sup> "when they entertained themselves to make their *Laws* and their *Politics*, they did it in a spirit of play."

<sup>45</sup> "pour régler un hôpital de fous"

<sup>46</sup> "They enter into their principles in order to moderate their madness to the least evil as they are able to."

of their esteem.’ Furthermore, they made their works conform to the imagination of justice of their society so that the books can uphold peace and order of society. Now, as stated, Locke does basically the same as Aristotle and Plato except that his work is more applicable to democracies (see p. 21). Therefore, democracies need to encourage men like Locke, who apply Aristotle’s and Plato’s method to democracy, to write works that uphold the first principles of democracy.<sup>47</sup>

So, we have examined how the loss of rational validity of the first principles might threaten society, how we should prevent it, and act if a man starts to doubt. Hence, it remains to do the same thing concerning faith. As we recall, religious faith was the other element that upholds the first principles; we showed that one could also act according to the doctrine of self-interest well understood because of his religious faith. Besides, we showed how reason plays an essential part for the religious man as well for he considers it to be in his self-interest, which is rational, to be religious and follow its doctrines (see p. 15-17). In other words, the American feels a great desire to understand everything as rational, even his faith. Hence, this fondness for rationality causes him to lose his faith of anything if it appears to be devoid of reason. So, it is essential for society that his religious faith, on which his acceptance of the doctrine of self-interest well understood is founded, stays intact.

However, friction between faith and reason will inevitably happen because of the development of science. This development will render many taught religious doctrines (totally) irrational.<sup>48</sup> The theory of evolution, for example, cast doubts upon religious doctrines. And some Christian denominations, because of their late acceptance of this

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<sup>47</sup> I believe that Tocqueville also says for this reason that “The minds of moralists of our day ought to turn, therefore, principally toward [the doctrine of self-interest well understood]. Even should they judge it imperfect, they would still have to adopt it as necessary.” (Vol. 2, P. 2, Ch. 8, p. 503) (See also p. 11-12)

<sup>48</sup> This way of reasoning is apparent in, for example, Galileo Galilei: “I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forego their use” (*Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina*).

doctrine, lost much credibility.<sup>49</sup> So, in order to appeal to the changing status quo, religious doctrine must be willing to reform. For, would it not be strange if it is the true essence of religion to let you stray from the truth? The Lord, himself, teaches us: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (*John* 14:6, NIV) Thus, if what that the church teaches appears to be manifestly false, we must not blame the scripture but the misinterpretation of it.

Furthermore, through apologetics like Pascal and Kierkegaard, religion can refute the claims that it is ridiculous to believe in a religion. For, such thinkers will explain that there are limits to our knowledge, or that it is still rational to believe in something that seems improbable (as in the Wager or the Leap). Besides, people could show that science itself is not a threat to religious faith but rather a fortifier of it. They could argue that since science follows mathematical laws there must be the lawmaker of the principles and laws of science and that not everything is mere chaos.<sup>50</sup> However, such arguing might cause people to equate God with nature itself.<sup>51</sup> Then, it is still possible to argue that science cannot dispose of divine intervention and creation. For, “When we speak of divine intervention, we quite

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<sup>49</sup> Charles Darwin published his *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. It took the Roman Catholic Church 91 years to come up with an official doctrine that made the theory of evolution compatible with the Catholic religion. Pope Pius XII promulgated a papal encyclical called *Humani generis* where he, for example, states: “For these reasons the Teaching Authority of the Church does not forbid that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, research and discussions, on the part of men experienced in both fields, take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution, in as far as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter—for the Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are immediately created by God.” (36, official English translation)

<sup>50</sup> C.S. Lewis even thought that the Scientific Age depends on this belief: “Men became scientific because they expected Law in Nature, and they expected Law in Nature because they believed in a Legislator. In most modern scientists, this belief has died: it will be interesting to see how long their confidence in uniformity survives it. Two significant developments have already appeared—the hypothesis of a lawless sub-nature, and the surrender of the claim that science is true. We may be living nearer than we suppose to the end of the Scientific Age.” (*Miracles: a preliminary study*)

<sup>51</sup> Spinoza famously argued that God and Nature are the same, thereby, basically denying the existence of a God that exists outside of nature and intervenes. See, for example: “...for the eternal and infinite entity that we call *God*, i.e. *Nature* [*Deus, seu Natura*], acts by the same necessity as that by which he exists. For we have shown that he acts out of the same necessity of nature as that by which he exists. Therefore, the reason, i.e., the cause, why *God* or in other words *Nature* acts, and the reason why he exists, is one and the same.” (*Ethics*, P. 4, Pref., translated by G.H.R. Parkinson, italics are added)

obviously do not refer to the scientific determination of an event, but to the meaningful connection between this event and others or human thought. Now this intellectual connection is as much a part of reality as scientific causality; it would be much too crude a simplification if we ascribed it exclusively to the subjective side of reality.” (Niels Bohr to Heisenberg, Heisenberg, *Physics and Beyond. Encounters and Conversations*, Ch. 7 “Science and Religion”)

Nevertheless, as we stated, to believe in first principles requires more than just reason (see p. 14). Hence, being a first principle, faith in God is not usually attained through reason. So, if it is impossible to move a man’s heart to faith, let him not see religion as a threat to his own freedom. Instead, show him that religion follows the doctrine of self-interest well understood (see p. 15-17) and that religion is thus very ‘useful’ for the preservation of this doctrine.<sup>52</sup> If that is managed, he will see it as immoral to weaken the faith of others.

Therefore, we clarified what threatens the faith in the first principles and how these threats could be prevented. Thus, we established how the decay of both faith and imagination that the first principles are rational could be weakened or prevented. The only thing that remains is to see if modern-day America employs any of the above-described precautions in order to keep that firmly established imagination of the justice and good of society.

First, according to my own observations, a vast majority of the Americans still have “an immense opinion of themselves” and believe that America is the greatest country in the world. They still “believe that at birth each has received the ability to govern himself, and that no one has the right to force one to be happy like him.” Most “have a lively faith in human perfection; they judge that the diffusion of enlightenment will necessarily produce

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<sup>52</sup> Founding Father and President Thomas Jefferson seems to have tried doing that in his book *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* (Also known as the *Jefferson Bible*). The book primarily focusses on the moral teachings, and leaves out most supernatural things, references to the Trinity, Jesus’ divinity, and his resurrection.

useful results, that ignorance will bring fatal effects.” They “consider society as a body in progress; humanity as a changing picture, in which nothing is or ought to be fixed forever, and they admit that what seems good to them today can be replaced tomorrow by the better that is still hidden.” (Vol. 1, P. 2, Ch. 10, p. 359)

Furthermore, although atheism is rising at quite a rapid speed, American Christians are in a privileged position compared to some of their European democratic nations. Most Christians in this country still “practice their religion without shame and weakness.” (Vol. 2, P. 2, Ch. 9, p. 505) People in the government still seem to be aware of the Christian foundations and do not dare to scoff at them, or at least out loud. In return, churches pray to bestow wisdom upon the people in power (see note 28). So, the state still does “call religion to their aid” and does not see religion, at least, for the most part “in the ranks of their adversaries.” (Intr., p. 11) Therefore, the doctrine of self-interest well understood is fortified by both the enlightenment and faith of a large group of religious Americans.

Nevertheless, I am skeptical that the ‘new generation of Americans’ are as proudly partaking in the American imagination as the previous generations. Among this new generation, there are significant numbers of people whose pride to be American has been exchanged for irrational envy towards other European nations. “I shall not deny that in the United States one often regrets not finding those uniform rules that seem constantly to be watching over each of us.” It is, of course, true that “the little details of social orderliness that render life sweet and comfortable are neglected in America” compared to some European nations. “But the essential guarantees in society exist [in America] as much as elsewhere.” And, I often felt forced to reply to these people that “There is no country in the world where, after all is said and done, men make as many efforts to create social well-being” as in America. (Vol. 1, P. 1, Ch. 5, p. 87) I would be prouder, at the present moment, to be an

American, a country where the people are at least concerned about the well-being of their fellow citizens, than to be a Dutchman who does not feel the need to help his fellow citizens since the government takes up the role as the mother of the weak. We pay our taxes and hold the government accountable if there are neglected people. So, in the Netherlands, “it is that every day [the government] renders the employment of free will less useful and more rare; it confines the action of the will in a smaller space and little by little steals the very use of free will from each citizen.” (Vol. 2, P. 4, Ch. 6, p. 663)

However, in America thanks to the broad acceptance of the doctrine of self-interest well understood, most people feel responsible for the well-being of the people around them. In other words, we Dutch are, almost two-hundred years after Tocqueville’s advice, still not endowed with the will, spirit, and power that comes with the belief in the doctrine of self-interest well understood. Whereas, in America, there are way more people that possess that will, spirit, and power.

However, despite the stronger spirit, sadly, a growing number of Americans seem to be in favor of a spiritless centralized welfare state such as we have in Europe. Such a welfare state “is taking each individual by turns in its powerful hands and kneading him as it likes.” “It extends its arms over society as a hole; it covers its surface with a network of small, complicated, painstaking, uniform rules through which the most original minds and the most vigorous souls cannot clear a way to surpass the crowd; it does not break wills, but constantly opposes itself to one’s acting; it does not destroy, it prevents things from being born; it does not tyrannize, it hinders, compromises, enervates, extinguishes, dazes, and finally reduces each nation to being nothing more than a herd of timid and industrious animals of which the government is the shepherd.” (Vol. 2, P. 4, Ch. 6, p. 663)



Nevertheless, if nothing changes in the education of this new generation, a similar welfare state as in Europe seems to be the inevitable necessary evil that can battle individualism. For, the doctrine of self-interest well understood that battled individualism throughout America's history is not 'as well understood' with the new generation of Americans, because they lack the observance of the above-described precautions in the education of the people, which will be elaborated in the next paragraph. So, the American imagination that is built around this doctrine is way less vivid in the experience of this generation. If this trend continues, America cannot rely on the free will of the people, for without the doctrine of self-interest well understood; their will is corrupted. Hence, instead, it must set up a welfare state that controls the wills of the people.

But, how could it happen that Americans, the first masters in the education of the doctrine of self-interest well understood, begin to fail in preserving the teaching? I believe that this doctrine has lost its power among this group of people, because Americans decided that the level of enlightenment of the people was not sufficient anymore. As stated, it was common that "the general cultivation of intelligence" was enough to become a good democratic citizen. And if studies are "pursued beyond this, it is then directed only toward a special and lucrative matter; one studies a science as one takes up a trade; and one takes from it only the applications whose present utility is recognized" (see p. 9). However, these days, people seem to understand that "the general cultivation of intelligence" implies that one also needs a college degree that focusses on 'general education,' i.e. a facsimile of liberal education. Some are so convinced of the importance of such a degree that they even argue that such a degree should be considered as a natural right that needs to be funded by the

state.<sup>53</sup> As a result, there is now an enormous number of colleges that offer forms of ‘general education’ in America.

In general, these colleges do more harm than benefit to the American imagination. They make people become aware of the relativity of what is good and evil without having the capacity to handle such relativity. Instead, many proudly walk around and tell people that laws and customs are merely ‘social constructs’ and as a result harm the common belief that the first principles have a rational foundation. Many of these colleges acquaint the students with the theories of modern philosophy that quite openly question the rational nature of the first principles without acquainting them with traditional philosophy that could alleviate the harm of these modern theories. Therefore, it is not uncommon that people leave these colleges far more acquainted with the theories of Karl Marx, Derrida, and Foucault than with the theories of John Locke and the Founding Fathers.

Furthermore, these teachings are not favorable to faith, which fortifies the American imagination. Being opposed to the old ways of teaching, many of these colleges think that there is no need to teach the Bible and apologetics of religion. Hence, students lose faith in the religion they accepted from birth. Therefore, many leave colleges thinking that they are enlightened enough to see religion as one of the absurdities in this world. The cultural influence religion has in their country makes them only perceive “religion in the ranks of their adversaries.” (Intr. p. 11) So, whereas the older generation still “practice their religion

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<sup>53</sup> Americans often praise the European system of higher education. In Europe, where the tuition is significantly smaller compared to America, thanks to state-funding, the argument is that the nation should fund its citizens during their time at university so that they can do higher-skilled work. The citizens’ capacity to do such work will later increase the total welfare of the state. However, in Europe, as it used to be in America, every study prepares you for a specific job. Studies in humanities in Europe have a hard time finding funding, for the state does not see a clear economic benefit of supporting those. And most people agree with such a treatment of these humanities studies; they would be even upset if their taxpayer money would go to studies that do not prepare people for a specific job. It would have been better for the quality and esteem of these humanities studies that they stayed private as they historically were.

without shame and without weakness” (see p. 31), many people of the new generation scorn it or fear to be mocked when they proclaim that they are religious.

Moreover, the people that are corrupted by these colleges act like bacteria that spread themselves in other institutions. They become teachers, politicians, lawyers, etc. They rapidly spread their ideas to the rest of the nation and threaten the doctrine of self-interest well-understood. The youth and ‘common folks’ will be susceptible to the skilfully crafted rhetoric of these educated people. Hence, they can ‘corrupt the youth’ very easily.

Thus, the artificially created demand for ‘higher education’ has done great harm to this country. To prevent further harm to the American imagination, America must tame their “eternal love for equality.” (Vol. 1, P. 1, Ch. 3, p. 52) For, this equality creates the dangerous illusion that everyone has the same ‘natural disposition’ to be as wise as Tocqueville. It forces people to think about the first principles even if they do not have the capacity to handle the truth. They would rather destroy the rational veil around these principles and, as a result, harm their lives and society.

To conclude, I do not propose a total ban on higher general education because the lack of a group of people with “a penchant for intellectual pleasures” is one of the vices of democracy. (Vol. 1, P. 1, Ch. 3, p. 51) I hope that for those that *truly* enjoy and are disposed to philosophize, there are schools at which one can study the great books and dedicate oneself to the truth. And that others, who see the utility in these ventures, support them. “I firmly believe that one cannot found an aristocracy anew in the world; but I think that when plain citizens associate, they can constitute very opulent, very influential, very strong beings—in a word, aristocratic persons.” (Vol. 2, P. 4, Ch. 6, p. 668) It would serve the nation well if associations like schools or corporations provided a new generation of ‘aristocratic entities.’ Such entities, for example, a university of the stature of Harvard or a Rockefeller Foundation,

could embody (as a body) the same kind of greatness as a Washington, Jefferson, or Madison.<sup>54</sup> They could provide the American imagination with new life, and, thereby, make this country flourish. However, it is naive (and, to me, even arrogant) to think that everyone wants and will profit from higher ‘general education.’ Let people enjoy other ways of life if they would be happier to do so. And, to the few philosophers that indulge in their seeming superiority, I say: “Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man.” (David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Sect. I, 4)

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<sup>54</sup> These three great thinkers and statesmen all come from the ‘aristocratic South’ (see note 29).