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## **Liberalism and Globalization: An Essay On Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Manent**

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LIBERALISM AND GLOBALIZATION:  
AN ESSAY ON MONTESQUIEU, TOCQUEVILLE, AND MANENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Political Science

by  
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May 2015

*For my parents*

Tocqueville points out that in democratic times, in contrast to aristocratic ages, familial relations become “more intimate and sweeter” while “the natural bond tightens.” As a most fortunate beneficiary in this regard, I am full of gratitude for their continued love and support—for their natural generosity that has made so much possible.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Montesquieu rather provocatively opens his great work, *The Spirit of the Laws*, with the following epigraph from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2.553): *Prolem sine matre creatum* ["a work with no mother"]. It would be an egregious exaggeration to begin comparing my own essay here with his masterpiece, but among the infinite things distinguishing (and elevating) his text from this dissertation is my reliance upon the many, many mothers and—so as not to be politically incorrect—fathers that contributed to this humble creation. Among them are, first and foremost, the incomparable pedagogical parents I have had the fine fortune of studying political philosophy with at Louisiana State University: Drs. James Stoner, Ellis Sandoz, and Cecil Eubanks. The differences and similarities among them, and their respective readings and teachings of great texts, have instilled fruitful tensions within my own soul. The influence of all three has found its way into this work—indubitably for better—and whatever flaws are to be found herein are most certainly my own. Indeed, their positive intellectual influence shall remain with me for my life's duration. So far as flaws go, fortunate furthermore have I been to have had Dr. Stoner's keen editorial eye, which kept me in check regarding both form and substance, and I am most grateful for all his support and patience over these past years—it has not been a short journey.

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welcome), Kim Hurd (not a few times for “tea” at Chimes trading notes on “social history,” among other things), Rudy Hernandez (anywhere and everywhere with his commanding voice and presence, adding thoughtfulness to thoughts), Sarah Beth Vosburg (running around the lakes together as she ran circles around ideas), Michael Kuz (with pipes over a chess board and a thousand intriguing theories from Poland and back, and beyond), Eric Schmidt (around the BBQ clutching Michigan IPA and a sense that everything is alright on the home front so long as the bass are biting), Freke Ette (as elusive as he is kind and quick, whether addressing fashion, the feminine, exegesis or eschatology), as well as the rest of those with whom I shared the second—and so too the second and a half—floor of the Political Science Department in good ’ole Baton Rouge.

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*Θάλαττα!*

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## ABSTRACT

Many in the West today talk about the emergent unity of humanity, as social scientists examine the world through “global values,” assessing “global opinion”; economists study the “global economy” and “global finance”; historians write of “universal history;” legal scholars speak of “global domestic politics” and “world society,” while advocating “transnational justice”; political pundits announce the death of the nation-state. One could list additional examples illustrating the same apparent fact: a growing sense of global unity, and a universalist perspective on things social, economic, legal, historical, and political. To what extent, however, is this phenomenon—often referred to as “globalization”—an extension of liberalism, or instead an accident following upon it? Do all liberal thinkers embrace it, whereas opponents are necessarily anti-liberal thinkers? While some are partisans of universalism, and certain others are partisans of particularism, there is nonetheless a moderate, middle, and liberal, perspective. The works of Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Pierre Manent shed light on this view, offering resources for understanding the importance of particular political communities within a broader theoretical horizon of humanity. Each in their own way defends the integrity of political bodies, denies that the universal perspective is the only legitimate one, and recognizes that without differences and distinctions across the political landscape, self-government and the freedom of action is impossible. The liberalism of Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Manent, demonstrates that the human condition is a political condition. Thus, the mediation of political forms is requisite for human flourishing—particular communities are necessary for individuals and peoples to manifest their universal humanity.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“The drive to the universal and homogeneous state remains the dominant ethical ‘ideal’ to which our contemporary society appeals for meaning in its activity.”

—George Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 89

“It is thus evident that virtue must be a care for every city, or at least every one to which the term applies truly and not merely in a manner of speaking. For otherwise the partnership becomes an alliance which differs from others—from [alliances of] remote allies—only by location. And law becomes a compact and, as the sophist Lycophron says, a guarantor among one another of the just things, but not the sort of thing to make the citizens good and just. But that the matter stands thus is evident. For even if one were to bring the locations together into one, so that the city of the Megarians were fastened to that of the Corinthians by walls, it would still not be a single city.”

—Aristotle, *The Politics*, 1280b5-15

Among the many things Aristotle’s political science teaches is that one may learn something about the character of a given political situation by paying attention to the manner and reasons for which honors or prizes are awarded.<sup>1</sup> Adopting this insight suggests we may begin to inquire into the political situation of our day by considering the circumstances of the 2009 awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize. The Norwegian Nobel Committee summarized the basis for its decision to honor American President Barack Obama with its prize as follows: “Now is the time for all of us to take our share of responsibility for a global response to global challenges.”<sup>2</sup> One cannot help but be struck by the commanding nature of the statement on the one hand and its extreme generality on the other hand. Under normal circumstances a general command requires a degree of interpretation, and interpretation often takes its point of departure through questioning. Thus, we can start by asking some of the following: why above all is *now* the time for responsibility as opposed to other moments?; what does it mean for a challenge to be “global” and in what capacity can “all of us” be organized to respond or act in a “global” fashion?; and finally, does “our share of responsibility” suggest an allocation of equal

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 1266b35-1267a8, *et passim*; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1130b30.

<sup>2</sup> [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2009/press.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2009/press.html)



shares for each individual, or should responsibility be broken down according to certain loyalties, groups, or other arrangements?

Following this statement of justification the Committee's press release speaks more directly about its chosen recipient: "Only very rarely has a person to the same extent as Obama captured the world's attention and given its people hope for a better future. His diplomacy is founded in the concept that those who are to lead the world must do so on the basis of values and attitudes that are shared by the majority of the world's population." The essence hereby shifts from an appeal for responsibility of "global" proportion to a statement on leadership of "the world's population"—that is, it addresses the "diplomacy" of a single state's elected executive who has more than impressed even his own electorate inasmuch as he has "captured the world's attention." Thus the Committee confidently speaks of the "people" of "the world" as singular and unified with regard to "hope for the future"—that is, of something like humanity's hope, and the future of humanity in the singular. Whatever else it might mean for the entire world's people to have such a unifocal "attention," above all, the final sentence substantiates the entire series of claims regarding President Obama's reception of the Nobel Peace Prize. Herein the foundational "concept" is bespoken: global diplomacy rests upon a presumed set of "values and attitudes that are shared by the majority of the world's population." One recalls Voltaire's doubtlessness: "There is only one morality just as there is only one geometry." The Committee seems to share Voltaire's sentiment, and so too do those who applauded its decision. But is even majoritarian unity the world over in a moral and spiritual sense so decidedly present?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> To whatever extent such unity exists within the West, it is more obviously absent outside of European and North American opinion. Consider Sadakat Kadri's conclusion after a great deal of travel through the

To be clear, our intention is not to engage in partisan polemics or buttress accounts either for or against particular statesmen or award committees; we are not so much interested in whether President Obama was or was not a worthy recipient of the prize by the Committee's own standards or otherwise. Instead, as suggested, this particular event points beyond itself by providing a way of entering the discussion on opinions and sentiments related to a universal "idea of humanity." To invoke Aristotle once more, we want to know what such opinions mean and what share of truth they contain. Furthermore, since political science today must direct its concern to understanding human action no less than at Aristotle's time we are interested in knowing about how this opinion motivates individuals to act and thus what can be said about the operation of this spiritual unity in practice: in what way might a global majority act, and with what consequences? To the extent that morality's singularity does or does not approximate that of geometry's unity, the fact remains that particular individuals are the practitioners of morality: in practice the moral is manifest in well more concrete (albeit less precise) form than, say, the geometer's topological or differential concepts. In the past, moral and political acts either occurred within, or were mediated and even carried out by, concrete political bodies or forms. Laws, customs, borders, and so on delineated political space, while particular political deeds were articulated in and through the concreteness of a specific and to some extent identifiable political community. Have things so changed?

There is certainly a great deal of talk about the emergent unity of humanity, at least in the West. Social scientists now examine the world in terms of "global values" and

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Islamic world, that "there is no single Muslim approach to reason, revelation or modernity." Kadri, *Heaven on Earth: A Journey Through Shari'a Law* (New York: Random House, 2013).

assess “global opinion.”<sup>4</sup> Historians increasingly write in light of “universal history,” some engaging in what is called “The New Global History.”<sup>5</sup> Legal scholars speak of “global domestic politics” and “world society,”<sup>6</sup> and among the jurisprudentially minded there exist various advocates of “transnational justice.”<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, military theorists and strategists speak of the changing face of war, or even the replacement of intrastate warfare—war among particular peoples—by a variety of “global policing.”<sup>8</sup> More dramatically still, some consider “global space” as the “new frontierland.”<sup>9</sup> Perhaps least

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<sup>4</sup> The “World Values Survey” (WVS) sufficiently illustrates the point, as found at: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>.

<sup>5</sup> MIT historian Bruce Mazlish, and member of the New Global History Initiative, recent work offers “both an essay, as well as a historical analysis” of Global History, and so to “a moral exhortation,” towards the “construction of Humanity.” Mazlish, *The Idea of Humanity in a Global Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 28-29.

<sup>6</sup> See, Jürgen Habermas, “The European Nation-State: On the Past and Future of Sovereignty and Citizenship,” in *The Inclusion of the Other*, eds., C. Cronin and P. De Greiff (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), 105-28. In numerous places he writes additionally about the emergent “post-national constellation,” and the inevitable surpassing of the nation-state to more global forms of governance. See, Habermas, “Toward a Cosmopolitan Europe,” *Journal of Democracy* 14:4 (Oct., 2003): 86-100. Christine Min Wotipka and Kiyoteru Tsutsui, in “Global Human Rights and State Sovereignty: State Ratification of International Human Rights Treaties, 1965-2001,” *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Dec., 2008): 724-754, speak of a process of “socialization in international society” that has impacted states’ decisions to ratify human rights treaties, and thereby sacrifice sovereignty. The trend, they argue, is only increasing, thus solidifying the concreteness of an “international society.”

<sup>7</sup> For discussion of representative proponents of this idea—even conceived as a “movement” of scholars, lawyer, intellectuals, politicians, and the like—as well as a critique of such views, see, John Fonte, “Liberal Democracy vs. Transnational Progressivism: The Future of the Ideological Civil War Within the West,” in *Orbis* (Summer, 2012), available: [http://denbeste.nu/external/ideological\\_war.pdf](http://denbeste.nu/external/ideological_war.pdf). Cf. Jon Kyl, Douglas J. Feith, and John Fonte, “The War of Law: How New International Law Undermines Democratic Sovereignty,” *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 92, No.4 (July/August, 2013): 115-25.

<sup>8</sup> Rather than being political actors in any conventional sense, some see today’s agents of war as “thugs” and “criminals” on a global stage that amounts to a form of perpetual or endless global policing, which is not unrelated to the contemporary effort to make war “more humanitarian, more civilized, or less cruel.” Thus, Western war, while waged to defend liberal values is no less “intended to incarnate those values.” To whatever extent this is true, the following statement is poignant: “As ever, the way in which we respond to fundamental questions about ourselves and the world around us is reflected in the character of war.” Caroline Holmqvist-Jonsater, “War as Perpetual Policing,” *The Character of War in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, eds., Caroline Holmqvist-Jonsater and Christopher Coker (London: Routledge, 2010), 103-118; cf. Timothy Edmunds, “What Are the Armed Forces For? The Changing Nature of Military Roles in Europe,” *International Affairs* 82, No. 6 (2006): 1059-75. Adam Elkus, for one, disputes what he sees as exaggerated claims regarding a change in the very nature of war as well as an end to the “Western way of war” and war more broadly, in “Only the West has Seen the End of War,” *Infinity Journal Exclusives*, 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2012: [http://www.infinityjournal.com/article/65/Only\\_The\\_West\\_Has\\_Seen\\_The\\_End\\_of\\_War](http://www.infinityjournal.com/article/65/Only_The_West_Has_Seen_The_End_of_War).

<sup>9</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, “Reconnaissance Wars of the Planetary Frontierland,” *Theory, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2002): 81-90. In this case, it is not something to be necessarily welcomed, as it is an “obliteration” of previous modes of security—both real and theorized, or strategized. The “changed

surprising, much attention is paid to the “global economy” and “global finance,” which is defended by some as the foundation for fostering solidarity and equality among the world’s peoples, while contrarily proclaimed by others to be an unstable basis for such unity and a root cause for continued inequality and class disparity in the world, at least in its present form.<sup>10</sup> One could list any number of additional examples that illustrate the same tendency<sup>11</sup>: a growing sense of global unity, and a universalist perspective on things social, legal, historical, and political. Western elite opinion rarely pauses before appealing to a “global conscience” in defense of the latest cause. As emphatically stated by one proponent: “At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the *conditio humana* cannot be understood nationally or locally but only globally.”<sup>12</sup> To what extent is this phenomenon, often referred to as “globalization,” an extension of liberalism or possibly at odds with it?

There is a sense in the West that the conventions of liberal democracy—or, the institutions and political culture of liberalism—are in fact most natural. The underlying contention is that the liberal regime best satisfies human needs and desires in general, if not *in toto*. To whatever extent liberal political philosophy is genuinely rooted in

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existential condition” that came about by surprise may be summarized as follows: “*Il n’y a pas du ‘dehors’* any more... We are all ‘inside’ with nothing left outside. Or, rather, what used to be ‘outside’ has entered the ‘inside’—without knocking; and settled there—without asking permission. The bluff of local solutions to planetary problems has been called, the sham of territorial isolation has been exposed. Don’t ask where the frontierland is—it is all around you, in your town, on the streets you walk” (83-4).

<sup>10</sup> Jagadeesh Gokhale, “Globalization: Curse or Cure? Policies to Harness Global Economic to Solve Our Economic Challenge,” *Policy Analysis*, No. 659 (Feb., 2010): 1-24. Gokhale rightly suggests that globalization has different results and prospects for different countries at varying levels of development and economic strength, and even if one assumes globalization to be a singular process, there is no one single set of policies to provide success. Moreover, he astutely emphasizes the importance of demographic factors in considering distinctions among developed and developing nations. For a critique of some of the rhetoric of globalization and an attempt to compare the “myths” with the “facts,” see, Michael Veseth, *Globaloney: Unraveling the Myths of Globalization* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Another telling place to look is with respect to developments in literature, and the apparent global readership that certain authors seek to write for, in a globalized style. See, Tim Parks, “The Dull New Global Novel,” *The New York Review of Books*, Feb. 9, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Ulrich Beck, “The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies,” *Theory, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 19, Nos. 1-2 (2002): 17-44.

“nature,” the elements of liberalism are often considered the only defensible ones—according to reason, or at least to “public reason.” One may object that this defense largely stands on the basis of a now enduring set of liberal customs, more than on continued coherent or rational justification. To speak somewhat more scientifically—to adopt the language of modern political science—the modern liberal regime is for many the sole “legitimate” form: it seems most successfully to meet the basic needs of all human beings. Its customs and conventions are argued to be the most conducive to satisfying the common, natural desires of man, universally. However, in speaking of “basic needs” and a universal satisfaction, it may just be that this legitimacy comes at the price of failing to cultivate the higher aspects of human nature.

Thus, even if the liberal regime can be technically legitimated, must we accept that it is in fact *the* best regime, and what form or shape should even the best such liberal regime take? For that matter, is its legitimacy so universal that the liberal regime is *unconditionally* good? Are there conditions or circumstances that make even the liberal regime less suitable, or bring into question liberalism’s ability to address such conditions or circumstances?<sup>13</sup> And if indeed the liberal regime comes to be unconditionally good, then on what basis is there a plurality of liberal regimes, rather than one global liberal regime? In light of this question, one wonders whether “globalization” is not the process towards global unification under the form of a single such regime, or at least the emergence of a universal set of rules administering human things so as to maximize

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<sup>13</sup> The “original antagonist” of liberal theory has arguably returned with force, requiring reconsiderations from liberal theorists today—that is, due to “the challenge of illiberal revealed theology” and its contestation of the very foundations of liberal constitutionalism. Consider, J. Judd Owen, “The Task of Liberal Theory after September 11,” *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Jun., 2004): 325-30; cf. John Milbank, “The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority,” *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 85, No. 996 (Mar., 2004): 212-38.

satisfaction? Finally, on what basis does the liberal regime, based as it is on the principle of consent, require the original framework that gave rise to it, namely, the national state? From the perspective of consent, all such frameworks appear arbitrary. Indeed, the phenomenon of globalization seems concomitant with a process of individuation (if not increasing individualism) and according to the free, equal, and autonomous individual, any given state may fail to recognize his universal human rights. Thus, the so-called global society both associates universally and dis-sociates particularly. As one astute observer writes, “we ever have the impression of being in a world that is at once more universal and more fragmented.”<sup>14</sup> Such radically opposing tendencies cannot help but instill a sense of disorientation, and if this situation is unlikely to foster the health of the soul, it is unclear whether it may provide lower levels of satisfaction, after all. While some argue that the present situation is only a midpoint on the way towards achieving the promise of further liberating the individual from socio-institutional constraints, ultimately fulfilling the hope for freedom within a cosmopolitan order, others question the likelihood, stability, and meaning of such freedom.<sup>15</sup> We may therefore ask, “How much globalization can we bear?”<sup>16</sup> Something of a brief theoretical genealogy of the liberal regime is necessary so as to begin considering these questions.

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<sup>14</sup> Pierre Hassner, *La Violence et la Paix: De la Bombe Atomique au Nettoyage Ethnique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000), 324.

<sup>15</sup> This promise is inherent in much of Habermas’s thought (see *supra* note 6) as well as in the work of Beck (*supra* note 12); cf. Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande, *Cosmopolitan Europe*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007). Such thinkers argue that the future expansion of freedom resides in emerging transnational legal structures and democratic norms no longer bound by the nation-state; as though transcending the nation-state solves the political problem, *tout court*. In response, Mark Lilla writes: “It is simply a fantasy to think that the perennial problems of politics can be dissolved through progressive juridification or humanitarian aid, which is what some very serious European thinkers, notably Jürgen Habermas, clearly have in mind.” Lilla, “The End of Politics” *The New Republic*, June 18, 2003, available at: <http://www.well.com/~mp/lilla.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Rüdiger Safranski, *How Much Globalization Can We Bear?* Trans., P. Camiller (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

It is well known that liberalism is born in and through a thought experiment: the state of nature. The state of nature might be called (to adopt a Tocquevillian locution) the “generative fact” of liberal political philosophy: it is its primary intellectual instrument. There is something striking about a concept with generative capacity, or a generative instrument of the mind, as it were. So much makes it tempting to say that liberal political philosophy is an effort of mind moving matter. However, there is nothing accidental about its capacity as such, for the first liberal political philosophers conceived of the state of nature in order to influence and change the existing political order of the day, based as it was on a faulty understanding of things; or so they argued.<sup>17</sup> The state of nature was created to establish true knowledge of human nature—to establish the facts of anthropology—in contrast to the preceding classical and Christian anthropologies. The truth of the state of nature and its generative power—which is to say the “effectual truth” of the state of nature—resides in the fact that, in its inception, it is indeed a state of the mind, an abstraction, and so in short a no-place. Its chief property, therefore, is its universality, and its most important content is the individual and his rights. Even if it never existed in *stricto sensu*, it has an ever-present presence, as its substance continually extends itself. Or, to put it differently, being nowhere in particular it can be anywhere and everywhere, as evidenced by its origination of the most general and decontextualized form of rights<sup>18</sup>: *human* rights.<sup>19</sup> The state of nature is therefore the omnipresent

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<sup>17</sup> “Since the seventeenth century, philosophy has become a weapon, and hence an instrument.” Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 34, cf. 78. “The state of nature is an accurate image of the internal contradiction of each tradition: it is the ultimate actualization of the factional disorders of the Greek cities and the wars of religion of Christendom.” Manent, *The City of Man* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 34ff. The state of nature is a polemical or destructive, as well as productive or creative instrument—one may suggest that it both captures and inaugurates the spirit of modern philosophy that will later manifest under the headings of “creative destruction” and the like.

<sup>18</sup> For a contrary argument, see, Carl Schmitt, who argues that “Hobbes’ state of nature is a *no man’s land*, but in no way on that account a *nowhere*. It is locatable, and Hobbes locates it among other places in the

conceptual foundation of the liberal regime, and the individual of the state of nature forms the basis for the modern self-understanding of the individual that has continued to spread the world over.<sup>20</sup> When the generative fact is forgotten, it is merely taken for granted; its continued success is due to its ability to generate without detection—one may call it an *instrumentum absconditus*.

That said, the state of nature does have a history, for all things in and of the world are born at some point in time. In the case of the state of nature, one may ask, is it not, after all, the beginning of history, and thus the generative fact of history, or better to say of History itself?<sup>21</sup> Whatever the case, it has two obvious historical aspects. As a

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New World.” Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth* (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2006), 96-7. Meek, in *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), takes up Locke’s famous phrase, “In the beginning all the World was *America*,” to discuss its concreteness and influence as a result. Nevertheless, even if these first thinkers claimed it existed *in concreto* somewhere the point remains the same: its purported existence only makes its imaginative power over the liberal mind all the greater, and so too therefore its effects.

<sup>19</sup> This is not meant as a critique of human rights as such, or an outright assault on the very idea of rights, but of an understanding of rights that is unconditional, and either incoherently accounted for ontologically or altogether unhinged from political reality, so that the extension of rights becomes endless in scope and number. If it is true that “their very existence...depends on emotions as much as on reason” and that the “claim of self-evidence relies ultimately on an emotional appeal,” then it surely follows that “the human rights revolution is by definition ongoing,” and no single definition for rights suffices “because their emotional basis continues to shift, in part in reaction to declarations of rights.” Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007), 26-32ff. Without a properly rational basis, so much seems to be the case; moreover, this understanding does indeed appear to be the prevalent one. For discussion in the American context, where “rights discourse” has come to lend itself to “absolute formulations” that “promotes unrealistic expectations” and a “near-aphasia concerning responsibilities...without much consideration of the ends to which they are oriented,” see, Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse* (New York: The Free Press, 1991). Even if the “international human rights movement” is a new phenomenon, having emerged only in the 1970s, as historians like Samuel Moyn have argued, this does not contradict the possibility of a relationship in principle to earlier thought. Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> That is to say it is based on an anthropology that speaks of man as, simply, the being with rights. (Rather than, say, the polis animal, or created in the image of God, etc.) The notion of a reductionistic view of human nature in modern political philosophy has been much discussed. See, for example, Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), esp. 1-26.

<sup>21</sup> On the distinction between “history” and “History” see, James Ceasar, “The Idol of History,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* Vol. 20, No. 1 (2003): 38-58. Ceasar writes that “History” (with a capital H) has two typical forms (excluding Providential and religious understandings, even as they may be influenced by such views), the first of which is “Philosophy of History,” which offers a singular, universal account of history that may be either progressive or retrogressive on the basis of some guiding principle. The second is a less rigorous form, known as “Historicism” or “the Historical School,” which is pluralistic in its principles and



concept it has a history insofar as different thinkers have used it over the centuries since its inception. It has, therefore, a history in terms of what the Germans call *Begriffsgeschichte*. Its most recent historical form goes by the name of the “original position.” In the second sense, however, the history of the state of nature is the history *in* the state of nature, and so the course of development that leads *out* of the state of nature. After all, this instrument was conceived for purposes beyond itself, as is true of all instruments; just as all foundations are themselves meant to be subsequently built on. To the extent that early thinkers, like Hobbes and Locke, were less concerned about the details of the actual internal historical development, later thinkers like Rousseau especially began to attend to the problem with greater interest.

This followed not only from the emergence on the European scene of various historical accounts of primitive tribes and documents from travelers, further feeding the imaginations of those thinking in terms of the state of nature, but in the meantime the state of nature philosophy itself began to have real effects on the governments and states of Europe. The project of liberal political philosophy was coming into fruition in the form of the modern sovereign and consensual state, thereby doing away with the older, hierarchical, divine right-based Medieval realms. Accepting that the real effects of early liberalism proved its general potency, if not its veracity, it was up to later thinkers to reexamine the intricacies of the instrument, in order to understand and even expand upon

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units, insofar as there are multiple unfoldings that may be grasped, rather than one alone (i.e., on the basis of civilizations, nations, cultures, peoples, or races). Summarizing what is common between them, he writes that it “is the view that human meaning is to be found in the unfolding of time.” The “discovery of history” has as its starting point the denial of man’s natural sociality: individual selves not constituted by relations with others, or with God, or with any unchanging part of being, can have no history, which is certainly true in Hobbes’ state of nature. The “discovery of history,” and so the “experience of history,” follows upon the creation of such relationships, which is tantamount to creating history—man, as a historical being, who has crossed out from his natural state, creates himself and his world, thus, from this perspective, *all* is dependent upon man’s doing.

what we might call the logic of liberalism and its unfolding. The key to understanding this logic resides in acknowledging the importance of the state of nature and its elemental universalism—that is, both as a universally originating concept and as one that potentially generates a single and universal regime. For, at the risk of oversimplifying, it is arguable that the unchecked unfolding of liberalism begins with the state of nature and its outline of individual natural rights, at first partly and artificially protected by particular yet partial states, and ends in a global and impartial state that recognizes the ever-continuous declaration of human rights.

To keep matters straightforward at this preliminary stage, it is fair to say that there are two basic alternative forms of the state of nature: one beginning in war and the other beginning in peace; however, both seek peace, even a just peace as their end. Insofar as the beginning is a war of all against all, the objective is to move men simply from war to peace, while if the beginning is peace, then one seeks to return to it, having fallen into an aberrant state of war. One is tempted to say that the second must come with a more complex philosophy of history. Either way, it would seem that all thinkers beginning with a state of nature logically endorse, or open the way, for some sort of theoretical account of the historical unfolding of things—of man's transition from the state of nature to civil society. It is a process that requires time and development, for civil society is an "artifice," a "second nature," and must be created: in a word, civil society is a *project*, and it emerges from human creation and consent, based on increased understanding, over and against the natural situation of man. It is well to recall a particular aspect of the first elaboration, carried out by Hobbes, namely the extent to which peace was the objective. Indeed absolute peace, at nearly any and all cost, was what Hobbes sought.

Hobbes' determination to secure peace for man requires establishing the requisite conditions and institutions for avoiding a return to the state of nature. Such determination necessitates establishing a commonwealth that will not "dissolve." Or, following (and even systematizing) Machiavelli as he does, his objective—and it is more than a hope—is to found a "perpetual republic."<sup>22</sup> Hobbes' creation of an "artificial man" aspires to his "artificial eternity of life."<sup>23</sup> But domestic security alone does not guarantee peace. Rather, the establishment of Hobbes' commonwealth, or some such form, must spread to cover the globe: eternal life demands particular death—the death of particular states and the birth of a global artifice. As Alexander Kojève argued, beginning from Hobbes, in and through the addition of modern natural science and technology—a further increase in man's understanding or intelligence and its application to nature—the path from war to peace inexorably leads to the "universal and homogeneous state."<sup>24</sup> The problem of universal war inherent to the state of nature requires a universal, or global, solution. But is this logic inevitable? Is the dynamic of liberalism so inexorable as to eventually bind the notions of "perpetual republic" and "perpetual peace"—or move from the individual imperative of avoiding the *summum malum* to that of a global "categorical imperative"? In perhaps more common parlance, to what extent is globalization our fate? Can liberalism's drive towards the universal be moderated; is there a moderate liberal alternative, or are there only radical, reactionary, and particularistic voices of dissent?

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<sup>22</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), III.17; see, Translator's Introduction, xli-xlii.

<sup>23</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIX. These claims are far from outlandish to our ears, for we are familiar with the historical examples of "a war to end all wars," and of the very outlawing of war by international bodies.

<sup>24</sup> Kojève, "Tyranny and Wisdom," in *On Tyranny*, eds. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 153-77; Barry Cooper, *The End of History: An Essay on Modern Hegelianism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 13-45, 244-82.

It is the objective of this dissertation to discuss three thinkers who provide alternate yet liberal ways of conceptualizing, understanding, and responding to this set of questions. If forced to summarize the range of problems by way of a single issue, we can speak of the tension between the universal and the particular inherent to the modern political world. And it is in the works of Baron de Montesquieu, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Pierre Manent, that the problem is best approached, as is argued herein. Furthermore, each stands as something like a witness to an unfolding of things that we are now experiencing in full. Firstly, Montesquieu is witness to the emergent modern state with its plurality of regimes, for the question of the particular regime initially remained rather open.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, Tocqueville is witness to the emergent democratic regime as establishing itself in the position of the sole surviving form within the modern state, thus proclaiming itself the only legitimate, if not finally most natural, modern regime. Thirdly, Manent is witness to the logic of the democratic regime spilling over, and undermining, the very framework of the state that made modern democracy possible in the first place. That said, if each is a witness in a historical sense, all are at least aware of additional or alternative possibilities. As we will see, none of them ultimately presume or defend an inexorable logic or unfolding to the human story: history remains open, as far as all three are concerned. Before turning to discuss the outline of argumentation, another word on why these three thinkers have been chosen; this time negatively by way of why others have not been selected.

If the present political world can be characterized as tending towards ever-greater political universalism, would the phenomenon not be better studied through thinkers who

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<sup>25</sup> Both Hobbes and Locke consider multiple possible regimes as legitimate, insofar as for Hobbes, it is ultimately a matter that sovereignty not be divided, while for Locke, the only regime he vehemently opposes is that of absolute monarchy, or the Hobbesian variety of absolute sovereignty.

best themselves exemplify such universalizing tendencies? One can think of Kant's transcendental perspective and his political cosmopolitanism, or Hegel with his Absolute System and historical dialectic regarding its end, as well as Comte and his idea of the triumph of science, whereby the conquest of nature replaces martial conquest and competition, alongside his prophecy regarding the "religion of humanity." Lesser Enlightenment thinkers as well might be apt for study, such as La Bruyère and his humanitarianism, Condorcet and his progressivism, or Saint-Simon and his technocratic-scientific globalism. The reason we have chosen an alternate course rests in the fact that while one can certainly come to see the logic of universalization in these thinkers, only part of the problem is exposed. As *partisans* of this logic (each in their own way, to be sure) their works fail to expose the potency of the tension—the true antinomial aspect inherent to the relationship of universal and particular—and so their thought is, strictly speaking, less political and more *historical* (or, historicist).

Insofar as one thinks politically, one must address the problem of distinctions and oppositions, and one must begin on the level of common experience. That is to say, from the perspective of shared life within a particular community. Indeed, genuine political thought is a matter of actively distinguishing and acknowledging disparate parts, as well as gathering and collecting commonalities, and following threads of continuity. However, an initial awareness of difference and commonness is only possible through lived experience among others, who are both like oneself and different. Therefore, thinking politically is equally distorted by taking one's point of departure from the perspective of the isolated individual as it is from the perspective of the global whole. Rather, political thought begins with reflection by an individual among individuals, in a

political world, which does not exhaust the broader political universe, even as it makes up one part of it.

This essay both takes for granted and defends the idea that at the heart of the human world—in thinking, reflecting, and acting—is this antinomy of the universal and the particular—a sort of *complexio oppositorum*. Therefore the political is, by nature, pluralistic, for the world is defined by a plurality of actors, opinions, customs, regimes, and so on. And yet a certain thread of universality can be woven through all such differences: the human and political world is intelligible. This is an insight at least as old as Aristotle, who was himself nothing if not a master at attending to the range of detail and differences in the world before him, while making sense of it in the event. Such intelligibility was wrought by way of attempting to sort through the difference between “nature” and “convention,” which are themselves indicative of the problem of the universal and the particular.<sup>26</sup> One of Aristotle’s chief criticisms of Plato, as is well known, is that the latter sought to bring all such distinctions and differences into unity, and thereby collapse the differences innate to the actual human world.<sup>27</sup>

We cannot enter into this ancient debate here, but all this to suggest at least two things. First, that the problem of the universal and the particular, or of unity and

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<sup>26</sup> The problem of universals and particulars is a basic and inescapable human problem on various levels, even if the language of “universal” and “particular” emerges at a given point in history. The problem is especially pronounced in the realm of the political. Anyone thinking about the political systematically must develop a certain number of concepts, or symbols, through which they come to understand the order of political things that otherwise appear so varied. Such concepts have a degree of universality and so abstract from the particulars of the world, and yet to the extent that they wholly abstract they become incapable of illuminating political reality. Rather, they become constructs that illustrate either the creativity or desires of the individual who evokes them. It is often said that “the concept” is born in Greece: the problem of universals and particulars is first brought to conscious reflection with the birth of philosophy. See, for example, Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in *The Vocation Lectures*, eds. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2004), 14.

<sup>27</sup> For a very thoughtful discussion of this debate, and a careful reading of Plato that qualifies his drive to unity and the collapsing of differences, see, Arlene Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity: The Birth of Political Science in Ancient Greek Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992).

plurality, is not a new, or simply modern, one. Nor is it something inaccessible to thought, or reflection. Second, it is by way of partisanship to the political, and so to experience of the existing political world as it concretely manifests this tension, rather than to pure universalism or particularism, that the matter is best approached. By engaging the texts of Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Manent, the problem comes into clearer view—and indeed, it is a *problem* without definitive solution, but one that each seeks to think and live within. Each of the three undoubtedly varies in his hopes, expectations, and views regarding the degree of tension and so the amount of reconciliation that may be expected. To say that they see the tension as a problem is not to suggest they deny any harmony whatsoever. Broadly speaking, all three thinkers understand that actualizing universal humanity requires the circumscription of particular political communities, each of which concretizes and represents something of our shared human essence—individually, but among other such communities. However, in so doing, no one such manifestation exhausts humanity. Nevertheless, political study of humanity requires examination of its particular concretizations. Furthermore, each thinker likewise understands that particular individuals across these communities are more or less capable of manifesting excellences, or virtues, that exemplify the greatness of humanity, and thus a full sense of what it means to be human. Universals only ever become real in the world through particulars, and perhaps most representatively, in particular individuals in particular communities, as well as by such particular communities.

It should be added that the convergence and divergence in the views of Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Manent on these matters are not merely due to the times

in which they find themselves—although this cannot be entirely discounted, since the intensity of the tension differs over the ages. Differences in each follow from their respective forms of political science. In so bringing them together we risk overlooking important points of dissimilarity. But while all such matters will not be lost, whatever oversights occur, the fruit gained will be a deeper understanding of our general problem, and thus a greater possibility for orientation in our own, present situation. It is not our intention to offer an exhaustive interpretation of any of the three. What our reading ultimately offers is a window on their restoration of the perspective that human experience is fundamentally political, and that neither political life, nor political thought, can be undermined or overridden by abstractions of a universalist or particularist variety. All three, in their own ways begin from, and engage with, something like the ordinary experience of the citizen, even as they manage to see further than the average citizen, not least of all because each engages in something of a comparative approach—discussing and comparing polities and regimes, speeches and deeds, over the course of space and time.<sup>28</sup> Over the course of such examination, the merits of the liberal regime are not lost on either of them, but each is attentive to its shortfalls as well, which is to say its conventions do not *wholly* satisfy the exigencies of human nature. One may readily ask with each of them then whether any political regime simply can.

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<sup>28</sup> For example, Montesquieu, when discussing the nature of the three initial varieties of government he analyzes, says, “To discover the nature of each, the idea of them held by the least educated of men is sufficient.” Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Book II, Ch.1. Tocqueville, famously writes at the end of his Introduction to *Democracy in America*, the following: “This book is written to favor no particular views, and in composing it I have entertained no designs of serving or attacking any party; I have undertaken not to see differently, but to look further than parties, and whilst they are busied for the morrow I have turned my thoughts to the Future.” Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Introduction (concluding sentence). Finally, Manent emphasizes the importance of the political philosopher contributing to the “civic conversation,” and he likewise refers to the need to move to and from great texts and the present situation. Manent, *Democracy Without Nations?*, 5-10.



The following discussion is divided into three parts, each devoted to one of the three thinkers. We begin with Montesquieu, who sets the stage for the larger problem of universalism. The initial discussion of chapter two opens by examining the matter through the debate between the ancients and moderns. The ancients were nothing if not attentive to particularity—of family, community, and so on—and Montesquieu illuminates this fact. However, Montesquieu discusses with great interest some of the ancient examples of empires and conquest. His views are curiously ambiguous on such matters. His own interest in diversity and difference leads him to examine the ancients with a certain amount of sympathy, culling insights regarding the human heart and its passions; however, as one moves through the text, Montesquieu's advocacy for modern liberty becomes apparent, alongside his depiction of a world increasingly open or, as we are wont to say today, globalized. Indeed, at the heart of this phenomenon of an opening world is commerce, which we address at length in the third chapter.

Montesquieu was one of the earliest and keenest observers, as well as supporters, of commerce, noting its ability to transform politics both domestically and internationally. Discussing commerce as such, we reflect upon his views of war, the law of nations, the possible softening of mores in modern times, the importance of geography, and whether there are not certain natural and intractable divisions among the world's peoples. While his endorsement of modern liberty and its concomitant commercial activities is strong, he does signal reservations. Thus, many of the questions regarding globalization of concern to us—such as peoples' mixed or conflicting allegiances and loyalties, the ability of a community to maintain its integrity or even its sovereignty, whether there can be a balance between patriotism and cosmopolitanism, what

relationship between the economic and the political is healthiest for society, and so forth—can all be asked in and through Montesquieu’s great work, *The Spirit of the Laws*.

The second part proceeds to examine Tocqueville. In many ways, Tocqueville adopted a political science akin to Montesquieu’s, with its concern for understanding and knowing the movements of the human heart, in terms of its desires and passions, as well as its habits and sentiments. While similar in approach, however, Tocqueville’s context is much more our own, insofar as he is writing in the midst of the ongoing democratic revolution. Consequently, there are important differences in method between Montesquieu and Tocqueville, to which we draw attention, as we think with Tocqueville about politics in a globalizing world. Among the many facets of the democratic revolution and the various ways of interpreting it, it becomes apparent that globalization is an important element, which Tocqueville himself well knew; democratization includes a degree of increasing universalization and homogenization. Chapter four discusses the extent to which this democratic revolution has reached, addressing both Tocqueville’s hopes and fears regarding the state of the human spirit under such a regime. What becomes clear is that the logic of equality carries great weight in the democratic heart and soul—but its weight is an ambivalent one—as it can instill unprecedented doubt alongside the comfort of conformity, may diminish civic participation even as it extends rights, and may offer freedom while risking intellectual and even political despotism. That said, this logic is not altogether inexorable.

In examining Tocqueville’s account we discuss the resources to which he turns and the strategies he offers in order to maintain the integrity of the community, and the health of souls among the citizenry, in a democratizing world. Chapter five turns more

specifically to discuss his concern with the generalization and abstraction of ideas and sentiments that tend to emerge in democratic times. The problem is especially relevant given that projects of global governance rest very much upon vague notions of universality, derived as they are from the logic of equality. Tocqueville keenly analyzes how equality—particularly manifest in the idea and sentiment of similitude—gives rise to intellectual independence that may culminate in a form of weakness with respect to action; the different role that compassion takes upon its generalization; how the most general of general ideas, namely pantheism, stands athwart to human freedom; and the role poetry plays in shaping as well as propagating ideas, not least of all the idea of humanity, another most general of ideas. Thinking through Tocqueville's analysis of such matters helps us to understand our present. Moreover, we are offered an example of how to reinstate an epistemological balance between general and particular ideas in the very study of politics.

In the third part we turn to look at the work of a great student of both Montesquieu and Tocqueville, the contemporary political philosopher Pierre Manent. Manent has become one of the most thoughtful critics of the contemporary European project, based on its attempt to depoliticize or transcend the political. However, rather than offer a conventional critique on the basis of Euroskepticism or nationalism, *per se*, his argument is political, and it emerges out of his approach to political philosophy. He has developed what he calls a history of political forms, that offers a fascinatingly compact yet detailed account of self-government in the West, examined through the continued attempt of human beings to put words and deeds in common—that is, framed by different forms of communities as well as constituted by a variety of regimes.

Manent's method, as it were, is to take something of a classical approach to political science while adding a modern modification. It is classical insofar as the nation can be understood as something of an extension of—or still somehow tethered to—the *polis*, but it is modern insofar as the nation nonetheless differs from the ancient city.

We provide an overview of his history of political forms in the sixth chapter, for it is from this perspective that one best understands precisely why humanity cannot constitute a political form. Moreover, what comes of this discussion is just how remarkable the nation has been, and indeed continues to be, as a political form. An understanding of the nation is not exhausted by the study of nationalism. Therefore, a defense of the nation need not be nationalistic in the strict sense. Manent's argument, rather, is political, and his defense is one that defends the capacity for human action and for self-government. By better understanding the genesis of the modern nation, the present opinion of outright rejecting it in turn becomes increasingly questionable. Manent's argument, therefore, suggests that globalization is not inevitable, and that politics—indeed, all political projects—are about human choices. The seventh chapter continues our discussion of Manent's project by delving into the theologico-political problem, which is important for understanding the nation as well. Manent's method adds an interesting historical dimension to the problem, further demonstrating the importance of his approach. However, in this final chapter, we conclude by critiquing the limitations of Manent's history of political forms, due to his failure to understand the uniqueness of the American form. Notwithstanding the insights he offers into European political development, Manent insufficiently distinguishes America from Europe. To the extent that he is concerned about the universalizing tendencies of Europeans—indeed, primarily

Western Europeans—and the European desire to exit the political by unifying first Europe and subsequently humanity, America very much retains its particular form. This is the case not only in terms of popular opinion, but due to its very constitutional order, and on the basis of the founding principles. America is, generally speaking, a liberal regime (in the philosophical sense), and indeed it is a contributor to certain aspects of globalization. However, it also serves as an exception to the apparent logic of globalization that would otherwise culminate in the ultimate unity of humanity. An example to humanity it may be, but America remains so as a sovereign and particular state among a broader community of nations rather than a harbinger of the community of humanity yet to come.

## **2. MONTESQUIEU: AMBIVALENCE OF THE HEART: ON GENERAL AND PARTICULAR PASSIONS**

“The less we can satisfy our particular passions, the more we deliver ourselves to general ones.”  
—Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, V.2

In the human heart there is a perpetual generation of passions;  
so that the ruin of one is almost always the foundation of another.  
—La Rochefoucauld, *Moral Maxims*, no. 10

Our day is replete with commentary regarding change—on change in and of the world. Whether stressing the speed of change or its immensity—“great and rapid change,” as is commonly said—we seem rather to have an especial eye for change. Many of our hearts, moreover, may continually long for change. Observations of and desire for change are surely related, for change is not something that comes only or always of its own volition. Political change, for example, involves human will—or the decisions and actions of certain individuals. Political campaigns propose a change of rulership, and sometimes a change in the broader rules of the game; sometimes too outright regime change is sought, through more or less radical means. Contrarily, resistance to change no less requires volition, vigilance, and in regrettable instances, violence. Advocates desiring change are ever met by adversaries warning against it. Generally speaking, the former claim that what is new holds the key to advancement, or that the possible is likely an improvement. Detractors defend their opposition by arguing that constancy of what is known—or known to be tried and true, or familiar and existent—is best. All this to say that change and constancy are themselves experienced as equally real, even if not always in equal quantity, and irrespective of which among them is closer to the good at any moment. Thus, the debate over change and constancy remains a permanent feature of human life.

Nevertheless, it seems right to say that we moderns are more open and prone to change. For what is it to be “modern” other than to want *not* to be “ancient”—that is, to be different from predecessors, to change from old ways to new ones, and largely reject the past? The very notion of modernity is inseparable from the idea, or ideal, of novelty, and a concomitant sense of autonomy, as many have argued.<sup>29</sup> While it is incorrect to deny that anything new emerged under the ancient sun, the dawn of the modern one seems itself a major change. To heap metaphor upon metaphor, is not this modern sun the fire created and brought by man himself—is not the difference between the ancient and the modern so fundamental, as to have brought about a radical change, which is to say at the very radix of being? We moderns have a sense that the difference between ourselves and our forefathers, and so between modern ways of life and ancient ones, is sufficiently vast to the extent that the ancient world is either inaccessible or comparatively inferior; or, paradoxically, both. Thus it is felt to be increasingly distant and deficient the more modern we become, the more rapidly we continue to change from the old, and allegedly improve upon it. And one of the major changes we sense is a growing unity among the world’s people, or an increasing degree of universalism across humanity. The modern hope is for change to permanently establish universal justice, once and for all, here on earth.

No longer will antiquated divisions keep the world’s people apart; no more shall differences result in conflict or disparity. If politics is grounded in distinctions, the most radical hope of modernity is for a post-political condition, where all hitherto differences of significance are depoliticized. Thus, one might wonder whether universal justice is at

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<sup>29</sup> For a nice summary account of the genealogy of the terms “modern” and “modernity,” as well as of competing conceptualizations over time, see, Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 1-18.

odds with the good, which may be particular, divisive or multiple, and sometimes even unjust. Modern humanity, however, aspires to justice free from separations in assuming that universal justice is the only good. If there is one commandment for our times it is that no “self” shall fail to *wholly* identify with the “other,” and so a sense of similitude ought to override any awareness of difference.

But if all of this is only sensed, felt, or hoped for, is there any way to really measure or gauge such change? Can we distinguish between surface and profound differences and changes; that is, between ones that necessitate altering principles of thought and action—not least regarding justice—and ones that do not? What criteria help us to understand whether certain changes are superficial and thereby reflective, after all, of a deeper constancy; that some distinctions among peoples are insurmountable in practice; that alleged improvements may come at a price; and that the universal is perhaps not an adequate criteria for all things human?

Such large-order questions are arguably best approached by first considering political phenomena directly, and so too by thinking with great political observers who take in, analyze, and reflect upon the world of human practice before them. Baron de Montesquieu was a most nuanced and attentive observer of the political world, which was undergoing both more and less obvious changes, including in terms of justice and universality. His great work, *The Spirit of the Laws*, is, among other things, a reflection of and on the changes of his day and what consequences these emergent differences hold for political life. Moreover, he was attentive to the distinction between real and apparent differences, not least of all when comparing cases old and new, or ancient and modern. As indicated by his profession early in the Preface of his work: “When I turned to



antiquity, I sought to capture its spirit in order not to consider as similar those cases with real differences or to overlook differences in those that appear similar.” This statement is less symmetrical than it appears, and in fact doubly emphasizes the importance of knowing where and when things are different or are similar.<sup>30</sup> In either case, both differences and similarities may lie on as well as beneath the surface; they may likewise be obvious or subtle. Discerning real difference and similitude requires effort in thought and imagination, in attending to the facts and recreating seemingly foreign or lost experiences for oneself.

For example, when discussing the revolutions in commerce (about which we will say more below), Montesquieu spends a great deal of time considering the transformations in navigation, and the technological developments that made such changes possible. For Montesquieu, the arts responsible for these developments do not only improve upon themselves, but they likewise correct nature’s shortcomings: art acts into nature, as it were, bringing about distinct changes. In a chapter entitled, “On the commerce of the ancients,” his eye for significant changes is fully manifest, as is his ability to draw the consequences for changes from imaginatively comparing earlier and later experiences. As he writes: “For if, at a time when sailing has much improved, at a time when the arts are communicated, at a time when one corrects with art both the defect of nature and the defects of art itself, *one feels these differences*, what must it have been for the sailing of the ancients?” (XX1.6, emphasis added). To this he immediately

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<sup>30</sup> In discussing Montesquieu’s irony, Warner finds this passage to be the “epitome of irony,” insofar as it overtly alerts us to “the disparity between the *esprit* of the ancients and the *esprit* of the moderns,” but, in “cleverly *telling* us twice to be aware of the real differences amidst apparent similarities, what Montesquieu is *doing* is presenting us with a real similarity amidst apparent differences.” Stuart D. Warner, “Montesquieu’s Prelude: An Interpretation of Book I of *The Spirit of the Laws*,” in *Enlightening Revolutions: Essays in Honor of Ralph Lerner*, 163.

adjoins the following: “I cannot leave this subject.” He feels compelled to stick with the topic, for feeling the differences brought by advances in the arts and sciences (and so too in philosophy), offers entry into feeling the significance of change—ongoing change, from the root to its many fruits. That said, as the remark of the Preface makes clear, Montesquieu had to *turn* to antiquity—that is, to actively address something that has passed, or is at least not immediately present to him, but something that he can nonetheless make accessibly present; perhaps better to say, make spiritually accessible. Comparison of cases and therefore assessment of change and of difference is indeed possible, for in the case at hand, the “spirit” of antiquity may be grasped.

While *The Spirit of the Laws* compares and contrasts the spirits of various laws, peoples, and human activities, so too does it compare more broadly the spirits of ages and times. Montesquieu does not, however, speak of the spirit of modernity outright, or at least not systematically. One wonders whether he is tacitly suggesting that modernity’s spirit is somehow ungraspable, or at least less readily available to thought. Might it be sketched but not depicted in full, insofar as it is a spirit still in process? *The Spirit of the Laws* as a whole offers a representation of this very spirit in its unfolding, along with its contradictions, hopes, uncertainties, and concerns. Insofar as it is not presented directly, it might be suggested that in contrast, the spirit of antiquity is not only visible because it is in the past, but that at the heart of the latter is the fact of limitations and delineations. Ancient peoples were explicit, in speech and deed, about differences, and the distinctions between peoples—political, spiritual, cultural, legal, etc.—were taken for granted. According to the ancient spirit, difference and variety leapt to the eye and mind: limitations and dividing lines were to be seen all around. The spirit of antiquity, one is

tempted to say, consisted of separation. Contrarily, the modern spirit seeks to overcome and overturn limitations; it bears contempt for arresting divisions, and carries on with an absorbing change, or change that absorbs all things, seeking to synthesize what appears otherwise separated: it consists of unification. And yet, the very spirit of modernity may in fact be less graspable, not only because it is our spirit (and we are presently immersed in it, or absorbed by it), but precisely because of its unlimitedness—that is, it is an undifferentiated unity and, to the extent that it hangs together, it lacks reflective coherence. Insofar as it delineates itself at all, it does so largely by negating antiquity and its inherent limitations and distinctions, while perpetuating the logic of changeability and incessant innovation.

With the preceding remarks in mind, it is herein argued that even as Montesquieu's political science encourages much of the modern spirit, it offers an important reminder that is akin to something of the ancient spirit, as one of its core teachings is the recognition of relevant distinctions, and the ineluctable fact of political plurality. He helps readers to cultivate the ability to distinguish between real and apparent differences and similarities, and thus to neither overemphasize or underemphasize them. Montesquieu offers guidance in developing a balanced tolerance—a spirit of tolerance, to be sure, but a tolerance of spirits that does not collapse or synthesize all differences. For Montesquieu understands that as much as politics and its forms may change, there remains a degree of constancy to man's political condition, not least of all regarding its concomitant difficulties, due to the inescapable weaknesses and corruptibility of man's nature. Ultimately, it is not his objective to get men to move beyond politics, but to cultivate a healthy love in and for one's political community,

properly speaking. As he writes in his Preface: “If I could make it so that *everyone* had *new reasons* for loving his duties, his prince, his homeland and his laws and that *each* could better feel his happiness *in his own* country, government, and position, I would consider myself the happiest of mortals” (emphasis added). Montesquieu’s universal aim is to cultivate a new but nevertheless particular love within the hearts of readers—to love one’s own with reason.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, while Montesquieu shares in the spirit of modernity, and is even an advocate of it, he resists many of its extremes, on the one hand, and presses back upon abstractions and empty appeals to universalism, on the other. By attending so carefully to the parts and wholes, or to the particulars and universals, of human and political life, Montesquieu restores a sense of limits to modern politics as well as to modern political philosophy. His work exemplifies the fact that healthy political existence requires balancing and moderating any drive towards radical particularism or radical universalism; each being an over- or under-emphasis of political limitations, respectively. This chapter offers an introduction to the emergence of the tension between the particular and universal and its consequences for politics, largely in discussion of a few ancient characters present in Montesquieu’s work. Through them, the feeling of differences (and lack thereof) becomes palpable. The present discussion sets up an elaboration in the next chapter on the effects of growing universalization Montesquieu sees in the world before him, so as to assess the implications as he understands them.

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<sup>31</sup> As Cohler nicely summarizes: “Montesquieu says he hopes to offer his readers, as inhabitants of a particular country, true, not prejudiced, understandings of their duties. But to be unprejudiced is not to be universal; rather, it is to understand oneself and the basis of one’s own government. What interests Montesquieu, as he points out in the Foreword, is the quality, the modification of the soul, or the virtue that makes a particular government work. Montesquieu does not ask us to abandon that virtue but to see it as singular and to look for the adjustments proper to it. Enlightenment here is neither abandonment nor universalization of the principles of government...” Ann M. Cohler, *Montesquieu’s Comparative Politics and the Spirit of American Constitutionalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 5.

## The Heart and the Particularity of Passions

Novelty and change, and an increasing endorsement of modernity, emerge in greater degrees as one moves beyond the first part of Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*. Various commentators have claimed that Montesquieu initially celebrates the ancients in order to later put them aside, or that he praises them only to eventually make readers aware of their faults and shortcomings.<sup>32</sup> However, his admiration of certain ancient features and figures is such that he keeps readers wondering about where he really stands, which awakens us anew to the lively *quarrelle* between the ancients and moderns.<sup>33</sup> We too must assess the degree and goodness of certain changes as we consider the differences, as well as the similarities, between the ancients and moderns Montesquieu stresses in more and less obvious ways, and to various ends. After all, Montesquieu does not outright impose his judgments on us. At a high point immediately after discussing the novel English constitution, he makes explicit that "one must not always so exhaust a subject that one leaves nothing for the reader to do. It is not a question of making him read but of making him think" (XI.20). One important difference to think about that emerges early in the first part of the work is that related to education.

In a general discussion of the laws of education, Montesquieu makes clear that these are "the first we receive" and are the very laws that "prepare us to be citizens" (IV.4). He then speaks of society as a "great family" that includes all particular families,

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas Pangle, *Montesquieu's Philosophy of Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989); Harvey Mansfield, *Taming the Prince* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 217-18.

<sup>33</sup> Manent writes that the "extraordinary subtlety of *The Spirit of the Laws*" is due in part to "the difficulty of the enterprise," namely Montesquieu's attempt to "hold the old and new together in thought," not least of all "when the innovation in question is real, profound, and essential." Manent, "The French Revolution and French and English Liberalism," in *The Legacy of the French Revolution*, eds., Ralph C. Hancock and L. Gary Lambert (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996), 44. In a different, but not unrelated sense, Mansfield writes that Montesquieu "clear[s] out of his inquiry the rival extremes represented by the ancients and moderns, so that his own moderation can emerge." Mansfield, *Taming the Prince*, 220.

and that each of the latter should be “governed according to the plan” of the greater family. The particular parts should conform to the general whole by way of education: “If there is a principle for the people taken generally, then the parts which compose it, that is, the families, will have one also.” Thus private education operates according to the same principle of the government, and the laws of education accordingly differ depending upon the kind of government. If the laws of education are the first we receive, they are nonetheless not confined by familial rule—or the idiosyncrasies of individual families—but are directed outwards towards the political community. The particularity of each family is generalized through education in a manner consistent with the particularities of the government. There is apparently no one general education for mankind, according to Montesquieu’s understanding of ancient practice; however, there is consistency and continuity *within* individual communities and so among its families. One cannot conceive of a universal education for fostering citizenship, given the complex differences among peoples and their governments. And so it seems that politics—the concrete government and its constitution—is a primary determinant of human education, which is in turn supported by proper education of peoples. Such an understanding is hardly Montesquieu’s alone, as, for example, it echoes Aristotle’s understanding of education in its political orientation, as well as in its variegation based on different regime types; that is, of an “education relative to the regime” (*Politics*, Bk. VIII).

However, after discussing education in monarchies and in despotic governments, Montesquieu pauses to consider the following contrast, as indicated by the chapter title: “The difference in the effect of education among the ancients and among ourselves” (IV.4). He informs us that “[m]ost of the ancient peoples lived in governments that had

virtue for their principle,” which is to say that virtue was the motivating passion, or the driving force of the government. And, he writes, when “virtue was in full force [*dans sa force*],” remarkable things happened: “things were done in those governments that we no longer see and that astonish our small souls [*nos petites âmes*].” The force of virtue in ancient republics, and the astonishing things carried out therein, followed from ancient education.

The ancients were not somehow different from us in nature, insofar as small souls may conceivably be enlarged, provided proper guidance; souls may expand or contract depending, at least to some extent, upon circumstances.<sup>34</sup> Our souls have shriveled due to the change in circumstances, which in large part consist of the government and the kind of education we receive. We no longer live in the ancient republican governments where “the full power of education is needed” (IV.5) so as to bring on the full force of virtue. Insofar as virtue was in full force in these ancient republics it is important to recall what Montesquieu emphasizes in his Author’s Foreword: “In order to understand the first four books of this work, one must note that what I call *virtue* in a republic is love of the homeland, that is, love of equality.” He then underlines that it is “not a moral virtue or a Christian virtue; it is *political virtue*, and this is the principle that makes republican government move.” Political virtue is rooted in a very particular kind of love, or a form of love directed at a very particular object, namely one’s own republic. The full power of education was necessary to cull the strings of men’s hearts and deflect their

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<sup>34</sup> To truly see what “was extraordinary in the Greek institutions,” Montesquieu suggests comparing it with “the dregs and corruption of modern times,” however, immediately afterward he offers a *modern* example that parallels the ancients: “A legislator, an *honnête homme*, has formed a people in whom integrity seems *as natural as* bravery was among the Spartans. Mr. Penn is a true Lycurgus; and, though he has had peace for his object as Lycurgus had war, *they are alike* in the unique path on which they have set their people, in their ascendancy over free men, in the prejudices they have vanquished, and in the passions they have subdued” (IV.5, emphasis to English added).

love away from the self, engaging in “a renunciation of oneself, which is always a very painful thing” (IV.5). Self-love is transformed through education into “love of the laws and the homeland.”

This is no easy task, to be sure, for while man is “[m]ade for living in society,” there is the ever present possibility that he “could forget his fellows,” insofar as “it is in [men’s] nature to act by themselves” (I.1). Thus, ancient (republican) education must instill “a continuous preference of the public interest over one’s own,” and when successful, Montesquieu says it “produces all the individual virtues,” for *all* the individual virtues, in fact, “are *only* that preference” (IV.5, emphasis added). For Montesquieu, the crown of the virtues (to adopt Aristotle’s phrase), therefore, consists in the “continuous preference of the public interest.” And even as the particular form of government most conducive to this kind of love is democracy (since each citizen is entrusted with the government), Montesquieu then proclaims that government, being “like all things in the world,” is no different in that “in order to preserve it, one must love it.” *All* governments—all things—require love in order to persist: love is at the heart of preservation and a certain kind, as well as certain amount of it, must be in the hearts of men to preserve their government. Different governments, however, require varying degrees and forms of love. Or at any rate, each kind of government has its springs in one or more of the human passions, as Montesquieu makes repeatedly clear when speaking about the principles of governments (IIIff.). In that the success of governments ultimately rests on ordination or direction of the passions, considering the following



poignant insight is key: “The less we can satisfy our particular passions, the more we deliver ourselves to general ones” (V.2).<sup>35</sup>

Individuals—“we”—must direct our passions somewhere, for we cannot not be passionate: human beings are lovers, and man’s love may be more or less general or particular. The pressing question is whether or not—and if so, how—we can love generally and particularly at the same time, or what the consequences may be of loving in such contrary, even contradictory, ways—that is, the consequences for the lover as well as for the object of love. Thus, Montesquieu raises his modern readers’ astonishment at the manner in which the ancients loved *politically*. He makes distinctly clear the unique way in which the ancient city could draw passions out from individual souls towards it, while binding and circumscribing this love so as to not run beyond it. If the logic of love, or of the passions, is to seek its satisfaction in more general objects when dissatisfied with particular ones, from the perspective of small souls it is an astonishing thing indeed that the republic, or the political body more generally, could so successfully establish itself as the culmination of passionate satisfaction. We indicted ones, however, with “our” allegedly small souls, cannot help but wonder whether this contraction is because our passions are far more particular, or far more general, or somehow both? Is the contraction a result of an extreme or of a contradiction? Moreover, is Montesquieu correct or faithful in his depiction of ancient satisfaction on the one hand, and modern pusillanimity on the other?

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<sup>35</sup> Cohler, et. al. translation slightly altered.

## Education and the Particularity of Community

Montesquieu continues the comparison of ancient education with the moderns by attributing what he sees as a most important advantage to the former: “it was never contradicted [*jamais démentie*].” The lives of the ancients—due to their education, or the manner in which their souls were formed—were constituted by remarkable consistency. Such lack of contradiction suggests a recurrence of things over the course of time and an ability to make sense of present things based on previous experience. One gets the further impression that there was coherence to whole things, so that the various parts—of the city, of the world, of one’s soul—all had their place, and across the lives of peoples there was an experiential consistency. Montesquieu makes the ancient world seem suddenly very simple. By extension, regarding the spirit of antiquity referred to in his Preface, one may extrapolate that it too had coherence, which is why he can speak so directly about its spirit, as *a* spirit. For this sweeping generalization of education, if not of antiquity as a whole, Montesquieu provides a strikingly singular measure, namely one man, Epaminondas: “In the last year of his life, Epaminondas said, heard, saw, and did the same things [*les mêmes choses*] as at the time that he was first instructed.” The laws of education Epaminondas received were not only the first, but in many ways the very last he was exposed to as well.

Of course, this is not to say that Epaminondas had no surprises in his life, or was sheltered from all change. After all, he was a general responsible for great feats and was therefore witness to vicissitudes in the order and power of Greek cities. In fact he was much praised by many for his valor in maintaining and restoring order amidst such

conflagration.<sup>36</sup> While by all accounts an exemplary figure, Montesquieu claims he exemplifies the perfection of ancient education, for the changes he may have observed were superficial, or insufficiently significant to unsettle his well-formed soul.<sup>37</sup> Epaminondas thereby serves to represent something like the complete satisfaction of ancient (republican) love through continued passion for the public interest.

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<sup>36</sup> Cicero, for one, in speaking about what defines a general offers exemplary men who best illustrate the definition, saying, “I would bring the examples of the Africani and Maximi; and instance Hannibal, Epaminondas, and such other heroes.” Cicero, *De Oratore: Or, His Three Dialogues Upon the Character and Qualifications of an Orator*, trans. William Guthrie (London: R. P. & C. Williams, 1872), I.XLVIII [p. 85]. Later, when discussing the panegyric, he discusses this particularly Greek form of praise and celebration of persons, listing Epaminondas among Themistocles, Aristides, Agesilaus, Philippus, Alexander, and “others.” Ibid., II.LXXXIV [p. 217].

<sup>37</sup> In what is extant from Plutarch there is no “life” altogether devoted to Epaminondas. Instead, he appears in two other lives, that of Agesilaus and of Pelopidas. (For what it’s worth, in the life of Agesilaus he refers to a particular detail that he says he has “mentioned in the life of Epaminondas.” Apparently the assumedly lost life was in parallel to one of the Scipios. For details, see, G. Shrimpton, “Plutarch’s Life of Epaminondas,” *Pacific Coast Philology*, Vol. 6 [Apr., 1971]: 55-9). While Montesquieu does not explicitly refer to either of these two lives (as he provides no notes at all for IV.4), he cites 16 other lives and two comparisons in *The Spirit of the Laws*, so it is no stretch that Plutarch is at least one of his sources for Epaminondas, among others. Not least, two chapters later he refers outright to the *Life of Lycurgus* (IV.6). It is therefore worth recounting in brief what Plutarch says about Epaminondas. In the biography of Agesilaus, during a peace among the warring Greeks with various ambassadors descending on Sparta, Plutarch refers to Epaminondas, one of those sent as a “Theban, famous at that time for his philosophy and learning,” although not yet distinguished as a general. However, among all the delegates, he “alone maintained the dignity of an ambassador,” whereas the lot of others “crouch[ed] to Agesilaus.” His defiance in speech and deed, and defense of liberty for all cities from Spartan domination, caused the rage of Agesilaus who “struck the name of the Thebans out of the league [of peace], and declared war against them,” while making peace with the rest of Greece. *Plutarch’s Lives*, ed., Arthur H. Clough (New York: Modern Library Classics, 2001), Vol. 2, 59-60. In discussing Pelopidas—a friend of Epaminondas and a man similarly descended from an “honourable family in Thebes”—Plutarch’s remarks demonstrate that Epaminondas was anything but typical. For example, he “made his familiar and hereditary poverty more light and easy by his philosophy and single life,” and never could Pelopidas persuade him to share in his wealth. These two friends, moreover, involved in public life together, are presented as mutually benevolent, kind, and reverent, while lacking the envy, confusion, and mutual jealousy that plagued other such pairs as Aristides and Themistocles, Cimon and Pericles, and Nicias and Alcibiades: “The true cause of this was their virtue; whence it came that they did not make their actions aim at wealth and glory...but both from the beginning being inflamed with a divine desire of seeing their country glorious by their exertions, they used to that end one another’s excellences as their own.” Somewhat striking is that at one point in Epaminondas’ life, after the Spartans came to dominate Thebes, and others fled after the conquest (including Pelopidas), Plutarch reports “Epaminondas stayed at home, being not much looked after, as one whom philosophy had made inactive and poverty incapable.” Does this fact indicate inconsistency in his life, or should one interpret it as demonstrating his consistent devotion to his city?—despite the changes around him, he remained. *Plutarch’s Lives* Vol. 1, 386-8.

One may be inclined to protest against this rather exaggerated claim, or this manner of generalization.<sup>38</sup> Is such consistency conceivable in the speeches and deeds, or the words and actions, of one man as well as of those around him? Alternatively, just what are these “things” that so remained *the same*, according to Montesquieu? Even if Epaminondas can stand in for statesmen and generals, or certain good citizens, upon consideration of a different type of man, present in and before his day, namely the philosopher, it is far from obvious that every such Greek “said, heard, saw, and did the same things.” A cursory reading alone of various Platonic dialogues illustrates the extent to which philosophizing reveals *different things* to the interlocutors, as well as many contradictions, not least since quite a number of the dialogical exchanges end in aporia. Moreover, philosophical education was precisely concerned with dramatically changing men’s lives, or turning their souls around, in the sense of *periagoge* in Plato’s *Republic*. In the book on education Montesquieu in fact refers to Plato on a number of occasions—to his *Laws* and *Republic* as well as to his “laws”—and while he draws out other elements of the works, he never discusses the philosopher-king or the education of philosophers (IV.6 *et passim*); least of all does he stress the higher intentions of philosophy and the *Republic*.<sup>39</sup> To the extent that philosophical education focused on political virtue and consisted of a certain civic orientation, it more importantly sought to lead men to moral and intellectual virtue. In so doing, it at least transcended the particular city, even as it

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<sup>38</sup> Scholars have argued that Montesquieu intentionally distorts antiquity, and the manner of Greek political life, offering an innovative view of classical republicanism and virtue. See, for example, Thomas Pangle, *The Theological Basis of Liberal Modernity in Montesquieu’s Spirit of the Laws* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2010), 51-93.

<sup>39</sup> For discussion of Montesquieu’s “obviously inadequate interpretation of Plato’s *Republic*” and the reasons for this, see, David Lowenthal, “Montesquieu and the Classics: Republican Government in *The Spirit of the Laws*,” in *Ancients and Moderns: Essays on the Tradition of Political Philosophy in Honor of Leo Strauss*, ed. Joseph Cropsey (New York: Basic Books, 1964), esp. 273-80; cf. Pangle, *Montesquieu’s Philosophy of Liberalism*, 64-6ff.

was dependent upon it. Montesquieu's exclusive use of Epaminondas is arguably directed at underlining the *ineffectiveness* of classical philosophical education, and the implication is that this was so much the better for ancient political life, insofar as such a contradicting education would have a destabilizing effect on the life of the republic.<sup>40</sup> The "advantage" of ancient education was that it was genuinely political, in that it was consistently or even simply political.

Epaminondas's life was so intimately bound up with his particular city of Thebes that one finds no real private or personal space, as it were. One could hardly imagine Epaminondas—or the spirit of Epaminondas—apart from considering Thebes and his Theban citizenship.<sup>41</sup> By extension, Montesquieu intimates, one could hardly imagine the spirit of the ancients without considering ancient education. Even as Epaminondas could look beyond the walls of his city, and defend them as well as travel outside of them to do so at times,<sup>42</sup> everything he observed and experienced was understood in light of these walls—geographically and psychologically, physically and morally—which is to say through the regime in which he was reared. His life is defined by his education as his education has delineated his life. The "same things" his education led him to see—both with his eyes and soul—included above all his city and his fellow citizens; everything was rooted in a sense of the public business, and in Epaminondas' case it led to heroic feats on its behalf. Montesquieu depicts a remarkable bond—a seamless connection—

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<sup>40</sup> Consider how he says, "the speculative sciences...render [men] savage [*sauvage*]" (IV.8). As the editors note, *sauvage* in the French implies both the idea of savage brutality and the shy and wild, which is to say it is something altogether *asocial*. Rousseau will develop this thought further, when he criticizes the philosopher's inability to act and effect change due to his contemplativeness.

<sup>41</sup> Consider, in contrast, Montesquieu's depiction of Alcibiades—a man who in many ways seems to have been something of the antithesis of Epaminondas, and yet he is described as being "the wonder [*l'admiration*] of the universe" (V.4).

<sup>42</sup> In fact, Epaminondas died outside of his city, during the battle of Mantinea, while fighting the Spartans. *Plutarch's Lives*, Vol. 2, 66.

between speech and deed, together bound by the city as a public tutelary association. As he later notes, the ancient republics were admirable for their ability to keep at bay all that conduced “a spirit of distance from public business” (XXIII.21). Epaminondas is exemplary for having been altogether void of this “spirit of distance” from the erstwhile “same things” he first experienced through the laws of education.

Montesquieu thereby emboldens his claim of ancient consistency by playing up ancient practice (and specifically republican practice) or the “effects” of education, while downplaying ancient theorizing, or the “speculation” of classical philosophy (not least the speculation on education itself, as well as the moral and intellectual effects of a philosophical education). The core of his criticism could be interpreted as directed at the abstractions and generalizations of the philosophers’ speculations—concerned, as they were, with the universally best, or with “the idea of perfection,” rather than the particularly existent thing of which one was already a part.<sup>43</sup> Such speculations were insufficiently political, or socially ineffective, because they sundered the satisfaction of the city, and thereby diminished the effectiveness of the ancient laws of education,

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<sup>43</sup> As he later writes in the context of Rome: “Sects of philosophy had already introduced into the [Roman] empire a spirit of distance from public business which could not have reached this point at the time of the republic, when everyone was busy with the arts of war and peace [Montesquieu adds a note: see in Cicero, *De Officiis*, his ideas about the spirit of speculation]. From it came an idea of perfection attached to all that leads to a speculative life; from it came distance from the cares and encumbrances of a family. The Christian religion, succeeding philosophy, fixed, so to speak, ideas for which the former had only cleared the way” (XXIII.21). One book later he emphasizes the basic orientation of men, as especially conducive to proper political life: “Men, being made to preserve, feed and clothe themselves, and to do all the things done in society, religion should not give them an overly contemplative life” (XXIV.11). And since he considers the sects of philosophy among the ancients to be akin to kinds of religion (XXIV.10), then philosophy too, on Montesquieu’s assessment, ought not to dwell on contemplation, but address matters political. The laws, however, may be called upon to correct the disorientating effects of religion and philosophy: “As religion and the civil laws should aim principally to make good citizens of men, one see that when either of these departs from this end, the other should aim more toward it” (XXIV.14).

releasing or unbinding the passions of men.<sup>44</sup> The problem introduced by philosophy is a problem exacerbated “among ourselves” not least since we no longer live in small states and are no longer educated by “singular institutions.” The effects of philosophy on the political world are, in our day, even greater according to Montesquieu, as will be seen. It can therefore no longer be assumed “that all citizens pay a singular attention to each other. This cannot be promised in the confusion, oversights, and extensive business of a numerous people” (IV.7; cf. VIII.16). Amidst this “confusion,” and the extension of business well beyond the public thing, the “singular attention” of citizens is fractured. As the size of political bodies has changed, so too therefore has the extent and expanse of men’s love; the object of the passions has become less directed. But more than just enlargement is in effect here, for a major difference in education is likewise present. The *effect* of the education “we receive” is that it enlarges the distance—it instills a “spirit of distance”—from the *particular* community in which we are born and instructed. The distance is, very concretely, both physical and spiritual. Montesquieu goes on to explain why this is the case.

### **Modern Education and the Division of the Heart**

“Today,” Montesquieu writes, “we receive three different or opposing educations: that of our fathers, that of our schoolmasters [*maîtres*], and that of the world. What we are told by the last upsets [*renverse*] all the ideas of the first two. This comes partly from the opposition there is for us between the ties [*engagements*] of religion and those of the world, a thing unknown among the ancients.” What *our* fathers and schoolmasters teach

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<sup>44</sup> Montesquieu is not only very attentive to the direction and receptacles of love, but is likewise concerned with the proliferation and differentiation of desire: “Those to whom nothing is given desire nothing; those to whom a little is given soon desire a little more and then a great deal” (V.17).

us is different from what those of the ancients taught them, and furthermore, these teachings are at odds with the world. What we learn in the world sends us in a different direction from what we learn in the family and schoolhouse. The difference is not finally in the details of the education per se, but more importantly in their ultimate orientations. The effect of modern education is to divide the individual, and draw him in ambivalent directions. If towards the community, then also away from it; when towards what is one's own, likely even more so to what is beyond; and this due to an opposing set of ties: the inheritance of religious tradition contradicts the reality of the world.

Altogether “unknown among the ancients” on Montesquieu's telling is the “opposition” between the two sets of bonds of religion and of the world. There was but one set of ties for Epaminondas and the ancients, for their religions were, as Rousseau will famously call them, “civil religions.”<sup>45</sup> Religion itself contributed to the cultivation of citizenship.<sup>46</sup> Religion, education, and the world had no deep, or significant, separations from the public business in ancient republics, on Montesquieu's account: all drove men towards civic virtue, inspiring them to manifest it “in full force.” For “us,” however, religion—our religion—divides men between the realities of the political world and the teachings of those who exhort concern with what is beyond the world, which is to say with the demands of Heaven.

One is reminded of Machiavelli's castigation of the Christian religion and his judgment that it was to blame for the decline of ancient republics insofar as it taught men

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<sup>45</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, IV.8.

<sup>46</sup> This is not to say he denies that ancient religion had certain pernicious political effects and abuses in practice, as for example, he notes that in Athens “the excessive number of festivals was a great problem. Frequently, business could not be conducted among this dominating people to whom all the Greek towns brought their differences” (XXIV.23).



to attend more to their salvation than their patria.<sup>47</sup> However, Montesquieu's claim here is perhaps less direct than Machiavelli's and his critique of the Christian religion's effects on political life is somewhat ambiguous<sup>48</sup>—an ambiguity no less directed at the universal expanse of the Christian religion.<sup>49</sup> In speaking of “ties” or *engagements*, Montesquieu's account does not so much emphasize the personal element of salvation at this point as the

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<sup>47</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.11-12, II.2

<sup>48</sup> Elsewhere he addresses the effects of “the idea of a place of reward” and its necessary connection to “the idea of a region of penalties.” He is particularly concerned with the situation where there is hope for the former idea with fear for the latter one. The consequence, he writes, would be the loss of force of the civil laws. When men are certain in their belief “of rewards in the next life” they “escape the legislator; they will have too much scorn for death.” Thus: “How can one constrain by the laws a man who believes himself sure that the greatest penalty the magistrates can inflict on him will end in a moment only to begin his happiness?” (XXIV.14). The question is undoubtedly pertinent in age of renewed religious terrorism. See, Barry Cooper, *New Political Religions or An Analysis of Modern Terrorism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005).

<sup>49</sup> He is not without praise for the positive effects of Christianity on political life: “Remarkably, the Christian religion, which seems to have no other object than the felicity of the other life, is also our happiness in this one!” (XXIV.3). He criticizes Bayle for misunderstanding “the spirit” of Christianity and in this passage, one is tempted to say, even exaggerates the positive effects of Christianity upon citizenship, writing that Christians, “would be citizens infinitely enlightened about their duties and having a very great zeal to perform them [of course, he does not specify here *which* duties]; they would sense the rights of natural defense; the more they believed they owed to the religion, the more they would think they owed to the homeland.” Montesquieu finds it “astounding” that Bayle failed to “distinguish the orders for the establishment of Christianity from Christianity itself, and the precepts of the gospels from their counsels.” His point seems to be that the very spirit of Christianity is a certain political flexibility, which is to say that it can and will be adjusted according to the particulars of place and culture, insofar as the *counsels* are not like hard and fast laws, and the real *precepts* are few: “When the legislator, instead of giving laws, has given counsels, it is because he has seen that his counsels, if they were ordained like laws, would be contrary to the spirit of the laws” (XXIV.6). The difference between precepts and counsels in matters political and religious is elaborated in the following chapter: “Human laws made to speak to the spirit should give precepts and no counsels at all; religion, made to speak to the heart, should give many counsel and few precepts” (XXIV.7). Thus, even as the Church introduces into the world, through universal spiritualism, an unprecedented spirit of universalism, its spirit is one that is conducive to balance with particulars, according to Montesquieu. For discussion of Montesquieu “as an opponent of Christianity who is at the same times its heir,” and one who did not so much aim at the disappearance of religion than at “a transformation of Christianity” to make it “safe for liberalism and constitutionalism,” see, Clifford Orwin, “For Which Human Nature Can Never Be Too Grateful”: Montesquieu as the Heir of Christianity,” in *Recovering Reason: Essays in Honor of Thomas L. Pangle*, ed., Timothy Burns (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 269-84; cf. Robert C. Bartlett, *The Idea of Enlightenment: A Post-Mortem Study* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 13-44, who argues that Montesquieu and Bayle “are at one on the fundamental questions,” notwithstanding their real and apparent differences, insofar as both seek to demote religion's negative effects on politics by restricting politics to the pursuit of goods rooted in the natural passions, such as the desire for security.

conflict between two different communities.<sup>50</sup> The ties of religion under the Christian dispensation are universal: all Christians everywhere are engaged by the City of God and its commands, and are thus beholden to duties that transcend any given particular political community. The Church, as representative of the City of God, has the task of properly forming individuals so as to aspire and live up to the demands of the Heavenly City, and no doubt it understands itself as being a real and effective city in the world, even as it claims not to be of the world. However, these ties are, so to speak, invisible, in contrast to the very visible ties of the world, manifest in the form of one's own concrete community, in its laws, customs, and ways, and in contrast to the many other existent but different ones outside. The religious ties may often be at odds with the worldly, political ties—one may feel engaged by two alternate cities—causing a certain imbalance, or inconsistency in the lives of men. This division within the spirit of individuals and communities may otherwise be understood as a division and opposition between what is particular and what is universal. What follows is the emergence of ambivalence in the direction the passions and love may take.

The great task of political philosophy in the wake of Christianity's emergence has been to strike a balance or compromise in this regard, between the universal Church and the particular polities. So much has been called the “theologico-political problem” of the West, which has served as the catalyst of European political development.<sup>51</sup> This is not the place to recall this long and complex history and the various ways the problem has

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<sup>50</sup> Montesquieu repeatedly reminds readers that when speaking of religion, he speaks “not [as] a theologian but one who writes about politics,” and thus he examines “the various religions of the world *only* in relation to the good to be drawn from them in the civil state” (XXIV.1 [emphasis added]; cf. XXIV.3, 4, 14ff.).

<sup>51</sup> See, Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), ch. 1. This problem, in these terms, will be addressed herein at greater length in the seventh chapter of this work.

been addressed; suffice it to say that it is an inheritance within which Montesquieu himself is working. And even as the power and presence of the Universal Church has waned, the Western sense of universality has taken on new forms, both as an extension of, as well as in opposition to, Christian universalism. Of course, if the Western sense of universalism emerged first by way of philosophy and then most effectively in and through the Church, the latter at least was preceded by various political projects that sought universality. While Rome is the obvious example—and Montesquieu was nothing if not a keen student of Rome—one earlier empire of particular interest to Montesquieu is that of Alexander, which he finds to be unique in antiquity.

#### **Alexander and “the whole earth”**

Montesquieu first introduces Alexander after discussing the right of war and its extension, the right of conquest. It is his contention that the “purpose of conquest is preservation” and any servitude that may ensue is only “accidental” (X.3). He is by no means unaware of the abuses that both theorists and practitioners have made of this right. Nevertheless, he states that a conqueror “can change the course of everything,” to which he adds “muffled tyranny is the first thing which is liable to violence” (X.4). The course of political history, no doubt, is unthinkable without the role that expansion and imperial politics has played. If many are liable to emphasize the negative consequences, such as the destruction of life and property, and the eradication of whole peoples, Montesquieu is surprisingly quick to counter that its destructive power can be positive as well: “A conquest can destroy harmful prejudices, and, if I dare speak this way, can put a nation under a better presiding genius.” Conquest can liberate as well as enlighten.

Montesquieu offers an argument of humanitarianism, *avant la lettre*.<sup>52</sup> He does not, however, offer a systematic account as to what conditions and course of action must prevail for this to hold true. Instead, he provides a negative example in the form of the disastrous approach of the Spanish in Mexico. Rather than free and enlighten the Mexicans, the Spaniards, he says, “brought them a raging superstition” and “they made freemen slaves.” The weighty emphasis he puts on this example makes it clear how sensitive Montesquieu is to the way in which conquering peoples can go awry. And even in the best cases, he acknowledges that there is a heavy price to pay, for each conqueror must “make amends for part of the evils he has done.” In offering a concluding definition of the right of conquest, he says it is “a necessary, legitimate, and unfortunate right, which always leaves an immense debt to be discharged if human nature is to be repaid.” Political action, no matter the nobility of intentions, always risks an element of evil, or at least requires a means of amending transgressions. There are limits to the good of conquest, as there are inherent limitations to the good all human action may initiate.<sup>53</sup>

After what amounts to a rather ambiguous discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of conquests, of wavering goods and evils in expansive activity,

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<sup>52</sup> In his *Commentary and Review of Montesquieu's Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Thomas Jefferson (Orig. published, Philadelphia: William Duane, 1811 [Reprinted, New York: Burt Franklin, 1969]), 91-2, Destutt de Tracy approves of this passage. In agreeing that “a people often gain a great deal by being conquered,” he adds that it is “particularly true, of those whose fortune it is to be conquered by a representative government, for they thereby gain both liberty and economy,” whether they are incorporated into the body of the conquering state are refounded into a new state. For de Tracy, this kind of conquest “is in truth more like a rescue from bondage...and this is what renders the representative form of government formidable to all others.”

<sup>53</sup> If, as Montesquieu writes in his Preface, “[i]t is not a matter of indifference that the people be enlightened,” there are nonetheless reasons for caution: “In a time of ignorance, one has no doubts even while doing the greatest evils; in an enlightened age, one trembles even while doing the greatest goods. One feels the old abuses and sees their correction, but one also sees the abuses of the correction itself. One lets an ill remain if one fears something worse; one lets a good remain if one is in doubt about a better.” Enlightenment is not without its ambiguities and ambivalences; the political good is rarely self-evident and not without trade-offs. Thus, Mansfield nicely summarizes Montesquieu’s “essential task”: “To see the abuses of enlightenment without renouncing enlightenment.” Mansfield, *Taming the Prince*, 218.

Montesquieu gives two ancient examples that triumphed over superstition; two cases against the one failed modern Spanish example. Under the title, “Gelon, King of Syracuse,” Montesquieu provides a short discussion of what he believes to be the “finest peace treaty mentioned in history” (X.5). Gelon made peace with the Carthaginians, and in the subsequent treaty he sought the abolition of the Carthaginian custom of sacrificing their children. “Remarkable thing! After defeating three hundred thousand Carthaginians, he exacted a condition useful only to them, or rather, he stipulated one for mankind.” It is at this point Montesquieu closes the eponymous chapter with a single sentence from the life of an altogether different man: “The Bactrians had their elders eaten by large dogs; Alexander forbade them to do this, and this was a triumph he gained over superstition.” This triumph introduces Alexander who nine chapters hence is given his own chapter that is full of great praise for “his enterprise” (X.14).

Prior to addressing Alexander directly, however, Montesquieu discusses a modern example of comparative failure in the likes of Charles XII (X.13). Contrary to common opinion, Montesquieu does not singularly attribute Charles’ downfall to the famous battle of Poltava—often considered the end of the Swedish Empire and the founding of the Russian Empire—rather he says, “if he had not been destroyed at that place, he would have been destroyed at another.” It is possible, on Montesquieu’s telling, to rectify the accidents of fortune, but “one cannot avert events that continuously arise from the nature of things.” And Charles’ error was precisely that he was “not ruled by the actual arrangement of things, but rather by a certain model he had chosen; even this he followed badly.” Charles’ “model”—namely, Alexander—was adopted rashly, and became something of an imposition, or an abstraction, as it was at odds with the realities of

politics and his own abilities. It was, Montesquieu underlines, contrary to “the nature of things.” Montesquieu therefore determines that Charles “was not Alexander but he would have been Alexander’s best soldier.” Charles’s ambition could have served Alexander’s own ambition well; however, one may question whether Charles would have been so satisfied as a subordinate. In fact, it is conceivable that Charles might have been Alexander’s most dangerous soldier; perhaps brave in battle, but otherwise potentially unruly if his desires were akin to Alexander’s. The difficulty one is faced with is that large-scale ambitions, or plans for universal rule, require the mobilization and aid of those with no less strong but lower-lever passions; the lesser executioners of a vision must be engaged but aspire to a baser form of satisfaction than that of the visionary or leader. One must be able to enflame passions, but also tame them, accordingly. The problem is one of a species that Plato raises in his *Republic*, when dealing with the spiritedness of the guardians. It is no less a problem in modernity than it was in antiquity.

Why, one wonders, does Montesquieu introduce the ancient, Alexander, by way of the modern, Charles, and furthermore raise the status of the ancient over the modern? To be sure, the obvious ancient comparison is the parallel Plutarch himself draws between Alexander and Caesar, which Montesquieu only draws together with remarkable brevity in closing (as well as an initial passing remark between the types of battles both first fought). One reason why Montesquieu likely discusses Charles is to attack many of his contemporaries who held the Swedish king in high esteem.<sup>54</sup> Montesquieu thus subtly

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<sup>54</sup> Not least among these is, of course, Voltaire. It is not inconceivable that this was an attack on two fronts: regarding the praise of Charles, and so too against those who failed to take the ancients seriously. In the case of Voltaire, based on his works, *Nouvelles Considérations sur l’histoire* and *Discours sur l’Histoire de Charles XII*, it has been said that “Voltaire dealt exclusively with modern history for he believed that

takes on both modern theory and practice, and subsequently establishes himself—a different kind of modern—as the true theorist of ancient practice, making Alexander of antiquity more relevant to the present times than Charles the modern. The modern political world may have changed, but some of the most important lessons can nevertheless be learned from a proper understanding of ancient political actors.

Readers are informed that “Alexander’s project succeeded only because it was sensible [*sensé*],” and a few lines later that the project was not only “wise [*sage*], but it was wisely executed [*sagement exécuté*]” (X.13). Even when acting rapidly and “in the heat of his passions,” Montesquieu dares to say that he “was led by a vein of reason [*une saillie de raison qui le conduisait*].” Others, Montesquieu charges, have “wanted to make a romance of his story,” but such men are of a spirit more “spoiled” than that of Alexander himself. Montesquieu writes at once tauntingly and invitingly that their romantic decadence is “unable to hide” this “vein of reason...from us.” Montesquieu is not so much discovering the ‘cunning of reason’ unbeknownst to the actor, but considering both Alexander’s intentions—his wisdom and strategy—as well as the broader consequence of his project. Alexander’s project is fully intelligible on its own terms, even as its intelligibility may offer insights beyond itself. While Montesquieu seems full of praise for him, he is not, however, without reservations as well. His

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ancient history could only satisfy our curiosity whereas modern history could be a definite source of moral instruction.” Patrick Henry, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Jan. – Mar., 1977): 146. This is a notion against which Montesquieu obviously stands athwart, and on the basis of which Montesquieu might charge Voltaire for having failed to genuinely turn to antiquity to capture its spirit (for reasons beyond idle curiosity). In his *Pensées*, Montesquieu refers to Voltaire’s *History of Charles XII*, and mentions an “admirable fragment,” while commenting on the “vivid” writing of the work, but adds that “[s]ometimes the author lacks sense.” *Mes Pensées*, no. 641 (p. 201). In a later note he is more candid, and the analogy he draws could hardly be more biting to Voltaire: “Voltaire will never write good history. He is like the monks, who write not for the subject they are treating but for the glory of their order; Voltaire writes for his monastery” (no. 1446, p. 416). The rivalry between Montesquieu and Voltaire is not unknown, for as Peter Gay has noted, “Voltaire sniped at [*Esprit des lois*] for a quarter century.” Gay, *The Party of Humanity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 59, 90, 208ff; cf. Paul Rahe, *The Logic of Liberty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 10-26.

ambiguous tribute forces one to wonder about the extent to which Montesquieu endorses some kind of universal rule, and insofar as he allows it, of what he thinks it ought to consist.

Montesquieu makes clear that Alexander did not set out on conquest before securing Macedonia against the encircling barbarians, and doing this included “completely suppressing the Greeks.” The servitude of the Greeks, however, was merely instrumental. It was not driven by enmity, rather it was a necessary step for the project’s sake: “he used this oppression only for the execution of his enterprise.” Alexander’s oppression of the Greeks reached the success it did because he hid their servitude from them. Montesquieu’s interpretation of this concealment is based on his claim that Alexander managed to “dazzle” the Greeks by destroying their “eternal enemies,” the Persians, and led them to expect the conquest of Asia at large (X.13). Thus, Montesquieu suggests that the love of Greek liberty at this time was less than Greek enmity—the resentment of the Greeks could be used against them, insofar as they no longer had the virtue and will to actually act upon their anger to vanquish their enemies. Happy instead were they to give themselves up to an oppressor if they could witness their enemies’ destruction. It should be noted that the Greeks of this period were no longer of the stature of Epaminondas; their erstwhile ordinate civic love and virtue had become corrupt.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Montesquieu had previously invoked the authority of Justin (his work, *Epitoma historiarum Philippicarum*) on Greek decline, who suggests it was coterminous with Epaminondas’ death (VIII.5, n. 2): “Justin attributes the extinction of virtue in Athens to the death of Epaminondas...” at which point the Athenians ceased to be positively competitive, spending their income instead on “festivals,” going to the theater instead of being “at camp,” whereupon the Macedonians “came out of obscurity.” Six chapters later Epaminondas is again mentioned, or rather his time is compared with that of Plutarch’s time, such that in the latter, “the parks, where one fought naked, and the wrestling matches, made the young people cowardly, inclined them to an infamous love and made only dancers of them,” whereas “Epaminondas’ time, wrestling had brought victory to the Thebans at the battle of Leucra.” The very same physical activity—wrestling—can have different spiritual outcomes given the nature of the period.



What Montesquieu's description of this example and others makes clear is that Alexander was successful at finding his opponents' weakness—strategic, psychological, geographical, etc.—and exploiting it, often taking an opposing approach from those he encountered. While he certainly had some luck along the way, in the beginning, Montesquieu stresses, he “left little to chance.” Eventually, through temerity, wisdom, industry, and some fortune, his victory at the battle of Arbela “gave him the whole earth.” Additionally key to Alexander's achievements, according to Montesquieu, was the speed with which he executed each stage of his plan and every battle strategy implemented. “Alexander's marches are so rapid that you believe that empire of the universe is the prize for running, as in the Greek games, rather than the prize for victory.” To summarize his strategy of conquest, one may describe it as wisely used speed and speedily applied wisdom.

So far as preservation goes, Montesquieu makes explicit that Alexander defied the counsel of those (including Aristotle, mentioned in a note) who sought to make the Greeks masters over the enslaved Persians. Instead, it was Alexander who united the “two nations” and thereby wiped out “the distinctions between the conquerors and the vanquished: after the conquest, he abandoned all the prejudices that had served him in making it; he assumed the mores of the Persians in order not to distress the Persians by making them assume the mores of the Greeks.” He took away the particular liberty of the Greeks in order to establish a kind of equality among Greeks and non-Greeks. Alexander mixed peoples through marriages, relocated peoples to new and old towns in foreign parts of the empire, and intermingled customs.<sup>56</sup> By no means unaware of the differences

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<sup>56</sup> The risk involved in such a mixture is far from small, and elsewhere Montesquieu explicitly advises against it, for forcing one people (or at least one's army) to adopt the customs of the vanquished, or vice

between peoples, Alexander was nonetheless indifferent to certain prejudices attached to these differences, so long as he could manipulate and mix them for the purpose of his project: “In order not to drain Greece and Macedonia, he sent a colony of the Jews to Alexandria; it was unimportant to him what mores these peoples had, provided they were faithful to him.” Montesquieu admires Alexander’s project as something of a proto-multiculturalist one.<sup>57</sup> His ability to mix and match disparate peoples led to a patchwork empire in a time of remarkable political differences and hostility, based to some degree

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versa may result in hostility towards the leader. This is made abundantly clear in Montesquieu’s source, Arrian, cited no less than eight times in this chapter alone. For example, on one of a handful of occasions, Arrian writes that Alexander had “hurt their [his soldiers’] feelings” with “his adoption of Persian dress, the issue of Macedonian equipment to the Oriental ‘Epigoni,’ and the inclusion of foreign troops in units of the Companions.” The result of this was disrespect and disobedience on the part of all sides, and thus mutiny at Opis, raising of Alexander’s ire and order for executions; however, the eloquent speech that follows, mixing his own humility and pride, attests to his “genius,” to be sure. See, Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander*, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt (New York: Dorset Press, 1971), 361ff [VII.8-9]. Plutarch says that Alexander took “a middle way between the Persian mode and the Macedonian, so contriv[ing] his habit that it was not so flaunting as the one, and yet more pompous and magnificent than the other.” *Plutarch’s Lives*, Vol. II, 174ff; an example of competing jealousies among peoples can be found at Ibid., 194-5. Montesquieu himself addresses this problem of mixing customs more explicitly in the chapter following the one on Alexander, entitled, “A new means for preserving conquest” (X.15), where he discusses “an admirable practice” that amounts to “a new means for preserving the conquest” (X.15). He gives the example of the Tartar conquest of China. They prevented the vanquished from despairing while minimizing their own arrogance as conquerors, and so held both peoples to their political duties, consisted of pitting the jealousy of each nation off that of the other. The Tartars achieves this by constituting each provincial body of troops with half Chinese and half Tartars and dividing the tribunals in the same fashion. Montesquieu summarizes the good results in threefold fashion: “1. The two nations constrain one another; 2. Both keep military and civil power, and one is not wiped out by the other; 3. The conquering nation can spread throughout without weakening and ruining itself; it becomes capable of resisting civil and foreign wars.” So sensible is this institution, he concludes, that “the absence of a like one has led to the ruin of almost all the conquerors on earth.” And yet he goes on to say that an “immense conquest presupposes despotism” (X.16), while the armies spread throughout the provinces are “insufficient.” The prince in this case requires “a specially trustworthy body” that is ever prepared “to assail the part of the empire that may waver.” To the extent that Alexander implemented the “admirable practice” of opposing national jealousies, or mixing peoples, we not only know that Alexander’s empire fell, but Montesquieu does not hide the fact that “his empire was divided” immediately after his death (VIII.17). The “important men of Greece and Macedonia,” Montesquieu explains, who once lived freely or ruled freely over conquered peoples before they were “so scattered across that vast conquest [of Alexander’s]” could not have expected to have “obeyed others.” While they may have been subordinate to Alexander’s genius, no other man compared, and upon his death their particular forms of rule—their own passion for rule, out of glory or liberty or otherwise, could not be kept at bay. So much is the case of the other empires of Charlemagne and of Attila discussed here comparatively as well.

<sup>57</sup> Catherine Volpillac-Augier, “Montesquieu et l’impérialisme grec: Alexandre ou l’art de la conquête,” Société Montesquieu Colloquium: *Montesquieu and the Spirit of Modernity* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2002), 49-60. Volpillac-Augier also offers a pertinent discussion of some of Montesquieu’s sources—ancient and modern—regarding Alexander.

on faith to his person and rulership. His apparent respect for diverse peoples garnered the peoples' respect in turn. "He respected old traditions and everything that recorded the glory or the vanity of these peoples," often leaving vanquished peoples their mores and civil laws, and even in many cases their original rulers. Importantly, Montesquieu's silence about any major religious changes signifies his approval of Alexander's not disturbing the religious sensibilities of peoples, for as he writes elsewhere, "it is a misfortune for human nature when religion is given by a conqueror." As, he says, is illustrated by "the Mohammedan religion, which speaks only with a sword," and thereby "act[s] on men with the destructive spirit that founded it" (XXIV.4).

The success of preservation, Montesquieu argues, and thus the "vein of reason" running through his project, rests on the fact that Alexander did not conquer and subsequently seek to preserve his conquests with various tactics, but that his grander strategy of conquest itself amounted to a form of preservation: "[he] wanted to conquer all in order to preserve all [*pour tout conserver*], and in every country he entered, his first ideas, his first designs, were always to do something to increase its prosperity and power [*la prospérité et la puissance*]." This is in direct contrast with the Roman approach, as they "conquered all in order to destroy all." Proper preservation, according to Montesquieu's analysis, does not mean simply maintaining the status quo; it is not preservation without change. Rather, even as one delicately respects "old traditions" and the cultural elements containing and representing a peoples' pride, conquest aimed at preservation requires increasing the economic wealth and capacities of a people. The key to Alexander's conquest is inseparable from his introduction and extension of commerce. Again, in contrast to the Romans whose conquest was to the exclusion of commerce,

Alexander amounts, for Montesquieu, to what has called been “the pivot of a change in perspective.” Commerce—in the broadest terms—was not only a means but even in some sense Alexander’s end. Montesquieu attributes to him “a great revolution in commerce,” and later adds with assurance that, “one cannot doubt that his design was to engage in commerce with the Indies through Babylon and the Persian Gulf” (XX.8). In and through the commercial bridges he built, Alexander became the conqueror who unified, rather than separated.<sup>58</sup> The vein of his reason makes conquest of the whole earth coterminous with its commercialization.<sup>59</sup>

We return to discuss the spirit of commerce and its universalizing tendencies in the next chapter. At present, a few more words about Alexander’s character are necessary. Montesquieu further unravels this vein of reason by indicating three specific elements behind it. The first is that it was simply “in the greatness of his genius.” Alexander’s spirit was so rare and grand that he could hardly have been otherwise given the circumstances; he even refuted the advice of Aristotle, so great did he understand himself and his destiny. Second, Montesquieu suggests the fact of Alexander’s “own frugality and his own economy.” Alexander was not personally greedy or a lover of luxury and what he did he did for those who stuck with him; he sought no greater possessions than his fellows. That is, at least in terms of gold and other material goods that may be acquired through commerce or similar economy, for none but Alexander had the glory of ruling “the whole earth.” Thus: “His hand was closed for private expenditures; it opened for public expenditures.” The greatness of his genius consisted in

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<sup>58</sup> Catherine Larrère, “Montesquieu et l’histoire du commerce,” in *Le Temps de Montesquieu*, eds. Michel Porret and Catherine Volpilhac-Augier (Geneva: Droz, 2002), 324-5.

<sup>59</sup> The absence of religious references in this regard is also telling, since as Pangle argues at length, Montesquieu felt the best strategy against religious fanaticism was not to counter it with alternative religious or anti-religious arguments, but to greet it with silence. Pangle, *The Theological Basis*, 66ff.

no small part to his liberality towards others. And the third factor mentioned is Alexander's "immense prodigality for great things." Montesquieu is not suddenly being contradictory by implying he was greedy or had an extravagance towards "great things," for according to Littré's dictionary of the eighteenth century, "*La prodigalité est l'opposé de l'avarice*."<sup>60</sup> His private or personal desires were anything but those of common avarice, and he desired much more than common things.<sup>61</sup> What great "thing" could a man with his "greatness of...genius" desire on earth more than to rule the whole of it? And one with his *sagesse* knew full well that he would have to depend upon the passions of others to do so. He would need to appeal to and satisfy the desires of various peoples, finding what is common in the midst of differences, which would require dazzling them; respecting the particularities of their glory and vanity, he would have to simultaneously unite them through their common needs. Being without avarice himself, Alexander could establish himself as the generous bringer of prosperity for all, and even perhaps raise the desire for prosperity above that for things of glory and vanity. In this way, Alexander could secure his own glory, but what kind of glory is it; how genuine does Montesquieu

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<sup>60</sup> See the online dictionary, at: <http://littre.reverso.net/dictionnaire-francais/definition/prodigalit%C3%A9>. Interestingly, this very passage from Montesquieu is an example of its use.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Plutarch's Lives*, Vol. II, 139-99. The combination of Alexander's temperance with his sense of greatness is a recurring theme in Plutarch's account. On numerous occasions he denied himself the pleasure of indulging, particularly in conquered women, esteeming it "more kingly to govern himself than to conquer his enemies," for as Plutarch explains, Alexander "was wont to say that sleep and the act of generation chiefly made him sensible that he was mortal; as much as to say, that weariness and pleasure proceed both from the same frailty and imbecility of human nature." As the priestess of Apollo confirmed for him, Alexander considered himself immortal, and it was in his nature to seek immortal glory: "when his affairs called upon him, he would not be detained, as other generals often were, either by wine, or sleep, nuptial solemnities, spectacles, or any other diversion whatsoever; a convincing argument of which is, that in the short time he lived, he accomplished so many and so great actions" (155-7). Though Plutarch qualifies by later adding that "it is apparent that Alexander in himself was not foolishly affected, or had the vanity to think himself really a god, but merely used his claims to divinity as a means of maintaining among other people the sense of his superiority" (162). As a note of comparison, it may be suggested that that which Plutarch stresses (admittedly in his much longer account) and which Montesquieu suppresses, is the matter of Alexander's education as well as the lessons he learns from various philosophers—including Aristotle, Diogenes, Psammon, Callisthenes, Anaxarchus, and others.

consider it to be?<sup>62</sup> His success, moreover, was rather short-lived. One could do worse than compare the glory of Alexander to the glory of another ancient much admired by Montesquieu whom we have already encountered.

In his *Pensées*, Montesquieu makes only one mention of Epaminondas, but his importance for Montesquieu is evident enough; even if infrequently mentioned, Montesquieu clearly reflected repeatedly upon him. Remarkably, the one mention of the Theban is made with a direct contrast to Alexander. It is worth quoting at length:

Philosophy and, I dare say, even a certain commonsense have gained too much ground in this day and age for heroism to make much headway in the future. Once vainglory has become a little ridiculous, conquerors—no longer consulting anything but their own interest—will never go very far.

Each age has its particular character: a spirit of disorderly independence was created in Europe with Gothic government; the monastic spirit infected the times of Charlemagne's successors; then reigned that of chivalry; that of conquest appeared with orderly troops; and it is the spirit of commerce that dominates today.

This spirit of commerce makes everything a matter of calculation. But glory, when it is all alone, enters only into the calculations of fools.

I speak here only of vainglory, not that which is founded on the principles of duty, virtue, zeal for the Prince, love of Country; in a word, I speak of the glory of Alexander, not of Epaminondas. The latter, being real, is or ought to be for all nations and all times; the former, being chimerical, has the same vicissitudes as prejudices do.<sup>63</sup>

Heroism is something of the past, laments Montesquieu<sup>64</sup>, but the upside is that the now apparent ridiculousness of vainglory limits the likelihood and successes of conquerors.

So powerful has philosophy and commonsense become that men are primarily oriented in and to calculation; commerce cultivates calculators and gainsays glory. But one type of

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<sup>62</sup> Montesquieu's aforementioned critique of Charles XII is similar to that leveled against Louis XIV, and the broader notion of "universal monarchy." It is Montesquieu's belief that the world has significantly changed so as to preclude any sort of Roman, or even Alexandrian, form of conquest and rule. This technological and political, if not moral, change is the premise he begins with in his early work, *Réflexions sur la Monarchie Universelle en Europe* (Droz: Geneva, 2000). We pick up this discussion in the next chapter, on war and commerce.

<sup>63</sup> Montesquieu, *My Thoughts*, trans. Henry C. Clark (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2012), 236-7 [no. 810].

<sup>64</sup> This theme is repeated in a number of places in his *Pensées*: "It is probable that what is called *heroic valor* is going to be lost in Europe..." "That spirit of glory and valor is being lost little by little among us. Philosophy has gained ground..." and a list of reasons, moral and technological, are additionally responsible for the change. *Ibid.*, 225-26 [nos. 760, 761].

glory is always “real...or *ought to be for all nations and all times*”—that is to say, even in the midst of a spirit of commerce, even when the age is dominated by commercial calculation, and when some distance has separated men, they may still be able to approximate something like the glory of Epaminondas. The spirit of Epaminondas is as present as that of Alexander; they stand as two ancient alternatives of glory, the one more “real” than the other, but each equally relevant today. Epaminondas’s glory, for all its particularity—for all its localized Greekness, even Thebanness—resting upon a very specific and focused education, is nonetheless a universally admirable form of glory. While the glory of universality, so to speak, can be seen as particularly prejudicial. The universality of genuine glory rests upon particular political devotion: the love that preserves a government.

To be sure, one should not exaggerate the importance of Montesquieu’s private and unpublished musings, as he himself tells us in the introduction of his *Pensées* that its contents are unfinished reflections. Moreover, the intention here is not to say that Montesquieu sought a restoration of classical virtue per se, after all, the circumstances have changed. But Montesquieu’s keen awareness of the need for a modicum of political passions—or the important place of passion’s role in political preservation—make especially apparent the tension in politics between the particular and the universal, especially as the world becomes increasingly universal and open; that is, as individuals are drawn in directions beyond their own polities and are reared in the absence of ancient laws of education but under modern ones that otherwise educate in seemingly contradictory ways.

While Montesquieu sees many benefits to uniting peoples and commercializing the earth so as to tame politics—to bring about a cure for Machiavellism (XXI.20)—as we discuss in the next chapter, he nonetheless forces us to ask about the realness, and one is tempted to say the naturalness, about different forms of glory; thus, we must reflect on the consistency of different passions and their political consequences. Is the glory of republican virtue, in its stark Epaminondasian form, somehow more stable or more coherent, than an expanding or imperial form of glory?<sup>65</sup> After all, if it “is or ought to be for all nations and all times,” then its reality presumably remains ever present, beyond Epaminondas’ death and the demise of the ancient *poleis*. How though might it truly take shape and form without the requisite powers of ancient education, administered by its “singular institutions” in the small setting of the city? Alternatively, it might seem that Alexander’s glory too lives on, as it has certainly been a model to other conquerors, whether successful or not. However, Montesquieu indicates that it is, despite its imaginary staying power, “chimerical.”<sup>66</sup> One might argue that the glory of Alexander’s project was lost, on the one hand, through the success of the project in its commercial and calculative (or anti-glorious) effects, and on the other hand, with the demise of the political project (that hinged on faith to his person) upon his death (cf. VIII.17). Does not, however, something akin to his project in an a-personal form (as in an Alexandrian project sans Alexander) live on today in the form of a globalized or globally commercialized world? At any rate, in light of this mixed success, or the uncertainties

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<sup>65</sup> True heroism, Montesquieu says much later in his *Pensées*, ought to be constituted by moderation, which is in fact “the rarest virtue.” *My Thoughts*, 608 [no. 1987].

<sup>66</sup> Although what most distinguishes Alexander for Montesquieu, say, from Caesar and others, is the great consternation that those he conquered experienced upon his death; he left, for them, something like a sudden void in the world when he departed from it (X.14). See, Volpilhac-Augier, “Montesquieu et l’impérialisme grec,” 58.



about particular and universal glory—then and now—one wonders whether there are perhaps different principles, or a different ancient lens through which to consider matters of politics and passions and the difficult balance between things particular and universal.

### **The Stoics and their “most worthy principles”**

Montesquieu offers one notable ancient example that illustrates something like a suitable balance between the whole earth and one’s particular community, or between what is most general and what is one’s own. It is his depiction of “the Stoic sect” that provides a window into this view (XXIV.9). To begin with, the praise he lavishes on the Stoics is quite remarkable, and carries none of the reservations found in his portrait of Alexander: “There has never been one [i.e., among the “sects of philosophy,” which he says “could be considered as kinds of religion”] whose principles were more worthy of men and more appropriate for forming good men [*gens de bien*] than that of the Stoics, and, if I could for a moment cease to think that I am a Christian, I would not be able to keep myself from numbering the destruction of Zeno’s sect among the misfortunes of human kind.”<sup>67</sup> He goes on to say that the Stoic sect “*alone* knew how to make citizens; it *alone* made great men; it *alone* made great emperors” (emphasis added).<sup>68</sup> According

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<sup>67</sup> Elsewhere Montesquieu has similarly positive things to say about the Stoics: “At that time [i.e., from Antonius to Probus] the Stoic sect was expanding and gaining favor in the empire. It seemed that human nature had made an effort to produce this admirable sect out of itself—like those plants the earth brings forth in places the heavens have never seen. The Romans owed their best emperors to it...” Montesquieu, *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline*, trans. D. Lowenthal (Ithaca: Cornell Press, 1968), 145ff [Ch. XVI]. In a letter to Fitz-James (Oct. 8, 1750), he writes about his desire to pen a work imitating Cicero’s *de Officiis*, which was itself modeled after Panaetius, “who was a Stoic...since the Stoics were those who best treated this matter of duties.” He adds that he “reader the main Stoic books, and among others, the moral reflections of Marcus-Antonunus, which seems to me the masterpiece of antiquity.” Quoted in *My Thoughts*, 92 [no. 220, editor’s note, 1].

<sup>68</sup> One notable place where he is critical is when speaking about the Stoics’ view on friendship. They “carried the reasoning too far,” he writes, when claiming, “the Sage loves no one.” In this context the question of relations of citizens emerges, and Montesquieu acknowledges the limitations of attachments. We are unable to “attach ourselves to all our fellow citizens” but instead, he says, we select “a small number, to whom we limit ourselves.” Subsequently comparing Rome and the present, he says that in the

to Montesquieu, the Stoics “were occupied only in working for men’s happiness and in exercising the duties of society [*devoirs de la société*]; it seemed that they regarded the sacred spirit which they believed to be within themselves as a kind of favorable providence watching over mankind [*le genre humain*].” Likewise, repeating this theme of social devotion, he concludes: “Born for society, they all believed that their destiny was to work for it; it was the less burdensome as their rewards were all within themselves; as, happy in their philosophy alone, it seemed that only the happiness of others could increase their own.”

Montesquieu’s interpretation of “Zeno’s sect” unmistakably emphasizes the autonomy of its individual members alongside the instillation of duty towards “society.” Somehow the apparent disconnect between the individual’s self-sufficiency and his devotional attachment to “society” can be brought together. The consequence of Stoic philosophy, in its ability to produce citizens, great men, and great emperors gives one the impression of being positively political and moral; despite its detachment—among those who are erstwhile drawn to contemplate and speculate, and therefore think universally—the result is total political devotion.<sup>69</sup> One is therefore eager to know who exemplifies these characteristics, and just how these apparently contradictory tendencies may be combined. Consequently, it comes as something of a surprise to find that the *only* examples Montesquieu supplies are of emperors. Could it be that the only individuals able to live according to “themselves,” or the “sacred spirit which they believed to be

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former, “[c]itizens were linked to citizens by all sorts of chains,” including friendship, the enfranchised, slaves, and children; however, “[t]oday, everything is abolished, right down to paternal power; every man is isolated,” insofar as interests have become “particularize[d].” What otherwise detached men from themselves and bound him to another “brought forth great deeds,” while absent this, “everything is vulgar,” and only the basest, even “animal instinct of all men” is present. Ibid., 333 [no. 1253].

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Pangle, *Montesquieu’s Philosophy of Liberalism*, 233.

within themselves” as well as “watching over mankind”—to be altogether for one and one for all, as it were—are those who are in an absolute position of rule? In recalling Plato’s lesson regarding the strongly reluctant philosopher-king—the individual who would much rather devote *his* soul to the pursuit of wisdom rather than rule over the many—one cannot help but be struck by the apparent ease with which Montesquieu seems to solve this problem.<sup>70</sup> What is the criterion for the watchmen of “mankind”? At any rate, he “momentarily lay[s] aside the revealed truths” to say that “seek[ing] in all of nature... you will find no greater object than the Antonines.” The Antonines most naturally exemplify the “most worthy principles.” However, in addition to the Antonines (among whom one may include as few as three or as many as seven, some more or less well-reputed than others), Montesquieu goes on, somewhat shockingly, to include one emperor by name: “Julian even, Julian (a vote thus wrenched from me will not make me an accomplice to his apostasy); no, *since him there has been no prince more worthy of governing men*” (emphasis added). The only individual personally singled out, and otherwise considered the worthiest prince to have governed men from his time to the present, was the man who sought to restore Roman paganism.<sup>71</sup>

Whatever else one makes of these remarks, it is clear that Montesquieu does not hold Christian charity to be the means by which the fellow human beings beyond one’s political borders ought to be embraced. And yet the ambiguity of the political language

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<sup>70</sup> See, Lowenthal, “Montesquieu and the Classics.”

<sup>71</sup> Kojève (in his characteristically ironic fashion) has spoken of Julian as “not only an ancient philosopher but also an authentic emperor, although an ineffective one because he was behind—or ahead of—his time.” He contends that both “fear of Christian intolerance” but above all *raison d’État* is the principal reason for Julian’s attempt to restore paganism; however, it is his contention that Julian ultimately held a “radical, but silent or camouflage, atheism,” or was “an atheistic philosopher,” and that his “art of writing appears most extraordinary” when exposed, insofar as history has transmitted him to us as “a self-proclaimed ‘devout pagan’ and ‘Neo-Platonic mystic.’” Alexandre Kojève, “The Emperor Julian and His Art of Writing,” *Ancients and Moderns: Essays on the Tradition of Political Philosophy in Honor of Leo Strauss*, ed. Joseph Cropsey (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 96-8; cf. 111 (n.6).

in this passage is somewhat telling. Rather than speak of governments or states, Montesquieu twice mentions “society”—a term that is undoubtedly less binding than the others and seems well paired with the notion of “mankind” itself. By no means does he presume a return to the ancient world and its political-pedagogical consistency, with its exclusive emphasis on the particularism of the city, for even if it were possible, it is less than ideal with respect to freedom and security. Moreover, changes have occurred precluding such a return; the present power of universalism in the world cannot be denied.<sup>72</sup> The entire passage is reminiscent of Montesquieu’s statement from his Preface: “By seeking to instruct men one can practice the general virtue that includes love of all.” Montesquieu models himself in some capacity after the Stoics.<sup>73</sup> Like the Stoics, he seeks to provide the means for “the general virtue that includes love of all” and the particular virtue allowing each to “better feel his happiness in his own country, government, and position”; however, unlike the emperors, he does not seek to rule outright, and indeed denies the possibility for such universal rule by one. The fact that the world has changed, and is becoming increasingly universal in his day, provides him with reason to think that such a general love of mankind is all the more likely, even as he must provide some ballast against its overextension.<sup>74</sup> Striking the proper balance—even

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<sup>72</sup> Consider Cohler’s remarks: “The singularity of a particular political life is vulnerable to pressures toward universality, both from above and from below. Christianity adds greatly to the pressure, while it offers to form a whole life for everyone by controlling all of the passions for the sake of the universal divine spirit. Once Christianity—or perhaps its predecessor, Roman universality—became prevalent, Montesquieu seems to think that it is not possible or advisable to try to revive the particular political orders based on the development of particular spirits... Although the ancient understanding of political life as particular and spirited was plausible, any incorporation of that understanding into the modern circumstances will require legislation and legislators who will act indirectly.” Cohler, *Montesquieu’s Comparative Politics*, 146.

<sup>73</sup> See, Pangle, *Montesquieu’s Philosophy of Liberalism*, 234.

<sup>74</sup> The cosmopolitanism of the Stoics is well known, and has of late become a model for present day ideals of cosmopolitanism (see, Nussbaum, et. al.[Details]); however, properly understanding the Stoics, on the one hand, and assessing the stability and reality of their cosmopolitanism on the other, are difficult problems, given the limited as well as fragmentary works extant. As Pangle writes: “Of the original leading Stoics who lived prior to Cicero we know only through fragmentary quotations, doxographical

a new balance, or one based on “new reasons”—the requisite modern balance of love, between humanity and one’s own polity, so that neither love be at the expense of the other,<sup>75</sup> is an achievement that would make him “the happiest of mortals.” We turn in the following chapter to examine some of these changes he sees in the world before him, so as to assess his consequent hopes and means to moderate the extremes.

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paraphrases and second or third hand reports, often polemical, penned centuries after their death. But these original Stoics evidently promulgated the first widely influential cosmopolitan ethical ideal.” What is interesting is that contrary to many who presume a sort of openness and tolerance to such cosmopolitanism is that Zeno and his followers “seem to have meant by ‘natural law’ a codification of what they understood to be the austere and radically unconventional ethic of obedience to rational law...an ethic they presented in a rather dogmatic, moralistic, and even censorious version.” In short, whatever one makes of it, it is emphatically an ethic for the few, and so anything but an ideal for all. Pangle, “Roman Cosmopolitanism: The Stoics and Cicero,” in *Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Globalization: Citizens without States*, eds., Lee Trepanier and Khalil M. Habib (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 41-2.

<sup>75</sup> So much is the problem at large examined throughout this essay, which can be summarized by just how much, and in what way, universal aspirations can be mixed or reconciled with particular ones, and whether or not or to what extent political life and the community can include as well as moderate transpolitical aims? The importance of the consideration rests on the fact that it is not self-evident man is capable of living well on the highest plane of universality or the lowest plane of individualism—or, combined, as simply an “individual” in the “globe.”

### 3. MONTESQUIEU: OPENING OF THE UNIVERSE: THE EARTH, COMMERCE, AND THE RIGHT OF NATIONS

“The sea traffic in the Mediterranean and in the Black Sea were the only ones known; that of the Ocean was impractical; the compass had not yet brought the world together. The trips that a merchant from Constantinople or Smyrna now make in two months provoked the wonder of the world in that period, and were celebrated by all the poets. Thus, one must not be surprised to see so many imperfections in the ancient histories, and so many empires and kingdoms in oblivion. It was not like it is now, when all peoples are so bound together that the history of one always illuminates that of the others.  
—Montesquieu, *Pensées*, no. 1887

We have seen in the previous chapter how Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* is a work that uncovers competing passions. It demonstrates that the ambivalence of the human heart is a problem for political thought to engage with seriousness. This is perhaps especially true, as the world has become increasingly open—or as we like to say today, globalized. Arguably now more than ever before can man’s longings and passions be directed beyond the immediate place and objects around him, in even contradictory ways. And alongside the extension of such longings and passions has been an increasing drive towards greater universalization and a certain growing sense of—or desire for—uniformity across the Western political landscape, if not that of the world as a whole. So it is worth reflecting with Montesquieu on the following:

There are certain ideas of uniformity that sometimes seize great spirits (for they touched Charlemagne), but that infallibly strike small ones. They find in it a kind of perfection they recognize because it is impossible not to discover it: in the police the same weights, in commerce the same measures, in the state the same laws and the same religion in every part of it. But is this always and without exception appropriate? Is the ill of changing always less than the ill of suffering? And does not the greatness of genius consist rather in knowing in which cases there must be uniformity and in which differences?

Such questions are especially relevant today, as so many spirits are struck by ideas of uniformity, desiring as they do a globalized and harmonized world—one where the

weights, measures, laws and the like in all areas of human life are the same; or, where natural differences have little consequence.

It is nevertheless important not to take too narrow a view of globalization—that is, by discussing it in but its most recent manifestation. The contact and connection between different and disparate peoples, and a drive towards the uniform, are by no means strictly contemporary phenomena. The ancient world consisted of expanding empires and trading peoples, and so too in Montesquieu’s own day commerce was becoming all the more widespread, as well as studied with greater attention. The navigation of the globe, through technological developments, and thereby the discovery of the coasts of Asia and Africa, and of America that was altogether hitherto unknown, were consequential by Montesquieu’s day. So much to the extent that it is in terms of movement and transport—in the development of the art of navigation, or the technology directly related to commerce—that we can greatly *feel* the difference between the ancient and modern world: “For if, at a time when sailing has much improved, at a time when the arts are communicated, at a time when one corrects with art both the defect of nature and the defects of itself, one feels these differences, what must it have been for the sailing of the ancients?” (XXI.6). So it is that Montesquieu reflected greatly on the political implications of how “[t]he compass opened the universe, so to speak” (XXI.21).<sup>76</sup> This chapter examines this opening, the place and likelihood of political uniformity in an open universe, and its consequences for human mores and virtue. It is argued herein that Montesquieu’s embrace of universalizing commerce is qualified, and that he is very aware of the ambiguities such an open universe brings forth, for both human happiness

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<sup>76</sup> Montesquieu speaks of the discovery of the America as the expansion of the universe: it made possible for the House of Austria under Charles “a new kind of greatness” when “the universe expanded and a new world obedient to him appeared” (XXI.21).

and greatness. His attention to natural distinctions—which is to say bodily, physical, topographical and climatological differences—and the plethora of details that shape human communities and communication make up part of *his* “genius...in knowing in which cases there must be uniformity and in which differences.” It is a genius from which we can still profit today.

### **The Communication of Peoples, in Commerce and War**

“The history of commerce,” writes Montesquieu, “is that of communication among peoples” (XXI.5). And by “communication” Montesquieu means more than just interaction in speech; rather, it implies various kinds of encounters and exchanges, in goods, ideas, currencies, services, and the like, both for better and for worse. As more peoples in different parts of the world—not least in different climates—have come into contact and communication with one another, commerce expanded, for “peoples of the same climate have almost the same things,” therefore, “they do not need commerce with one another as much as do peoples of differing climates” (XX.4). It is inherent to the logic of commerce that it broadens and expands, for that which is communicated from afar is what is least likely to be available at home. Moreover, this communication in its expansive form is not unrelated to certain dramatic kinds of activity, such as war and attempts to maintain peace: “[Commerce’s] greatest events are formed by their [i.e., peoples’] various destructions and certain ebbs and flows of population and devastations.”

The long process of universalizing commerce, and so of globalization, has by no means been a painless or steady one. Even as it may be true that “[t]he natural effect of



commerce is to lead to peace,” insofar as “[t]wo nations that trade with each other become reciprocally dependent”—for “all unions are founded on mutual needs” (XX.2)—commerce nevertheless exacts its own additional price. It may have effects that are other than peaceful, while perfectly reciprocal dependence cannot always be guaranteed. Moreover, the logic of interconnected interest is not the only one operating in the political world; nor for that matter in the hearts of men. This chapter discusses Montesquieu’s views on commerce, war, and the physical setting of these activities to illustrate that while he sees commerce’s universalization as a likely positive force, particularly in countering the devastation of war, he is not unaware of the less than ideal effects such changes can have on human communities, as well as that the earth’s physicality plays a significant and inescapable role in these spheres of activity. Thus, his work indicates certain limits to universality in politics—the opening of the universe is not a singularly positive event, and therefore a critical political gaze is necessary to engage the phenomenon.

While the political universe may be opening up in new ways—fostering new kinds and objects of human passions, as well as at more general levels—Montesquieu does not hold out for any ultimate, or universal solution to the political problem. Alternatively, he is not one to deny the reality of tangible, and perhaps even intractable, distinctions between peoples. *The Spirit of the Laws* serves to constantly remind its readers of the inescapability of contingency in human affairs, and the irreconcilability of certain particularities. On the whole, and unlike many of his near successors, Montesquieu offers no systematic or universal philosophy of history, never mind one that proposes a consummate end. The fact that Montesquieu’s work teaches history

continues, even along multiple trajectories and with a degree of unpredictability—that we may speak of *both* the history of humanity *and* the histories of peoples, or of universal history and particular histories—is itself indication of a balanced approach to the universal and particular.<sup>77</sup> This lesson is particularly evident from his discussion of war and peace as well as of commerce.

Various scholars have engaged with Montesquieu's views on these and related themes. The relationship between war and commerce in *The Spirit of the Laws* is by no means incidental, and indeed, the general argument that each has a similar logic, or spirit, at its core, so that a world of commerce may one day eliminate war, is a claim dear to much of liberal thought.<sup>78</sup> It is a hope generated by reflection on the state of nature and the desire to flee it on every level, once and for all. Even as Montesquieu's initial discussion of war and defense is followed by a later elaboration of commerce, with

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<sup>77</sup> As Todorov has written: "The spirit of the laws is not simply universalist, or purely conventional. Unlike those who, like Montaigne, know only all or nothing and end up embracing a purely relativist credo (even as they contradict it with an absolute practice), unlike those who decide that if everything is not subject to rigorous laws then nothing can be, Montesquieu accepts both positions from the outset and seeks to articulate them, to assess the respective strength of determinism and of freedom, the degree of equilibrium between the universal and the relative." It is therefore a "new articulation between absolute values and particular facts." Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 378.

<sup>78</sup> Consider Benjamin Constant's well-known statement on the matter, that war precedes commerce and commerce overrides war, historically, as though both at bottom contain the same logic (of acquisition). Constant, "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns," *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), esp. 312-15. However, all such thinkers err in collapsing these two too smoothly, for war is not *fundamentally* reducible to acquiring and taking, but contains a spiritual element of glory, honor, and the desire to dominate. As Manent writes about Constant in particular: "One might say that Constant 'commercializes' war at the same time as he 'bellicizes' commerce, perhaps even 'commercializing' war more than the reverse... War does not consist only in pillage and raids or material conquest. It encompasses a moral element that is largely foreign to commerce properly speaking: the desire to conquer the enemy, to obtain victory. Constant transforms the desire to conquer into the desire to acquire. He adopts as a self-evident truth the psychology of acquisitive individualism, 'bourgeois' psychology." Manent, *A World Beyond Politics?*, 74-5. Consider likewise, Kant's discussion in his work, "Perpetual Peace," in *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), where he writes that, "[the] spirit of commerce... cannot exist side by side with war, and that sooner or later [it] masters every nation" (114). Cf. Thomas Pangle and Peter Ahrensdoerf, *Justice Among Nations* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1997), 185-217, who discuss just how long Kant thought the process of peace, or progress in general, would in fact take—namely, "eons"—and the problems involved regarding the support for his faith in progress toward perpetual peace.

implications of commerce's effect on softening martial tendencies, we will see he is not confident this is inevitable. Various qualifications lessen the oversimplified view that commerce and war fit neatly together so that Montesquieu is less sanguine regarding the commercialization of the world as being tantamount to its demilitarization.

Thus, while some find that Montesquieu is overwhelmingly insistent that national character is particularly difficult to change, and is stable in the long run,<sup>79</sup> others perceive a “dramatic presentation of a continuously expanding republican federation as the only adequate solution to the problem of politics.”<sup>80</sup> It is not self-evident that his arguments regarding commerce can be decontextualized in so straightforward a manner, and applied to the world at large as a single, or singular process—that is, with one adequate solution to the political problem. Not unlike the distinctions he makes between different forms of government throughout the work, so too does he characterize commerce in multiple ways. It should not surprise us that he differentiates commerce, given his erstwhile differentiating gaze upon the world. One ought, therefore, to be hesitant in regarding Montesquieu as professing the ultimate triumph of commerce, or of the logic of economics more broadly, over the political (and thereby over war), given the intersection between them—even the ambivalent and complex intermixing of various factors in this regard. This is not to deny that Montesquieu analyzes the important influence of trade and commerce upon peoples and the concomitant relations among states, for this is at the heart of his understanding.<sup>81</sup> However, there is no singular or inevitable effect and logic

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<sup>79</sup> Merle Perkins, *Montesquieu on National Power and International Rivalry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 49ff.

<sup>80</sup> Robert Howse, “Montesquieu on Commerce, Conquest, War, and Peace,” *Brooklyn Journal of International Law*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (2006): 7.

<sup>81</sup> The very success of “the commercial ethic depended upon its penetration into the political and social lives of individual states.” Steven J. Rosow, “Commerce, Power and Justice: Montesquieu on International Politics,” *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Jul., 1984): 352.

that applies to each people, or to the world as a whole. Montesquieu offers no guarantee of pure progress, least of all on a universal scale.

So it is that Howse rightly hesitates initially when concluding, with the following: “Perhaps we should not project onto [Montesquieu’s] sober spirit the actual project of world government or a universal liberal society.” Nevertheless, he goes on to suggest that, “without some such conception, [Montesquieu’s] contentions about the relationship of commerce, war and peace collapse into a set of contradictions, paradoxes and tautologies.”<sup>82</sup> This reading is one of many examples that feel the need to engage in a systematization or reduction of what Montesquieu otherwise understands to be the complexity of the world of human practice and politics. He himself avoids drawing all particulars into a universal, if not homogeneous, gaze, collapsing the tension between the two, even as his interpreters seek to do so. If paradoxes or ambiguities remain a part of his political presentation, perhaps we ought to consider the fact that the political condition is not itself soluble, and that Montesquieu had no illusions about grand theorizing to otherwise solve the political problem at large. It is less a matter of incoherence than it is sensitivity to limitations, in thought and action.

Similar to Howse, but with less heavy-handedness, Long emphasizes Montesquieu’s cosmopolitanism, seeing him as having “laid the foundations on which Kant built his plans for Perpetual Peace.”<sup>83</sup> While there is undoubtedly a cosmopolitan element to Montesquieu (as discussed in the previous chapter), this is, to reiterate, a viewpoint that is qualified by a certain appreciation of the difficulties and rarity of maintaining such a lofty perspective—that is, by the general fact of ambiguity in the

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<sup>82</sup> Howse, “Montesquieu on Commerce, Conquest, War, and Peace,” 16.

<sup>83</sup> Katya Long, “The ‘anti Hobbes’? Montesquieu’s Contribution to International Relations Theory,” *In-Spire Journal of Law, Politics and Societies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2008): 88-101.

human heart. It is conceivable that Montesquieu felt a few, gifted and noble spirits, might be able to live in a manner that transcends particular polities, but he was far from thinking they could transform the world in their image. One need only recall that enlightenment for Montesquieu does not mean a simple universalism or rejection of particularism, but instead includes “new reasons for loving [one’s] duties, his prince, his homeland and his laws and that each could better feel his happiness in *his own* country, government, and position” (Preface; emphasis added). Whatever cosmopolitan perspective he offers (and to whomever it is truly intended), it is qualified by a sense of the importance of loving one’s own, founded as it may be on “new reasons.” A pure cosmopolitanism is not the core of Montesquieu’s teaching.

Rosow, for one, offers more attention to the inherent difficulties to which Montesquieu awakens us insofar as he explicitly addresses Montesquieu’s theory of international relations in light of its combining “a theory of a capitalist structure of international trade with a historical appreciation of the impossibility of projects of universal monarchy in Europe.”<sup>84</sup> While the logic of commerce is “cosmopolitan,” the universalization of the typically European monarchical form of rule amounts to the expansion of nationalism. Thus, Rosow presents Montesquieu as working in and through a position between the logics of nationalism and cosmopolitanism, and to whatever extent he advocates an expansion of the development of European commerce and international law, he did “not draw the optimistic conclusions” that many of his contemporaries and successors did. “He was not optimistic about the prospects of the new system. There was no determinism in Montesquieu’s view, no eschatological vision...Montesquieu only flirted with the internationalist idealism of the proponents of perpetual peace, just as he

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<sup>84</sup> Rosow, “Power and Justice: Montesquieu on International Politics,” 347.

accepted a limited truth in Machiavellianism.”<sup>85</sup> As Perkins highlights, Montesquieu offers “no one answer to the problem of the source of national power” and so no ultimate or universal solution to ensure liberty and security (or the “tranquility of mind” that individuals so seek), whether monarchical or republican.<sup>86</sup> This is not a defect in his own thinking, but the strength of what can be said to be his antinomial, multi-perspectival approach, and its sensitivity to the complexities of human and political life.

### **The Perfection and Ruin of Mores**

As indicated, the subjects of war and peace, and commerce—or what we now call international relations and political economy—are relationally bound in Montesquieu’s work, for both have to do with “communication” among peoples in the broadest sense of the term. Both consist in the relations between peoples and political bodies on a range of levels, including the highest, or most global. Moreover, both touch directly on the consolidation and disintegration of communities. The activities of war and commerce have their respective spirits that impact the integrity of peoples and their ways of life, and so too therefore do such activities influence the hearts of men, as well as the passions therein. War may expand and strengthen the polity, or fragment and destroy it; it can elevate patriotism and devotion or enervate and dishearten civic morale. So too can

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 364. Rosow reaches this conclusion because he finds “considerable variety in Montesquieu’s vision” as compared to much of the international idealist tradition, for he “did not have a single vision regarding the constitution of all states.” To the extent that he wanted nations to recognize “a sense of universal citizenship” it was so as to “recognize and want to preserve the particularity of others,” rather than override it. Thus, the preservation of particularity as such is integral to the continued presence of political liberty. In her excellent article, Radasanu has similarly highlighted how Montesquieu can help to “conceive of the possibilities for and limits to international peace.” In criticizing the fact that commentators either focus on Montesquieu’s realism or his idealism without relating the two, she argues this very relationship is what is most interesting, and helps shed light on “the compatibility between power and gentle mores.” Andrea Radasanu, “Montesquieu on Ancient Greek Foreign Relations: Toward National Self-Interest and International Peace,” *Political Research Quarterly* (available online: <http://prq.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/01/11/1065912911431246.abstract?rss=1>).

<sup>86</sup> Perkins, *Montesquieu on National Power and International Rivalry*, 70.

commerce contribute to the material wealth and economic vitality of a people, as it may erode older barriers and frontiers, or weaken traditional bonds and create transnational ties. Finally, war and commerce induce the establishment of additional laws that seek to regulate political bodies. After all, early on Montesquieu had underlined that war among individuals and among societies “bring about the establishment of laws among men” (I.3), while certain refinements and developments occur through the regulations provided by the “right of nations, which is the political law of the nations” (X.1). Commerce likewise brings forth “more laws” and Montesquieu agrees with Plato’s assessment that “in a town where there is no maritime commerce, half the number of civil laws are needed” (XX.18).

In the case of both modern right of nations and the expansion of commerce, Montesquieu provides explicit praise. The former, he notes, changes depending upon the times and on this front “homage must be paid to our modern times, to contemporary reasoning, to the religion of the present day, to our philosophy, and to our mores” (X.3). Insofar as “our modern times” deserve recognition for an improved understanding of the right of nations, as compared to the Romans, one can also applaud commerce for curing “destructive prejudices,” for “it is an almost general rule that everywhere there are gentle mores, there is commerce and that everywhere there is commerce, there are gentle mores” (XX.1). Mores become less fierce than in previous times, and commerce spreads “knowledge of the mores of all nations everywhere.” The knowledge that is spread is knowledge of diversity, of different mores, and once “they have been compared to each other,” “good things have resulted from this.” But not good things alone, and indeed, one should not fail to note the qualification that it is *almost* a *general* rule that commerce

softens mores. Cautious not to make too many generalizations, Montesquieu tacitly leaves open the possibility for exceptions, since knowledge of differences could conceivably exacerbate tensions or prejudices. Such caution is based on Montesquieu's own deep understanding of the human heart and the richness that a science of mores must consider. Not only that, but he is well aware that, on the one hand, "one retracts one's errors as slowly as one can" (XXI.9) for men are reluctant to admit their mistakes, while on the other, "the drawbacks that one foresees...are often less dangerous than those one cannot foresee" (XXI.23). Holding to these insights, it is no wonder Montesquieu proceeds with the restraint and moderation he does.

Thus, he writes that "[o]ne can say that the laws of commerce perfect mores for the same reason that these same laws ruin mores" (XX.1). Montesquieu elaborates on this statement of near perfect ambivalence by adding the following: "Commerce corrupts pure mores, and this was the subject of Plato's complaints; it polishes and softens barbarous mores, as we see everyday." Every day one may observe that the barbarous is improved while purity is diminished: commerce limits the possibility for moral greatness but lessens moral depravity. This fact, Montesquieu indicates, is evident to those who take the time to observe. And it is not something that deserves outright, or unquestionable celebration. For while it may be true that "the spirit of commerce unites nations," Montesquieu underlines the importance of how "it does not unite individuals in the same way" (XX.2). In countries where men are "affected only by the spirit of commerce," such as in Holland, he says one can see that "there is traffic in all human activities and all moral virtues," to which he adds: "the smallest things, those required by humanity, are done or given for money." The very requirements of and for humanity



become transactional, and reducible to the logic of trade and exchange. Selfish interest drives the softened and polished, he suggests. Thus, Montesquieu hereby hints at a curious result: insofar as the universe opens up, such that more members of the human race communicate with one another, the virtues of humanity become questionable. While joined at a national level to a greater extent—states further joined through common interests—individuals lose a sense of their humanity towards others. Stated otherwise, it is an open question as to how and what kind of virtue is possible in such an opened world. Moreover, it is worth adding that war is sometimes waged on the basis of weakness, or decadence, and a “second barbarism” or a “barbarism of reflection” is not inconceivable, as his older Italian contemporary, Giambattista Vico, once argued.

In the aforementioned passage, Montesquieu notes that the positive effect of the spirit of commerce is that it “produces in men a certain feeling for exact justice,” which opposes them to banditry and to a set of moral virtues that at least limits always and only considering one’s own interests, so as at least to consider the interests of others. This exact justice ensures that interests—one’s own and those of others—are accounted for, and no doubt banditry violates both sets of interests. Obvious to all though, is the fact that interest does not exhaust the human person; it is not the only logic at work in the human heart. In contrast, where there is no commerce at all, Montesquieu makes mention of Aristotle’s inclusion of banditry as a means of acquisition. What is important here, is that this a-commercial spirit, even anti-commercial spirit, amidst banditry, produces a virtue altogether absent among commercial peoples, namely “hospitality.” Bandit peoples, such as the Germans of Tacitus and others, both offer and receive strangers “with the same humanity.” Montesquieu hereby highlights how a rare form of

humanity is lost, how certain virtues are possible only where commerce has not yet emerged—even where barbarism persists—and that there are therefore different manifestation of humanity, or of humanity's virtues. That purity is precluded but barbarism is softened, suggests simultaneous progress and regress. One detects here that if commerce opens the universe, it somehow closes the souls of men, or at least closes off one of its magnanimous parts. While the peoples of the world may have a higher degree of communication, there is likely to be less hospitality among them, as well as more traffic in vice and trade in things hitherto requiring a modicum of virtue but now conducted on the basis of interest alone.

This narrowing of interest is perhaps most poignantly demonstrated through Montesquieu's discussion of religion, where he highlights the impact of commerce on religion. He writes: "Religion has such great threats, it has such great promises, that when they are present to our spirits, no matter what the magistrate does to constrain us to abandon it, it seems that we are left with nothing when religion is taken away, and that nothing is taken from us when religion is left to us" (XXV.12). His chief insight that follows is that a ruler does not minimize religion by punishing or banning it outright. One does not turn the souls of men directed towards God by penalization, least of all through punishing the body or even inflicting death, for this often only affirms the believer's faith. Rather, "a more certain way to attack religion is by favor, by the comforts of life, by the hope of fortune, not by what reminds one of it, but by what makes one forget it." The "comforts of life," which commerce indubitably delivers, changes the direction of men's passions. Addressing religion, lawgivers must not make its practitioners "indignant," but instead lead them to "indifference," for "other passions act

on our souls...when those that religion inspires are silent.” Given that Montesquieu finds “the prejudices of superstition [to be] superior to all the other prejudices” (XVIII.18), he welcomes some transformation of religion among men, insofar as it tames destructive religious prejudices. Montesquieu is not without praise for many elements of Christianity, particularly, as he underlines, that we owe to Christianity “both a certain political right in government and a certain right of nations in war, for which human nature can never be sufficiently grateful” (XXIV.3). On the one hand, the political consequences of commerce may in part mirror those of religion, as at least in the case of Christianity, Montesquieu speaks of the “softness” of the Gospel message. On the other hand, in replacing the longing for Christianity’s promises with the “comforts of life” offered up by commerce, Montesquieu appears a qualified advocate. While the violent and destructive passions and prejudices of religion may be minimized, Montesquieu is more than aware of religion’s political utility, and its role in cultivating human virtues. It may be he aspires toward a “modernizing reinterpretation of Christianity,” as Pangle suggests.<sup>87</sup> What is certain, however, is that his discussion of commerce and religion, notwithstanding their differences in spirit, illustrates the importance of a science of politics attending to the place and importance of the body in political life.

### **The Body and “a thousand passions”**

Despite the changes across time, one thing remains constant, not least as evidenced by its recurrence as a theme in Montesquieu’s work, namely the fact of both human and political embodiment. This should hardly come as a surprise. Given that Montesquieu speaks of the “spirit” of a nation and of its laws, one would expect

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<sup>87</sup> Pangle, *The Theological Basis of Liberal Modernity*, 106ff.

something of an associated body. Moreover, he takes seriously his own claim that man follows certain physical laws given his own corporeality (I.1).<sup>88</sup> Being no pure idealist or metaphysician, but instead one who looks at the world politically, as he repeatedly reminds his reader,<sup>89</sup> each spirit, whether individual or collective, has a real, concrete manifestation, or framework, as well. A nation, or a people, is not an abstract entity, and while it is not wholly fixed or static in space but is subject to history and its vicissitudes, it is nevertheless a real actor. Each and every nation or people has a greater or lesser ability to act, based in some part no doubt on the nature and principle of its government, and the various other aspects that form its spirit, but no less on its shape and size as an embodied entity. Thus, the various political bodies—the necessarily different peoples of the world—are individuated and cannot easily be compounded; hence, for example, the great difficulty of conquest, insofar as it implies a mixing of bodies, sometimes those of vastly different natures and spirits (X.3ff; cf. IX.2).

The array of distinctions across the political universe suggests certain insurmountable divisions and thereby the real possibility for conflict. The judgments and decisions on the part of actors play a large role in this matter, to be sure, with respect to strategy, prudence, diplomacy, and the like. However, from the inescapable logic of political embodiment follows the fact that these bodies can and will collide at times. As there is a spiritual element to politics, which may be considered the realm of freedom, so too is there the physical aspect of politics, which carries the force of determination. Not

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<sup>88</sup> Jean Goldzink, *La solitude de Montesquieu* (Paris: Fayard, 2011), 103: “The political cannot in any way ignore the physical that weights upon [man],” not least with respect to the effects of locality and its relation to the forms of government. If Montesquieu’s “materialism” has surprised or even embarrassed some, it does not, properly speaking, originate from a materialist perspective.

<sup>89</sup> On a few occasions, Montesquieu underlines the political orientation of his work: “As in this work I am not a theologian but one who writes about politics, there may be things that would be wholly true only in a human way of thinking, for they have not been at all considered in relation to the more sublime truths” (XXIV.1).

all things are always possible, as circumstance of time and place narrow the range of available options. Moreover, man is “a limited being” who “loses even the imperfect knowledge he has, and “[a]s a feeling creature, he falls subject to a thousand passions” (I.1). It is no wonder then Montesquieu spends the amount of time that he does on trying to understand conflict and its resolutions through what we today call international relations.

The title of book nine, “On the laws in their relation with defensive force” opens with a chapter engaging the question of “how republics provide for their security.” The opening line is a startling example of what appears to be itself an ineluctable law of political ontology: “If a republic is small, it is destroyed by a foreign force; if it is large, it is destroyed by an internal vice.” Adding to the impression of fixity in such things, he speaks of a “dual drawback” that “taints democracies and aristocracies equally, whether they are good or whether they are bad. The ill is in the thing itself; there is no form that can remedy it.” Given the inescapable fate of republics, at first glance, we are told “it is very likely that ultimately men would have been obliged to live forever under the government of one alone.” Despotism or monarchy would appear the only alternative governments given the constraints of this fact. After all, “despite men’s love of liberty, despite their hatred of violence, most peoples are subjected to [despotism],” considering the difficulty of establishing a moderate government. The latter requires “a masterpiece of legislation that chance rarely produces and prudence is rarely allowed to produce,” while in contrast, “a despotic government leaps to view” (V.14). This is a powerful indictment against republicanism and its inherent instability, if ever there was one. However, he goes on to say that in the face of such facts, men “devised a kind of

constitution that has all the internal advantages of republican government and the external force of monarchy,” which Montesquieu refers to as “the federal republic.” No doubt, we have a further qualification to the two kinds of republics adumbrated in part one, and this is by no means a conceptualization Montesquieu draws out of the air.

This “society of societies,” where “many political bodies consent to become citizens of the larger state that they want to form,” boasts examples in the “associations” that allowed Greece to “flourish for so long.” Key to the longevity of the Greek republics—of ancient republics in general—was their ability to associate for the purposes of external defense. Alliance formation could be seen as the best offense and defense. The erstwhile truth regarding the destruction of republics is met through the human power and freedom to associate and consent. By mixing the small and the large in the form of an association, and thus creating something like an intermediate form, republics have a better chance at security, or so it might seem.<sup>90</sup> The reader is inclined to ask, however, just how serious Montesquieu is being here? One must be cautious given this quick swing from a definitive statement on an impasse, and a subsequent announcement of resolution. Moreover, just seventeen chapters prior to this, in the preceding book, Montesquieu underlined that “a republic must dread something.” What maintained the laws among the Greeks was fear of the Persians, and so too were Carthage and Rome “mutually strengthened” because they “intimidated one another” (VIII.5). Montesquieu’s

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<sup>90</sup> For discussion on the divided views regarding Montesquieu’s claims here—whether he is to be taken seriously or not—see, Andrea Radasanu, “Montesquieu on Ancient Greek Foreign Relations: Toward National Self-Interest and International Peace.” Radasanu argues that this apparent solution does not illustrate Montesquieu’s devotion to republicanism, least of all the ancient variety, nor does it indicate his belief that the way to peace depends upon republican models. She argues that the purpose of his presentation here “is to point out that the institution is flawed and that republicanism as conceived by the ancients cannot be salvaged through confederation,” all of which is part of his slow and careful replacement of virtue with security concerns. Montesquieu hereby encourages readers to consider regimes and institutions on the basis of the degree to which they can successfully protect their citizens and their own security.

eloquent conclusion here is as follows: “The more secure these states are, the more, as with tranquil waters, they are subject to corruption.” Such being the case, a successful society of societies might itself foster internal corruption; the logic of security, while aiming to secure, nonetheless rests upon a palpable insecurity, namely dread of an enemy.

After indicating that this held for the Greeks, he says that it likewise applies in the case of the Romans; however, the catch is that this society of societies worked both for *and* against them. By way of these associations, “the Romans attacked the universe, and with their use alone, the universe defended itself from the Romans.” Thus, “when Rome had reached its greatest height, the barbarians were able to resist it” through various “associations made from fright.” The success of federal republics is such that both attackers and defenders can garner strength from consenting to form a “larger state.”<sup>91</sup> The paradox persists, given that federal republics give both aggressors and defenders greater confidence; or better yet this confidence can turn defenders into aggressors and force one-time aggressors to be on the defensive. Those “associations made from fright” can become frightful associations, which begs the question as to whether such larger states do not likewise become “destroyed by an internal vice” of some kind. How can security and confidence through largess avoid the temptation to further expand, even if without force at first? What prevents or inhibits the confident and large from ever desiring to grow, even if only to further ensure security? The problem of security is never solved once and for all, and if republics large and small can mitigate the ills of the “dual drawback” temporarily, there is no permanent remedy.

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<sup>91</sup> Comparing Montesquieu with the abbé de Saint-Pierre, who wrote an influential tract, *Projet pour rendre la paix perpétuelle en Europe* (1713), Perkins notes the following: “If the abbé de Saint-Pierre saw the federative principle as a means of enforcing European peace, Montesquieu conceived it as a device which may lead to hegemony and to defence against hegemony.” Perkins, *Montesquieu on National Power and International Rivalry*, 73.

That said, Montesquieu goes on to write that because of the federal republic, “Holland, Germany, and the Swiss leagues are regarded in Europe as eternal republics.” But surely he is being ironic here no less, or speaking only as an observer of opinions—of what is “regarded in Europe” by some, or even by many—for he himself has elsewhere expressed how all governments pass out of existence: “Since all human things have an end, the state of which we are speaking [i.e., England] will lose its liberty; it will perish. Rome, Lacedaemonia, and Carthage have surely perished.” (XI.6).<sup>92</sup> Is his point, perhaps, to signify the exaggerated sense of security of some, and to point out that whatever success the federal republic may offer, it is hubris to regard any political order as eternal in the way certain Europeans may regard particular existent republics? It is conceivable that Montesquieu is indicating the presence of a kind of European decadence in political opinions. Who would be so bold as proclaim the eternity of any republic—who, in all seriousness, would pronounce the possibility of a perpetual republic? This seems a tacit attempt to moderate certain opinions that may lead, on the one hand, to complacency regarding the need for vigilance regarding the preservation of a republic, or on the other, to extravagance and the idea that conquest and expansion are the sure way to self-preservation.

Whatever the case, this is not to deny that Montesquieu finds a balancing principle at work in the operation of such associations, even if the sought balance is less than indefinite. In consenting, or allying, along the lines of a society of societies, the one “who might want to usurp could scarcely have equal credit in all the confederated states.

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<sup>92</sup> As Perkins writes in a discussion of Montesquieu’s ability to make predictions: “the fate of dying nations has influenced his thought and overshadowed any naïve belief that legislative intervention may conclusively prolong the lives of nations or for long give them a linear course. His negative, retrospective determinism causes him to stress the mortal nature of all nations rather than their life.” Perkins, *Montesquieu on National Power and International Rivalry*, 61.



If he became too strong in one state, he would alarm all the others.” Even if he succeeded in subjugating a part, the other independent forces could still resist him before he dominated the whole. The complexity and multiplicity of this association is such that the “state can perish in one place without perishing in another; the confederation can be dissolved and the confederates remain sovereign.” These are not parallel claims, however. For one part to perish and the whole to remain extant is different than the case where the whole dissolves and the parts remain separate, or sovereign, wholes unto themselves. Montesquieu’s point is that the dissolution of federations is not the end of society, *per se*, and thereby not an inevitable return to the state of nature. The principle of a federal republic provides something of an additional layer of security that can serve the mutual interest of all associates. Thus, each republic may enjoy “the goodness of the internal government of each one; and, with regard to the exterior, it has, by the force of the association, all the advantages of large monarchies.”

In the event that one seeks to bring together states of a different nature, however, Montesquieu underlines that the only way for them to “continue to exist together in one federal republic is by force” (IX.2). There is instability when it comes to mixing or binding different natures, or governments of different kinds. The alternative, it would seem, would be to transform all states to the same nature, but such a position presumes that the particulars of a people, its territory, mores, and all the aspects contained in its spirit can be overridden with ease, or be disregarded. For this reason, Montesquieu proceeds to discuss how both despotic (IX.4) and monarchic (IX.5) states provide for their security. Only after following his original typology in this regard does he turn to discuss “the defensive force of states in general” (IX.6), although under this heading he

addresses three particular states: France, Spain, and Persia. The examples are not incidental, for in the following chapter, entitled simply, “Reflections,” he offers an argument against the “project of universal monarchy”—something all three of the aforementioned governments were drawn to.

It may be something of a surprise that Montesquieu will offer discussion of how different states may defend themselves “in general,” for would not the question of security and the strategy to preserve it be just as particular to its nature as its laws? On the crucial point of maintaining existence, how could the means of defense not flow from specific principles and circumstances? If the title heading suggests generalizations, the content of the chapter speaks in terms of proportions and relations that are anything but a singular model; instead, being relational or relative, it is consistent with what he will later spell out: “All size, all force, all power is relative” (IX.9). Thus, Montesquieu illustrates how there is a relation between size and speed, or “the speed with which one can execute an undertaking against it and its promptness in rendering this effective” (IX.6). Insofar as this is a general concern, it must be placed within the concrete context of space and territory, which are factors inevitably linked to a state’s capacity for action: action requires a space, and the circumscription of territory must be such that one can move with sufficient speed within it so as to respond—to act according to the concrete reality of a peoples’ embodied statehood—before one’s borders are breached and the space is conquered by another. If we have begun to think today that geography and space are of less relevance, given advances in communications technology and the increased role of air power for purposes of defense (and what is known as the revolution in military affairs), such that the obstacles on and of the earth, and even the earth itself, are no

hindrance to speed and movement, Montesquieu's work offers repeated reminders of the inescapability of frontiers, terrain, and the space within which we live and fight.<sup>93</sup>

### **The Earth and its “natural divisions”**

The earth is neither “flat,” nor is it a “smooth” sphere, void of discrepancies, barriers, and natural divisions. Modern readers may find Montesquieu's lengthy discussion about climate's impact upon laws and nations—and the broader examination of “physical causes”—to be irrelevant, passé, or even strange, but this too is integral to his attention to the range of details of political life, as well as his insight into the corporality of human beings and their communities.<sup>94</sup> Broadly contrasting the continents of Europe and Asia, he describes the ease with which empires are maintained in the latter, due to its vaster landscapes and fewer natural barriers, whereas Europe's geographical

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<sup>93</sup> For an argument regarding the displacement of geography by speed, and thus of geopolitics with “chronopolitics,” see, Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*, trans., Mark Polizzotti (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986). A discussion of Henry A. Wallace's views about a smaller and borderless world due to an increase in speed and flow of information can be found in, Veseth, *Globaloney*, 11-20. Most convincing are the arguments of Robert Kaplan's recent work, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate* (New York: Random House, 2012). Kaplan seeks to “recover our sense of geography” to argue that geography is not destiny, but is inescapably part of the context of events. In the process he persuasively exposes “the limits of liberal universalism,” as he interprets present conflicts in light of territoriality, geographical positioning, and regional structures, while offering insight on what we may expect in the future. Consider also Saul Bernard Cohen's older, but still very relevant work, *Geography and Politics in a World Divided* (New York: Random House, 1963).

<sup>94</sup> Even if there are a number of facts to disagree with in Montesquieu regarding the impact of climate upon individuals and peoples, or if he overdraws causality in some cases, the relevance of climate in today's politics is hardly beneath the surface. Consider, for example, the importance of climate change and its impact upon the very geography and territoriality of the earth in the “High North.” As the polar icecap melts and the northern tundra opens up, new lanes for shipping and previously inaccessible mineral resources will emerge. Following upon this are concerns of defense and strategy, and sovereign integrity for nations of the north, such as Canada, Russia, the United States, Denmark, Norway (the so-called “Arctic Five”), as well as others. “Arctic sovereignty” is a growing area of research and debate in military and legal circles, which rests upon the changing and unchanging facts of geography in the broadest sense, which Montesquieu attends to with great seriousness and insightfulness. For a thorough study that considers questions of trade, security, and policies in light of an emerging “new arctic” (and that “the world is witnessing nothing less than the opening of a new ocean, something that has not occurred on Earth since the end of the Ice Age”), see, Charles M. Perry and Bobby Anderson, “New Strategic Dynamics in the Arctic Region: Implications for National Security and International Collaboration,” *The Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis Paper* (Feb., 2012).

concentration and topographical unevenness has had different consequences. Asia is much more conducive to despotism and servitude because of the physical nature of its territory: insofar as despotism is rule without mediation and intermediate divisions, the more homogeneous the continent, the less supportive it is of the divisions requisite for free and moderate government. In contrast, the many “natural divisions” in Europe “form many medium-sized states in which the government of laws is not incompatible with the maintenance of the state; on the other hand, they are so favorable to this that without laws this state falls into decadence and becomes inferior to all the others” (XVII.6). Europe’s “genius for liberty” is in part attributable to its concentration of continental, or topographical, and thereby political and national differences. And the very competition between states, has been conducive to internal legal ordering.<sup>95</sup>

To be sure, on this macro level of continental comparisons, the different degrees of liberty within Europe are underplayed, but so much is inevitable from such heights. Yet as we know, Montesquieu has multiple perches at various levels from which he gazes. Significant here is that his counsel regarding size and shape, and the earth’s complex surface, recalls the fact of territoriality, and how the physical elements—or, the details of political physiognomy—are intimately related to the judgments and decisions

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<sup>95</sup> Francois Guizot argued that Europe’s superiority and greatness rested upon the coexistence of a variety of political communities of different forms and substance, rather than being a civilization unified in a singular sense. According to Guizot’s account, in most previous civilizations “the excessively predominating dominion of a single principle, of a single form, has been the cause of tyranny,” whereas in Europe, “liberty has been the result of the variety of the elements of civilization, and of the state of struggle in which they have constantly existed.” Guizot, *The History of Civilization in Europe*, trans. William Hazlitt (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2013), 31.

In a different vein, Carl Schmitt has analyzed the development of the *Jus Publicum Europaeum* and claimed that an important part of this legal development is based on the conception of territoriality and therefore the realities of the earth and the divisions among peoples on the basis of territorial appropriation. He argues that this one-time legal development that helped civilize war and positively balance intrastate affairs began to be corroded, prior to the turn of the nineteenth century, by a “spaceless universalism” that was no longer rooted in Europe. Void of a concrete spatial reference, an indiscriminate form of “international law” began to emerge, as propagated by the Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907. Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*.

regarding action and a people's political history more broadly.<sup>96</sup> In sum, the body and spirit of a polity are inseparable, and the world's polities vary in their bodily and spiritual manifestations and combinations. Given the natural differences and divisions—the discrepancies and variance in the physical geographical landscape—there is unlikely to be a single and identical political spirit the world over, and with the emphasis Montesquieu places upon the bodily, it is clear he does not err in imagining a purely spiritual forms of politics, or a politics that extends directly and solely from the will.

In the case of France and Spain he says that they meet “the requisite size,” as “the state must be of a medium extent so as to be proportionate to the degree of speed nature has given men to move from one place to another.”<sup>97</sup> These states, with their facility to direct forces within a reasonable amount of time, and their ability to gather knowledge regarding the whole of the country so as to minimize exposure are contrasted with the

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<sup>96</sup> While the physical aspects may present what appears to be an overwhelming deterministic aspect, study of these things may in fact open the way to greater freedom. As Aron writes: “The virtue of geographical study is, first and foremost, to dissipate illusions or legends of a *determinism* of climate or relief. The deeper and more precise the study, the fewer regular relations of causality it discovers.” Aron then draws specifically on books XVII and XVIII of *The Spirit of the Laws* to demonstrate this point. Aron, *Peace and War*, 183. Samuel argues that the very design of Montesquieu's text is to juxtapose the antitheses of human freedom and determination to reveal the tension between them, so as to make a stronger case towards a sort of resolution of the tension and thereby advance human freedom. Books XIV-XVIII form the bulk of the deterministic case, culminating in the turning point of Book XIX where the championing of freedom carries on from what began in XI, as “spirit” can then account for, and attempt to move beyond the deterministic in full knowledge of it, even as it remains grounded in it. In short, freedom is never pure, or absolute. Ana J. Samuel, “The Design of Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws*: The Triumph of Freedom over Determinism,” *American Political Science Review* Vol. 103, No. 02 (May 2009): 305-321.

<sup>97</sup> The degree of speed may change, but not its nature; that is, speed may increase, but it may never become “pure” speed, or instantaneous: distance will never be altogether overcome, or the discrepancy between distance and speed is not collapsible, for a man cannot be everywhere at once, and even as it is a state's attempted strategy to “be able to appear everywhere,” there will always be empty or hidden spaces. Thus, there will always be a “fog of war,” so long as man is not altogether removed from the equation of war. These questions touch on the difference between the character of war and the nature of war, a distinction drawn by one of the greatest philosophers of war, Clausewitz, who argues that in a fundamental sense war never changes. Indeed, his text is not titled *The Napoleonic Wars*, or *How Prussia Does and Ought to Wage Wars*, but is given the laconic yet profound titled, *Vom Krieg*—it is “on war” in general. This is the very title Montesquieu himself uses (who, of course, predates the Prussian Officer) for the second chapter of book ten, which is addressed below.

vastness of Persia.<sup>98</sup> Its size means its mobilization and deployment are slow, its forces are separated from one another, and communication is greatly hindered. Montesquieu thus speaks of the “true power of a prince,” arguing it is based not on his ease in conquering but “in the difficulty there is in attacking him”; or, in a bolder sense, he adds, “in the immutability of his condition.” The truly powerful are the ones who can resist or stave off external change, and expansion only invites change, or instability, for states that expand expose “new sides from which they can be taken.” If it is “wise” for a monarch to increase his power, it is “no less prudent” for him to limit it. There are therefore drawbacks to being both large and small, and the size of a polity’s body is no incidental matter—the problem of size is by no means restricted to republics. On this note Montesquieu turns to offer some “reflections,” which he gives as the title to IX.7.

Montesquieu argues, as he had in his earlier work at some length (and it is curious he does not cite it, as he does with his work on the Romans)<sup>99</sup>, that the project of universal monarchy “would have been...fatal to Europe,” as well as to the subjects, the king, and his family, should King Louis XIV have succeeded as he had hoped in fulfilling it. For Montesquieu, “Heaven” actually “better served” Louis “by defeats,” for notwithstanding his lack of success in becoming the only king in Europe, he became most powerful of all. To have great power in the presence of other rulers is one thing; to be the only ruler is another. A plurality of powers or states, or rulers, in the international realm is better for all—is in accordance with Providence even—instead of unifying power

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<sup>98</sup> “It is remarkably fortunate for France that its capital is closer to the different frontiers in proportion to their greater weakness; and the prince here sees each part of his country the better as it is more exposed” (IX.6).

<sup>99</sup> For discussion surrounding his reservations of initial publication (anonymously, and outside of France), as well as how this earlier text was worked into *The Spirit of the Laws*, see, Rahe, *Montesquieu and the Logic of Liberty*.

under a single rule. The project of seeking such universal rule of one “cannot fail in one country without failing in all others, or fail for a moment without failing forever” (IX.7). These sentiments were previously formulated by Montesquieu at greater length in his work, *Réflexions sur la monarchie universelle en Europe*, and the very lines from *Spirit of the Laws* IX.7 are nearly taken verbatim from chapter XVII of *Réflexions*.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, the claim with which Montesquieu opens the latter work is that universal monarchy eventually failed with the Romans, and having done so it has now failed “forever.” Thus, he argues that such a project is not only dangerous for the sake of balanced power and peace, but that it is despotic to the core. A centralized world government is at odds with Montesquieu’s view of liberty and its foundations.

What is interesting, however, is that he finds that the present state of Europe, and so the course of European political development at large, has made such a prospect ultimately impossible—circumstances preclude it. Any attempt to draw the many nations under the rule of a single command is foregone, or so he argues. Of course, if this is so decidedly the case, why does Montesquieu feel the need to make such an argument to persuade readers? Perhaps it is an intellectual exercise to merely detail the circumstances that have changed from, say, the time of the Romans who ruled universally with a monarchy, to the time of the present Europeans. But that Montesquieu felt compelled to write it, and argue persuasively, suggests he maintained that despite certain circumstantial changes, men’s ambitions remain the same across time and must continually be addressed. Insofar as he understands men to be preoccupied by their interests, he likewise contends they are ever at risk of being overcome with spiritedness.

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<sup>100</sup> Montesquieu, *Réflexions sur la monarchie universelle en Europe*, XVII, pp. 103. For the place of this text in Montesquieu’s corpus and the history of its publication, relation to *Spirit of the Laws*, and the like, see, The Editor’s “Introduction,” and cf. Rahe, *Montesquieu and the Logic of Liberty*, 18-26.

The need to tame men's pride and desire for large conquest and glory is a permanent problem, no less so even if the stakes of such aspirations may vary. Whether or not the European situation is such as to make universal monarchy "morally impossible," given technological developments that have equalized forces, and a "right of nations [*droit des gens*]" that makes such hegemonic wars ruinous for those waging them, the fact is that men may still pursue such ambitions, as Louis XIV was arguably perceived as doing.<sup>101</sup>

In speaking of moral impossibilities, Montesquieu offers ethical and practical counsel rather than describing what is in fact precluded. His *humanité* leads him to exaggerate, in hopes that men will not take such grave risks for glory, and his advice is buttressed by pragmatic details. What is curious, and what illustrates this moral suasion rather than an ontological truth, is that despite his emphasis on the changed nature of things—again, between the time of the Romans who successfully carried out universal monarchy, and that of present Europe—the fact is that in emphasizing and underlining these changes, his argument retains an ambiguous core: to argue on the basis of change, Montesquieu cannot avoid the truth of change, *per se*. That is to say, present circumstances are no less open to change. Neither prosperity nor power is fixed, and there is continual variation of both, particularly within Europe: it is "the nature of these things is to vary continually."<sup>102</sup> It is on the basis of this constant variation that there are "a thousand hazards," which should prevent anyone from trying to engage in such an endeavor. Montesquieu's reflections on the dangers of universal monarchy hint at the problem of universal regimes at large: global empire, or a world-state, is more likely to

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<sup>101</sup> Montesquieu, *Réflexions*, I.71-2. Rahe writes that it is "in dispute" as to whether Louis XIV ever actually sought universal monarchy, for he "never publicly embraced such a goal," and when his opponents accused him of it, "he denied its truth," just as "historians today are inclined to the view that his aims were, in fact, considerably less grand." Rahe, *Montesquieu and the Logic of Liberty*, 7.

<sup>102</sup> Montesquieu, *Réflexions*, I.74.



exacerbate the political problem rather than solve it. Thus, one thing most of all is certain: human beings frame their lives in political communities, on various scales, notwithstanding the various changes across time that may alter the shapes and forms of such associations.

If no single community is permanent, the act of putting things in common among some people and against others is an indelible fact. And so, “considered as inhabitants of a planet so large,” it follows that “different peoples are necessary” (I.3). Even with the opening up of the universe, and an increasingly universalistic world, certain differences persist, due to the broad range of “physical” and “moral” causes that shape peoples. Well known for taking into account the immensity of details and variety in the human world, Montesquieu’s political science is a masterful undertaking for its combined examination of these causes—what may be called political physics and political psychology—thereby considering human activities “from all these points of view” (I.3, I.1). Recalling attention to political physicality is a particularly important reminder for our democratic and technological age as we are wont to overlook such details. Recalling attention to the place of the body and the bodily place of politics seems apt in politically disembodied times, when we imagine few to no obstacles to our wills, and the spirit of unity and universalism.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> For discussion of our disembodied times, or democracy’s tendency towards de-corporalization, see Claude Lefort’s discussion in, “The Image of the Body and Totalitarianism,” *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 292-306.

### **“The First of All Empires”**

Part 3 of *The Spirit of the Laws*, which consists of 6 books (the third of which is literally the central book of the entire work), begins with a book discussing “laws in their relation to the nature of climate” (III.14) and ends with a book on “the laws in their relation with the principles forming the general spirit, the mores, and the manners of a nation” (III.19). The entire trajectory of this third of six parts then is from political physics to political psychology—that is, on the relation of body and spirit to laws. A dialectical movement of this sort arguably runs through the whole of *The Spirit of the Laws*. To the extent that one can read the text as a linear dialectic, as is sometimes suggested,<sup>104</sup> one may also read the work somewhat concentrically, considering the central parts in relation to peripheral parts—that is, outward from the corporeal core. The books of this third part consist of the baseline reality from which, or upon which, human political possibilities radiate, and in which they ever remain rooted to some extent. The first five books deal both with nonhuman nature and human nature, considering throughout rudimentary needs and desires, and the kinds and degree of environmental factors that satisfy or frustrate them, inflame them or dampen them. It is little surprise then to find that the topic of slavery is central as well, which repeatedly raises the issue of bodily mastery. Montesquieu is a great opponent to slavery—writing that “[i]t is not good by its nature” (XV.1ff.) and “is against nature” (XV.7)—and yet his extended study of it makes it intelligible, suggesting how certain “natural reasons” have led to it. He

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<sup>104</sup> Samuel provides a convincing account of how “*Spirit* is organized in a dialectical way,” as the first three parts of the work reflect the alternation and battle between forces of determination and of freedom in certain areas of life, while the latter three parts advance the cause of liberty over determination in other spheres. Samuel, “The Design of Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws*”; cf. Michael Zuckert, “Natural law, natural rights, and classical liberalism: On Montesquieu's critique of Hobbes,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* Vol. 18, No. 1 (2001): 227-251.

does not simply explain to excuse, for as he writes when discussing the circumstances of polygamy: “In all this I do not justify usages, but I give the reasons for them” (XVI.4). Rather, he suggests that human reason, by way of prudent legislation, aided in part by technological and mechanical developments (XV.8), may counter natural reasons if indeed they are more conducive to human liberty. However, he underlines that there is no universal or formulaic manner by which slaves may be freed, writing explicitly “it depends too much on circumstances” (XV.18). The concrete context must be considered in the matter of lifting the constraints of physical servitude and thus introducing the possibility of greater freedom.

As has been pointed out, this third part “begins and ends with the most detailed discussions of human nature in the whole of *The Spirit of the Laws*. The discussions constitute an elaboration of the theoretical principles stated in Book I. It is perfectly fitting then that the books comprising Part Three are literally the central books and that their titles all refer to ‘nature.’”<sup>105</sup> There is no escaping the fact that the natural environment affects men’s bodies and that different settings have different effects. As Montesquieu argues, the differences in this regard “should make very different characters” (XIV.2). Likewise, the facts of the physical setting bring constraints and demands that shape the community: “The differing needs of differing climates have formed different ways of living, and these differing ways of living have formed the various sorts of laws” (XIV.10). “The empire of climate,” he writes in the first book of this third part, “is the first of all empires” (XIX.14); however, by the time one reaches the concluding book of part three, he underlines the fact that “[m]any things govern men: climate, religion, laws, the maxims of the government, examples of past things, mores,

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<sup>105</sup> Pangle, *Montesquieu’s Philosophy of Liberalism*, 164.

and manners.” Climate remains the first in this list of what are multiple things that not only govern men, but in conjunction with one another form what he famously calls “a general spirit” (XIX.4). The particular things of both nonhuman and human nature, constitute a people’s spirit, which itself requires embodiment to appear. Even as things related to nonhuman nature may be minimized in their weight of governance, through the activity of the legislator—that is, by way of his spirit—the former remains a factor nonetheless. While the balance of these governing things certainly varies, *all* continue to play some role in shaping the character of peoples. It would be an error in both theory and practice to reduce a people to pure body or pure spirit, or to the governance of one “thing” alone, just as it would be wrong to assume all peoples to be governed by the same thing, or even an identically proportionate relation of things.

The general spirit of a people is not therefore merely an artificial construct or a haphazard assortment of things, let alone something that may be uniformly imposed, but results from a broad natural process of development. Laws, Montesquieu underlines, “should be so appropriate to the people for whom they are made that it is very unlikely that the laws of one nation can suit another” (I.3). And in the extreme, Montesquieu notes: “There are climates in which the physical aspect has such strength that morality can do practically nothing” (XVI.8). While there is an element of organic unfolding in the lives of peoples,<sup>106</sup> to reiterate, men may nevertheless garner greater control over their natural environment, over this first of all empires, and thus human nature can come to tame nonhuman nature to some extent. But even as the strength of the latter diminishes,

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<sup>106</sup> Isaiah Berlin underlines the manner in which Montesquieu views organic development of peoples and their laws, and views him as an empiricist who seeks naturalistic explanations wherever possible. Berlin, “Montesquieu” in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (New York: The Viking Press, 1980), 130-61.

its presence is never eliminated.<sup>107</sup> The strength and shape of every peoples' spirit is to some extent related to the earth's variegated surface—to the physical content of its particular space—and this variation is considerable when one reflects upon the details.

It can influence things including courage and ability in war; the power of imagination and the passions, as well as the kind and degree of taste and sensitivity; the form and strength of love (XIV.2, XIV.14; XVI.11); the ready acceptance of certain metaphysical ideas (XIV.5, XIV.7); the devotion to labor (XIV.6) and general level of industriousness (XIV.9); the relationship of a people to alcohol (XIV.10); the types of diseases and the facility of their transmission and proliferation (XIV.11); and the psychological state of a people not least regarding their propensity for suicide (XIV.12). If the list appears somewhat random, it does not take a great deal of effort for commonsense to provide some examples to corroborate such claims. That is not to say they form irreversible laws, or instances without exception; however, Montesquieu is likewise suggesting these influences can be addressed, so long as they are indeed considered. The less temperate a climate is though, the more “a good education” is necessary, which is to say that “a wise legislator” is all the more important in extreme conditions, so as to better regulate the bodily rather than have the body weigh down the spirit. As one chapter title has it, “bad legislators are those who have favored the vices of the climate and good ones are those who have opposed them” (XIV.5). Thus, Montesquieu does not deny the possibility for improvement, or relegate those of the warmest climates to slavery and despotism indefinitely, nor however does he avoid the

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<sup>107</sup> “Nowhere do we find a climate that leaves human nature unaffected. Never can political life be based *simply* on human nature or natural right, for the core of human nature is always shaped to some degree by climate. And if we could find a place where all influences of the climate were neutralized, it is doubtful if we should desire such a habitation.” Pangle, *Montesquieu's Philosophy of Liberalism*, 169.

difficulties: “a certain laziness of the spirit, naturally bound with that of the body” is the greatest challenge for the legislator to overcome—for the consequence is a “spirit incapable of any action, any effort, and application.” In a word, such laziness is conducive to slavery of various kinds (XV.7): when laws are badly made, lazy men appear, and out of laziness men are enslaved. Only the basest of human possibilities emerge when the spirit is not active in engaging the body. Liberty rests upon energy and action, effort and application; it does not follow simply from a perfect constitution or set of institutions.

To be clear, the aim here is not to corroborate all Montesquieu’s empirical claims, for his work is not without its errors on the level of natural science; after all, modern natural science has made significant advances beyond the time of the eighteenth century. However, the general attention to nonhuman nature’s place in politics, and its role in cultivating distinctions, is a worthwhile lesson. If some of Montesquieu’s conclusions are less than convincing in this regard, his method, so to speak, is one we need to be convinced of anew. It is a curious fact that we today still trade in some of these ideas on the level of common sense, while social science is loath to consider such opinions as worthy of scientific consideration, only registering them in opinion polls instead. Public opinion at least still recognizes generalizations about different peoples, and so differences regarding the general spirit of a people, at least in part on the basis of their place in the world—thus, as related to the climate and geography of their lives. For example, everyone knows that the climate of war matters greatly, and so too does the climate from which soldiers come or in which they train, as any man on the street can recount the difficulty regarding Americans in the tropics and jungles of Vietnam (this, of

course, in addition to the more complex problem of ill-formed strategy regarding “irregular” or “insurgency” warfare); or how common opinion still holds that northerners are more industrious than southerners, as one can presently read in the newspapers about the European divide between “Germans” and “Greeks”; that colder nations are well known for being heavier drinkers, as indicated by consumption levels in Russia and the Baltic countries; and while the location of disease hardly requires mention, the manner in which diseases have spread across like and unlike climates is of significant importance in the history of peoples, as has been notably popularized by writers like Jared Diamond.<sup>108</sup>

At any rate, having mentioned that climate has a role in the liberty of a people—that it makes them more or less energetic, prone to activity, attentive and industrious—it is not by accident that the only two nations mentioned in the chapter titles of this first book of part three are China and England. On the one hand, China and England represent two polar opposite political possibilities: despotism and liberty. On the other hand, they represent opposing geographical realities: a large continental space and a small island place. However, by juxtaposing presumed opposites, Montesquieu overrides these presumptions by indicating the success of legislators in dealing with nonhuman nature—in properly opposing the “vices of the climate”—and that this is true for countries irrespective of their degree of liberty, or kind of government. Elements of contingency cannot be overlooked. The legislators of China were sensible when they did not take “the peaceful state” of men for granted but instead oriented men towards “the action proper to making them fulfill the duties of life,” and they did this by making their religion, philosophy and laws “all practical” (XIV.5). If the Chinese climate otherwise inclines

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<sup>108</sup> See, for example, Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1999).

men to rest, these legislators introduced “moral causes” to divert them from being languid. Moreover “a good custom in China” (XIV.8) has been to rouse the peoples to their plowing by offering honors from the emperor to those who best cultivate the fields. Appeals to the pride of men, and even inflaming it, is no less possible in the most difficult of climates: the industriousness of men may be encouraged with the right form of legislation. Success is achieved not by ignoring the climatological factors, but precisely by attending to them.

So far as England goes, Montesquieu offers a curious discussion of suicide: “the English resolve to kill themselves when one can imagine no reason for their decisions; they kill themselves in the very midst of happiness” (XIV.12). This English “illness” “comes from the physical state of the machine and is independent of any other cause.” It is due to the English climate, Montesquieu argues, and yet this otherwise drab condition is an important source of England’s ability to keep tyranny at bay. The English mind has a certain “impatience” that makes the most suitable government for such a people “one in which they could not be allowed to blame any one person for causing their sorrows, and in which, as laws rather than men would govern, the laws themselves must be overthrown in order to change the state” (XIV.13). Thus: “In a free nation, this characteristic [of impatience, nearing on obstinacy] would be one apt to frustrate the projects of tyranny, which is always slow and weak in its beginnings, just as it is prompt and lively at its end, which shows at first only a hand extended in aid, and later oppresses with an infinity of arms.” Restful people, those completely satisfied and without any kind of stubbornness or sorrows, are more prone to servitude, but “a people who rest in no situation, who constantly pinch themselves to find the painful sots, could scarcely fall asleep.”



In sum, the immediate environment in which a people find themselves influences their physical dispositions, and lawgivers err in disregarding such facts. They must not exaggerate physicality, but need recognize and recall its influence all the same. Thus, if we find ourselves smiling at some of the evidence Montesquieu provides for his claims about the differences among effects of cold and hot climates through—for example, his enthusiasm about experimentation on a cow’s tongue and the results of its fibers expanding or contracting based on its contact with heat of cold air—it is not unlikely that he would find our general disregard of physicality equally risible, and rightly so. Montesquieu is no pure determinist, for he himself argues that “[t]he doctrine of a rigid destiny ruling all makes the magistrate a tranquil spectator,” for such a man will think “that god [or nature] has already done everything and that he himself has nothing to do” (XIV.11). But, to reiterate, Montesquieu is also anything but a pure spiritualist, for he makes it abundantly clear that lawgivers must deeply consider the material with which they are working. This is a fact that continues to be recognized today by those who think in terms of geography and the long-lasting features of the earth’s surface, otherwise detailed on maps. Even when speaking about commerce and its revolutions—a potentially liberating and universal activity—Montesquieu does not fail to remind readers of the particularities of nonhuman nature’s impact.

### **Commerce and its “great changes”**

Let us now return to where we left off above regarding commerce. Montesquieu’s book addressing the “revolutions” commerce has had “in the world” and its consequences for laws, begins by underlining that despite such revolutionary activity,

“it can happen that certain physical causes such as the quality of the terrain or of the climate fix its nature forever” (XXI.1). This striking statement opens a discussion consisting of a mixture of ancient and modern examples and comparisons. After all, “[f]rom time to time the world meets with situations that change commerce” (XXI.4), such as the direction and partners in trade; so too, of course, has commerce changed the world. “Commerce, sometimes destroyed by conquerors, sometimes hampered by monarchs, wanders across the earth, flees from where it is oppressed, and remains where it is left to breath: it reigns today where one used to see only deserted places, seas, and rocks; there where it used to reign are now only deserted places” (XXI.5). Commerce, like every other human activity, is subject to certain limitations and constraints—not least to the contingencies of place and the vicissitudes of time. Thus, Montesquieu’s hopeful eye is ever moderated by the inescapable facts and particularities of reality to which he attends with care. Even when discussing “revolutions” he remains restrained, and by no means lets himself get carried away by revolutionary tendencies.<sup>109</sup>

When discussing the commerce of the ancients, he summarizes the logic as follows: “The effect of commerce is wealth; the consequence of wealth, luxury; that of luxury, the perfection of the arts” (XXI.6). One can therefore conclude that where the arts are carried out to a certain point, there was likely “a great commerce” established. He derives as much about the Persians, the Medes, and the Assyrians. However, their luxurious reign through commerce was brought to an end by the Tartars, who not only ended the broad-based communications of peoples and destroyed patterns of trade, but even diverted rivers that facilitated exchange. In contrast to the commerce of luxury,

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<sup>109</sup> On Montesquieu’s non-revolutionary intentions and his rhetoric of concealment, see, Stanley Rosen, “Politics and Nature in Montesquieu,” *The Elusiveness of the Ordinary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 23ff.

Montesquieu speaks of “an economic commerce”—a distinction made in the previous book as well, upon relating commerce to the constitution: in government by one alone luxury is typically the foundation, whereas in government by many it is “founded on economy” (XX.4). The practice of the latter consists of “gaining little and even of gaining less than any other nation” the compensation for which is that of “gaining continually.” This form of commerce cannot “be done by a people among whom luxury is established who spend much and who see only great objects.” Montesquieu then quotes Cicero approvingly, who writes in his *De Republica* [4.7]: “I do not like a people to be both the rulers and the clerks of the universe.” At least in ancient commerce, the two activities of ruling and clerking are “contradictory,” for together they may fill the same individual’s head “full of both great projects and small ones.” That said, Montesquieu acknowledges that “the greatest enterprises are also undertaken in those states which subsist by economic commerce, and they show a daring not to be found in monarchies.” The reason, he suggests, is because the logic of commerce is to lead from one to another—from “the small to the middling, the middling to the great, and he who earlier desired to gain little arrives at a position where he has no less of a desire than to gain a great deal.” Commerce cannot likely remain contained; it begets more of itself, irrespective of its original size or amount. And so too, the ancient desire for a separation of politics and economics was more ideal than real, for “the great enterprises of the traders are always necessarily mixed with the public business.”

This is particularly true for governments ruled by many, and therein, Montesquieu ultimately claims that the greater one’s sense of prosperity, the more risk one will take. If one believes that “what one has acquired is secure, one dares to expose it in order to

acquire more; only the means for acquisition are at risk; now, men expect much of their fortune” (XX.4). Properly mixing the spirit of commerce with the general spirit of a people is a high aim for the legislator, and the English are “the people in the world who have best known how to take advantage of each of these three great things at the same time: religion, commerce, and liberty” (XX.7). While other peoples let political interests trump commercial ones, “England has always made its political interests give way to the interests of its commerce.” Rather than following Cicero’s maxim, the English seem to have benefited politically no less by acting as clerks of the universe only to likewise rule it. But these twin roles have required a constant preparedness for war and a strategy of colonization. The English role in opening the universe was active, for the latter has not opened of its own volition. Yet this modern example has a sort of parallel and particularly instructive ancient one. As discussed in the previous chapter, here too Alexander serves Montesquieu well in providing material for reflection on both change and permanence in politics, and on the complex relationship between commerce and war.

### **Conquering to Trade, or Trading to Conquer?**

At the heart of his discussion of Alexander and commerce is the following question: “It is true that Alexander conquered the Indies, but must one conquer a country in order to trade with it?” (XXI.8). Montesquieu tells us that Alexander initiated “a great revolution in commerce” on the basis of four events that occurred under his rule. These consisted not only in the conquest of the Indies but also of Tyre and Egypt, and of the discovery of the seas to the south of Egypt, i.e., the Red and Indian Seas. Alexander’s success, not unlike previously discussed, was based on knowledge and force; he had a

“project” or a “design” and the means to implement it. But this project seems to have changed along the way on Montesquieu’s telling, for while he may have initially followed the course of others, he charted his own path, too, and adapted his design according to new knowledge. If he took the same voyage as Darius towards the Indian Sea, the latter did so with “the fancy of a prince who wants to show his power rather than the orderly project of a monarch who wants to use it” (XXI.8), which had no consequences for commerce or navigation. Moreover, the Persians did not engage in trade, nor did the Egyptians for the most part, and when the former conquered the latter, “they brought with them the same spirit they had at home,” which included an “extreme” “indifference to sailing” (XXI.9). They were therefore ignorant of ocean voyages and oceans themselves, to the extent that “the Red Sea had to be discovered a second time, and the ocean a second time, too, and this discovery awaited the curiosity of the Greek kings.” Alexander brought a different spirit, or at least allowed his spirit to be affected by new “information.” His curiosity and broad spirit meant he was not, in conquering, blinded by conquest in itself; nonetheless, the knowledge he acquired and the changes in his spirit would have been impossible without the force of the conqueror. Throughout this discussion Montesquieu displays his deep knowledge of geographical details, trade routes and developments in navigation—not only due to his own curiosity of such facts, but because of their centrality to the history of the communication of peoples.

When Alexander reached and discovered the Red Sea, a revolution followed. He secured Egypt for himself but in doing so “open[ed] it in the very place where the kings, his predecessors, had locked it” (XXI.8). Moreover, Alexander “did not dream of commerce” previously, for it was a thought that “could come to him only with the

discovery of the Indian Sea.” Thus it became his “project” to establish commerce between the Indies and his western empire, and as a result “Egypt had become the center of the universe” (XXI.9). Nevertheless, he still lacked sufficient knowledge of certain parts of the earth, even as he initiated a Western desire to press outward and open further the universe of men and the mixing of different peoples. The commerce of the Greeks and Romans in the Indies “was far less extensive than ours” given the greater number of countries we know about, of which they remained ignorant, so that “we engage in commerce with all the Indian nations and even do their commerce and navigation for them.” However, the ancients “engaged in commerce with greater ease than we do.” What is the reason for this? Montesquieu hints obliquely that it has to do with a different level or degree of satisfaction. For example, we today—of Montesquieu’s time and ours—could not rest satisfied with but the commodities received from the inhabitants of the Southern Islands. And so, the trade routes to Egypt would alone be insufficient; rather, we longed for and executed passage to the Cape of Good Hope, and beyond as well. With an attention turned away from virtue to interest—from one kind of humanity to another—the world opens up, but it is far from self-evident that men find greater happiness. At any rate, commerce “wanders across the earth” (XXI.5) and the “history of luxury” is inseparable from the history of commerce (XXI.6).

If commerce came easier for the ancients when it existed, because it was more limited, it was also easier to put a stark end to it, as evidenced by the many examples Montesquieu gives of acting against the communications among peoples. Among those mentioned, the “calamities of the Carthaginians” (XXI.11) brought about by Roman conquest is a particularly important one. On one level it shows how the two logics of

Cicero stand at odds with one another—that of being clerk versus ruler over the universe—at least in the ancient world. However, he also brings to light that “the great wars between Carthage and Marseilles over fishing grounds” were followed by peace, which led to a mutual engagement in economic commerce. Both being commercial peoples, notwithstanding the interruptions through war, they managed to maintain their commercial ambitions. Their wars were due to a certain amount of mutual jealousy, and yet the most destructive war, at least for the Carthaginians, were the Punic wars, when in fact the Romans were not at all “jealous of its commerce” (XXI.11). They sought only to conquer “the whole earth” and yet engaged a practice of acting “as destroyers in order not to appear as conquerors.” The Romans destroyed to conquer and without concern for commerce—“their genius, their glory, their military education, and the form of their government drew them away from commerce” (XXI.14)—while Alexander conquered to pave the way for commerce. In short, the Roman conquerors and Alexander each saw the “whole earth,” however, they saw it differently: one for domination the other for opening it up to communication. Alexander’s success at inaugurating a revolution in commerce had long-lasting effects, whereas in a chapter entitled, “On the state of the universe after the destruction of the Romans,” Montesquieu judges that “one would have said that they [the Romans] conquered the world only to weaken it and to deliver it defenseless to the barbarians” (XXIII.23). In any case, ancient history illustrates that commerce may be both a cause of war and of peace; just as peace- and war-making may both be conducive to commerce. To the extent that Montesquieu does speak admiringly of the Romans, his greater praise is reserved for Alexander, suggesting that in practice, a certain mixture of clerking and ruling is to be preferred.

Indeed, in a chapter entitled, “How commerce in Europe penetrated barbarism” (XXI.20), Montesquieu gives an account of changing views of usury, the role and persecution of the Jews in their commercial activities, not least their invention of the “letters of exchange,” and the overall result that “Commerce was able to avoid violence and maintain itself everywhere, for the richest trader had only invisible goods, which could be sent everywhere and leave no trace anywhere.” Princes have since been forced to act more “wisely,” with less cruelty and recklessness, unless they were to pay a heavy economic price: “for it turned out that great acts of authority were so clumsy that experience itself has made known that only goodness of government brings prosperity.” Montesquieu refers to these consequences as an ongoing cure of “Machiavellianism,” insofar as councils need be more moderate, and the one-time violence of political revolutions and coups will become but “imprudences.” His insights here can be summarized by the following: “And, happily, men are in a situation such that, though their passions inspire in them the thought of being wicked, they nevertheless have an interest in not being so.” We must again take note that while men are in this “situation,” there is no guarantee that they will submit strictly to their interest.<sup>110</sup> And as we shall see when discussing Tocqueville, the common good requires that men seek more than their own, mere individual interest.

At any rate, the pursuit of national economic interest has had the political effect of increasing power, for as Montesquieu saw, the discovery of America commercially linked Europe to Asia and Africa with the result that “Europe has reached such a high degree of power that nothing in history is comparable to it.” He makes this assessment

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<sup>110</sup> For discussion of Montesquieu’s “science of interests,” and its place in modern political philosophy that attends so much more to the passions and interests than does classical political philosophy, see, Harvey Mansfield, “Self-Interest Rightly Understood,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Feb., 1995): 48-66.



on the basis of considering “the immensity of expenditures, the size of military engagements, the number of troops, and their continuous upkeep, even when they are the most useless and are only for ostentation” (XXI.21). The great wealth generated by commerce has created well-armed states, capable of fighting wars on an unprecedented scale. To have become wealthy, however, does not guarantee its maintenance, for “by the use of the exchange, wealth somehow does not belong to any state in particular and since it is so easily transferred from one country to another” (XXII.15), certain defensive and martial courses of action may follow to preserve it. Not only that, but necessity may dictate at times certain less than peaceful approaches to ensure the continuance of commerce, for if commerce has been born of conquest and war in the past, nothing guarantees against the recurrence of such means. “The business of society must always go forward,” (XXII.19), and to reaffirm this claim he reiterates it: “Business must go forward, and a state is lost if everything falls into inaction” (XXII.22).

If the “natural effect of commerce is to lead to peace,” commerce may nonetheless have its own *unnatural* effects, which are largely downplayed by Montesquieu but not absent upon further consideration. The limits to what commerce can achieve in shaping human behavior and action rest in part on the fact that the opening of the universe does not beget a political singular or uniform solution to the problem of human rule and order. In fact, an open universe may exacerbate the political problem. Just as Montesquieu advises that “[o]ne must not judge Europe as if it were a single state” (XXIII.25), it follows that one cannot examine or judge the whole world to be one, or presume its eventual unification. Notwithstanding greater universalization in an open universe, so much variety and a multitude of particulars persist, with consequences for

relations—pacific and martial, commercial, or otherwise—between the necessarily different peoples of the world in and among their respective societies. In the next section we turn to Tocqueville, who elaborates on Montesquieu’s understanding of the human heart, with greater attention to the effect the democratic revolution is having upon it, and what this means for politics and human flourishing.

#### 4. TOCQUEVILLE: THE DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION'S REACH: EQUALIZING CONDITIONS

“Between those centuries of disorders and miseries one encounters others when societies rest and when the human race seems to catch its breath. That is still, to tell the truth, only an appearance; time no more suspends its course for peoples than for men; both advance daily toward a future of which they are unaware; and when we believe them stationary, it is because their movements escape us. These are people who walk; they appear immobile to those who are running.”  
—Tocqueville, *DA*, I.2.2

“In centuries of equality the human spirit takes another turn. It readily fancies that nothing stays put. The idea of instability possesses it...for in democratic centuries, what is most in motion amid the motion of all things is the heart of man.”  
—Tocqueville *DA*, II.3.6

The previous chapters on Montesquieu have drawn out two phenomena of ambivalence. First, the human heart and its general and particular—and thus, often opposing—passions; and second, of a world becoming simultaneously more open and yet possibly less coherent, or at least less cohesive. Put otherwise, reading Montesquieu introduces one to the conflict latent in the modern liberal world between patriotism and cosmopolitanism on the one hand, and that between globalization and individualism on the other.<sup>111</sup> Tocqueville’s work, as many have noted, picks up on Montesquieu’s in a variety of ways, not least regarding our concerns here.<sup>112</sup> Equally attentive to the

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<sup>111</sup> This ambivalence of liberalism is well noted by others, as, for example, Lawler remarks: “Political liberalism seems to point in two directions, both toward the proud existence of self-government or rule and toward self-forgetfulness in political devotion.” Peter Lawler, *The Restless Mind* (Lanham: Roman & Littlefield, 1993), 3. In other words, liberalism points—paradoxically and simultaneously—towards individualism and collectivism. One might also suggest that liberalism points towards the truth of one’s individuality as well as the truth of human commonness, or unity. More directly still, it is the case that today, men are individuals, citizens, and members of humanity, and these three truths are not altogether reconcilable. As Lamberti writes, “Better than anyone else, Tocqueville posed the central problem to modern political philosophy: how to respect the individual while preserving the citizen.” Jean-Claude Lamberti, *Tocqueville and the Two Democracies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 188.

<sup>112</sup> Some examples of interpretations suggesting that Tocqueville closely follows Montesquieu, include, Melvin Richter, “The Uses of Theory: Tocqueville’s Adaptation of Montesquieu,” in *Essays in Theory and History*, ed. Melvin Richter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 74-102; Raymond Aron, “Tocqueville,” in *Main Currents in Sociological Thought: Volume One* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2008), 237-302. Ceaser argues that “traditional political science, which lasted for some twenty-three centuries, has a long and distinguished list of practitioners,” and, he argues, “is best represented in the

movements of the human heart, his discussion situates its ambivalent dynamism within a world of growing equality, arguably well beyond what Montesquieu might even have imagined. And so far as an open, commercial world of equal individuals goes, Tocqueville is especially impressive when it comes to the paradox of how a growing sense of similarity among men can result in an increased degree of isolation from society, or from the public good, simultaneously inducing greater dependence upon the state and thereby increasing the possibility of despotism. His observations in and of America provided him with a sense of what to “hope or fear” with the onset of the “social revolution” that was increasingly equalizing conditions, and out of which he sought to understand “the direction that democracy” may or may not take across the political world (Intro., 13).<sup>113</sup> His work offers a window on both how to think about our political

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works of Aristotle, Montesquieu, and Tocqueville,” for they all “focus the study of politics on a direct, common-sense encounter with what they hold to be politically most important: the form of government or regime under which one lives.” James Ceaser, *Liberal Democracy and Political Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 41. For a similar view, see Raymond Aron, who likewise discusses Tocqueville in comparison to Montesquieu and Aristotle, writing, “In the history of sociology, Tocqueville remains the closest to classical philosophy, as interpreted by Prof. Leo Strauss.” Thus, Tocqueville does not refrain from making judgments while describing, but just as with the aforementioned predecessors, he demonstrates that “a description cannot be faithful unless it includes those judgments intrinsically related to the description”—all this particularly in the context of political regimes. Aron, *Main Currents*, 262ff. In contrast, Hennis argues, “Montesquieu does not supply the key to an understanding of Tocqueville, and that to view him within this tradition leads to a failure to understand his modernity. Tocqueville’s actual teacher,” he writes, “if one is to be ascribed to him, is Rousseau.” However, he comes closer to agreeing with Ceaser, for example, in a broad sense, when he later writes: “As with everyone before him, the knowledge [Tocqueville] seeks in this field [of *science politique*] is sought not for its own sake but for the sake of correct action,” adding in a footnote: “The purpose of political knowledge is not changed in Machiavelli or Hobbes, either. They only radicalize it.” Ultimately, “Montesquieu may have been Tocqueville’s mentor as far as the form or the analytic ordering of the subjects is concerned,” however, given the changed political situation from Montesquieu’s day to that of Tocqueville, “Rousseau is Tocqueville’s real teacher when it comes to substance; indeed, the substance which is at issue: human freedom.” Wilhelm Hennis, “In Search of the ‘New Science of Politics,’ in *Interpreting Tocqueville’s Democracy in America*, ed. Ken Masugi (Savage: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991), 27-62. All this without speaking of the third influence of import, namely, Pascal. On this, see, Peter Augustine Lawler, *The Restless Mind*; and, Paul Rahe, *Soft Despotism, Democracy’s Drift* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 169-70 *et passim*.

<sup>113</sup> All references to *Democracy in America* will be to volume, part, chapter, and page number (in the Mansfield and Withrop edition) as follows: I.1.1, 1, with the exception of references to the Introduction that will be simply by page number.

situation and what might be done to help men live satisfying and free lives under present conditions.

As democracy has gone global, and insofar as globalization and democracy are intimately related phenomena, one commentator is correct in suggesting the following: “The central questions raised by Tocqueville in his studies of America, France, and other European countries are just as crucial for understanding the course of the Global Democratic Revolution taking place in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.”<sup>114</sup> Indeed, Tocqueville famously describes the “development of equality of conditions” in striking terms. He says it is something like “a providential fact,” and in this sense, he speaks of it having one of the “principal characteristics” of just such a fact, namely, it is “universal.” No isolated or incidental phenomenon, it is furthermore, according to Tocqueville, “enduring,” insofar as it is beyond the power of human beings to counter it outright; it may be directed, but not stopped. Thus, it is a fact that is both in and of history, as well something that transcends history—it is a fact that could not be more general, for it applies at least in principle to all men in all places. And so, “all events, like all men, serve its development” (Intro., 6). It is, however, something that likewise has its source in the human heart, as Tocqueville describes the passion for equality that exists in at least two opposing forms. The first is “a manly and legitimate

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<sup>114</sup> Sheldon Gellar, “Tocquevillian Analytics and the Global Democratic Revolution,” in *Conversations with Tocqueville: The Global Democratic Revolution in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Aurelian Craiutu and Sheldon Gellar (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 33-54. McWilliams notes that while Tocqueville’s writing “seems to rely on the existence of borders between states” he otherwise “draws attention to the impermanence and even impotence of political borders in the modern world.” *Democracy in America*, she argues, serves as witness to the “the spectacle of a world where long-standing political borders, especially at the international level, are being crossed and compromised at a furious rate.” And it is the phenomenon of democratization that is the “the greatest political development of the modern age,” largely because it itself transcends such borders. McWilliams suggests that Tocqueville’s political science can be seen as directed at “the challenge of preserving political liberty in a world of increasingly evident global scale.” Susan McWilliams, “Tocqueville and the Unsettled Global Village,” in *Tocqueville and the Frontiers of Democracy*, ed. Ewa Atanassow & Richard Boyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 153-77.

passion for equality that incites men to want all to be strong and esteemed.” The second he labels “a depraved taste for equality in the human heart that brings the weak to want to draw the strong to their level and reduces men to preferring equality in servitude to inequality in freedom” (I.1.3, 52). People in the age of democracy do not naturally or inevitably scorn freedom. Tocqueville says they have a taste for this too; however, “freedom is not the principal and continuous object of their desire; what they love with an eternal love is equality...nothing can satisfy them without equality, and they would sooner consent to perish than to lose it.” Amidst the flux and movement of the human heart today, its apparently sole continuous and even natural desire is for equality. Of course, with such equality—drawn from a manly or from a depraved taste for that matter—come certain difficulties and problems. Tocqueville examines the logic of equality as it is unfolding historically and as it continues to operate in the human heart.

Beginning as he does from this universal fact, Tocqueville engages the particular manifestations and possibilities of social and political equality, in their positive and negative variations, in an attempt to show how men can cultivate a healthy political existence in light of this enduring and universal phenomenon. For equality of conditions is what he refers to as “the generative fact,” from which he says in America “each particular fact seemed to issue” (Intro., 3). To which he adds much later that “in the midst of the apparent diversity of human things, it is not impossible to find a few generative facts from which all the others flow” (I.2.10, 315). Just how few is unclear, but not unlike Montesquieu, Tocqueville finds that the diversity of human things can be made intelligible, and this is especially true by consciously balancing general and particular facts, epistemologically and otherwise.

In the penultimate chapter of the first volume, Tocqueville states explicitly that any reader thinking his aim was “to propose Anglo-American laws and mores for imitation by all peoples who have a democratic social state would have committed a great error,” for the general situation of democracy requires different and particular laws and mores. Stated more philosophically, such an error would have meant becoming “attached to the form, [and] abandoning the very substance” of Tocqueville’s thought (I.2.9, 302). Just as the general and particular require balance, so too must form and substance each be properly attended to without undue attachment to one over the other. Whatever else his reservations about his own work, Tocqueville is “sure of sincerely having the desire” to succeed in making known what he saw, which is to say that he never “knowingly succumbed to the need to adapt facts to ideas instead of submitting ideas to facts” (Intro., 13-14).<sup>115</sup> For as he states elsewhere, “[t]here is nothing more unproductive for the human mind than an abstract idea. I therefore hurry to run toward the facts” (II.3.18, 590). And so Tocqueville’s mind remains largely above the “blind instincts” and “invincible habits” at either end of the “opposing penchants of the [democratic and aristocratic] intellects[s]” that otherwise lead men astray to “direct actions despite particular facts” (II.4.2, 641). In this and the following chapter we discuss Tocqueville’s insights—some of the ordered and sincere combination of facts and ideas—on these fronts, so as to illustrate his continued relevance as a guide for our own political world today, with its aspirant universalism.

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<sup>115</sup> Relatedly, Tocqueville provides one definition of “genius” as being able “to fit actions to facts.” Tocqueville, *Recollections*, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J.P. Mayer & A.P. Kerr (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1970), 43.

## Tocqueville's Art and Science

Just as Tocqueville himself limned in his “Speech Given to the Annual Public Meeting of the Academy of Moral and Political Science” on April 3, 1952, there are “two parts of politics that must not be confused, one fixed and the other in motion.” The first is what he refers to as “the general and permanent condition of humanity” and can be properly examined by science, founded as it is “on the very nature of man, on his interests, on his faculties, on his needs as revealed by philosophy and history, on his instincts, which change their objects according to the times without changing their nature, and which are as immortal as his race.” Tocqueville appropriately calls the second “the art of government,” which consists of “a practical and militant politics that struggles against the difficulties of each day, adapting to the variety of incidents, providing for the passing needs of the moment, and calling to its aid the ephemeral passions of contemporaries.”<sup>116</sup> There is an existent, if not always apparent, relation between these two aspects of politics—science and art, or theory and practice—and it is something of an open question regarding the extent that this relationship itself can, or is subject to, change.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Tocqueville's Speech is available in, *Alexis de Tocqueville and the Art of Democratic Statesmanship*, eds. Brian Danoff and L. Joseph Hebert, Jr. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 17-30.

<sup>117</sup> For discussion of Tocqueville's appreciation of the tensions between theory and practice, or intellectualism and statesmanship, see, Richard Boyd and Conor Williams, “Intellectuals and Statesmanship? Tocqueville, Oakshott, and the Distinction between Theoretical and Practical Knowledge,” in *Alexis de Tocqueville and the Art of Democratic Statesmanship*, 117-36. Boyd and Williams demonstrate that for Tocqueville, “it is a dangerous fallacy to think that theory can ever take the place of practice,” and yet that “an epistemological skepticism about the limits of theoretical knowledge need not culminate in an anti-democratic political disposition. Cf. James W. Ceaser, “Political Science, Political Culture, and the Role of the Intellectual,” in *Interpreting Tocqueville's Democracy in America*, ed. Ken Masugi (Savage: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1991), 287-325. Ceaser convincingly shows how Tocqueville's work calls for “a science of politics to combat the potential hazards of the easy ideas produced by literary writers about politics.” In connecting political culture and political thought as he does, illustrating the mutual influence of each, Tocqueville's new science “points to the need to transcend the artificial modern division between political theory and empirical political science.” Ceaser argues that following Tocqueville leads one to the view that political culture should be understood with reference to



Notable in Tocqueville's own distinction is the common fact of human "needs" and the connection between "instincts" and "passions," insofar as these are, curiously, both permanent and changing—that some are temporary and some eternal (some of the latter beyond the obvious ones, say, of basic sustenance and the like, but being more political, as it were). The significance of what Tocqueville calls the "great democratic revolution" and thus the emergent "age of democracy" is central to all his thinking, not least because it is something of a cause, or carrier of change, in the instincts, passions, and the needs of men; something of a revolution in the hearts and minds of men has taken place. However, this revolution is true to its own etymological ambivalence: it consists of a revolving as well as of a renovating, so to speak. It brings with it both continuity and change. It is less that new passions or needs are born, than that some are heightened while others are dampened, both for better and for worse. Therefore, one must read Tocqueville's statement in *Democracy in America* calling for a "new political science...for a world altogether new" [ "*Il faut une science politique nouvelle à un monde tout nouveau*" ] with some qualification—his *altogether* here is an exaggeration, or something of a rhetorical cue applied to ask readers to consider precisely the problem of novelty and permanence, as well as of motion and fixity, in human and political affairs.<sup>118</sup>

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the philosophic ideas that form the broader perspectives governing peoples' views and opinions. Ultimately, the maintenance of liberty requires knowing and cultivating the requisite ideas and perspectives that generate in people both the means and will toward a life of freedom.

<sup>118</sup> Hennis reads this statement, placed as it is "at a dramatic point in this highly dramatic introduction," to be "scarcely...understood as anything but an indication of the ambition of its highly ambitious author," thereby suggesting that we ought to read Tocqueville's book and oeuvre as a whole as a possible "answer to this need." He concludes by writing that Tocqueville's "actual theme, his only theme" is: "How can we prevent the degradation of souls in an age of equality which has been willed by destiny?" Most important for this political science is that "man's sense for the higher things be preserved and that his sensitivity to greatness be prevented from falling asleep." Hennis, "In Search of the 'New Science of Politics.'" If this is the case, the world may have changed, but hardly *altogether*, insofar as these aims are not unlike those of classical political philosophy, circumstantial differences aside. Mansfield and Winthrop likewise offer a focused discussion of this striking statement calling for a new political science, arguing there is "good reason" to think it can be found in his book and writings on the whole, but that "he left it implicit and

The proclaimed need for a new science should be considered in light of the fact that he “undertook to see, not differently, but further than the parties,” and at least two such parties hereby referred to are those with two opposing views on the democratic revolution itself: “A great democratic revolution is taking place among us: all see it, but all do not judge it in the same manner. Some consider it a new thing, and taking it for an accident, they still hope to be able to stop it; whereas others judge it irresistible because to them it seems the most continuous, the oldest, and the most permanent fact known in history” (Intro., 3).<sup>119</sup> Tocqueville finds some amount of truth in both views, insofar as he traces

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scattered rather than explain it systematically, also for good reason.” Ultimately, they claim that modern political science, preoccupied as it has been—since Hobbes—with solving the problem of legitimacy so as to bring an end to heated conflict has failed, and in the meantime as it has avoided discussing the state or health of human souls, souls have been degraded. Thus, “The modern theorists believed they could have legitimacy without concern for souls; Tocqueville disagrees.” Harvey C. Mansfield Jr. and Delba Winthrop, “Tocqueville’s New Political Science,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Tocqueville*, ed., Cheryl Welch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 81-107. With the discussion in note 112, *supra* in mind, Kraynak argues that Tocqueville’s “adaption of classical regime analysis to fit the phenomena of democratic sovereignty and the limited constitution is the centerpiece of the new science.” Robert P. Kraynak, “Tocqueville’s constitutionalism,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 81, No.4 (Dec., 1987): 1175-95. Goldhammer situates Tocqueville in a Pascalian milieu where the heart and mind are divided, and while Tocqueville has “nothing but the highest respect for reason” (or science), he has “doubts about the guidance that reason can offer man,” so that instinct (or art) is a necessary supplement. Ideas and insight may not only fail to guide men, but may lead him down dangerous pathways. Therefore, Goldhammer argues that the new political science “was intended to direct the new political art, whose purpose was to shape man’s instincts, for when the light of reason fails and circumstances are unprecedented, instinct is all man possesses to set himself on the right course.” The extent to which instincts are malleable, and what degree of continuity they bear across time, is a complex problem in Tocqueville. “As often as not, instinct occupies a middle position: it is like love, at once circumstantial and durable.” Thus, “the word instinct conjures up for Tocqueville the Pascalian ambiguity, uncertainty, and doubleness of man’s situation. Reason by itself is too feeble and instrument to guide him in life’s storms. He must use reason whenever he can, but, knowing in advance that it may fail him in crucial moments, he must live his life and constitute his society in such a way as to cultivate those instincts most likely to save him when reason fails.” Arthur Goldhammer, “Translating Tocqueville: Constraints of Classicism,” *The Cambridge Companion to Tocqueville*, 153-55, 158-59. On the matter of continuity and change in Tocqueville, see, Pierre Manent, “Tocqueville, Political Philosopher,” *Ibid.*, 108-20, who writes: “In the constant change of all things human, one thing does not change: democracy as ‘democratic revolution,’ as equalization of conditions, which is ‘the oldest, most continuous, most permanent fact known to history.’ The unchanging fact is change of a certain type. What is permanent is the way in which things change and the direction in which they move.”

<sup>119</sup> His references to two parties in Europe, or to “a struggle between two contrary principles” in Europe, is a recurring feature. Cf. I.1.5, 187ff. Likewise, he speaks of two opinions “as old as the world, and one finds them over and over in different forms and reclothed with diverse names in all free societies. One opinion wanted to restrict popular power, the other to extend it indefinitely.” I.2.2, 167. Finally, consider the following powerful statement: “In this century, when the destinies of the Christian world appear to be

the revolution's roots well back beyond his own day, noting certain consistencies of human character over the ages; just as he draws sometimes startling distinctions between democratic and aristocratic ages, peoples, and souls. He has sought the moderate ground that is attached to neither extreme, as he indicates in the "Notice" to the second volume: "Placed in the midst of the contradictory opinions that divide us, I have tried for the moment to destroy the favorable sympathies or contradictory instincts that each of these opinions inspires in my heart" (400). Thus he avoids flattering either of the "great parties" or any of the "little factions" that hold ideologically to radical or reactionary views, seeking to further the democratic revolution or restore the old aristocracy. Ultimately, he hints at an at least hidden bond between things democratic and aristocratic, insofar as they can even be compared, while he suggests that certain aspects of the latter are necessary to ennoble and properly sustain the former.<sup>120</sup> After all, "however new and unexpected contemporaries may find the particular events of any age, including our own, they are always part of the age-old history of humanity."<sup>121</sup> One can indeed learn from the old world, just as one might learn from and apply some of the old science and art, as well. In fact, in his other major work, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, Tocqueville stresses just how much the revolutionaries failed "to put an abyss between what they had been and what they wished to become" in their great effort "to disassociate themselves

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unresolved, some hasten to attach democracy as an enemy power while it is still getting larger; others already adore it as a new god that issue from nothingness; but both know the object of their hatred or their desire only imperfectly; they do combat in the shadows and strike only haphazardly." I.2.6, 234. In contrast, Tocqueville seeks to approximate perfect knowledge of democracy, without overwhelmingly hating or desiring it; hence what might be called his objectivity.

<sup>120</sup> While famously saying at the end of *Democracy* that democracy and aristocracy are fundamentally incommensurable, Zetterbaum is correct in arguing that Tocqueville "does in fact subject them to common standards, standards that are trans-historical, that transcend the limitations of any particular social or political condition." Marvin Zetterbaum, *Tocqueville and the Problem of Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), 23, 34-5.

<sup>121</sup> *Recollections*, 71. Interestingly, the editors here add in a footnote that the following words were marked for omission in the manuscript: "For what we call new facts are most often only forgotten ones." The alleged omission was due to his further marginalia: "Has not this been said by others?"

from their past.” If the *Democracy* goes to great lengths to highlight novelty, the *Old Regime* highlights how much of the past remains, and how “[u]nintentionally” the revolutionaries used the debris of the old regime to construct the framework of their new society.”<sup>122</sup>

At any rate, as we will see, for Tocqueville, the democratic comes to represent the general while the aristocratic the particular, in terms of passions, ideas, and the human spirit at large. On one level, it is likewise possible to relate the aristocratic with art and the democratic with science, albeit not exclusively, but insofar as the former heightens art, or the poetry of existence, while the latter emphasizes the rational or science of life. The democratic spirit tends to extend reason in the extreme, to the highest level of generality, so that the process of rationalization becomes increasingly emptied of content; it skirts over particular differences, divisions, and distinctions, holding the imagination’s attraction to (and exaggeration of) curious details at bay. What is science, on a most basic level, other than the search for universal and unchanging laws, even to the contempt of exceptions? The aristocratic spirit, in its heightened manifestations, places an overemphasis on imagination, with an acute attention to particularities, sometimes at the expense of broader general truths or patterns that may weave a rational thread through the many details. Nevertheless, both the general and the particular, just as both art and science, participate, as it were, in humanity. That is to say, both are means of expressing and representing humanity. Not to mention, one speaks of humanity in general as well as of its particular manifestations, and both artistic and scientific inclinations are fundamentally human. Thus, for all their differences, and in consideration of all that

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<sup>122</sup> Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, trans. Alan S. Kahan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 83.

separates them, the aristocratic and democratic spirits have a common bond as well, rooted, so to speak, in the very nature of man.

Interested as he is in man simply, Tocqueville nevertheless demonstrates that man is always politically situated in some way: man's heart and mind take on a particular form, given the regime under which he lives, and so under particular conditions man is more or less democratic or aristocratic.<sup>123</sup> Stated differently, for all that the world has changed—entering as it has the democratic age—some things remain unchanged. The human condition has been and is a *political* condition, despite the fact that the range of possible regimes may have changed, and that the human expressions of the heart and mind vary over time.<sup>124</sup> While his political science may require different means to achieve its objectives, it remains chiefly concerned with raising and representing what is best in humanity. In his own words: “Only the goal toward which the human race should always be tending is unmoving; the means of getting it there vary constantly” (II.2.15, 518).<sup>125</sup> That said, he likewise makes clear that “there is nothing in the world but patriotism or religion that can make the universality of citizens advance for long toward the same goal” (I.1.5, 89). The political or the theological alone have the power to hold man's collective attention for sufficient time to direct him towards action, but just as God or the gods must take on some form or be mediated by man in some particular way, so too must the political take a specific body in aspiring towards any given goal. Such

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<sup>123</sup> That is not to say that man is simply reducible to a political type, for as has been convincingly argued, “Tocqueville is no partisan of the futile effort to reduce modern or extremely restless individuals to citizens, an effort which also opposes man's true greatness. Because the American cannot and should not be simply citizens, they must also be religious. They have longing which they know, at least sometimes, elude political and technological satisfaction. Their apolitical greatness lies in those longings, which point beyond the limitations of this world to a greatness, as Pascal says, beyond human experience.” Lawler, *The Restless Mind*, 9.

<sup>124</sup> Manent, “Tocqueville, Political Philosopher,” *The Cambridge Companion to Tocqueville*, 114ff.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. “For it is true that, although humanity is always the same, people's outlooks and the incidents that make history vary constantly.” *Recollections*, 37.

embodiment, and the variety of mediating forms, inevitably results in separations—that is, among the world’s peoples; hence the multiplicity of collectivities. The broad task of political science and art within such collectivities, according to Tocqueville, is establishing and maintaining a combination of liberty and dignity—the conditions and qualities to which humanity ought to aspire, and seeks to achieve in a variety of ways.<sup>126</sup> As this was Tocqueville’s goal in light of the democratic revolution, so it need be ours in an apparently globalizing world. The preservation of liberty and dignity requires applying the art and science of politics in a way that moderates certain universalizing tendencies, consisting as it must in “holding men together...as a body.”<sup>127</sup> Doing so rests upon being able to properly see both the surface and depth of things human and political.

### **From “External Configurations” to “Internal State of Soul”**

Chapter One of Part 1 of the First Volume of *Democracy in America* opens with discussion of North America’s “external configuration,” which, Tocqueville writes, “presents general features that are easy to discern at first glance” (1.1.1, 19). This statement serves not only as entry into his book, but as itself a first glance at his manner of analysis—that is, his *methodos*.<sup>128</sup> Starting from the outside, with the general, and

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<sup>126</sup> In *Recollections* he states emphatically that in politics he “had no cause to defend except freedom and human dignity” (105). In *Democracy*, Tocqueville says that the end of politics consists of “independence and dignity” (II.4.7, 666), and “freedom and human greatness” (II.4.7, 670). For discussion of these aims, and by way of contrast with Aristotle, see, Mansfield and Winthrop, “Tocqueville’s New Political Science,” esp. 104 (note 7). If Aristotle aims at virtue, Tocqueville aims for greatness, and the latter is not, for Tocqueville, necessarily identical with virtue. Both seek to raise man upward, or encourage what is higher, and the question to ask is whether and to what extent in fact the differences in their respective political sciences rest upon differences in the world—that is, just how new is the world; if not altogether, still sufficiently to necessitate a change in the very substance of political science, rather than simply its form?

<sup>127</sup> *Recollections*, 82.

<sup>128</sup> Kaledin, interestingly, reads this opening discussion of America’s geography and terrain as an objective as well as a subjective landscape upon which Tocqueville’s “own inner drama was played out and where

what appears as obvious, he moves inward, to what is more difficult to discern at first glance—to what he initially refers to as the “internal state of soul” (I.1.1, 24). Doing so requires an additional glance, or multiple glances, which then in turn complicate what was originally easily discernible. It is a matter of examining parts, or the internal aspects of what otherwise appears whole. Additionally, as Tocqueville elsewhere writes: “All men placed at the same point of view do not envision the same objects in the same manner. This is so with greater reason when the point of view is different” (I.2.10, 362). This is true for democracy itself, which, despite being “founded on an idea so simple and natural, nevertheless always supposes the existence of a very civilized and very learned society.” A distant and first glance reveals something different from a second and closer one: “At first one would believe [democracy] to be contemporaneous with the first ages of the world; looking at it closely, one easily discovers that it could only have come last” (I.2.5, 199). Thus, Tocqueville sorts through the opinions of others, as well deeply considering what he himself has seen. Consequently, he says he encounters in America “something more than an immense and complete democracy,” and therefore “the peoples who inhabit the New World can be envisaged from more than one point of view” (I.2.10, 302). In short, all general features are complicated by the particular details, and this

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his social and political imagination found fullest scope.” The “dark forests of America” that Tocqueville writes of became a recurring metaphor for his own “personal struggle against skepticism and doubt” and the increasing isolation he felt from his own people and age. The tension between doubt and belief, Kaledin highlights, is at the heart of the concluding chapter of *Democracy*, just as it is central to the opening one: “The unresolved struggle between mind and value, intellect and faith at the heart of *Democracy in America* is Tocqueville himself.” Arthur Kaledin, *Tocqueville and His Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 7, 63-82, 172-3, *et passim*. While there is some merit to Kaledin’s reading, he is often prone to over-psychologizing Tocqueville’s work when looking for the “journey within the journey” to America, and so the “other book within *Democracy in America*” that he reads as “a subliminal epic of self-exploration in which Tocqueville ranges through his own feelings and experiences in quest of his true self, to finally locate himself in history.”

complication—this tension—is inescapable.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, Tocqueville is very conscious of it, trying as he ever does, to balance between over-generalization and - particularization.<sup>130</sup> By the end of the first volume, after having taken so many objects or parts into consideration, from various perspectives, he then “gather[s] all of them under a single point of view,” which provides a concluding discussing that is “less detailed, but surer,” so that he may “perceive each object less distinctly” but “embrace the general facts with more certainty” (I.2.10, 391). Tocqueville’s regard ever strives to grasp “the form” of objects so as to “conceive a clear idea of the whole,” while not neglecting the parts that constitute the sum, or the many details that constitute human existence. So much may be considered part of his moderation—one of his chief intellectual virtues.

His endeavor to tread a moderate line in this regard is less surprising given that, first, he often thinks in terms of dichotomies (which are “easy to discern at first glance,” but again, are later complicated), and second, that one of his most important conceptual dichotomies—the democratic and aristocratic—contain, or represent, things general and

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<sup>129</sup> Later, when speaking about American executive power, he makes a comparison between the American president and the king of a constitutional monarchy in Europe, prefacing this discussion by saying, “In this comparison I shall not be much attached to external signs of power; they deceive the eye of the observer more than guide it.” He is aware of when the surface, or external, distracts or obfuscates, and must therefore be circumvented or passed through quickly, rather than when it must slowly be pierced and waded through towards the depths, or the internal. As he writes a few lines later, “One must therefore leave the surface and penetrate further.” *DA* I.1.8, 117-18. He is nothing if not careful in his attention to such matters, and the language is anything but incidental. After all, “The human mind invents things more easily than words: hence comes the use of so many improper terms and incomplete expressions.” *DA* I.1.8, 148. And finally, one finds a further analogy when he speaks—not without playfulness—about the freedom of the press and its relation to expression versus thought: “Expression is the exterior form and, if I can express myself so, the body of thought, but it is not thought itself.” *DA* I.2.3, 173. His expression about expression makes one question the true spirit of the body of his thought; or, again, leads one to consider the exterior in light of the interior, and vice versa.

<sup>130</sup> Commentators repeatedly speak of how self-conscious a writer he is. See, for example, Schleifer, who speaks of his “intense self-awareness as a writer.” James T. Schleifer, “Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* Reconsidered,” *The Cambridge Companion to Tocqueville*, 128; Zetterbaum says “Tocqueville writes with full consciousness of the requirements of political practice; his first consideration is always the effect his thought will have on society,” and so he is “a statesman writing for statesmen.” On this basis Zetterbaum convincingly unfolds the “salutary myths” that Tocqueville introduces, and resolves certain paradoxes between his public and private writings. Zetterbaum, *Tocqueville and the Problem of Democracy*, 19-20ff.



particular. Just as Tocqueville's thought can only be properly understood through his manner of comparison, and thereby thinking in and through both terms of any pair, so too must we follow his manner of juxtaposing both general and particular categorizations.<sup>131</sup> In so doing, we shall additionally come to understand how he advises mixing or balancing the general and particular—ideationally or theoretically, as well as politically, and practically.<sup>132</sup> It is his contention that democracy, as the rule of the majority, can become tyrannically homogeneous, insofar as “democratic republics in our day have rendered [violence] just as intellectual as the human will that it wants to constrain” (I.2.7, 244). Left to itself, the majority can become despotic, setting itself and its ideas and interests as the general—or sole—standard, so that any particular opposition finds no place, or is otherwise absorbed.

Whereas in the past, an absolute and despotic government “struck the body crudely, so as to reach the soul; and the soul, escaping from those blows, rose gloriously above it,” in democratic republics, the tyranny proceeds otherwise: “it leaves the body and goes straight for the soul. The master no longer says to it: You shall think as I do or

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<sup>131</sup> Consider his oft-quoted statement: “the mind becomes clear only by comparison”; Cf. Aron, who considers him a comparative sociologist of the highest degree... (184-85). As Schleifer—who has spent a great deal of time perusing Tocqueville's notes, drafts, and the like, while translating his work, and thereby reflecting continually on matters of style, method, and language—writes: “Tocqueville also commonly wrote in parallel structures, in matched phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. This feature reflects another important intellectual trait. He tended to think in pairs, and especially in contrasting pairs, or pairs in tension. This attention to contrasting pairs is, of course, related to one of Tocqueville's favorite techniques: comparison and contrast.” Schleifer, “Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* Reconsidered,” 122-23.

<sup>132</sup> Schleifer argues that his belief in “harmony meant pairs in equilibrium”—that is, he sought and advocated a certain balance in thought and advocated the same in deed, in terms of the various comparative categories and objects he juxtaposed. Ibid., 123. Manent concludes that Tocqueville is precisely a philosopher for the very reason that he institutes “the confrontation between ‘aristocracy’ and ‘democracy’” and so declares “that the debate between these two forms of humanity—between justice and grandeur—cannot be resolved,” thereby reopening “the question that our dogmatic passion declared to have been settled in advance.” Manent, “Tocqueville, Political Philosopher,” 120. Tocqueville's philosophical depth rests in his ability to see that there are timeless tensions, and that one state of soul (or even one kind of state, or regime, that fosters certain types of soul) can only be considered in full in the light of other such states and souls—no single manifestation of human or political life exhausts the range of possibilities, even while the range is well less than unlimited.

you shall die; he says: You are free not to think as I do; your life, your goods, everything remains to you; but from this day on, you are a stranger to us... You shall remain among men, but shall lose your rights of humanity... Go in peace, I leave you your life, but I leave it to you worse than death.” Today’s experience of political correctness—the alleged correcting and abolition of certain differences and distinctions—or the aspirant correction of politics by altogether transcending the political, would be unsurprising from Tocqueville’s perspective. The intellectual equalization and leveling to which democracy is prone—that is, its tendency to “extreme equality,” and to universal similitude, in areas not only of the body, but of the soul—is dangerous to liberty. In the extreme, the majority that comes to be a shapeless mass or a generalized group void of particular and contrary voices culminates in the “perpetual adoration of itself” (I.2.7, 245). Such self-adoration is the only act of will, the only idea that remains, in souls that have submitted to the notion of the most generalized right.

An important part of his new political science is the task of countering such tendencies, albeit without being reactionary in the opposite regard; without seeking to revert to something other than will of the majority, or placing the “social power” elsewhere than in the people. Key to keeping the general interest of the majority from becoming omnipotent is the cultivation and maintenance of opposing and particular interests and ideas. Thus, in the age of democracy, Tocqueville seeks to “keep open aristocratic possibilities,” not out of any partisanship to class, or the past, but to liberty and dignity.<sup>133</sup> After all, as he writes in his *Recollections*: “in matters of social constitution the field of possibilities is much wider than people living within each society

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<sup>133</sup> Lawler, *Restless Mind*, 21 *et passim*.

imagine.”<sup>134</sup> It may be difficult for men in the age of equality to see beyond the steady equalization of conditions, or to view alternate results and forms of equality, but not impossible if properly considered. Some have therefore spoken of Tocqueville’s “aristocratic liberalism,” and of his defense of “the aristocratic sources of liberty.”<sup>135</sup> Not without profundity and insight, Tocqueville’s liberalism has been referred to as “liberalism with soul.”<sup>136</sup>

While his concern includes the soul, Tocqueville’s initial attention to “external configurations” follows the Montesquieuan approach that likewise recognizes the importance of things bodily, and the concrete details and objects in and of human life. Just as Montesquieu makes apparent that any and every spirit requires manifestation through some kind of body or form, so too does Tocqueville emphasize this fact.<sup>137</sup> The “spirit of liberty,” for example, only exists in a delineated space, through the actions of

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<sup>134</sup> *Recollections*, 76.

<sup>135</sup> Arther Kaledin devotes a chapter to Tocqueville’s “Aristocratic Liberalism,” in *Aristocratic Liberalism: The Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burckhardt, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), see esp. 137-47.

<sup>136</sup> Mansfield and Winthrop, “Tocqueville’s New Political Science,” 84, in the context of how Tocqueville’s new political science is concerned with the soul, and is therefore an immersion in practice rather than an endeavor at formulating and deriving principles; for this reason he is so devoted to studying, bolstering, and properly cultivating pride. “He prefers liberalism in practice to liberalism in theory because liberalism in practice is liberalism with soul.”

<sup>137</sup> In one instance Tocqueville speaks of societies as being “like organized bodies,” which “follow certain fixed rules in their formation from which they cannot deviate. They are composed of certain elements that one finds everywhere and at all times” (I.2.5, 200). If initially striking in its rigidity, the statement is clarified—its “elements” come to light—as being a division of people into “three classes,” namely the rich, those who are not rich but “live amidst ease in all things” (and so something like what we refer to today as the middle class), and finally those without property who “live particularly by the work that the first two furnish them.” To this he adds: “you cannot fix it so that these categories do not exist.” The law of numbers in politics is inescapable. One may read this as a modification of Aristotle’s discussion of the few and the many and their typical arguments in politics, with the added difference that Tocqueville speaks of each class having “certain instincts that are their own” when it comes to handling issues of a state’s finances. Since the proportions vary (as he illustrates regarding America, England, and France), and so do the consequences of universal suffrage, the fact is that the ruling of the many need not *necessarily* be the rule of the poor, for in America, “the great majority of citizens are possessors,” which puts it in a much more “favorable” situation than the France of his day.

individuals, or even in a particular text.<sup>138</sup> And indeed, Tocqueville's discussion of the external configurations of America is immediately followed by—and thereby complicated by—his well-known discussion of “the point of departure” of the Americans (I.1.2, 27-45). Drawing a parallel between a single human life and the life of nations, he writes: “The man is so to speak a whole in the swaddling clothes of his cradle,” to which is added: “Peoples always feel [the effects of] their origins. The circumstances that accompanied their birth and served to develop them influence the entire course of the rest of their lives” (I.1.2, 28). There is much to the word “circumstances” here, for what could be more localized than the birth of a particular person or peoples? No birth occurs more than once, nor does it happen in more than one place. And yet few things can be properly understood strictly in light of their birth time and place. So much is suggested by the genetic fallacy, which is one Tocqueville commits by his use of a single—*the*—point of departure, as well as refutes by writing more than a singular history along a linear trajectory; the general truth of the point of departure is further complicated by additional particular details. If indeed the chapter on the point of departure is “the key almost to the whole work” (I.1.2, 29), it is a key that *almost* opens the door, but nonetheless requires effort from extraneous sources, and so it may be said to open a door to further doors and doorways.<sup>139</sup> At any rate, the spiritual circumstances Tocqueville elaborates here fall under the title of Puritanism, which is by no means a simple concept: as the point of departure it has many parts.

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<sup>138</sup> Tocqueville very succinctly defines what he means by “a spirit” in one passage as a sum of common habits (I.2.3, 177). Common habits are, needless to say, practiced, and to be so held in common, must have some form of manifestation (even as the expression, to *hold* in common suggests).

<sup>139</sup> After all, in *Recollections* he writes that he “hate[s] all those absolute systems that make all the events of history depend on great first causes linked together by the chain of fate and thus succeed, so to speak, in banishing me from the history of the human race.” He goes on to stress the importance of “chance” and “accident” and “the concatenation of secondary causes,” as well as the various facts that are otherwise “inexplicable” (62).

Puritanism, Tocqueville writes, “was not only a religious doctrine” but “also blended at several points with the most absolute democratic and republican theories.”<sup>140</sup> Even as the first Americans wanted to make “*an idea* triumph,” in studying their documents and sources, “one seems to breathe in an air of antiquity and a sort of biblical perfume” (I.1.2, 32-3). Such imagery requires pause, for not only is it an open, even contestable, question as to whether ancient and Biblical ideas are wholly reconcilable under a single idea, but air, simply speaking, does not have the same weight or quality as perfume.<sup>141</sup> Perhaps Tocqueville only uses “antiquity” here in its more rudimentary sense of old (rather than “Greek” or “Roman”), for what he himself emphasizes is the “conviction” animating the writer, which in turn “elevates his language.” The Puritans, based on a reading of their writings—in this case, the writing of Nathaniel Morton, an early historian of New England—give one perusing such works the impression that they did not simply set out as “a small troop of adventurers going to seek fortune beyond the seas.” Rather, one finds “the seed of a great people that God comes to deposit from his hands onto a predestined land.” The idea, coming as it does from God, is represented by a tangible seed, while the erstwhile physical land is imbued with predestination. Mind and body are mutually representative and intermingled in a most complex fashion:

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<sup>140</sup> See, Sanford Kessler, “Tocqueville’s Puritans: Christianity and the American Founding,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Aug., 1992): 776-92, who points out the virtues and shortcomings of Tocqueville’s understanding of Puritan “point of departure.” He likewise highlights the ambiguities and changes over time: “Tocqueville initially claimed that the Puritans made America a sort of Christian commonwealth where moral and intellectual life was governed by faith. He later shows, however, that the Puritans set in motion a process which made individual judgment and self-interest the bases of American mores rather than the Bible and Christian love” (789). Cf. Barbara Allan’s, *Tocqueville, Covenant, and the Democratic Revolution: Harmonizing Earth with Heaven* (Lanham: Lexington, 2005), for an elaborate discussion of the importance of the covenant tradition of Reformed Protestantism in American constitutionalism and Tocqueville’s understanding and extrapolations from this basis.

<sup>141</sup> On the matter of ancient thought and the Bible, see, for example, Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action From Augustus to Augustine* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 2003); and Leora Batnitzky, “Leo Strauss and the ‘Theologico-Political Predicament,’” in *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, ed., Steven B. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 41-62.

external configurations and the internal state of soul are not unrelated. And as Tocqueville is a writer, or sort of historian, he too knows that his language requires the elevation of conviction. His conviction is often conveyed through his prominent use of imagery.<sup>142</sup>

In one of many remarkable footnotes, and one that explicitly addresses the connection between things external and internal—between body and spirit, or matter and mind, as well as presentation and re-presentation—Tocqueville elaborates on the “rock on which the pilgrims descended,” namely, that in the town of Plymouth (I.1.2, 34). The emigrants that landed had the goal of founding a colony, and while they failed to do so on the banks of the Hudson as hoped, they “were finally forced to land on the arid coasts of New England.” The rock that “is still shown” there, is one, he notes, that has “become an object of veneration in the United States.” The veneration that takes place in the mind passes by way of objects in space, which are carriers of meaning. Man can and does express the elements of his soul—the external can represent the internal—and often through things that can literally be seen by the eyes.<sup>143</sup> Tocqueville here goes on to say that he has “seen fragments of it carefully preserved in several towns of the Union. Does

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<sup>142</sup> As Faguet has written: “the task which [Tocqueville] set before himself was to penetrate beneath accidental history to solid history, or beneath history to the physiology of peoples. Emile Faguet, *Politicians and Moralists of the Nineteenth Century* (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 80. Faguet adds, rather eloquently, the following: “Thus he was a historian of institutions or a demological historian. This was quite new at the time when he attempted it—that is, in 1833. Between the history which was too hampered by philosophic considerations and the purely epical history, and again, the history which was not much more than a pamphlet and a controversial work, there was decidedly room for a patient, and at the same time impassioned, study of this underworld, of these depths, of the bottom of this sea upon which pass the currents, the ebb and the flow and the tempestuous agitations of the waves of living. This was the task to which Tocqueville applied himself. Notice how he was prompted to this study by his nature; meditative, reserved, as little man of the world as of the platform, he was well made to pay little attention to the surfaces, to probe the depths and listen to the silences and to hear best of all the things which make the least noise” (81-2).

<sup>143</sup> Of course, not all such things may be seen, but even our own language cannot help but reify or objectify speeches and deeds that may not necessarily be directly heard or seen, as, for example, when we say, “That was a beautiful *thing* you said,” or “an awful *thing* you did.” The *thingness* of human experience is inescapable—that is, for beings with embodied souls.

this not show very clearly that the power and greatness of man is wholly in his soul? Here is a stone that the feet of some miserable persons touched for an instant, and this stone becomes celebrated; it attracts the regard of a great people; they venerate its remnants, they parcel out its dust in the distance. What has become of the thresholds of so many palaces? Who cares about them?”<sup>144</sup>

So many images he uses, both in his personal reflections and correspondences, as well as in his political analysis, apply language of the body and concrete space, which imbues it with significance beyond its material or physical existence on the one hand, and implies the fact that there is an inescapable concreteness to things human and political, on the other, so that ideas never triumph alone, without obstacles and limits, or *in vacuo*.<sup>145</sup> So much is consistent with his critique of the *philosophes* and the French revolutionaries who sought to create what Tocqueville called “an imaginary ideal society in which everything seemed simple and coordinated, uniform, equitable, and in accord with reason”—as though there were nothing that could not be forced to conform to the mind and its desires.<sup>146</sup> And as for the drive to rationalization and uniformity, he argues in various places how it conduces to tyranny, not least in terms of laws and mores; here in

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<sup>144</sup> This is to highlight but one of many places where Tocqueville emphasizes the bodily, physical, or physiognomical, and its relation to greater meaning. Indeed, early on he writes: “I confess that in America I saw more than America; I sought there an *image* of democracy itself, of its penchants, its character, its prejudices, its passions...” (Intro., 13). Images teach powerful lessons; the imagination helps to clarify ideas. One might go so far as to say that the imagination of an aristocrat in search of images, and submitted to facts, comes to a proper understanding and grasp of the idea of democracy.

<sup>145</sup> As Schleifer writes, “Tocqueville often resorted to the device of images or word pictures to clarify his ideas and to persuade his reader. This use of the portrait was part of his larger effort to put his ideas in the clearest, simplest terms.” Schleifer, “Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* Reconsidered,” *Cambridge*, 123.

<sup>146</sup> Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, 201; cf. with his remarks about the power of ideas with respect to those who created “this colossal Revolution...the French Revolution, this most momentous event in history,” namely the “political writers,” with their “political science”...in his speech to Academy. *Op. cit. supra*.

the context of changes in the European political landscape and the diminished “spirit of resistance” in various nations:

When provinces and towns formed so many different nations in the midst of the common native country, each of them had a particular spirit that opposed the general spirit of servitude; but today, when all the parts of the same empire, after having lost their franchises, their usages, their prejudices, and even their memories and their names, have become habituated to obeying the same laws, it is no more difficult to oppress them all together than to oppress one of them separately (I.2.9, 300).

The ideas of uniformity and universality that follow so closely to that of equality requires continued resistance, even as there is philosophical truth and validity to such ideas.

Tocqueville states that he would “regard it as a great misfortune for the human race if freedom had to be produced with the same features in all places” (I.2.10, 302), assumedly because such homogeneous freedom limits the possibility of greatness in variety and varieties of greatness. While Tocqueville is certainly not disinterested in the “philosophical merit of an idea,” he is above all concerned with “the moral and political effect that it can produce.”<sup>147</sup>

The same could be said about laws, which are not without their consequences on things both physical and spiritual, and are on some level ideas that take legal form in particular communities. Arguably, nowhere in the first volume is this connection made more strongly than in the area of estate law, insofar as changes in this law result in rather stark changes in the matter of the family and in men’s ideas of it. In fact at one point, Tocqueville writes: “No great change in human institutions will be made without discovering estate law in the middle of the causes of that change” (I.2.10, 334). In the case of changes in estate law, Tocqueville illustrates how the consequences can quite literally be destructive of the physical and mental structure of the family, as well as its situatedness in, and bond with, a particular piece of territory. He writes that with the case

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<sup>147</sup> Tocqueville Letter to Arthur de Gobineau, Dec. 20, 1853, in, *Alexis de Tocqueville, Selected Letters on Politics and Society*, ed., Roger Boesche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 303.



of the right of primogeniture, and so in aristocratic families, “territorial domains pass most often from generation to generation without being divided. The result is that family spirit is in a way materialized in the land”(I.1.3, 48). The family not only has an actual body, made up of its members, but, “[t]he family represents the land, the land represents the family; it perpetuates its name, its origin, its glory, its power, its virtues. It is an imperishable witness to the past and a previous pledge of existence to come.” Time itself is concretely represented in the family-land connection—memory and hope are inextricably wound up in this bond. However, “[w]hen estate law establishes equal partition, it destroys the intimate connection that exists between the spirit of the family and the preservation of the land; the land ceases to represent the family, for, since it cannot fail to be partitioned at the end of one or two generations, it is evident that it must constantly be diminished and in the end disappear entirely” (I.1.3, 49). The result of equalization—or “equal partition”—is a physical and spiritual transformation; the family and its territory are no longer the same in their appearance and substance.

The consequences are greater yet, for a change in the spirit of the family is coterminous with a change in what might be called the spirit of commerce; or, certainly with men’s relationship to money and their desire for it: “from the moment when you take away from landed property owners a great interest of sentiment, memories, pride, and ambition in preserving the land, you can be assured that sooner or later they will sell it, for they have a great pecuniary interest in selling it, since transferable assets produce more interest than others and lend themselves much more easily to satisfying passions of the moment.” Again, the relationship to time—in a very spiritual sense—is altered, for passions cease to be related to the past or the future. Passions are less guided by the

familial memories and hopes, but are instead individuated and concerned with the immediate present. It is worth quoting Tocqueville's own words further: "What is called family spirit is often founded on an illusion of individual selfishness. One seeks to perpetuate and in a way to immortalize oneself in one's remote posterity. Whenever the spirit of family ends, individual selfishness reenters into the reality of its penchants. As the family no longer presents itself to the mind as anything but vague, indeterminate, and uncertain, each concentrates on the comfort of the present; he dreams of the establishment of the generation that is going to follow, and nothing more." Tocqueville subsequently states that one does not therefore seek to perpetuate one's family; however, he immediately qualifies this conclusion by stating, "*at least* one seeks to perpetuate it by *other means* than landed property" (emphasis added). If the effect of the democratic estate laws is to destroy the older aristocratic family, men can nevertheless find new means to perpetuate the family; or establish a new form of familial life. Family life can go on, under the new form—and so, with a new spirit—namely, that of the democratic family.

This early discussion serves as introduction to two especially important sections of the second volume, namely where Tocqueville discusses the democratic family and the already mentioned phenomenon of individualism. For he later elaborates on how democracy induces in men a forgetfulness of their ancestors and that it also "hides his descendants from him and separates him from his contemporaries; it constantly leads him back toward himself alone and threatens finally to confine him wholly in the solitude of his own heart" (II.2.3, 484). This isolation, and turn of men inside of themselves, away

from the public sphere and its good, is, to be sure, “despotism’s golden opportunity.”<sup>148</sup> However, to reiterate, one can still yet seek to derive from democracy “all the good that it can do; and knowing its good instincts as well as its evil penchants” one may yet “strive to restrict the effects of the latter and develop the former” (I.2, 6, 235). As bodies and souls take on new shapes—individually and collectively—influenced as they are by the substance of equality—externally and internally—the fact of their inevitable relatedness remains. What Tocqueville’s new political science attempts to balance is attentiveness to things bodily or material, and things spiritual or of the soul—that is to say, knowing when and how to rest on the level of the external, and when or in what fashion to plunge deeper, or beyond to inwardness. Such balance is of great importance when it comes to both interpreting and shaping the opinions and ideas of a democratic people.

### **The “Spirit of the City” and the “Idea of Rights”**

As the democratic revolution is no longer confined to either America or to Europe,<sup>149</sup> Tocqueville was correct in sensing something of an “*irresistible* advance of modern societies toward democracy.”<sup>150</sup> Contemporary political science is well aware of the situation, as indicated by the attention paid to comparative studies of democracy, indexes of democratization, and studies regarding the consolidation of democracy—

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<sup>148</sup> Hennis, “In Search of the ‘New Science of Politics,’” 51.

<sup>149</sup> As Lamberti rightly states: “Political wisdom consists in judging not so much by laws as by mores, and the wise man knows from history that ‘mores’ evolve only very slowly. That is why it is reasonable to conclude that the democratic movement, which is still in the ascendancy, will continue to dominate for a long time to come. Morally and politically, however, the affirmation of the right to equality can take very different forms, depending on whether or not it is coupled with an affirmation of liberty” (Lamberti, *Tocqueville*, 10)

<sup>150</sup> Aron, “Tocqueville,” 237. Although, as Zetterbaum argues, “he never completely explains why democracy is bound to triumph,” which has led many interpreters to “avidly” search for both a philosophy of history in his work, while likewise seeking to uncover “his true intent.” Zetterbaum, *Tocqueville and the Problem of Democracy*, 4.

sometimes known as transitology—well beyond the Western world.<sup>151</sup> Alongside this advance toward democracy is of course the spread of the idea of political rights, and what Tocqueville saw as the broad endeavor “to give the peaceful exercise of certain rights to all” (I.2.6, 227). After all, he states that he knows of “only two manners of making equality reign in the political world: rights must be given to each citizen or to no one” (I.1.3, 52). However, Tocqueville’s understanding of rights—of *certain* rights—is an intentionally circumscribed, or limited understanding, directly linked with his notion of political liberty. In contrast to some unlimited views of rights that one finds today, with a definition of rights that extend well beyond any association with the political, even sometimes being either apolitical or anti-political, the rights Tocqueville has in mind and advocates serve to support and enliven political life.<sup>152</sup> In rather evocative language, Tocqueville refers to what he calls “the spirit of the city [*l’esprit de cité*],” and he does so precisely in the context of his discussion of rights, suggesting that the spirit of the city seems to him to be “inseparable from the exercise of political rights” (I.2.6, 226).

This “spirit of the city” is the polar opposite of force or violence, and is never reducible to a single man, or mass, for that matter. Furthermore, it is something that

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<sup>151</sup> See, for example, Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe* (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

<sup>152</sup> As Winthrop convincingly argues (“with the assistance of Tocqueville”), many of the “prevailing theories of rights will ultimately only enervate liberal democracy”—namely, those that stem from “two principle sources” (i.e., from the natural rights theories of Hobbes and Locke, or the moral philosophy of Kant), “even though they depart from both of these sources” by attempting to bridge certain differences from the disparate sources, “combining Hobbes’s essential concern for happiness with Kant’s exclusive concern for dignity.” “The apparent disadvantages of Hobbes and Kant—the vulgarity of Hobbesian preservation and the austerity of Kantian moralism—are overcome by expanding our rights to the ‘primary goods’ individuals might need to design and achieve ‘life plans.’” Delba Winthrop, “Rights: A Point of Honor,” in *Interpreting Tocqueville’s Democracy in America*, 394-424. For a clear and helpful discussion of the “new version of rights discourse” that has led to a “rapidly expanding catalogue of rights,” thereby multiplying “the occasions for collisions” of opposing rights, while likewise “trivializing core democratic values” and an otherwise “venerable tradition of rights,” see, Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk*.

Tocqueville says is diminished by “administrative centralization” (I.1.5, 83), for it is instead the conscious endeavor of political participation and the spirit that serves as a spring to political action in the world. And if this spirit is the antithesis of force, Tocqueville says that the idea of right likewise follows “immediately” after force, the latter of which can never be more than a “transient element in success” (I.2.8, 260).<sup>153</sup> Thus, the spirit of the city provides individuals with a sense of belonging that may otherwise be referred to as “national pride,” and he elsewhere states that certain laws are necessary to “awaken and direct that vague instinct of the native country that *never abandons the heart of man*, and in binding it to daily thoughts, passions, and habits, and to make of it a reflective and lasting sentiment” (I.1.5, 89). The spirit of the city is further constituted by the desire and satisfaction of devotion to one’s fellows and a common cause, in the liberty and strength that allows men to carve out a common destiny in the world. If the spirit of the city is captured by the free activity of individuals, who both assent to and abide by laws made in their name, it is likewise the antithesis of a phenomenon briefly alluded to above and what Tocqueville famously calls “individualism” (II.2.2, 482). The latter phenomenon is one where a man “turns all his sentiments toward himself alone,” but is distinct from selfishness, *per se*. “Selfishness is born of a blind instinct,” and is common throughout the ages, insofar as certain men have always had “a passionate and exaggerated love of self,” where everything is related to oneself, or one’s self is preferred above every other self and thing. However, individualism arises from “a new idea,” and “proceeds from an erroneous judgment

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<sup>153</sup> In more evocative terms, when writing about the tragic situation of the Indians—left between barbarism and civilization, or given “only two options for salvation: war or civilization; in other words, they had to destroy the Europeans or become their equals” (I.2.10, 312-13)—Tocqueville writes: “one cannot destroy everything, fury has a limit” (I.2.10, 325).

rather than a depraved sentiment.” The depravity of selfishness is not due to any particular time or regime, whereas individualism “is of democratic origin, and it threatens to develop as conditions become equal.” Individualism “is specifically democratic and has the tendency to progress as democracy does.”<sup>154</sup>

Most profoundly, Tocqueville writes, it “has its source in the defects of the mind as much as in the vices of the heart.” These defects and vices are born from certain democratic ideas and conditions, and must be countered by rightly advocating the spirit of the city; it ought to push back against harmful ideas. Individualism is only exacerbated by a view of rights that is without political boundaries, born as it is of the individual self only to serve the interests and desires of this same self, otherwise void of obligation, responsibility, and community. In order to oppose this vague and all expansive sense of rights, political rights need remain the predominant notion of rights, and be attached to the spirit of the city. Though this spirit is modified today, in its manifestation and strength, as compared with previous ages, it can nevertheless be encouraged and discouraged by present ideas of the mind and movements of the heart. Central to this task is making this spirit seem useful to men in protecting their rights and serving their interests: to make it consistent with their individual needs without reducing their attention to simply meeting such needs.

While it is by no means “an easy thing to teach all men to make use of political rights,” Tocqueville does believe that when it can be done, “the resulting effects are great.” To this he adds that, “if there is a century in which such an undertaking ought to be attempted, that century is ours.” Why now more than ever? The reason is because “religions are weakening” and “the divine notion of rights is disappearing,” while “mores

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<sup>154</sup> Lawler, *The Restless Mind*, 38.

are being altered,” and alongside this “the moral notion of rights is being effaced.”

Traditional religion and morality, and the erstwhile understanding of rights that follows from them, can no longer be relied upon to serve the public good, or the spirit of the city; again, the older idea of virtue cannot alone be turned to for support. The spirit of the city and the idea of rights are not likely to be bound by theology or philosophy. For the one-time stable beliefs have given way “to reasoning” of an individualist and materialist form, as older and established “sentiments” have given way to “calculations.” Tocqueville goes so far as to label this fact a “universal disturbance” (I.2.6, 228). Even as the march of equality is part of God’s plan—a Providential fact—and on one level brings a greater degree of justice for all, it is corrosive, and has so dramatically disturbed the hearts and minds of men.<sup>155</sup> Thus, at present, there is only a single “immobile point in the human heart” that can be relied upon, or that must be appealed to, which is the idea of “personal interest.”

The modern heart that is agitated and in flux nonetheless has a settled core that can serve as the foundation for bridging the idea of rights and the spirit of the city, and it is up to the new political science to carry out this task.<sup>156</sup> Without appeal to the notion of personal interest, man’s heart today is unreliable in its simultaneous support for both the idea of right and the spirit of the city. In fact, Tocqueville goes so far as to suggest that

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<sup>155</sup> For Tocqueville, to speak of Providence or a Providential fact, is neither to deny or exaggerate human liberty: “Providence has not created the human race either entirely independent or perfectly slave. It traces, it is true, a fatal circle around each man that he cannot leave; but within its vast limits man is powerful and free; so too with peoples” (II.4.8, 676).

<sup>156</sup> That said, Tocqueville elsewhere provides something of an important caveat to this idea, which is worth quoting at length: “The political powers that appear the best established have as a guarantee of their longevity only the opinions of a generation, the interests of a century, often the life of one man. One law can modify the social state that seems the most definitive and the best consolidated, and with it everything changes. The powers of society are all more or less fugitive, as are our years on earth; they rapidly succeed each other like the various cares of life; and *no government has ever been seen to be supported by an invariable disposition of the human heart or founded on an immortal interest*” (I.2.9, 284-5, emphasis added).

“[m]en are no longer bound except by interests, not by ideas” to the extent that “human opinions form no more than a sort of intellectual dust that is blown around on all sides and cannot gather and settle” (II.1.1, 406). Nevertheless, even if interest alone binds, it is possible that one’s idea of interest can change, or become broadened. In what is perhaps the most dramatic example he gives, namely that of war, Tocqueville argues that democratic people fear conquest much less than war, where it is the opposite for aristocratic peoples. Since each democratic citizen likely has a very “small part in political power and often takes no part in it” yet “all are independent and have goods to lose,” it follows that, “[i]t will always be very difficult to make a democratic population determined to take up arms when war is brought to its territory.” The conclusion he draws is the following: “it is necessary to give rights to these people and a political spirit that suggests to each citizen some of the interest that make nobles in aristocracies act.” To this he subsequently adds that, “only the passion and the habit of freedom can compete with advantage against the habit and the passion of well-being” (II.3.26, 634).

Tocqueville’s examination of the introduction, use, and application of rights into modern politics is at once cautionary and encouraging. Thus, he admits that “men who will in the new societies [of equality] will often make use of their individual reason” but he is far from believing “that they will often abuse it” (II.1.1, 407). The abuse he has in mind consists of seeing one’s own interest altogether detached from that of others, or having an idea of interest that is pursued at the expense of others. He qualifies his previous statement when adding that “without common ideas there is no common action, and without common action men still exist but a social body does not.” The existence and prosperity of society requires that “all the minds of the citizens always be brought



and held together by some principal ideas,” which means drawing opinions from “one and the same source” (II.1.2, 407). An idea of interest that is common after all is precisely based on the idea of the common—of interests that are both one’s own and that of others, of common or mutual interests, which are enshrined in rights. Therefore, in instructing the people of their “true interests,” so that they best understand how “to profit from society’s benefits,” they must also learn how to “submit to its [i.e., society’s] burdens” (Intro., 9). Thus, the granting and receiving of rights does not operate in a single direction, but comes with a cost, or with responsibilities that are not without burden, and yet this burden cannot be buttressed by traditional means or promises; be it of happiness through virtue or in an afterlife. But this apparent burden may itself be lessened, or masked, through the formulation and application of a very specific “doctrine”—not only an idea, or set of ideas, but a doctrine properly articulated and taught by certain “moralists.”

The bridge between the spirit of the city and the idea of rights is founded upon the “doctrine of self-interest well understood.” This is a doctrine that allows these contemporary moralists to “bring...to light” “the points where particular interest happens to meet the general interest and be confounded with it” (II.2.8, 501). And it is something Tocqueville finds to exist with remarkable strength in America. While the internal evidence, so to speak, is found in examining men’s ideas and the teachings of American moralists, the external evidence, as it were, is that America is the country that has “taken most advantage of association and where they have applied that powerful mode of action to a greater diversity of objects” (I.2.4, 180). When well understood, self-interest leads men to meet their own needs, but likewise to “associate for the goals of public security,

of commerce and industry, of morality and religion.” The result of such a “powerful mode of action” so applied, is the perpetuation of a belief that there “is nothing the human will despairs of attaining by the free action of the collective power of individuals” (I.2.4, 181). One can hardly overstate Tocqueville’s view of the importance of men in associations and acting together, and the influence this has on the human mind and heart. To be sure, it is precisely this “collective power of individuals” that constitutes the spirit of the city. This is not, however, a form of collectivism, or some classical ideal of *homonoia*, but filtered as it is through the teachings of contemporary moralists and their doctrine of self-interest well understood, men do not feel compelled to sacrifice themselves to others like them “because it is great to do it” or out of some high-minded notion of virtue and beauty. Rather, they come to understand that at least some sacrifices “are as necessary to the one who imposes them on himself as to the one who profits from them.” Such enlightened self-love, and a view of interest backed by necessity, may “not produce great devotion; but it suggests little sacrifices each day”—sacrifices not altogether at odds with one’s personal interest that can make a positive contribution to the broader interest of the community at large.<sup>157</sup> In this way, an otherwise individualistic people are guided to “aid each other and [the doctrine] disposes them willingly to sacrifice a part of their time and their wealth to the good of the state” (II.2.8, 502), thereby making real the city’s spirit.

Tocqueville intentionally speaks of the spirit of *the city*, for what is the city but the emblem or symbol of political life, par excellence. While by no means a romantic

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<sup>157</sup> To be sure, these sacrifices do not violate the “impious and detestable...maxim that in matters of government the majority of a people has the right to do everything” (I.2.7, 240), for the city is not synonymous with the majority, even as part of the latter’s possible tyrannical drive is to make itself so. But it is so that: “Men cannot enjoy political freedom unless they purchase it with some sacrifices, and they never get possession of it except with many efforts” (II.2.1, 481).

who longs to restore the ancient *polis*, there are certain facts of the city that any particular political community has in common.<sup>158</sup> This spirit requires locality and a certain amount of particularity, both within the city, and among (or against) other cities; it is a spirit that emerges through conscious civic activity and intentional political action among a select group of people. His implication is that there is no genuine spirit of the world, or of the globe. One may speak of humanity, but there is no singular political spirit of humanity, for it manifests itself in particular ways and forms; men act, mankind as a whole is not an actor. To be sure, this spirit differs today as compared to the classical spirit that relied on the cultivation of virtue in a stricter sense—not least on the difficult virtue and limited rule of the few. It is additionally different because it seems “inseparable” today from the exercise of political rights, and the idea of rights is itself of more recent origin. It is true that Tocqueville links the idea of rights with that of virtue (a much older idea), for he says, “[a]fter the general idea of virtue I know of none more beautiful than that of rights, or that these two idea are intermingled” (I.2.6, 227). The *general* idea of virtue is, however, something of an opaque expression, which leaves open the question of whether he has either moral or political virtues in mind, whether he mixes or separates them; in fact, Tocqueville herein offers no definition of virtue, and any precise sense of its meaning is less than aided with his suggestion of the intermingling of the two ideas of virtue and of right.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Tocqueville famously speaks contemptuously of “the attempts that are made to judge the modern republics by the aid of those of antiquity,” the subsequent inference regarding “what will happen in our time from what took place two thousand years ago,” all of which tempts him “to burn [his] books in order to apply none but novel ideas to so novel a condition” (I.2.9, 289). But as we have seen, Tocqueville nevertheless appropriates certain ancient ideas, or at least arrives at some similar insights; unsurprisingly, given the degree of continuity of the political across space and time.

<sup>159</sup> Kraynak argues: “The type of virtue that Tocqueville has in mind here (and that he praises repeatedly in all his writings) appears to be a synthesis of civic and heroic virtue. Following Montesquieu and Rousseau, he defines civic virtue as republican virtue: it is patriotism or love of country over love of self, a sentiment

Tocqueville only complicates matters by writing the following: “The idea of rights is nothing other than the idea of virtue introduced into the political world.” He would seem here to reduce virtue to political virtue, and furthermore reduce political virtue to such things as honorably protecting one’s family and property and expressing one’s right to vote. However, this is directly at odds with his broader understanding of the need for moral order, proper education, and the role of religion in society. Moreover, insofar as rights are *nothing other than* the introduction of virtue into the political world, he also speaks about how “the century of blind devotions and instinctive virtues is already fleeing far from us” (II.2.8, 503). It does not seem a straightforward task by any means to introduce virtue into the political world, even under the name or cover of something else, not least if it is “already fleeing far away from us.” Nevertheless, something must be found, to bring and hold together the spirit of the city and the idea of rights. And again, it is the doctrine of self-interest well understood that meets this need: “Self-interest well understood is a doctrine not very lofty, but clear and sure. It does not seek to attain great objects; but attains all those it aims for without too much effort. As it is within the reach of all intellects, each seizes it readily and retains it without trouble. Marvelously accommodating to the weaknesses of men, it obtains a great empire with ease, and preserves it without difficulty because it turns personal interest against itself, and to direct the passions, it makes use of the spur that excites them” (II.2.8, 502). The

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that Tocqueville often associates with self-assertion on the one hand and mastery of the selfish passions on the other...By heroic virtue, Tocqueville usually means great feats of courage and daring in war as well as chivalry and great acts of principled statesmanship...Whatever his sources of inspiration, Tocqueville holds civic and heroic virtue to be the highest ethical ideal because it produces noble characters, characters whose proud self-assertion and voluntary self-restraint make them true citizens and statesmen.” Kraynak, “Tocqueville’s Constitutionalism,” 1182. On so defining and categorizing virtue, consider what Tocqueville writes in *Recollections*, 39: “Virtues of any sort are rare enough, and we can ill afford to quibble about their type and relative importance.” Tocqueville gives the impression that it is simply better to practice virtue than theorize about it.

doctrine both satisfies personal interest as well as pits it against itself; men are encouraged to calculate on their own behalves but likewise to so calculate in a manner that includes the interest of the community from which they know they benefit. The doctrine cannot, Tocqueville writes, “make a man virtuous,” but it does form “a multitude of citizens who are regulated, temperate, moderate, farsighted, [and] masters of themselves,” and insofar as it “does not lead directly to virtue through the will, it brings them near to it insensibly through habits.” An approximation of virtue—a closeness to what is otherwise fleeing far from us—seems an acceptable result if indeed the age is as he sees it. As the doctrine extends its reach, it may well be that some men are prevented “from mounting far above the ordinary level of humanity,” but the good news is that “many others who were falling below do attain it and are kept there.” While some individuals are lowered, “the species...is elevated.” So much is necessary in an age of equality.

It is in the nature of democracy to have “the idea of political rights descend to the least of citizens, as the division of goods puts the idea of the right of property in general within the reach of all men.” This is “one of its greatest merits” in Tocqueville’s view. It is the positive use of equality, so to speak. Universal suffrage and the spread of wealth and property has given many “a particular good to defend,” and thus given more of a stake in understanding and defending such rights to an increasing number. Giving each a particular good provides support for the general interest, and general improvement of society. Democracy may have an equalizing force, but at its best—when rights are properly articulated and applied—it can help to spread a sense of civic participation; or, what is otherwise called the spirit of the city. Moreover, the idea of rights have helped

men to define “what license and tyranny are,” and it has helped men of the modern city to enhance the civic bond: “without respect for rights, there is no great people: one can almost say that there is no society; for, what is a union of rational and intelligent beings among whom force is the sole bond?” (I.2.6, 227). Nevertheless, it remains the case that the idea of rights can be ambivalent insofar as it may either foster the spirit of the city or help pave the way to individualism.

In order to have a positive effect, the idea of rights must therefore bring about something of the contradictory elements of the ancient city, namely, its cohesiveness and its opposing or moving parts. The spirit of the city does indeed consist of a view of the common, but it is not one of perfect harmony. The importance of dissonance to some degree is part of what so attracts Tocqueville to the American township, to the frenetic movement and agitation that he even calls (in Machiavellian language) “a sort of tumult” (I.2.7, 232; cf. I.2.10, 382). The “real advantages that America derives from democracy,” include a certain “agitation” that is “constantly reborn,” and one that passes from “the government of democracy...afterwards into civil society” (I.2.7, 233).<sup>160</sup> Shortly thereafter, Tocqueville approvingly quotes Madison’s *Federalist* 51 that addresses the importance of guarding society both against “oppression of its rulers” as well as guarding “one part of the society against the injustice of the other part” (I.2.7, 249). The plurality of parties, and the partisan spirit, is what best prevents tyranny; the “most perfected instruments of tyranny,” namely strong central administrative powers, must be kept out of the hands of a single group (I.2.8, 250). The plurality of bodies and the multiplicity in

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<sup>160</sup> Consider how in *Recollections*, when discussing the period under Louis-Phillipe, he speaks of “political life itself” being absent, in no small part because “no battlefield could be found on which great parties might wage war.” Instead, there was a “peculiar homogeneity of position, interest, and consequently of point of view” that deprived “parliamentary debates of all originality, all reality, and so of all true passion” (10).

levels of government allow that “however carried away the national majority can be by its passions, however ardent it may be in its projects, it cannot make all citizens in all places, in the same manner, at the same moment, bend to its desires.” Even as a sense of equality extends across society, the variety of personal interests, rooted in the particularities of desires and place, ever press back against strict uniformity and outright unity. While governmental centralization is necessary to help society advance “with energy toward [a common] goal,” the division of administrative power ought to be upheld (I.1.5, 83ff). Indeed, such things as municipal bodies, the various counties and their administrations, and other like internal institutional and social divisions, thereby “form so many hidden shoals that delay or divide the flood of the popular will” (I.2.8, 250).

Tocqueville likewise finds the means of resistance to uniformity in “the spirit of the lawyer,” whose study and work instills “the habits of order, a certain taste for forms, a certain instinctive love for the regular sequence of ideas,” all of which “naturally render them strongly opposed to the revolutionary spirit and unreflective passions of democracy” (I.2.8, 252). Lawyers at large, he writes, “naturally form *a body*,” and “[h]idden at the bottom of the[ir] souls,” one finds “a part of the tastes and habits of aristocracy.” In one of the few places where Tocqueville speaks outright about mixing principles—aristocratic and democratic—he goes so far as to say that the “body of lawyers forms the sole aristocratic element that can be mixed without effort into the natural elements of democracy and be combined in a happy and lasting manner with them” (I.2.8, 254). Insofar as it is the “sole” element that can be so mixed, its singularity rests in the fact that it can be so *easily* mixed, particularly since lawyers are so important for the legal defense and protection of rights. But if they are advocates of rights, it is

their high task to do so with the “taste and respect for what is old and therefore almost always joined with love of what is regular and legal.” Their advocacy is one that ought be a sort of ballast against the power of the people, or what Tocqueville calls “the most powerful and so to speak the lone counterweight to democracy” in America (I.2.8, 256). The lawyerly spirit Tocqueville praises is one that allows “lawyers to like the government of democracy,” but “without sharing its penchants and without imitating its weakness” (I.2.8, 254-5). Democratic lawyers ought to strengthen democracy by supporting political rights and tradition, and thereby adhering to the constitution, while serving as “an almost invisible brake that moderates and arrests” the peoples’ intoxication from “passions” and the concomitant self-indulgence that lets them be “carried away by their ideas.” Through the presence of the jury, “the spirit of the lawyer...spreads little by little beyond their precincts; it so to speak infiltrates all society, it descends to the lowest ranks, and the people as a whole in the end contract a part of the habits and the tastes of the magistrates” (I.2.8, 258).

In sum, the involvement individual men have in their government and in the concerns of society, thereby agitating them for better and for worse—gathered as they are in particular groups around certain personal interests at numerous levels—suggest that they share a common but differentiated political world, with allies and opponents alike; however, other bodies must likewise serve to moderate their activity and agitation, or help direct it in a manner that strengthens rather than weakens democracy. The plurality of disparate and even opposing parts combine to make up the spirit of a shared city; one circumscribed by the articulation of political rights. Such rights amidst the maintenance of plurality are of great importance for checking the sentiment—and love—of equality in



democracies, as well as the further theorization of equality, and the desire to bring equality to the practice of all areas of life.

### **“The Theory of Equality Applied to Intellects”**

Tocqueville writes that it is “of the very essence of democratic governments that the empire of the majority is absolute; for in democracies, outside the majority there is nothing that resists it” (I.2.7, 235). In the case of the American constitution, this “natural force of the majority” has been augmented “artificially.” Institutions have served this task, by, for example, forcing the legislature to obey and submit to the peoples’ “general views, but even to the daily passions of their constituents,” as the people directly name them for a very short period of time. But the structure of institutions is only an expression of a particular idea and moral sentiment: “The moral empire of the majority is founded in part on the idea that there is more enlightenment and wisdom in many men united than in one alone, in the number of legislators than in their choice” (I.2.7, 236). This, Tocqueville claims, is but “the theory of equality applied to intellects,” and it is a “doctrine [that] attacks the pride of man in its last asylum; so that the minority accepts it only with difficulty; it habituates itself to it only in the long term.” This idea of the “right to govern society that the majority possesses by its enlightenment” was yet another idea the first inhabitants brought with them to the shores of America. It is a new idea brought from the old world to the new world, where it could be implemented, so as to triumph.

It has an additional “principle” upon which it rests, namely that “the interests of the greatest number ought to be preferred to those of the few” (I.2.7, 237). Such a principle finds difficulties in application when a society is strongly divided among parties

or classes that share little by way of common interest; however, the social state of America is one of equality, and therefore of few stark differences. So much is now true of the world beyond America as well, and what was true of America then is more broadly the case as well: the majority “has an immense power in fact, and a power in opinion almost as great; and once it has formed on a question, there are so to speak no obstacles that can, I shall not say stop, but even delay its advance, and allow it the time to hear the complaints of those it crushes and passes.” Rightly, Tocqueville adds: “The consequences of this state of things are dire and dangerous for the future.” With every vice innate to democracy—such as legislative instability, minimal duration of laws, etc.—grows the power of the majority so that it is “the sole power that is important to please” (I.2.7, 238-9). Such singularity can certainly have positive effects, when so much “zeal and activity is brought to certain improvements,” however, chief among the vices that may surface and fester is that of the tyranny of the majority. Such tyranny swells from the “impious and detestable maxim that in matters of government the majority of a people has the right to do everything”—so much is the very “seed” from which tyranny grows. No doubt such a notion of right is one without boundaries, without any proper restrictions imposed, say, by the cultivation of the spirit of the city—that is, by a common understanding of justice and interest, and yet one that has internal differentiation, or is internally questioned, so as not to simply absorb and consume everything under the name of the city, or the social, but rather be kept in check and corrected by sources of resistance.

In fact, it is while discussing the tyranny of the majority that Tocqueville provides an important definition of a nation: “A nation is like a jury charged with representing

universal society and applying the justice that is its law” (I.2.7, 240). Each particular group of people serves as representatives for humanity’s attempt to live justly, through law—this attempt is itself something Tocqueville refers to as a “general law”—and so it is that every nation collectively expresses the human need and attempt to order existence in accordance with right. “Justice therefore forms the boundary of each people’s right,” and so there are inescapably certain divisions among different peoples. So too, however, will there always be internal divisions among a people, and it is here that Tocqueville struggles to discuss this problem, in light of the fact that he claims that the “government called mixed has always seemed to me to be a chimera. There is, to tell the truth, no mixed government,” for it is his contention that “in each society one discovers in the end one principle of action that dominates all the others” (I.2.7, 240). The domination of a principle does not altogether preclude the presence of other, if subordinate, principles. Multiplicity of principle, and so of parties, is to be encouraged; even needed for the sake of liberty.

Tocqueville does underline, however, that the mixing of several principles in the government so as to set them in stark opposition to one another, or when “a society really comes to have a mixed government, that is to say equally divided between contrary principles,” it in fact “enters into revolution or it is dissolved” (I.2.7, 241). Having *equally* powerful and contrary principles brings about dissolution and disorder, so one ought not to institutionalize them as such, but there is an “important point” that must not be lost in all of this. With the above in mind, he states that the result of the “struggle” between battling interests—between “the interests of the great doing battle with those of the people”—must be considered; there are in fact positive effects from such a struggle,

so long as the struggling interests are not equally strong or mutually powerful enough to instigate stasis. The difficulty then is in both placing “social power” somewhere so that it is “superior to all the others,” but likewise ensuring that there is means of resistance against it, for Tocqueville believes “freedom to be in peril when that power finds no obstacle before it that can restrain its advance and give it time to moderate itself.”

When the theory of equality is fully applied to intellects, and therefore to all, there is risk that it will manifest in two extremes: in the equal self that isolates itself from others feeling no need for its equals, or in the equal self that absorbs itself in the mass of others like itself. In either case, the individual is at once in a state of equality, but without any obstacles or restraints, without any of the requisite limitations that are necessary for cultivating freedom. So far as limits go, Tocqueville draws a most important lesson from America, even as he does not wish “to abuse the example of America”: “In becoming larger, Americans did not so to speak increase the powers of democracy; rather they extended its domain” (I.2.6, 229). To extend democracy is one thing, and so the spread of democracy as a political regime to various places the world over may be inevitable, as well as a good thing. However, the democratization of all things in life—of all spheres of human existence—is a power that must be resisted. Yet Tocqueville is sometimes unclear as to whether democratization can be resisted, or to what extent it is in fact irresistible: “But if it were true that there would soon be nothing intermediate between the empire of democracy and the yoke of one alone, ought we not to tend toward the one rather than to submit voluntarily to the other?” He then goes on to ask rather poignantly: “And if complete equality must finally arrive, would it not be better to let oneself be leveled by freedom than by a despot?” (I.2.9, 301).

In the next chapter we will see how powerful “complete equality” can be, and what it means to be leveled either by freedom or despotism. With closer examination of Volume 2 of *Democracy* the deep logic of equality at work in the human heart will come to light, buttressed as it is by the effectual power of the sentiment of sameness. We will discuss Tocqueville’s teaching of how ideas can pass into mores, and so how Tocqueville’s science and art addresses both the mind and the heart to mitigate the ideas and sentiments that stem from complete equality, consisting as they do of over-generalization and –universalization, so as to stem the tendency to despotism while encouraging that of freedom.

**5. TOCQUEVILLE:  
GENERALIZING IDEAS AND SENTIMENTS:  
THE EFFECTUAL TRUTH OF *le semblable***

“For in democratic centuries, what is most in motion  
amid the motion of all things is the heart of man.”  
—Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, II.3.6

“One does not gradually enlarge one’s soul like one’s house”  
—Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, II.3.19

In describing his own two-volume work, Tocqueville says that the first volume treats the “aspect of civil society” and the change it has met while the second addresses transformations in “the visage of the political world” (Notice to Volume II, 399). His discussion of the effects that equality has had on both “complete one another and form a single work.” Of course, equality is the cause of so many things, even the chief cause, but not the only one. Tocqueville reminds readers that he does not have so “narrow view” as to attribute a single cause to the “host of opinions, sentiments, and instincts in our time” that otherwise “owe their birth to facts alien or even contrary to equality.” It is not, however, his objective to examine such things; rather, his primary aim is to “bring out the extent to which equality has modified...our penchants and ideas.” Admittedly, it is an “immense” subject, “for it comprehends most of the sentiments and ideas to which the new state of the world gives birth” (Notice, 400). In this chapter, we elaborate our discussion of the effects of equality, particularly in terms of the generalizing of ideas and sentiments. So much is an important part of Tocqueville’s political science, which has aptly been called the study of “political psychology.”<sup>161</sup> We do so following two broad

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<sup>161</sup> The term is applied by Rahe, who rightly traces it back to Plato, while drawing connections between Tocqueville and Montesquieu, in, Paul Rahe, *Soft Despotism, Democracy’s Drift*; cf. Raymond Aron, “Tocqueville,” 237-302. On the importance of political psychology in the education of statesmen, and thus for the preservation of liberty and the prevention of tyranny, see, F. Flagg Taylor IV, “Montesquieu,

trajectories, what might be referred to as the generalizing of particular experience on the one hand, and of common experience, on the other. Not only are the two types of experience directly related, but they result in a conclusion of convergence.

To state matters otherwise, we can speak of the “spirit of great independence” and the “natural instinct to centralize” present among democratic peoples (II.4.5, 660). As individuals, democrats are prone to doubt while desiring self-sufficiency and independence; they take pride in their doubt and independence, for both are in accord with individual reason. However, they often likewise find themselves isolated, weak, and in great need; this so much wounds their pride that they must rely upon institutions if not individuals other than themselves. Moreover, as peoples, democrats aspire to uniformity, simplicity, and unity, which accord with universal reason, and so channel their ideas through common opinion—a sort of rational measuring rod. So as to mitigate reliance upon the authority of other particular individuals, democrats turn to the general opinion of a collection of men like themselves. Somewhat contradictorily then, they generalize opinion so as to preserve their particular pride. And because certain distinctions and differences are seen as oppressive, from the democratic perspective, the process of generalization, and thus of equalization, can go so far as to result in the most general of general ideas, namely pantheism—the complete removal of any and all separations.<sup>162</sup>

The political result of the intellectual generalization of ideas and sentiments is an increasing reliance upon what Tocqueville calls “administrative science,” practiced by the least particular part of the broader state with the greatest vehemence for rationalistic

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Tocqueville, and the Politics of Mores,” in *Alexis de Tocqueville and the Art of Democratic Statesmanship*, 93-116.

<sup>162</sup> Peter Augustine Lawler, “Democracy and Pantheism,” *Interpreting Tocqueville’s Democracy in America*, 96-120.

unity, the bureaucracy.<sup>163</sup> Thus, both as individuals and as peoples, democrats tend to naturally long for a strong and universal power, leading them to turn first towards a particular state, before ultimately longing for a single, universal and homogeneous state—the global “administration of things”—if not otherwise artfully mitigated.<sup>164</sup> For while equality “disposes men to want to judge for themselves,” it likewise “gives them the taste for and idea of a single social power that is simple and the same for all” (II.1.6, 424). So much is the taste of those today who aspire to build the architecture of a global state or a world without borders.<sup>165</sup>

While Tocqueville’s discussion of growing statism and “soft despotism” is well known, it behooves us to clarify how this condition is not only related to, or resultant from, the equality of conditions, but to examine the condition of similitude it fosters—a certain homogeneity and identity of ideas and sentiments in the minds and hearts of individuals—and thus the generalization, as well as universalization, of various aspects of human experience. For central to the phenomenon of globalization is the alleged sense that certain erstwhile real differences and distinctions are receding. Tocqueville is acutely aware of this notion, as is illustrated by his remark that “[v]ariety is disappearing from within the human species; the same manner of acting, thinking, and feeling is found in all corners of the world” (II.3.17, 588). We shall elaborate on his insight, and thereby

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<sup>163</sup> For Tocqueville’s extended discussion of rationalism in politics, see, Tocqueville, *The Old Regime*, esp. 195-247; for a discussion of the kind of rationalism in thought Tocqueville felt himself up against see the helpful discussion in, James W. Ceaser, “Political Science, Political Culture, and the Role of the Intellectual,” in *Interpreting Tocqueville’s Democracy in America*, 287-328.

<sup>164</sup> So much is an important part of the thesis proposed by Alexander Kojève, expounded in his exchange with Leo Strauss, in, *On Tyranny*, especially in the section entitled, “Tyranny and Wisdom,” 135-76. Kojève’s thesis is discussed at length in, Barry Cooper, *The End of History*, and is repeatedly engaged in the context of Tocqueville’s work in, Peter Augustine Lawler, *The Restless Mind*.

<sup>165</sup> For an interesting discussion of the question regarding democracy’s universality in Tocqueville, see, Francis Fukuyama, “The March Of Equality,” *Journal of Democracy: Tocqueville Reconsidered*, 11.1 (2000): 11-17.



examine the consequences for politics and human life of this growing sense of *le semblable* that the democratic age inaugurates.<sup>166</sup> Doing so will clarify the extent to which such tendencies may be tempered, and thus how the general and the particular need be balanced in our universalizing and globalizing world.

### **The Mutuality of Equality and Doubt**

We recall that the first volume of *Democracy* began on a most physical note, describing the topography and geography of America. The second volume begins in a particularly spiritual vein, addressing one of man's noblest spiritual vocations, namely philosophy. The first chapter is entitled, "On the Philosophic Method of the Americans." It is a chapter full of irony, to be sure, not least as immediately after the title announces an American philosophic method Tocqueville writes, "I think there is no country in the civilized world where they are less occupied with philosophy than the United States" (II.1.1, 403). The American philosophic method is decidedly unphilosophical or even antiphilosophical, which he adds is unsurprising, since "their social state turns them away from speculative studies." The strong tendency to attend more to the practical than the theoretical portions of science is something to "be found in all democratic peoples" (II.1.10, 434). Americans, at any rate, do not engage in philosophy; democrats are not prone to philosophizing, properly understood. The science related to theoretical principles requires meditation, "and there is nothing less fit for meditation than the interior of a democratic society." For there is no rest in a democratic society, nor a class

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<sup>166</sup> For a clear and concise argument of the religiosity of equality—that is, of how unmistakably foundational equality is for democracy, not only in a logical sense, but as a passion in the sense of a strong belief—see, Richard Avramenko, "Tocqueville and the Religion of Democracy," *Perspectives on Political Science*, Vol. 41 No. 3 (2012): 127-37.

at repose or one living a life of leisure in the original sense of the word. Rather: “Everyone is agitated.” “[M]en are so busy acting that little time remains to them for thinking.” 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” (II.3.21, 614).

The democratic revolution is constituted, or better to say, defined, by movement, and in the midst of such flux and momentum few have the disposition to consider or even grasp anything like an eternal order beyond the agitation. “In a democratic society...where fortunes are small and ill-secured, everyone works and work leads to everything” (II.3.18, 595). The mind and imagination of democrats is therefore “given over almost exclusively to conceiving the useful and representing the real,” driven as they are by the love of material enjoyments (II.1.17, 459). Thus, Tocqueville concludes, “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”—the daily practice of which consists of industrious work to ever increase prosperity. Such a love of well-being is itself part of the transformation of the tastes, sentiments, and ideas of the democratic heart and soul. Not least due to the need for some sense of security in the midst of a seemingly fluid social state: material goods and their enjoyment offer a semblance of fixity and stability in the world. One’s own possessions and the pursuit of them express the concreteness of individual existence and offer proof of one’s hard work and success. The tangibility of such outcomes makes it difficult to doubt both the effort and its outcome.

Democratic man requires palpable representations of his labor and life as well as what he deems to be good. Indeed, the democratic imagination “is given over almost

exclusively to conceiving the useful and representing the real” (II.1.17, 459). While the democratic imagination is not extinguished, there is little doubt for Tocqueville that “the taste for the ideal and the pleasure one takes in seeing it depicted are never as lively and as widespread in a democratic people as within an aristocracy” (II.1.17, 458). Thus, equality not only redirects men’s attention away from the ideal in any non-practical sense, but narrows the range of focus of the imagination. That is to say, equality sufficiently generalizes particular objects to the point of convergence, or the democratic mind skims the surface and denies relevance to certain details that the aristocratic mind might have exaggerated. So far as things converge, or the democratic mind strives for confluence of facts and things through generalization, one can find nothing broader than the pantheistic perspective that democrats are prone to, as discussed below.

With this in mind, it follows that American democrats are no more interested in the European schools of philosophy, and the many names they go by, with their varying takes on and depictions of the ideal; nor do Americans have a school of their own. Despite the fact that Americans neither study philosophy, nor the history of philosophy, “they possess a certain philosophic method,” which is “common to all of them” (II.1.1, 403). They have “never taken the trouble to define” the “rules” of this method, for doing so would itself suggest the establishment of a school with a name. Rather it is Tocqueville who offers a list of the “principal features that characterize” this philosophic method of the Americans, and he situates their method within a broader history of philosophy. It is not incidental to point out that such a method is a general one, for an entire people, if not for democrats on the whole. This early discussion leads one to wonder whether the onset of democracy and equality is coterminous with the beginning

of the end of philosophy, or at least its replacement with methodology—the latter of which can, at least in its most common form, be described as the general application of a ready-made instrument of thought that often substitutes for attentive and categorical thinking. At any rate, Tocqueville summarizes the American method in what is the principal feature found “in most of the operations of the mind,” namely that “each American calls only on the individual effort of his reason” (II.1.1, 403).

Such self-reliance, or individual rationality, mirrors the philosophy of Descartes. “America is therefore the one country in the world where the precepts of Descartes are least studied and best followed.” It is not that Descartes is the source of the American method, but that the feature of doubt—of doubting anything other than one’s own reason—is as central to a democratic social state as it is natural to Descartes’ thought. Tocqueville’s notable insight here is that social equality and intellectual doubt are inextricably linked—even two sides of the same democratic coin. Why is this so? To begin with, it is important to recall that democratic society is one without classes, or at least without fixed classes. As discussed in the previous chapter, there is a “continual movement that reigns in the heart of a democratic society.” Moreover, one does not find “a numerous class that stays at rest” and is therefore capable of meditation in democracy as one does in aristocracy, but instead, as just underlined, “everyone is agitated” (II.1.10, 434). Such movement implies the utter absence of external reference points—social, familial, traditional, or otherwise. Whereas in “aristocratic peoples all men are joined and depend on one another,” in contrast, democratic individuals are separate and independent. While it is the case that among aristocratic peoples “a hierarchical bond exists among all with the aid of which one can keep each in his place and the entire body

in obedience,” no such hierarchy, bond, or structure of obedience exists in a democratic social state (II.121, 472). Nobody is fixed or bound to a particular title, name, rank, or place in society, or even in history for that matter.

Bonds that erstwhile united generations are “relaxed or broken.” The very continuity of history falls away in the democratic mind. So much is exemplified by the practice today of giving each generation its own proper name—“Baby Boomers,” “Millenials,” etc.—as though each were born anew, altogether distinct from previous ones in time and space. Tocqueville himself writes, “in democratic nations each new generation is a new people” (II.1.13, 448). This stands in contrast to earlier aristocratic times: “In the aristocratic nations of the Middle Ages, generations succeeded one another in vain; each family was like an immortal and perpetually immobile man; ideas hardly varied more than conditions. Each man therefore always had the same objects before his eyes, which he envisioned from the same point of view” (II.3.18, 596). So great is the movement in democracies that each generation feels it has nothing to learn from preceding ones, and yet has everything to gain by its own endeavors; focusing as each does on a great variety of apparently new objects. Thus, “each man easily loses track of the ideas of his ancestors or scarcely worries about them.” Again, the movement is rapid and continuous enough to make men forgetful of the past, and therefore doubtful that any important lessons could be gleaned from earlier wisdom.

A remarkable paradox presents itself, for democratic man is at once more prone to think in broad terms, applying the category of humanity as a whole to his political thinking, and yet he is hardly capable of truly conceiving or imagining a people other than those of his own immediate place and time—or better to say, those just like himself.

The ability to think in terms of humanity, generally speaking, is just as much a consequence of similitude, for all peoples must be assimilated to meet the exigencies of such a general category. We will question below the extent to which this kind of thinking is or is not conducive to political thought and action. What Tocqueville demonstrates, however, is that men today do not share the same worries as those of yesteryear, or at least they are not worried about having forgotten older insights, despite their own assumptions of equality. Perceiving themselves as equals on an individual basis, so too does the logic of equality apply on the whole to generations. What can one learn from the past that one cannot discover on one's own? Doing so with the "individual effort of [one's own] reason" is a method applied by collectivities no less than by individuals. In short, when men truly understand themselves to be equal, the logic extends to each source of authority outside of oneself: no man or institution, no social body or group, past or present, has any greater stature than one's present self. To be sure, such independence is not without its strengths, for it displays a certain degree of intellectual ambition and pride, or even a form of courage, insofar as one is confident of finding one's way in the world without external guidance. However, it is far from self-evident that individuals can be properly oriented without some assistance from authorities beyond the independent self.

To acknowledge an authority is to accept a rule or power outside of oneself—a form of superiority or command one did not oneself author. It is, therefore, to acknowledge the fact of inequality, and thus to doubt oneself—one's own reason and its efforts—rather than to doubt all but one's individual reason. Therefore, the logical conclusion of social equality is intellectual doubt, just as intellectual doubt reinforces

social equality. Whether one ends up a democrat due to devoted study of Cartesian philosophy or one becomes a Cartesian in practice having been born into a democratic social state, the result is the same. While Tocqueville finds it surprising that Descartes himself did not apply his own method to all things, and instead made use of it “only in certain matters,” so as to judge for himself strictly philosophical and not political matters, his method was further encouraged by equalizing conditions. If for a period certain laws and the social state itself, as well as the habits of mind that follow from these, were opposed to universal doubt, slowly “when men were beginning to be equal and to resemble each other” doubt became more acceptable.

The effectual truth of similitude and equality—*le semblable*—was to extend the Cartesian method to all human ideas and institutions. Thus, the logic of equality is to generalize doubt: democracy inclines men to general doubt, which raises doubt to the status of the greatest, if not the only defensible, intellectual virtue, insofar as it is itself justified by the “continual movement that reigns in the heart of a democratic society.” After all, who could remain convinced of anything outside of oneself when nothing is at rest; when the present place and existence of all things is doubtful, and can only be understood to be contingent, or accidental? To put it technically, democracy’s unstable social ontology is directly related to the unsettled, restless disposition of the democratic soul: restlessness is the central psychological trait of the democratic man who is adrift in his social setting and intellectual life.<sup>167</sup> But can one adequately doubt something without first garnering some knowledge of the thing to be doubted? And yet, given the lack of time to properly examine things in detail, democrats are led to doubt without such

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<sup>167</sup> See, Peter Augustine Lawler, *The Restless Mind*; cf. Rahe, *Soft Despotism, Democracy’s Drift*, 170-71 *et passim*.

preliminary examination, doubting instead on the premise of doubtfulness's own ready-at-hand success.

It is little wonder that such social instability combined with doubtfulness is likewise conducive to what Tocqueville calls individualism, a phenomenon discussed in the previous chapter. Individualism can be said to be “the reflection and affirmation in the soul of each of this [democratic] social condition. It is the affirmation by the individual of his self-sufficiency.”<sup>168</sup> Whether such self-sufficiency is adequate, stable, or even real, remains an open question. In fact, the total reliance upon the effort of one's own reason may result in certain unreasonable outcomes. Nevertheless, the phenomenon is intelligible given the social conditions, and the democratic tautology comes to light: relying solely on the effort of one's own reason, one concludes that this faculty alone is consistent and reliable, justifying retreat within as the safest haven both socially and intellectually. In a state of equality men are left almost altogether to their own devices, with little to fall back upon, which in turn suggests to most men that the effort to forge ties is not likely worth the bother.<sup>169</sup> Thus, if social equality and intellectual doubt heighten men's sense of independence it is not without certain political costs. Indeed, “equality, which introduces great goods into the world, nevertheless suggests to men very dangerous instincts” (II.1.5, 419).

### **Independence and Weakness**

While intellectual self-sufficiency grants democratic citizens great independence, as they separate themselves from the bonds and authority of others, as well as from society's institutions, it makes them politically weak. Contrary to the expectation that

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<sup>168</sup> Pierre Manent, *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy*, 54.

<sup>169</sup> Paul Rahe, *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift*, 177.



individual independence might foster great civic virtue the apparent self-assurance and strength garnered within does not necessarily translate into social strength: “one finds none who exert a very great or above all a very lasting power over the mass” (II.1.20, 470). In fact, Tocqueville makes it plainly clear when he writes the following: “As conditions are equalized in a people, individuals appear smaller and society seems greater, or rather, each citizen, having become like all the others, is lost in the crowd, and one no longer perceives [anything] but the vast and magnificent image of the people itself” (II.4.2, 641). The rather uncanny result is that individuals sense, on the one hand, their independence, but on the other, equality presents them in the image of a single group, or a large and nebulous mass. Independence amidst equality is hardly a genuine or positive independence if it does not translate into action on the part of individuals, but leads them to turn towards “the crowd.” As Mansfield writes: “As equals [men] have an instinct towards pride and independence, but as individuals they suffer a sense of weakness and isolation that results from independence.”<sup>170</sup>

The undermining of old privileges and social structures—the situation of an unstable social ontology—frees the desires of men but provides few assured channels to fulfill them. Men at once feel they can chart their own personal destinies while their means to do so are not correlatively enhanced, due to the dramatic chance in social circumstances.

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

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<sup>170</sup> Mansfield, “Tocqueville: A Very Short Introduction,” 79.

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

They have destroyed the annoying privileges of some of those like them; they come up against the competition of all. The barrier has changed form rather than place. When men are nearly alike and follow the same route, it is difficult indeed for any one of them to advance quickly and to penetrate the uniform crowd that surrounds him and presses against him (II.2.13, 513).

The result is that at the very moment men appear to be independent, they retreat from it by making themselves dependent upon society; unable to rise above the “uniform crowd,” men are absorbed by it. *Le semblable* persists amidst an openness of possibilities while revoking the desire for distinction among so many men who sense their similitude; sensing that their individual ambitions are their own indeed, individuals likewise sense the futility of publicly pursuing them. Thus, the consequence of so much independence among the many is to “naturally [give] men in democratic times a very high opinion of the privileges of society and a very humble idea of the rights of the individual. They readily accept that the interest of the former is everything and that of the latter, nothing” (II.4.2, 642).

Such ready acceptance of collective privilege rests in large part on the fact that the real intellectual authority of democratic peoples is found in “common opinion,” which Tocqueville argues is “the sole guide that remains for individual reason among democratic peoples.” The appearance of independence can become just that, an appearance. As Tocqueville’s work shows at length, the method of applying the efforts of one’s own reason in democratic times so often amounts to following “the intellectual empire of the greatest number” in practice. In times of great variety and inequality, rooted in social and political structures and forms, one cannot speak of opinion in the singularly common sense of the term—the vast differences and inequality among men constituted the foundation for direct sources of hierarchical authority. “In times of

equality, *because of their similarity*, men have no faith in one another; but *this same similarity* gives them an almost unlimited trust in the judgment of the public; for it does not seem plausible to them that when all have the same enlightenment, truth is not found on the side of the greatest number” (II.1.2, 409; emphasis added). When men come to see others as identical to themselves, and therefore doubt that any such individual could be a source of truth, this similitude of men likewise leads them to believe that the aggregate of equals alone must result in right. So much is an obvious part of our daily existence today, when we speak so readily of such things as “popular opinion,” “the scientific community,” “the experts,” or even more generally of the “global conscience,” as though there were a faceless collective voice that pronounces proper judgment—as though from greater numbers follows enlightenment and wisdom.<sup>171</sup> Dismissing personal forms of authority, democrats are more willing to submit to an impersonal form of authority, for doing so avoids violating their sense of self-sufficiency.<sup>172</sup> However, it only further exemplifies the weakness associated with such independence.

Tocqueville makes clear just how difficult it is to stand athwart of common opinion, writing that in times of equality, “general opinion puts an immense weight on the mind of each individual; it envelops it, directs it, and oppresses it.” So much so that even in the attempt, when a man fails to find anything that raises or distinguishes himself from his fellows, “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

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<sup>171</sup> So much is an extension of the concern of majority rule, or the tyranny of the majority, that concerned Tocqueville deeply. See, Rahe, *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift*, 171ff.

<sup>172</sup> One ought to consider this discussion in light of Tocqueville's generally low estimation of the human intellect, insofar as he writes the following: “One can reckon that the majority of men will always stop in one of these two states: they will believe without knowing why, or not know precisely what one must believe. As for the [third] species of conviction, reflective and master of itself, which is born of science and raised in the very midst of agitations of doubt, it will ever be given only to the efforts of a very few men to attain it” (I.2.3, 179)

that he is wrong when the greater number affirms it. The majority does not need to constrain him; it convinces him” (II.3.21, 615). The “immense weight” of general opinion requires no aid from force, but rather makes uncommon opinion itself the greatest burden. In this light, we find further reason for the widespread nature of individualism, insofar as it is precisely a form of retreat into the inner being of one’s own heart, or self, based on the assumption that one need not act or engage publicly. Reliance on common opinion coincides with the assumption that one need not think critically regarding the politics that carry the day. In this sense, there is little difference between the isolated self, and the voiceless self huddled amongst the crowd. Therefore: “Men who inhabit democratic countries, having neither superiors nor inferiors nor habitual and necessary associates willingly fall back on themselves and consider themselves in isolation” (II.4.3, 643). The meaning is characteristically double here: men consider themselves, above all, and they undertake the consideration of the self as isolated from other selves and objective reality more broadly speaking.

The situation is cause for concern insofar as it can make men more likely to hold ideas that diminish the importance of politics, and so of collective action and responsibility. On the one hand, additional incentive—appeal to a sense of material interest—becomes a regular requirement: “When citizens are all independent and indifferent, it is only by paying them that one can obtain the cooperation of each; this infinitely multiplies the use of wealth and increases the value of it” (II.3.17, 587). And on the other hand, in an age of increasing doubt—or loss of faith—men’s perspectives become narrowed while their desires take less lofty form. Combined with a sense of weakness men become more prone to dangerous ideas, such as doctrines of fatality that

deny human freedom: “our contemporaries are only too inclined to doubt free will because each of them feels himself limited on all sides by his weakness, but they still willingly grant force and independence to men united in a social body” (II.1.20, 472). Doubting free will is akin to denying the possibility of social life and of a people’s power to chart its own course. There is scarcely a doctrine more destructive of political life.

Accepting that all is determined and otherwise beyond one’s control conduces passivity among peoples, making the situation ripe for despotism. Furthermore, the denial of free will is not unrelated to doctrines of materialism, which deny any non-material part of being like the soul, or an active force and agency beyond mere matter and its movement based on chance or necessity. Insofar as democracy “favors the taste for material enjoyments” this taste may become “excessive” so as to eventually dispose men “to believe that all is nothing but matter; and materialism in its turn serves to carry them toward these enjoyments with an insane ardor” (II.2.15, 519). With the prominence of such doctrines, combined with a sense of weakness and isolation, one wonders whether the possibility for fellow feeling is altogether precluded. An examination of Tocqueville’s views on the likelihood of mutual aid among democrats and its limits further illustrates the generalizing phenomenon. For compassion is perhaps the most readily generalizable sentiment, and yet is weakest when void of particular substance. If democrats are capable of enlarging the object of their compassion to humanity as a whole, and are therefore more successfully humanitarian in theory, it is not clear that such generalized compassion is either sustainable or politically responsible.

## **Mutual Need and Democratic Compassion**

We have just discussed one of the important paradoxes that Tocqueville illustrates to be inherent to democracy: men may feel an inner strength alongside experiencing an outward weakness. If their hearts grow, their ability to act upon their sentiments decreases. The two states of independence and weakness, Tocqueville underlines, “must neither be viewed separately nor confused,” as these states “give the citizens of democracies very contrary instincts.” Such independence fills men with “confidence and pride among his equals,” while “his debility makes him feel, from time to time, the need of the outside help that he cannot expect from any of them, since they are all impotent and cold” (II.4.3, 644). The democratic heart is equally filled with pride and shame; the democratic mind suffers from the mutuality of strength and weakness; the democratic man is torn between opposing instincts of and abilities for action and inaction, on his own behalf and for his fellows. Thus he is prone to turn towards the state: “In this extremity, he naturally turns his regard to the immense being that rises alone in the midst of universal debasement. His needs and above all his desires constantly lead him back to it, and in the end he views it as the unique and necessary support for individual weakness.” However, the logic of democracy also opens new vistas for compassion—that is, it generalizes it, even universalizes it, so that as men become increasingly equal, they become all the more aware of their mutual and similar capacity for suffering. The experience of similitude makes compassion a predominant sentiment in democracy, as it is intimately related to the notion of mildness that Tocqueville repeatedly discusses. Mildness is no contingent fact, for Tocqueville links it “directly to the profound logic of

the democratic social state.”<sup>173</sup> In fact, Part III of Volume Two, which addresses the “Influence of Democracy on Mores Properly So-Called,” opens with an explicit discussion of “How Mores Become Milder as Conditions are Equalized” (II.3.1, 535). Equality opens the hearts of men to the humanity and suffering of others like themselves.

There is, Tocqueville writes, “real sympathy only among people who are alike” (II.3.1, 536). Under feudal institutions, and during periods of inequality, men do not feel sympathy or obligations towards man in general. Instead, individuals understood themselves in accordance with their class, or place in society, to say nothing of their ethnic, national, linguistic, and religious identities. Allegiances and sentiments rarely transcended these delineations. Thus: “Feudal institutions rendered one very sensitive to the ills of *certain men*, but not to the miseries of the human species,” and even then it was not “genuine sympathy,” but a sense of obligation and duty. Only among men of the same class could there be any such sentiment. To illustrate his point, Tocqueville provides evidence by way of the correspondence of an aristocratic woman, Madame de Sévigné, who was by all accounts a kind, loving, and enlightened woman—the farthest thing from being “a selfish and barbaric creature.” In her letter, penned to her daughter, she recounts the effects of a tax that adversely affected the peasants, inspiring their revolt and the reciprocal response of the executive that brought down the full force of the law upon them. Mme de Sévigné lets her pleasure and satisfaction regarding the punishments administered be known to her daughter, stating that their province is a “beautiful example for the others,” before turning to address more trite details of life in the countryside. It is Tocqueville’s conclusion that “Madame de Sévigné did not clearly conceive what it was to suffer when one was not a gentleman” (II.3.1, 537). He goes on to say that it would be

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<sup>173</sup> Manent, *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy*, 47.

inconceivable in a democratic age for even “the hardest man, writing to the most insensitive person” to “dare engage in cold blood in the cruel banter” reproduced from the Madame’s letter. The mildness of manners is today an inescapable fact.

While compassion was not previously predominant and so had little political import, the aristocratic age nonetheless fostered obligations. Tocqueville underlines just how important the political order was for establishing such bonds, when he writes, “these mutual obligations did not arise from natural right, but from political right.” It was the artifice of politics—the regime—that established and maintained such relations. To this he adds the following conclusion: “society obtained more than humanity alone could have done.” This is an important insight, insofar as it illustrates the weakness of humanity without political form, as well as its inability to bring about actual and lasting obligations. These bonds, while artificial—bound through the artifice of forms—were fixed across time and adhered to by both sides. It is not clear that a broad association based on a generalized natural sentiment could establish as much.

In aristocratic society was not an immediacy of sympathy, nor even a mutual understanding in the sense of empathy, as it were, but society’s structure remained intact, and men knew where they stood and what was required of them, without having to rely on passing sentiments. In contrast, it is true that the democratic regime undermines such rigidity, and in turn opens the human heart to the possibility of vicarious experience of those similar to oneself, in that so many appear similar. However, in its breadth, democratic compassion loses strength, which is to say it wanes in its commitment and longevity.

When ranks are almost equal in a people, all men having nearly the same manner of thinking and feeling, each of them can judge the sensations of all the others in a moment: he casts a rapid glance at himself; that



is enough for him. There is therefore no misery he does not conceive without trouble and whose extent a secret instinct does not discover for him. It makes no difference whether it is a question of strangers or of enemies: imagination immediately puts him in their place. It mixes something personal with his pity and makes him suffer himself while the body of someone like him is torn apart. *In democratic centuries, men rarely devote themselves to one another; but they show a general compassion for all members of the human species* (II.3.1, 536, emphasis added).

The effect of similitude is the sense that one has immediate access to the emotions and experience of those like oneself. This access, so to speak, is garnered through sight and with the power of imagination—reasoned speech is itself unnecessary. The distinctions and details that speech may offer are superfluous for general compassion. Once sufficiently generalized, the differences of particular experience recede into the background, for it is not only a generalized form of compassion, but the object of emotion is itself as broad as possible: “all the members of the human species.” Yet having gained in breadth, democratic compassion loses the strength of devotion, for genuine commitment requires the strength of a particular will, which is necessarily limited in terms of the objects to which and time with which it may devote itself. The problem is even more acute in a world where the information revolution has spawned what might now be called the “globalization of the spectacle of suffering”—something Tocqueville could only have imagined. As Orwin writes, “In a global village where so much misery is always on display, democratic compassion sustains an inclination toward humanitarian intervention. At the same time, however, isolationism (the collective counterpart to individualism) will remain an equally deep inclination of democratic peoples. Their will to sacrifice for humanitarian ends will be as weak as their wish to promote these ends is earnest.”<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Clifford Orwin, “Compassion and the Softening of Mores,” *Journal of Democracy: Tocqueville Reconsidered*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2001): 143; see also, Orwin, “Distant Compassion: CNN and Borrioboola-Gha,” *The National Interest* 43 (Spring 1996): 46-54.

In asking whether “we have more sensitivity than our fathers” as a result of the mildness equality fosters, Tocqueville replies that he does not know, adding: “but surely our sensitivity bears on more objects” (II.3.1, 538). That said, it is not self-evident whether it is better to be fully devoted in one’s compassion towards fewer objects than to spread one’s compassion towards a greater number. Whatever the case, the question highlights the problematicity of compassion and its inescapable limitations. With the invocation of compassion’s temporal and spatial limits one cannot help but be reminded of the contrary and transcendent form of compassion, or love—namely that of God’s love, which does in fact extend to all individual men and the human species as a whole. While the teaching of Christian charity informs men to approximate this feat, it admits requiring God’s intervening grace. The democratic regime so transforms men’s imaginations as to no longer require this intermediating force, or its interceding form of the Church. Notwithstanding the fact that democracy is in many important respects an outgrowth of Christianity, and that Tocqueville clearly argues for the continued importance of religion for maintaining liberty, the dismissal of forms and the democratic desire for unmediated equality dampens the voice of religion.<sup>175</sup> Likewise, democracy seeks to transform and thereby secularize Christian charity; to turn it into democratic compassion that no longer relies on any mediation but instead leaves each man’s heart directly responsive to the suffering of all. However, as a substitute democracy reveals its weakness in its inability to bring about great devotion. In contrast, what greater sign of

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<sup>175</sup> As has been discussed, Tocqueville refers to the democratic revolution as a “providential fact,” and he otherwise makes clear how important Christianity has been for making the idea of equality concrete, as illustrated in such statements as the following: “it was necessary that Jesus Christ come to earth to make it understood that all members of the human species are naturally alike and equal” (II.1.3, 412). And so he reminds readers of something that they “must never forget”: that “religion gave birth to the Anglo-American societies” (II.1.1, 405). We return to the importance and role of religion below.

devotion, and thereby better example of genuine compassion, can one find than the sacrifice of certain saints and martyrs, suffering and dying on behalf of others, in imitation of Christ?

Theological virtues aside, the fact remains that democratic compassion is full of ambivalence, and it is equality itself—the experience of *le semblable*—that serves as its tenuous support. For, “the same man who is full of humanity for those like him when they are at the same time his equals becomes insensitive to their sorrows as equality ceases.” And according to Tocqueville, this same truth that applies to individuals is equally true of peoples (II.3.1, 538-9). So it is that democracy “does not attach men strongly to one another, but it renders their habitual relations easier” (II.3.2, 539). Furthermore, as Tocqueville illustrates in his chapter on the democratic family, “democracy loosens social bonds, but it tightens natural bonds” (II.3.8, 563).<sup>176</sup> One may wonder then whether the natural is easier, or the easier is more natural, as well as whether this is a fact that democracy naturally draws out, or perhaps a fact that democracy creates, as it were. Whatever the case, Tocqueville reveals the ambivalent nature of certain so-called easier relations, for men more easily come together just as they more easily come apart, or stand at odds. Because equality is coterminous with greater movement and mobility—a general agitation—it means that a “muted war among all citizens is immediately established” (II.3.2, 540); something that does not exist to the same extent in aristocratic regimes. Even amidst social equality, great economic disparity may persist, and certain privileges may still be gained. So much is obvious from our own daily experience today.

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<sup>176</sup> On the question of the greater or lesser naturalness of democracy as compared to aristocracy, see, Manent, *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy*, esp. 67-82.

The difference with previous times is that the possibility of acquiring great wealth and privilege is open to all men, from which follows, however, that “those who possess them are constantly preoccupied with the fear of losing them or of seeing them partitioned; and those who do not yet have them want at all cost to possess them, or if they cannot succeed at this, to appear to—which is not impossible.” So it is, on the one hand, that men depend upon one another for the sake of great action, including for the generation of wealth, among other things, inasmuch as “all feel themselves to be subject to the same weakness and the same dangers, and their interest as well as their sympathy makes it a law for them to lend each other mutual assistance when in need” (II.3.4, 545). And thus on the other hand men have much to fear from one another since there are no fixed places or lots, and all are equally positioned to vie for the same positions, privileges and goods; they feel one another’s pain while being equally likely to cause one another pain, at large. This situation makes cultivating a civic sense of the utmost importance, and doing so rests upon developing faculties beyond an easy, even natural, general compassion. The basis for this cultivation is a proper development of certain ideas, as well as limiting the over-generalization of ideas. For just as a regime is constituted by and constitutes men’s sentiments, so too does it persist and contribute to their ideas. Indeed, certain common ideas are necessary for political life: “without common ideas there is no common action, and without common action men still exist, but a social body does not” (II.1.2, 407). Society is held together by way of the “principal ideas” that bind men’s minds together, and the character of such ideas in turn determines the kind of public and political life of a people. Arguably the most important fundamental ideas men hold in this regard are of the nature of man and of God. As Tocqueville writes: “There is

almost no human action, however particular one supposes it, that does not arise from a very general idea that men have conceived of God, of his relations with the human race, of the nature of their souls, and of their duties toward those like them. One cannot keep these ideas from being the common source from which all the rest flow” (II.1.5, 417). Even as men’s ideas of God may be little more than general, it is important that they are restrained from generalizing their idea of God to the ultimate extent of pantheism, as the logic of equality tends toward.

### **General and Particular Ideas, and the Generalization of Ideas**

In a remarkably epistemological chapter, one that follows upon a discussion of beliefs, and the sources of beliefs, among democratic peoples, Tocqueville examines the relevance and necessity of general ideas. He opens the discussion (II.1.3, 411) by stating the fact that God does not need general ideas, for at “a single glance he sees separately all of the beings of which humanity is composed, and he perceives each of them with the similarities that bring [each one] closer to all and the differences that isolate [each one] from [everyone else].” God does not need to generalize, because his mind grasps actual particularity—both similarity and difference—without any requisite mediation. He sees immediately the vast array of things in themselves, despite their multitude, and therefore “never feels the necessity of enclosing a very great number of analogous objects under the same form so as to think about them more conveniently.” Man’s mind lacks such perspective and capaciousness, for “if the human mind undertook to examine and judge individually all the particular cases that strike it, it would soon be lost in the midst of the immensity of detail and would no longer see anything.” Pure particularity blinds man, or

offers but a blur to his mind, which leads the human mind to have “recourse to an imperfect but necessary process that both aids it in its weakness and proves its weakness.”

General ideas offer men a means by which to name, categorize, compare, and consider similar things, or things that resemble one another to greater or lesser degrees. In turn, men are able to make judgments, sometimes with rapidity. However, general ideas “never provide anything but incomplete notions, and they always make [the mind] lose in exactness what they give it in extent.” For, according to Tocqueville, “there are no beings in nature exactly alike: no identical facts, no rules indiscriminately applicable in the same manner to several objects at once.” Nature is an infinite series of particularities, containing only a range of similarity, but not so much as to speak of identity. To the extent that the beings of humanity come close together through their similarity, they remain isolated to some degree through their differences, ultimately united only in the mind of God—in the midst of his general ponderance of the human race.

Tocqueville’s epistemological discussion outlined here highlights a basic but important ontological insight with political consequence: men are brought together on the basis of similarity and separated on the basis of difference. Generalization generates extension and inclusion but thinness, while particularization confers depth or substance but exclusion. To this basic truth is added the specific political context or social condition: conditions of equality foster greater likeness while inequality fosters greater distinction. “When conditions are very unequal and the inequalities are permanent, individuals little by little become so unlike that one would say there are as many distinct

humanities as there are classes; one always discovers only one of them at a time, and losing sight of the general bond that brings all together in the vast bosom of the human race, one ever views only some men, not man” (II.1.3, 412). Democracy opens the way to thinking of man, in general. While aristocratic periods gave rise to exemplary men, and great consideration of them in their distinctive and distinguishing virtues, democratic periods enlarge thought beyond the exceptional examples: “the man who inhabits democratic countries finds near him only beings who are almost the same; he therefore cannot consider any part whatsoever of the human species without having his thought enlarge and dilate to embrace the sum.” The consequence runs further: “All the truths applicable to himself *appear to him to apply equally and in the same manner* to each of his fellow citizens and to those like him” (II.1.3, 413; emphasis added).

While men grow in equality under democracy, it is an error to presume that equality eliminates all human differences. Tocqueville himself insists that certain inequalities remain, and thus a difference in talents and abilities persist all the same (II.2.20, 532; II.3.21, 613; II.1.2, 408; II.1.9, 431). Nonetheless, the appearance of similitude may lead men to a kind of in-difference and self-absorption in thought to the extent that they are unable to discern or detect any distinctions in experience outside of their individual selves. So much indicates a complete absence of dialectic when one mentally subjects all others to the same solipsistic standard, or when one presumes the subjective to be identical to the objective, establishing the former to be the standard of the latter. The habit of generalizing as such—of applying general ideas—is one in which Tocqueville finds the democratic man to increasingly engage, carrying it over into all of his studies and pursuits.

The habit of generalization is linked to the growing abstraction in language: “This love of general ideas manifests itself in democratic languages in the continual use of generic terms and abstract words, and in the manner in which they are employed” (II.1.16, 456). As is the case with general ideas, so too do abstract words demonstrate merit and weakness. Generic terms and abstract words “aid the work of the intellect” because they allow for the inclusion of so “many objects in a small space.”<sup>177</sup> One can cover a lot of ground in a short period of time, insofar as “these expressions enlarge thought”; however, if thought expands as such, it rarely pauses to examine the qualifications, particular cases—either in support or against the idea—and its constituent elements. Thought thereby slides thoughtlessly—if easily—along. Tocqueville speaks of the laziness of the democratic mind that is exhausted by the work of analyzing so many incongruous and distinct facts, so that it ultimately “denies them.” It is much easier instead to speak in the abstract terms of “the nature of races, the physical constitution of the country, or the spirit of the civilization,” all of which helps to shorten the mind’s work, providing greater satisfaction at less cost (II.1.20, 470).

It is thus the case that abstract words, which are readily used “without linking them to any particular fact,” both “enlarge and veil a thought” (II.1.16, 457). Tocqueville connects this phenomenon to the constant movement in and of society no less: “as their situation changes constantly, [democratic men] are never held firmly to any of their opinions by the very immobility of their fortune. Men who inhabit democratic countries therefore often have vacillating thoughts; they must have very large expressions to contain them” (II.1.16, 457). Instability is a cause of abstraction, as is novelty, for one

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<sup>177</sup> The essayist and critic Joseph Epstein offers the delightful and apt expression of ‘baggy pant phrase’ for loose language—suggesting both a cavalier and imprecise attitude towards words.



never knows if an idea expressed today will suffice for tomorrow's newness, and thus "a taste for abstract terms" naturally develops. Tocqueville's eloquent metaphor for an abstract word is to view it as "a box with a false bottom: one puts in it the ideas one desires and one takes them out without anyone's seeing it." The charm and secret power of abstract words follow from the fact that they can be all-inclusive and less than readily challenged by intentionally neglecting the concrete details that might otherwise challenge them.

Tocqueville goes so far as to say that the democratic habit of generalization eventually turns into a need. "[T]he need to discover common rules for all things, to enclose many objects within the same form, and to explain a collection of facts by a single cause becomes an ardent and often blind passion of the human mind." So strong can the penchant become that "democratic peoples are always ready to abuse [general] ideas and indiscreetly to become inflamed over them" (II.1.3, 415). If democrats are prone to doing away with forms, they may nonetheless retain the broadest, or abstract, of forms. Arguably the most common of all is that of the human species at large. It is important to reiterate that there are certainly some positive outcomes from the spread of general ideas—and even abstract words—for it gives rise to the very idea of the human species in general, which in turn makes men aware of a degree of natural likeness and equality among them, in contrast to the radical particularity of previous ages where people drove a firm wedge between the master and slave classes, for example. Thus, general ideas can contribute to maintaining and realizing "the natural dignity of the human species" (I.2.5, 194).

However, generalization can be carried to the extreme, when indeed one begins to generalize strictly from one's own experience to that of all others, considering every thing to be inherently identical, and equality to exist on all levels of existence and of the person. The consequence for politics when generalization is so great as to reject the need for any but the most encompassing of forms—forms that mediate and separate people—is the denial of any importance to particular political regimes, or even national borders and courts of justice. So much is a step well along the way towards the ultimate form of generalization, namely, pantheism. Indeed, pantheism is the most general of general ideas, and poses a serious threat to political freedom and action. Latent within the penchant to generalize is the desire to remove distinctions that are deemed to be oppressive—forms of inequality, on the one hand, but forms at large, on the other hand—but it is a process that can likewise undermine the sources of human action and the very space within which liberty thrives; not to mention expressions of human freedom rest upon the activity of individuals distinguishing themselves. Thus, there is a link between the annihilation of distinctions, or pantheism, and what Tocqueville calls the “doctrine of fatality” (II.1.20, 472).

### **Pantheism and the Doctrine of Fatality**

Tocqueville provides a brief statement on how much “progress” pantheism has made in his day, and the extent to which its influence and presence in European philosophy and literature has grown. Its very progress is the ultimate progress of equality: “There is no conceivable democratic or egalitarian progress beyond pantheism. It is the most general idea.”<sup>178</sup> Tocqueville finds that authors of various kinds either

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<sup>178</sup> Lawler, *The Restless Mind*, 34.

betray a tendency towards pantheism or borrow opinions and ideas from it. And for Tocqueville, it is no accident, but is “due to a lasting cause” (II.1.7, 425). For, among the various systems of thought and conceptualizations available to help explain the world and guide men, pantheism appears to Tocqueville as “one of the most appropriate to seduce the human mind in democratic centuries” (II.1.7, 426). It is a doctrine that lives under various names, permeating numerous modern ideologies that live on today, whereby the distinctions between transcendence and immanence are collapsed, or entire realms of being are blurred. It is an idea, however, for all those “who remain enamored of the genuine greatness of man” to unite and do combat against. The “genuine greatness of man” rests in something other than unifying all aspects of being; genuine greatness requires separation in the parts of being, and therefore distinctiveness—or to put it more emphatically, the assertion of distinctiveness on behalf of individual human beings.

Pantheism’s lasting presence derives from the equality of conditions, and so is inherent to, even inextricable from, the experience of *le semblable*. When individuals are increasingly equal and start to resemble one another, each appears “weaker and smaller,” for none stand out, or tower above others as either natural rulers or leaders. From the perspective of thought, “one gets used to no longer viewing citizens so as to consider only the people.” Equality leads the eye to larger groupings of peoples, until eventually it rises to the highest level of abstraction: “one forgets individuals so as to think only of the species.” So much is at the heart of our present day consciousness, or the global perspective, which some today aspire to establish as the only legitimate viewpoint. As has been convincingly argued, on the basis of Tocqueville’s work, democracy gives rise to a few select kind of human beings. One of the sub-types of democratic man that James

Ceaser teases out of Tocqueville's work is that of "Globo-Man." His chief psychological trait is his utter lack of unattachment to any particular society, leaving him instead drawn to humanity as such: "He is a practicing congregant of the religion of humanity."<sup>179</sup>

Among the numerous ways this macro-perspective—or the psychology of "Globo-Man"—manifests itself is in the work and approach of those Tocqueville refers to as "democratic historians." These writers and thinkers largely deny any role of import to particular individuals in shaping the destiny or history of peoples, seeing instead some general cause, or inevitable trajectory for the species to progress. The particular individual, even the particular nation for that matter, is absorbed into a larger entity, drawn as it is towards some abstract goal. Democratic historians today might claim that globalization is ineluctable to the point that national sovereignty is no longer legitimate—that it is a mere throwback to an older age, when particular nations mattered—insofar as we have now entered a global age, beyond political forms. Democratic historians "not only deny to a few citizens the power to act on the destiny of a people, they take away from the peoples themselves the ability to modify their own fate, and they subject them either to an inflexible providence or to a sort of blind fatality" (II.1.20, 471). Such a perspective is seen to be an improvement upon a more narrow one, caught up as it was in examining distinctive features, attending to particular details, and sometimes attributing too much significance to the wills and actions of a few.

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<sup>179</sup> Paul Rahe, James Ceaser, Thomas West, "Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift: What Tocqueville Teaches Us Today," in *First Principles Series Report #28 on Political Thought*, Sept. 2, 2009, available at: <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2009/09/soft-despotism-democracys-drift-what-tocqueville-teaches-today>. Ceaser goes on to make the following important point: "For Tocqueville, the stopping point of effective attachment in our age should be the nation. It remains the only unit that is still capable of great action and that can uphold a meaningful standard of honor. In other words, if the identification of man is humanity, the notion of greatness must grow dimmer and dimmer."

It may be granted that aristocratic historians exaggerated to some extent the importance of individual actors, when their attention was “diverted to individuals at every moment” to the extent that any or every “sequence of event elude[d] them” or that they denied any such sequence whatsoever. This perspective is admittedly not without its limitations as well. As Tocqueville professes, the ancient historians, while having written “such beautiful histories,” could not offer “a single great historical system.” In contrast, modern works are replete with systems of various kinds. Democratic historians are led to “assign a great cause to each fact.” Moreover, they end up trying to link every single fact systematically, as though everything is intelligible through a singularly causal lens. Notwithstanding the great diversity of objects and events, the democratic mind strives to embrace them all, seeking as it does “to link a multitude of consequences to a single cause” (II.1.7, 426). Just like in the case of general ideas, there is some validity to such seeking, but only to a limited extent, and when justified by the facts. To be sure, Tocqueville himself finds equality to be such a prominent cause; however, he also notes a remarkable number of particular details and additional causes. One might say, he ever qualifies such singularity. He professes as much in terms of understanding history and its events: “As for me, I think that there is no period in which it is not necessary to attribute one part of the events of this world to very general facts and another to very particular influences. These two causes are always met with; only their relationship differs” (II.1.20, 470). Moreover, he is well aware of “one of the most familiar weaknesses of the human intellect,” namely, “to want to reconcile contrary principles and to buy peace at the expense of logic” (II.1.6, 425). Some principles simply cannot be reconciled; some elements of human life remain necessarily separated; some facts are unsystematic in that

they arise from sources other than strict reason, and are therefore sufficiently particular as to preclude systematization. And yet, despite these insights, it remains that in democratic times, “[t]he idea of unity obsesses [the mind].” It is this obsession that paves the way for pantheism.

Pantheism is the culmination of the mind’s unification of all things. It is the utter elimination of all distinctions that human beings may encounter or perceive, whether real or imagined, to the extent that everything is collapsed into a single unity—all differences are done away with, among or across human beings, as well as among things animate and inanimate, material and spiritual, even human and divine. The democratic mind, obsessed as it may become, seeks unity,

on all sides, and when it believes it has found it, it willingly wraps it in its bosom and rests with it. Not only does it come to discover only one creation and one Creator in the world; this first division of things still bothers it, and it willingly seeks to enlarge and simplify its thought by enclosing God and the universe within a single whole. If I encounter a philosophic system according to which the things material and immaterial, visible and invisible that the world includes are considered as no more than diverse parts of an immense being which alone remains eternal in the midst of the continual change and incessant transformation of all that composes it, I shall have no trouble concluding that such a system, although it destroys human individuality, or rather because it destroys it, will have secret charms for men who live in democracy; all their intellectual habits prepare them to conceive it and set them on the way to adopting it. It naturally attracts their imagination and fixes it; it nourishes the haughtiness and flatters the laziness of their minds (II.1.8, 426).

The reconciliation of all principles, the drawing together of all things and all beings, offers the democratic mind a kind of peace—there is a “secret charm” to unity. The passion of equality that so moves the democratic heart leaves it unsettled in the presence of anything other than itself, or anything it cannot identify with without requiring mediation; hence the collapsing of all distinctions into a grand, nebulous, unity. So much is appealing to the democratic heart, and its direct form of compassion, which soon expands beyond the entirety of humanity to all other beings as well. Never before our time has a concern for animals been greater, to the extent that some advocate human

rights to certain clever creatures, like whales, dolphins, and chimpanzees. Likewise, one can witness a divinization of the environment, or the world at large—not to say nature itself—in certain environmental movements of the day, all of which is part of the pantheistic mindset. Whatever its charm, however, the consequence of pantheism, and so of this idea of god, is an idea of man that comes to negate his uniqueness, and so too the distinctiveness of individuals. It is an idea that attacks outright the remarkableness of the human will and the capacity for action—that is, of the kind of action and activity that allows man to express the highest elements within him, which otherwise distinguish him at once from all that is non-human, as well as from other humans. So much is what Tocqueville means when he speaks of greatness, which is both a product and preserver of human freedom that pantheism otherwise saps, or relaxes.

To lose sight of the impact that the action of individuals can have on nations is akin to “see[ing] the world moving without discovering its motor” (II.1.20, 471). To see things only in terms of unity and at the highest level of generality is to become blind and deaf to the reasons—to the particular speeches and deeds—that individuals initiate and assert. Consequently, one is tempted to believe that the movement of a people, or the activity of a nation, is anything but voluntary; instead, such a mind is inclined to perceive some larger force dominating and moving societies along. Tocqueville argues that the discovery of a general cause directing the particular wills of all individuals could not save human freedom. “A cause vast enough to be applied to millions of men at once and strong enough to incline all together in the same direction easily seems irresistible; after having seen that one yields to it, one is quite close to believing that one cannot resist it.” The democratic historians’ assertion of a general cause offers a charming lullaby against

the power of citizens to act, against their belief that they may modify their own fate, or that they are capable of anything great. The histories of “our time” suggest, “man can do nothing either about himself or his surroundings.” This is the kernel of what Tocqueville rightly calls the “doctrine of fatality,” which is so prominent among democratic writers, that is passed on to their democratic readers, and ends up “penetrating the entire mass of citizens and taking hold of the public mind.” It is a doctrine that is particularly dangerous in the democratic age, for there men are all the more inclined to doubt free will when “each of them feels himself limited on all sides by his weakness.” His independence leaves him isolated—lonely among a crowd, whose fate is seemingly determined.

It is both encouraging and a concern, however, that such minds may “still willingly grant force and independence to men united in a social body.” It is encouraging, for men bound by common ideas are capable of acting in concert, preserving their political freedom; however, it is a concern if men rely solely upon society to act for them or on their behalf. Hence Tocqueville states with earnest: “One must guard against obscuring this idea, for it is a question of elevating souls and not completing their prostration” (II.1.21, 471). One must not obscure the idea of the social body, in terms of individuals in a given social body, and a particular social body among the broader grouping of humanity’s distinct societies. Not obscuring this idea requires properly conceiving the idea of humanity—a proper representation of the ideal—which is to say understanding the continued importance of political plurality, and the particularity of peoples despite a genuinely general, or transcendent, human unity.



## **The Poetry of Humanity**

We have discussed how important ideas and sentiments are for political life, and just how relevant certain ideas about God and man remain in the democratic age. The nature of the latter ideas is such that they operate in the realm of the ideal as well, for they are ideas that rest at least in part on the power of imagination as well as on reason and feeling. Thus, they rely, if not require, the use of poetry, which Tocqueville himself defines as “the search for and depiction of the ideal” (II.1.17, 458). Poetry “completes and enlarges nature” and thereby adorns truth, offering “a superior image to the mind.” Poetry is both an example of man’s distinctiveness, in terms of his unique ability to represent the ideal, as well as a means by which his own greatness can be represented. However, like so many things, poetry too is shaped by the social conditions of the day, and according to Tocqueville, the very sources of democratic poetry differ from those of aristocratic poetry. Put most simply, aristocratic poets find “a thousand diverse subjects to depict” in that they live in a world “peopled with supernatural beings who do not come before the senses, but which the mind discovers” (II.1.17, 459). The religiosity of aristocratic peoples, and the strong faith of the aristocratic mind, leads the poet to depict things transcendent and divine, which is to say the ideal that arises from contemplation and the many objects outside and beyond the individual’s own mind—the aristocratic poet depicts what might be called an objective order, or its various aspects. In contrast, the democratic poet is inclined to depict the ideal in the useful and what is materially real, and what might otherwise be associated with his own subjectivity. Whereas doubt “brings the imagination of poets back to earth and confines them to the visible and real world,” aristocratic belief suggests that “aristocratic people will always be inclined to

place intermediary powers between God and man.” The aristocratic mind relies upon mediating forms, and depicts what is greater than man so as to depict man’s greatness; it discovers intermediary powers between God and man because God and man are not one and the same. This radical separation that requires inter-mediation to bring them together is one of the great sources of aristocratic poetry. On the other hand, the democratic mind dismisses forms to depict what is immediately before man, and his pantheistic metaphysics precludes any need for intermediary or mediating forms or powers. Thus, Tocqueville’s verdict is that “equality, in establishing itself on the earth, dries up most of the old sources of poetry,” however, it nonetheless “uncovers new ones” (II.1.17, 460).

Tocqueville provides a remarkable account of the stages of democratic poetic development. He argues that the democratic imagination passes from depicting and embellishing the material and inanimate things of the earth, before it eventually “turns the imagination away from all that is external to man to fix it only on man.” In a striking statement, Tocqueville summarizes how democratic poetry becomes the poetry of humanity: “Democratic peoples can amuse themselves well for a moment in considering nature; but they only become really animated at the sight of themselves.” This self-adulation is not unrelated to the fact that the democratic mind is prone to the idea of the “perfectibility of man” as something that is “indefinite” (II.1.8, 426). While an old idea, it is one that the aristocratic mind confined “in advance within certain impassible limits.” With man’s constant attention to himself, he sees no limits to the extent of his perfectibility, and without any distinctions between the transcendent and immanent realms, it becomes all the more conceivable that his own perfectibility here and now is the very meaning of existence. With little concern for the past, democratic peoples turn

their attention towards the future, and “in this direction their imagination has no limits; here it stretches and enlarges itself beyond measure” (II.1.17, 460). The future holds ultimate meaning, and the meaningful future is a perfected humanity, united as one.

Initially, the effect of *le semblable* is to make the individual of little interest to poetry, for one and all are alike, so that “the nation offers itself to the brush” instead. The logic of similarity makes men inseparable, and unites them in the mind of the poet, so as to “include all of them in the same image” and thereby depict the “people itself” as the object of poetry. This is only a stage, however, at which point democratic nations so clearly perceive “their own shape”—more clearly, that is, than previous peoples. Depicting the nation becomes the highest form of the ideal for the poet to represent, but as a stage, and in accordance with the effect of *le semblable*, this moment of national grandeur and aggrandizing must pass, for nations too are under the influence of *le semblable*. So the attention of the poet is drawn not vertically towards the heavens but horizontally towards the breadth of humanity. For there comes to be both appearance and reality to the similitude of nations and peoples, which is a consequence of “the extreme mobility of men and their impatient desires.” One would be hard pressed to find a better shorthand phrase to summarize globalization of style. At any rate, this extreme mobility and impatience of desire results in the following:

the inhabitants of different countries mix with each other, see each other, listen to each other, and borrow from each other. Therefore not only do members of the same nation become alike; nations themselves are assimilated, and in the eye of the spectator all together all together form nothing more than a vast democracy of which each citizen is a people. That puts the shape of the human race in broad daylight for the first time.

All that relates to the existence of the human race taken as a whole, its vicissitudes, its future, becomes a very rich mine for poetry (II.1.17, 461).

The democratic poets come to see only “humanity itself” and the grand shape of the human race, whereas in the past “the general notion of those like oneself was obscure.”<sup>180</sup> Neither the poets depict, nor do the people perceive, any objective sense to their social world, or any standard of measurement outside of themselves. So powerful is the appearance if not the substance of similitude, that depictions of the ideal preclude any attention to differences and distinctions. Each individual comes to easily identify with every other individual simply by virtue of being human, and democratic poetry both reflects and seeks to advance this experience.

Despite the often faltering faith in positive religions in democratic centuries, “men are...disposed to conceive a much vaster idea of divinity itself, and its intervention in human affairs appears to them in a new and greater light” (II.1.17, 461-2). So much is consistent with the democratic tendency towards pantheism. With fixation upon themselves, the divine becomes the force at work guiding the species: humanity’s history is thus divinized, and is thereby understood to have followed a necessary plan. This divinity is not given body or any proper form, for democratic poets “will always appear small and cold if they try to give corporeal forms to gods, demons, or angels, and if they seek to make them descend from Heaven to contend for earth.” Instead, God—no longer transcendent—is the force in and of history that becomes associated with the indefinite

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<sup>180</sup> This is not to deny that previous periods had a notion of the unity of mankind. To take only the most obvious example, the Greek philosophers certainly had an understanding of the human species at large, but to the extent that they could perceive its broad unity, the differences, nay the quite distinct and qualitative inequalities among humanity’s peoples—e.g., between Greek and Barbarian—were deemed as more profound, and were not unrelated to the ways of life of different peoples, which is to say the way they organized for and practiced politics. For an account of earlier views of human unity, see, H. C. Baldry, *The Unity of Mankind in Greek Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965). For an account of how influential the idea of human unity has become since the nineteenth century, see, Karen O’Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and Thomas J. Schlerth, *The Cosmopolitan Ideal in Enlightenment Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

perfectibility of the species, the ever-growing status of equality, and the ultimate unification of all peoples. This combination of ingredients, with its combination of a general consciousness of humanity and the inevitable triumph of progress, cannot help but result in a sort of passivity; locked within its own gaze upon itself, humanity becomes its own object of worship. The passive and self-recessed disposition is itself perfectly consistent with the individualism that Tocqueville so keenly analyzes.

One should hardly find it surprising that individualism has the potential to operate on the level of the particular individual and the general species, in an age of globalized and globalizing democracy and democratic consciousness. After all, it is in the chapter on individualism where Tocqueville draws the following comparative insight:

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

In democratic centuries, on the contrary, when the duties of each individual toward the species are much clearer, devotion toward one man becomes rare: the bond of human affections is extended and loosened (II.2.2, 483).

The relationship, on the one hand, between the forgetting of self in the devotion to another particular individual amidst obscurity of *le semblable*, and, on the other hand, the absorption of self in unison with humanity through clarity of *le semblable*, could scarcely be clearer. To the extent that democracy gives rise to a new-found duty to humanity, it is not clear that it will be enacted upon, or is sufficient to draw self-satisfied men outside of themselves to make genuine sacrifices. Indeed, the cure for the broader problem of individualism, which can be consistent with complacent forms of humanitarianism, is a means to draw the individual, and even the species, outside of itself—to transcend itself. Tocqueville powerfully suggests that a properly transcendent religion can aid in this

regard, for it alone can provide a genuine form of universality that preserves the particularities of political life.

The topic of religion in Tocqueville's work is a vast and complex one, and cannot be addressed at length here.<sup>181</sup> The subsequent chapters will discuss the broader problem of religion and politics—or the theologico-political problem—at greater length. In conclusion, however, we recall that Tocqueville makes it clear just how important religion was for the American founding, and in its point of departure, stating that readers “must never forget” that “religion gave birth to the Anglo-American societies” (II.1.1, 405). And while religion's role in American life, and religion itself, have changed over time, key to the “particular strength” of religion in America is how it became “intermingled with all national habits and all the sentiments to which a native country gives birth.” Perhaps above all, however, one must be clear that “in America religion itself has so to speak set its own limits.” It is the limitation of religion that allows for the space of politics, but the presence of religion helps foster political freedom. Religion is at once mixed with habits and sentiments—is present in the American heart—but is separated from American politics: “the religious order there has remained entirely distinct from the political order.” This separation—one is inclined to speak of the separation between the City of God and the City of Man—is central to the balance between what is ultimately universal and what is necessarily particular, for true universality is beholden to the transcendent. The confusion of religion and politics in a democratic world is another

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<sup>181</sup> For helpful discussions, see, for example, Ralph Hancock, “The Uses and Hazards of Christianity in Tocqueville's Attempt to Save Democratic Souls,” in *Interpreting Tocqueville's Democracy in America*, 348-93; Catherine Zuckert, “Not By Preaching: Tocqueville on the Role of Religion in American Democracy,” *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (April, 1981): 259-80.

manifestation of pantheistic tendencies, and is far from helped when the democratic religion of Humanity is itself preached by democratic poets.

## 6. MANENT: WESTERN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT: HUMANITY AND A HISTORY OF POLITICAL FORMS

“The drama of modern humanity is one that oscillates between the affirmation of universality and the affirmation of particularity...In the idea of modern humanity, there is a very noble need to recognize the humanity of another. at the same time, it bears a weakness and a danger, insofar as it rests upon the postulate that this recognition can be immediate and facile...We are in a situation where the word “man” is sufficient unto itself, as though prior to its annunciation, we evoke, by way of a phenomenon of resonance, something immediately intelligible and definitive. To understand what is man—how he realizes himself, the manner in which the human world revolves around the ideas of justice, of truth, of love, of religion—is an immensely complex task of philosophy.  
—Pierre Manent, “La Tentation de l’Humanitaire”

“The rule adopted on board the ships on which I have met ‘the man without a country’ was, I think, transmitted from the beginning. No mess liked to have him permanently, because his presence cut off all talk of home or of the prospect of return, of politics or letters, of peace or of war,—cut off more than half the talk the men liked to have at sea.”  
—Edward Everett Hale, *The Man Without a Country*<sup>182</sup>

We concluded the previous chapter by discussing the “poetry of humanity,” after tracing some of the major effects—and so the logic—of the sentiment of “the same,” or *le semblable*, which operates in and through the modern democratic regime. The poetry of democracy, like the ideas and sentiments of the democratic age more generally, both reflect, and instill, universalism—that is, the unity and universality of humanity. To speak of humanity is inescapably to deal in abstractions; the very idea of humanity is a general concept—it is one of the most important generalizations in an age of generalization. However, it has now become more operationalizable, so to speak, and more prominent in political discourse than in any previous time. Far from being a concept used solely by academics and philosophers, or even by poets, it is today the language uttered by larger groups of people, often by those said to speak “for the people”; in short, it is a universal universally invoked. Given its usage by statesmen and citizens

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<sup>182</sup> The story can be found in the following wonderful collection, *What So Proudly We Hail*, eds., Amy A. Kass, Leon R. Kass, and Diana Schaub (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2011), 1-22.



alike, it requires examination, in terms of what it evokes or means, as well as what is implied or hoped to be operationalized in the context of the political.

Among the numerous topics he has addressed, Pierre Manent has sought to examine our discourse of and on humanity, and therefore thoughtfully penetrate our sentiment of humanity. His examination is cast in and through a political gaze; his critique of the present discourse and sentiment emerges through his partisanship, not to any particular party, but to the political as such.<sup>183</sup> In other words, Manent writes first and foremost in defense of self-government. He therefore examines the meaning and use of the concept of humanity from the perspective of the question of self-government—asking, what is self-government to humanity and humanity to self-government? Or, can humanity at large govern itself and can self-government be universalized to the level of humanity? Thus, his discussion of the emergence of a concept and its application is born through detailed elaboration of a history of political development, namely of Western political development, for the idea of humanity is born in the West and must be understood in and through its political history.

In this chapter, we outline Manent’s rather unique history of Western political development, or what he calls a history of political forms. It is by way of this history that we garner a better grasp of both Manent’s particular mode of political philosophizing and of how the question of humanity and self-government come together—that is, of how

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<sup>183</sup> The phrase “political gaze” is drawn directly from the title of Manent’s autobiographical work, in the form of interviews with Bénédicte Delorme-Montini, which is entitled, *Le regard politique*. Daniel Mahoney has underlined the political focus of Manent’s work, in noting that despite his subtle exegetical work, “for Manent, textual interpretation has never been an end in itself.” Rather, political philosophy for Manent is a matter of learning “how to think about the world.” Mahoney, “Communion and Consent: Pierre Manent on the Wellsprings of Western Liberty,” *Perspectives on Political Science*, 41 (2012): 93

each can in fact question the other.<sup>184</sup> A subset of Manent's science of political forms discussed herein is what he calls the science of Rome, for there is, on the one hand, something especially unique about Rome, and on the other hand, something comparable to the present European situation. Thus, we will tease out Manent's comparison between the universalism of ancient Rome and the present attempt to inaugurate a universal state. So much opens the way to our discussion in the following chapter on the apparent emergence of a global architecture of law and a universal sentiment of morality—two kinds of modern empire, as it were. After elaborating on Manent's understanding of these phenomena and his critique of them, we will then turn to question the universality of Manent's approach to the universal. More specifically, chapter seven will subsequently take up the question of whether Manent's understanding of the West and Western political development is not overly European, or even French, insofar as it may misunderstand the differences—the particularity—of America. To the extent that a great Frenchman, Tocqueville, came to understand democracy in general through America to address his fellow Europeans, we argue that another great Frenchman, Manent, somewhat insufficiently accounts for the particularity of America when extrapolating from European experience to account for the West in general.

While this can be seen as something of a shortcoming in analysis, Manent's work nevertheless stands as a powerful teaching for Americans all the same. In fact, one may read this apparent analytical shortcoming as a rhetorical provocation. Given the amount

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<sup>184</sup> Paul Seaton speaks of Manent's "distinctive and complex conception and practice of political philosophizing" that involves "textual exegesis, political history and analysis, and independent philosophical reflection" as well as "a critically sympathetic engagement with fellow analysts of the modern world in general and of liberal democratic theory and practice in particular." Seaton, "Liberation from the Weberian Cage: Pierre Manent on Max Weber," *Perspectives on Political Science* Vo. 31, No. 3 (Summer, 2002): 165.

of time Manent has spent in America, and his sensitivity to differences and similarities in political thought and practice more generally, his apparent failure to differentiate America within the West may be something of a strategic ploy, at least for American audiences: exaggerating American and European similarities could serve to draw out, if not awaken, the American desire to distinguish itself anew. After all, even within Europe itself, Manent argues that the differences across peoples, and the healthy sense of competition among Europe's nations, contributed in large part to its past greatness. Over-generalizing can wound the pride of particular peoples and individuals, and thereby summon them to action—insofar as their pride remains sensitive to such blows. No doubt, Manent is much concerned with a dissipating ability for political action in the West, and so of a lack of Western pride properly cultivated. His political history, therefore, is arguably directed at bolstering Western political imagination on both sides of the Atlantic so as to recall both the possibility and need for action.<sup>185</sup> Whatever the likelihood of this rhetorical technique, and the validity of his view on America, we shall see that Manent remains today's most profound analyst of the sentiment of humanity, and one of the most insightful thinkers on what he calls more broadly "our contemporary political situation." Thus, it will be shown that America can be understood as something of today's greatest anomaly to this sentiment and situation, but only insofar as it remains tethered to its particular founding, in and through the strength as well as the pride in and of its constitution.

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<sup>185</sup> As Ralph Hancock has noted, Manent's exploration of Western political development is "*not* a dispassionate historical survey," but is one that aims to restore the centrality of the political to human thought, and of the inescapable reality of man's political nature. Hancock, "Pierre Manent Between Nature and History." Paper presented at *The City & the Soul: Pierre Manent on Politics, Philosophy, & Christianity*, Baylor University, Sept. 2011.

## A Formal Account of Western Political Development

Manent's account of the West is an endeavor to understand its history in light of man's irrevocably political nature—that is to say, out of men's natural desire to govern or to be well governed. “The only possible principle—the only possible cause—of the movement of human history is man himself, who strives to order his humanity by governing himself.”<sup>186</sup> A history of political forms, therefore, is not simply one of many equally plausible lenses that may be adopted, or perspectives from which one may choose to examine the unfolding of what Manent refers to as the “human adventure.” Rather, such an account of political development is precisely the most significant recollection to be offered: it literally signifies the deepest truths of our past and of human nature—that is, the ways in which particular peoples express their universal humanity. For the different attempts that peoples have undertaken to govern themselves or to be well governed in particular communities indicates such a universal desire and truth—or the truth of this human desire. Political history then is the architectonic history.<sup>187</sup> And human nature is—or at least certainly has been—constantly mediated by politics: the immediately human world has always presented itself through the mediated forms of politics and political activity. An account of political forms thereby provides the very context for all other activities and histories, insofar as the political is the broadest context for human action. In other words, the human community makes human action possible—primarily so, as far as the first community was the first framework of human action, and every subsequent community is a prime cause of action—while the different types of

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<sup>186</sup> Manent, *Metamorphoses*, 303.

<sup>187</sup> Manent's emphasis on political development makes his work analogous to other thinkers with a similar focus, such as James W. Ceaser, whose work focuses on the American context, which we will address in the following chapter.

communities are more or less conducive to different types of action, as they may or may not make possible certain kinds of regimes that likewise shape the activities and ways of life of peoples.

The political aspect of our nature then is not incidental for Manent; in fact, the political is no mere “aspect” but, one is tempted to say, is rather the best “access” to human nature, and so to humanity. This is not to say that human nature is solely exhausted by the political, but that things both trans- and sub-political are inextricably related, or relatable to—again, mediated by—the political.<sup>188</sup> The birth of the city, for example, emerges out of a less than truly political community, while the Church, as community a that is more than purely political should nonetheless be understood as an association with great political import. At bottom, a central fact for Manent is that “politics holds together the diverse aspects of human life, individual as well as social.”<sup>189</sup> For the political order is “the great mediation, or the mediation of mediations,” insofar as politics is inescapably and in so many ways related to, and intervenes in, the lives of private citizens, both for better and for worse.

The history of political forms examines these various types of human associations that have organized and shaped the lives of individuals and have successively unfolded in the West. Manent’s account is one through which Western history becomes articulate; or, alternatively, it is a way by which one can most adequately articulate the history of the

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<sup>188</sup> As he writes: “the political order is really that which gives its form to human life. The political things are the cause of human order or disorder.” He adds that his ambition presupposes a “reevaluation of the place of the political in the human things” since we have had a tendency to “oscillate between an under-evaluation and an over-evaluation” of politics or the political. *Le Regard*, 7-8. Cf. Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 225, where he discusses the relation between high and low, and their relation for the purpose of understanding. Ultimately, Strauss famously claims: “It is safer to try to understand the low in the light of the high than the high in the light of the low. In doing the latter one necessarily distorts the high, whereas in doing the former one does not deprive the low of the freedom to reveal itself as fully as what it is.”

<sup>189</sup> *A World Beyond Politics?*, 201.

West and its particular dynamic.<sup>190</sup> The science of political forms examines the principle contained within these various forms, which otherwise animates each one and its actors, as in the case of *philia* for the ancient city, or *caritas* for the Church. It is therefore a science that penetrates these forms to their principle while understanding the relationship between these forms and principles, as they encounter one another in succession as well as simultaneously, in history; the trajectory of which creates and continues the broader dynamic of the West. Of course, to speak of a dynamic is to speak of movement; to speak of *the* trajectory and *a* dynamic is likewise to offer a single principle for this movement above and beyond the numerous communities and their respective principles. The very principle of Western movement is itself politics—the repeated endeavor of individuals to govern themselves, or their desire to live orderly lives, and thereby make

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<sup>190</sup> While Manent's emphasis on political forms and his discussion of their interaction and development is unique, his attempt to understand Western history politically—in light of men's endeavor to govern themselves by deliberation and decision rather than living according to the unreasoning imperatives of instinct—is something that has been taken up by numerous others. One can find numerous parallels with, for example, Eric Voegelin's work, particularly his 5-volume study, *Order and History*. Voegelin has similarly sought to account for the human adventure through examination of men's repeated attempts to order their lives, individually and collectively, through the formation of communities that reflect their self-understanding. Thus, the community—as expressed through symbolic representation of various kinds—is a reflection of how men understand themselves, reality as a whole, and so their place within reality. While a discussion on the differences between Manent's and Voegelin's approaches would be of great interest, it would take us far afield from our present concerns. Suffice it to say that Voegelin's political science ultimately culminates in a science or philosophy of consciousness to probe the ultimate foundations of political order, which, while it begins from the political tends to lose sight of it by engaging in deeper questions of being. On the limitations of Voegelin's work in this regard, see, David Corey, "Eric Voegelin and Aristotle on *Nous*: What is Noetic Political Science," *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 64, No. 01 (Winter 2002): 57-79. In contrast, Manent's work remains ever attentive to the political, and Manent seems to take to heart Strauss's famously insightful statement: "The problem inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things." This is not say that Manent shirks the deeper questions of being, which arise through philosophy and religion, but instead, as we will see, Manent triangulates philosophy, politics, and religion; while focusing on one side of the triangle, he continues to rotate it so they are all held together, so to speak. In this regard, one could compare Manent's work to that of Philip Bobbitt, in *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), who likewise triangulates, although his triangle is differently constituted, namely, of strategy, constitutional order, and international law. While Manent and Voegelin both account for the emergence of the modern state and its great significance, they do not go to the same lengths as Bobbitt in acknowledging the importance of warfare and developments in strategy; however, the preceding two certainly agree with the insight that Bobbitt's work highlights at length: warfare is not an anomaly of the past, for the establishment and maintenance of order continues to require the use of force at times; war can itself be a vector of legitimacy and may indeed be an act that exemplifies virtue.

their self-rule a conscious project—which truly begins with the movement of the city, the latter of which is the first genuine political form.

Two things must be underlined at this point. First, for Manent, “there is no indefinite political form.”<sup>191</sup> Drawing on the work of Jean Baechler, Manent notes that as far back as Paleolithic man, individuals lived in bands and tribes, which were clearly defined in practice thousands of years ago. Upon living politically, people necessarily live in a given political form, or at least in transition from one form to another.<sup>192</sup> To be sure, there is a qualitative difference between the band and the tribe, on the one hand, and the city, on the other. But the point is that “one cannot live politically in an undefined way.” Not living politically means not living in order, or with articulate organization; unpolitical life precludes the ability for coherent action and cogent meaning. For insofar as groups are organized for action, a certain amount of communal integrity is required, and if there is to be a reasonable self-understanding, the various parts and problems of life—the recurring questions of existence—must be offered some kind of formal response.

Manent is not alone in pointing this out. Consider the following remarks by Voegelin when he discusses what he refers to as political or social “articulation”:

Political societies, in order to be in form for action, must have an internal structure that will enable some of its members—the ruler, the government, the prince, the sovereign, the magistrate, etc., according to the varying terminology of the ages—to find habitual obedience for their acts of command; and these acts must serve the existential necessities of a society, such as the defense of the realm and administration of justice—if a medieval classification of purposes will be allowed. Such societies with their internal organization for action, however, do not exist as cosmic fixtures from eternity but grown in history; this

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<sup>191</sup> Manent, *A World Beyond Politics?*, 44.

<sup>192</sup> Barry Cooper’s recent work discusses the “religion” and “politics” of the Upper Paleolithic period (between 50KYBP-10KYBP), highlighting structural and substantial equivalences to later human experiences and communities (while not neglecting important distinctions—hence the use of quotation marks for “religion” and “politics”). One point of import is that significant, stable, and continuous political organizations were necessary to construct the public works we now know as Neolithic monuments as found at Newgrange, Knowth, Stonehenge, and various North American Indian sites. Cooper, ““Politics” and “Religion” in the Upper Paleolithic: A Voegelinian Analysis of Some Selected Problems,” presented at the 2011 APSA Conference.

process in which human beings form themselves into a society for action shall be called the articulation of society. As the result of political articulation we find human beings, the rulers, who can act for the society, men whose acts are not imputed to their own persons but to the society as a whole...

Voegelin discusses this notion in the context of the problem of representation, and goes on to say that when there is sufficient articulation and one or more can so act to have his deeds imputed as such, he or they can be said to be representative of a society.

“Articulation, thus, is the condition of representation.” Providing further clarity, he adds that behind the concept of “articulation” is “nothing less than the historical process in which political societies, the nations, the empires, rise and fall, as well as the evolutions and revolutions between the two terminal points.”<sup>193</sup> Without formal and distinct communities, without the mediation of particular communities and their respective representatives, is it possible to conceive of universal representatives of humanity; and better yet, who would they be? The questions of formal mediation, or the forms of politics, naturally present themselves in the context of articulation and representation.

The second point of importance is that the number of political forms is not unlimited but finite. This insight stands in contrast to the common suggestion of our day that political variation is as great as the numerous cultures, groups, or even individuals in existence.<sup>194</sup> It is said that no two units are alike, and in accepting as much attention is focused on the splendor of differences—the understanding of political forms thus becomes altogether blurred. That said, emphasizing uniqueness across space and time is not logically wrong, for indeed differences persist; however, at a certain point if diversity

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<sup>193</sup> Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics in Modernity Without Restraint*, Collected Works, Volume 5, 116-20.

<sup>194</sup> Voegelin likewise writes that the “process [of articulation] is historically *not so individualized for each instance of a political society* that it would be impossible to bring the manifold of varieties under a few general types.” *Op. cit.*, 120 (emphasis added). This is indeed one of the primary tasks of political science, first carried out by Plato and Aristotle: bringing the manifold varieties under a few general types, and so classifying and comparing the different communities.



and uniqueness are stressed for their own sake—that is, assumed to be the only, or the categorical phenomenon—other important facts are obscured and understanding is inhibited. So much have we seen in our preceding chapters on Montesquieu. Needless to say, the simple fact of diversity is not itself reason to establish either its degree of naturalness or its desirability. An exclusive focus on the apparent limitlessness of types or kinds of human groups or cultures is born of the disposition of relativism. It follows from an at least tacit assumption that reason cannot actually know (or compare) anything in the external world because reality at large is unknowable: we know only the concepts or ideas of our minds that are subsequently imposed upon reality. Accepting as much, relativism refrains from any rigid classificatory impositions, which is to say that the relativistic mind neglects engaging reality for the purpose of understanding, or making it intelligible by way of evaluative distinctions. Such being the case, relativism and its consequent denial of reason has rightly been considered a “closing of the mind.”<sup>195</sup> Thus, in praising and accepting diversity it offers little more than indulgent flattery, since diversity from this perspective amounts to a muddled and undifferentiated mass, celebrated for its own sake; colorful, perhaps, but otherwise overwhelming to the mind and eye in its unintelligibility.

Approaching the world in this way is to engage it from a non-political perspective, which is to say from a view that is void of practice and practical reason. The participant knows that his political community has some kind of definite form, so long as it is an order capable of action, and that it therefore exists in a particular place, delineated

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<sup>195</sup> The now classic account in the American context is, of course, Allan Bloom’s *Closing of the American Mind*. More recently, with noteworthy theological analysis and discussion of present political implications, a related approach has been adapted to the world of Islam: see, Robert R. Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind: How Intellectual Suicide Created the Modern Islamist Crisis* (Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute Books, 2010).

as it is from others. Manent's stress on this point then becomes obvious, insofar as the political perspective preserves the possibility of self-government. As he writes, "This is one of the most important 'theoretical' propositions of political science. Inasmuch as the human world is political, it does not present an indefinite variability. It is structured and ordered." To which he adds that such a "theoretical proposition is heavy with 'practical' consequences"—the consequences of which require that we not abandon political forms, or a politically defined way of life, if we desire to be governed well.<sup>196</sup> This drive to abandonment is inherent in today's largely European attempt to shed itself of its present political form, the nation, and the sentiment that humanity can be unified by somehow going beyond its political past. Rather than simply defending the nation, Manent embarks first to understand the nation, which is no simple task, particularly in a climate that collapses the study of the nation into that of nationalism, presumed to be its inherent logic. Studying the nation requires, Manent argues, comparison and understanding of its contrasting and preceding forms. Thus, the question of the nation is another means by which to enter his history of political forms.

The first genuine political form, as alluded, is that of the city. Better yet: "The starting point of any political reflection is indeed the city."<sup>197</sup> In his magisterial work, *Metamorphoses of the City*, Manent devotes the first of three parts to what he calls, "The Original Experience of the City." This section is in turn divided into the following three chapters: "What Science for the City?," "The Poetic Birth of the City," and "The Civic Operation." The second part is entitled, "The Enigma of Rome," while the third is, "Empire, Church, Nation." The collection of forms in these titles constitute the general

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<sup>196</sup> Manent, *A World Beyond Politics?*, 44.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

range of political forms experienced thus far in the West. Manent admits that the work as a whole rests on an insight that suggests a sort of “defect” in his earlier work. Much of Manent’s previous scholarship elaborated in various ways an interpretation of European political development that placed “modern democracy” at the center, and even as the aim, of this development. His realigned search distances itself from what he refers to as this earlier “Tocquevillean” perspective, which can be described as an exaggeration of the “political and human transformation, the ‘anthropological transformation’ that the progress of modern democracy brings with it.”<sup>198</sup> The more substantial “anthropological transformation,” he now argues, is the Greek one, which the modern democratic revolution has built upon. The directionality of his approach has therefore shifted: rather than seeing history “running toward us, toward the grandeur and miseries of our democracy,” he increasingly came to see it as,

more and more clearly unfolding starting from the prodigious innovation that was the first *production of the common*, something much more substantial and moreover much more interesting than the virtues and vices of our too-famous equality. I saw more and more clearly the forms of our common life unfolding from the first and master form as so many reverberations of this original conflagration, as so many metamorphoses of this primordial form.

The argument that the Greeks invented politics is by no means unfamiliar, after all, the very word derives from the Greek name for the self-governing city, *polis*.<sup>199</sup> What Manent underscores is the importance and continued influence of what is otherwise a twofold foundation: of Greek politics and Greek political science. To be sure, the latter followed upon the former, but they came about within the same framework—within the same whole—and that both experience and knowledge about this experience emerged in

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<sup>198</sup> Manent, *Metamorphoses*, 14.

<sup>199</sup> See the work of Hannah Arendt and Christian Meier, with whom Manent’s study has many affinities; cf. Paul Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), ch. 1 “The Primacy of Politics in Classical Greece.”

a natural manner, albeit not without important and ineluctable tensions. In fact, Manent argues that this Greek foundation best illustrates “the circle within which we will not cease to struggle: political science is the science of political experience, but science and experience are distinct and at the same time inseparable.”<sup>200</sup> At any rate, it is the framework of the city that made the experience of politics, of action and self-government, and therefore self-knowledge, possible at all. An altogether new way of life is brought into being, which operates according to the principle of the common (*koinon*), insofar as the city is the locus where speeches and deeds are put together in common, and are so held together by the literal and metaphorical contours of the city. Men therefore come to govern themselves in and through conscious awareness of this activity. Reflection upon political activity is not itself an incidental element, but both a responsive and suggestive engagement with it. The framework of the city, however, gives rise to a number of possible ways for men to govern themselves—that is, there are a number of different types of regimes that men may establish—particularly according to the number of those who govern—one, few, or many. And it was to just this question that Greek political science was primarily devoted.

### **An Old and New Science, or A Necessary Modification of Classical Science**

As is well known, central to classical political philosophy was a concern with the *politeia*. The term is rich with meaning as partly indicated by the fact that English translations vary, rendering it as “constitution,” “republic,” or “regime.” Arguably “regime” is the most appropriate term since *politeia* includes, but is not exhausted by, the formal or legal constitution of a political order, nor is it necessarily republican, in any

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<sup>200</sup> Manent, *Metamorphoses*, 17.

strict sense. Nonetheless, most concretely, the regime is the arrangement of authoritative offices or honors, particularly regarding the highest form of office. More broadly, any given regime both represents and constitutes a certain way of life, a political culture or ethos—that is, a public morality and sense of justice that its laws, institutions, and members personify. In short, it is “a comprehensive good and moral order” to varying degrees.<sup>201</sup> Classical political philosophy, however, not only took for granted, but even made explicit, that such a comprehensive good and moral order could only exist in the city, or *polis*, for this kind of human association alone reached the requisite level of *autarkeia*, or self-sufficiency.<sup>202</sup> Thus, the extent to which a science of regime in the classical sense is helpful for modern political societies may be debated.<sup>203</sup>

One thinker who has stressed the continued relevance of a classical science of regimes, and one who has had a great influence on Manent himself, is Leo Strauss.<sup>204</sup> Strauss makes it very clear how important the ancient insight of the regime remains today: “The qualitatively different regimes, or kinds of regimes, and the qualitatively different purposes constituting or legitimating them, [...] by revealing themselves as the

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<sup>201</sup> This succinct and felicitous formulation is taken from, Susan D. Collins, *Aristotle and the Rediscovery of Citizenship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 29. This is not to suggest that all regimes are good *in themselves*, or objectively speaking, for they range from best to worst. That there is a degree of order due to the presence of the regime, and that its ruling members accept it as good, along with the concomitant ethos—whether in pursuit of their own interests or the common interest of all—holds for the regime in general.

<sup>202</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1252b27–30.

<sup>203</sup> A regime-oriented political science is anything but inevitable within the positivist climate of opinion, or a setting largely influenced by sociological thought. The French sociologist, Dominique Schnapper has noted that since “the nineteenth century, sociological thought was in fact founded by overthrowing the idea, inherited from the philosophical tradition, of the primacy of the political regime over economic and social organization and by analyzing the place of the social *in and of itself*.” Schnapper, *Community of Citizens*, trans., Severine Rosee (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1998), 5.

<sup>204</sup> For Manent’s own reflections on Strauss, see the series of biographical interviews in, Manent, *Le Regard Politique*, esp. 47–82; cf. Manent, *Modern Liberty and its Discontents*, trans. Paul Seaton and Daniel Mahoney (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), esp. Ch. 20 “Reflections on Strauss, Nature, and History,” and Ch. 21 “Strauss and Nietzsche.”

most important things, supply the key to the understanding of all political things.”<sup>205</sup> Manent does not reject this claim outright; however, the regime, any regime, must *be somewhere*, which is to say it is embodied in some way—within some broader form—and these embodiments have changed over time. The classical political philosophers engaged in the study of regime change, but the broader form never changed in their experience—or at least they did not raise this experience to the level of conscious reflection—and they largely denied the possibility of politics beyond the *polis*, as found in their critique of non-Greek, imperial life.<sup>206</sup> Nevertheless, with the transformation of the city to a new and distinct form, it is plausible that the regimes will be impacted. Is it not then conceivable that the ancient cycle of regimes operates differently, or becomes more than altered, even broken, when the framework—or form—of regimes alters or expands?

For Manent, the form of human association is the framework and instrument “to put things in common” and so to “crystallize the fact of being human.” Each such political form or body relates the speeches and deeds of a community to a broader complex of space and time, providing continuity with the past and hope for the future. Stated differently, a political form is the political endeavor—requisite for the being that is a political animal—to make universal humanity concrete in a particular form or cadre,

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<sup>205</sup> Leo Strauss, “Epilogue,” *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, ed. Herbert J. Storing (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), 318; cf. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 135-38. In this sense, Manent argues that there are “real innovations” or there is “future in the strong sense of the term” that was “not envisaged” by the classical political philosophers. Such innovations “supposed a transformation of the political form itself, and we know that Aristotle, far from exploring this possibility, multiplied the arguments to render it properly ‘unthinkable.’” *Métamorphoses de la Cité*, 159. Thus, Manent finds Strauss’s defense of classical political science to be in a certain sense unsatisfactory. It is in the context of assessing Strauss’s claims in *On Tyranny* as well as Voegelin’s response to Strauss that this critique emerges in *Métamorphoses*.

<sup>206</sup> Cf. Leah Bradshaw, “Empire and the Eclipse of Politics,” in *Enduring Empire: Ancient Lessons for Global Politics*, eds. David Tabachnick and Toivo Koivukoski (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 77-95.

and thereby mediate this inevitable tension.<sup>207</sup> Such formation or concretization is the condition for what Manent calls *opération*, or political action, and every form bears intrinsic properties and possibilities of *opération*; the community is the cadre for action, and thus the delimited body that makes certain internal and external actions possible. Therefore, each form can be conceived as a manifestation of human confidence in the ability to act, providing the circumstances that shape morals and passions, human self-understanding, and the range of human activity in life as lived with others. It is fair to say that according to Manent, there is a certain link between the dimensions, or size, of a form and the potency of its inhabitants' souls, and thus the kind of rule and rulers, or regime, that is made possible: political physics and political psychology intertwine. Thus, while certain changes have certainly occurred over time, Manent denies that the "springs of the human soul" can be radically altered or destroyed; *thumos*, for example, is not altogether undermined by modern democracy. "The relative role of the diverse parts of the soul can change within a given political and social regime, but it remains true that in every human being *all the parts of the soul are always present, even if not always active.*"<sup>208</sup> Thus, speaking concretely, a form makes possible the "*production du commun*," where the forces within individual souls may become present, and thereby seen in the activities of its members. And the first "common" emerged in and through the "primary and master form," namely the ancient city, from which other forms metamorphosed.<sup>209</sup> By no means rejecting the science of regimes, Manent therefore

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<sup>207</sup> *Le regard*, 151; cf. Manent, *A World Beyond Politics? A Defense of the Nation-State*, trans. Marc LePain (Princeton University Press, 2006), 42-50.

<sup>208</sup> Manent, *Le Regard*, 134, 142 (emphasis added).

<sup>209</sup> Manent, *Les métamorphoses*, 22. Of course the insight linking city and soul is as old as Plato, or classical political philosophy, but Manent adds what may be called a physiological dimension to what Voegelin refers to as the "anthropological principle" in suggesting that certain passions of the soul are not only related to the regime, but are related to the broader kind of human association.

offers what emerges as a necessary supplement to the classical perspective with his science of political forms. If the regime is the “key” to unlock political understanding, as Strauss suggests, then its displacement into a new kind of political space or body has opened the door to an additional, or concomitant, science.<sup>210</sup>

One may suggest here the analogy of the human body with its visible form, and the human soul in its invisible form, which together form the person. We know from experience that bodies and souls come in a variety of shapes and kinds, and shape does not necessarily correlate with kind, but all such ensouled bodies are living persons. For example, one finds courageous souls in both large and small bodies, just as both tall and short people can have either just or unjust souls. Yet a courageous soul manifests itself differently in a different body, for action depends on some level on the contingency of the body’s size and strength, or its unity and ability. Thus, it is a question of some interest whether any given regime can exist in any size or kind of form and whether or not there are certain limitations. One may wonder, say, can democracy exist in both a small form like a city or a large form like an extended state? The dimensions and expanse of a political body is not without consequence, and the differences between ancient and modern democracy are not unrelated to this, as well as other differences, between the

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<sup>210</sup> So as to dispel any confusion, since the “regime” is often understood to be the “form” of a city, and thus the “soul” of a city, it is worth noting that Manent says “there is no necessity to call it [a political form] as such, but this is the term that seemed to me the most simple, the most adequate. I am not an erudite historian, thus I have a tendency to see things in bulk [*en gros*]. Besides, this does no harm to science because the human things also *arrive* “en gros.” There is no need for a microscope to grasp them [*pour les saisir*].” Manent, *Le Regard*, 150. As an aside, one finds here a remarkable statement regarding the accessibility of political phenomena to the human mind; Manent’s science is one that both argues and demonstrates that the world of politics and action is intelligible, not least of all on the level of common sense and non-technical language. The science of political forms seeks to understand on a basic level the interaction and outcomes of human communities and human souls.



ancient city and the modern state.<sup>211</sup> However, all such forms, or polities, are on some level human creations, even as they are extensions or reflections of human nature, for they result from human speeches and deeds. Being so constituted suggests a certain amount of fixity as well as the ever-present possibility of change. In light of this, a science of political forms asks to what extent certain virtues or characters are related to particular forms or political contexts: are all passions and excellences of the human soul always and anywhere possible, or does the concrete cadre of community delimit what may become manifest?

There are, as Manent repeatedly outlines, strictly speaking four political forms: the city, the empire, the Church, and the nation (or nation-state). The Western historical succession has roughly followed in this order, although not to the utter exclusion or elimination of previous forms, and indeed non-Western empires preceded the city (which are arguably non-political), just as tribes of a less political nature preceded the original civic order. As intimated, the importance of the first form can hardly be overstated, for it is the ancient city that began the course of succession; it is the first establishment of human order oriented towards action and is itself a sort of work of action, or better yet “a common action,” having evoked the appearance and reality of human self-government. It is neither reducible to an instrument that satisfies basic human needs, nor is it in essence a means of protecting rights. Rather, the city *is* action, which ever carries with it the possibility, or danger, of transgression; therefore, it must be governed. At one point Manent characterizes governing as “action over action,” and as the most difficult action

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<sup>211</sup> It is worth raising a question regarding The extent to which Manent’s science of political forms is on some level “Montesquieuan” merits further exploration and discussion. Consider, for example, Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 1.VIII.20 (p. 126), *et passim*.

of man. There is, therefore, a “sad truth” to the city.<sup>212</sup> Although the city is constituted by liberty—the freedom to act and the production of common activity—it is nonetheless inseparable from war: both internal faction, or civil war, and external war with neighboring cities.<sup>213</sup> After all, there is something “terrible” about or in human action, for it both expresses the human being and exposes him. Every actor steps outside of himself at the risk of losing himself, or of initiating a course that is transgressive, beyond his intentions and various other limits. Later efforts of reform in political thought and action have sought to transform the dynamic of the city, so as to separate the liberty of the city from its accompanying disorders; that is, to allow for action while vying to circumscribe its destructiveness.<sup>214</sup> “Subsequent history appears overall as the ever renewed search for the political form that might make it possible to gather again the energies of the city while escaping the city’s fate as free but destined to internal and external enmity.”<sup>215</sup> What is more, Manent argues that the energy and action of the city and the possibilities bound up with it likewise make the later modern project possible; hence the aforementioned continuity from the first emergence of the ancient city: “If we

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<sup>212</sup> Manent’s most extended study of the city is found in *Les métamorphoses*, Part I (“L’expérience originelle de la cité,” 23-128), wherein he discusses the three “natures” of the city, in terms of the tragic (as birth or natality), the philosophic (as finality or teleology), and the political (as movement or dynamic). His account of the city and the nature of action have many parallels with Hannah Arendt’s in *The Human Condition*; perhaps not surprisingly since both are very attentive to Aristotle’s own account and kind of political science.

<sup>213</sup> Manent discusses how classical warfare, and the condition of the warrior, precedes and prepares the way for the conditions of the city and civic life; he does so through thoughtful readings of Homer, Thucydides, and certain tragedians, among others, in *Métamorphoses*, 25-81. Cf. M.I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (New York: New York Review Book, 2002 [orig. pub. 1954]); Victor David Hanson, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Furthermore, Manent elucidates how modern political philosophy (over-) simplifies the ensemble of phenomena related to war under the name of the “state of nature” and “state of war,” no doubt with the aim of more assuredly securing the “civil state”—a state literally *defined* by peace—even to the point of proclaiming the possible elimination of war through the “homeopathic” violence monopolized by the modern state.

<sup>214</sup> Manent, *A World Beyond Politics?*, 46.

<sup>215</sup> Manent, *Métamorphoses*, 12.

wish to understand the modern project, we must understand it on the basis of this first complete mobilizing of human action, that is, of the city.”<sup>216</sup>

The ancient city’s energy was both its source of liberty and greatness while it was the very same that led to its downfall, for the Greek cities exhausted themselves in what Thucydides memorably called the *megiste kinesis*, or history’s gravest crisis, namely the Peloponnesian War. In its wake emerged the superimposition of the Macedonian empire. While the city is the first form, and indeed a natural political form as it contains all the ingredients of political life and its fulfillment, the empire too is “a *natural* political idea” since it “corresponds to men’s unity, to the universality of human nature, which wants to be recognized and addressed by a unique power.”<sup>217</sup> The city and the empire then are the two polar forms, and two opposing answers to the balance between the particular and the universal: the city is particularity in abundance whereas the empire is universality in its apparent fullness. The two extremes otherwise represent the alternative possibilities of comprehension and extension: the former seeks to put as many things as possible in common among its members, and thereby is rather exclusive and exclusionary, while the latter results in a search for the lowest common denominator among people, arguably to the extent that it so dilutes commonality as to diminish any concrete sense of the common. In practice, of course, there is something of a synthesis, and hence a balancing of the universal and particular.<sup>218</sup> The Church is unique because it offers a new combination of the two, insofar as it is extensive to the point of including all of mankind, but it does not do so by seeking what is low and common; rather, by recognizing what is

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>217</sup> Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, 3.

<sup>218</sup> Manent, *A World without Politics?*, 96.

profound and of great significance. To be sure, however, prior to the emergence of the Church was the case of the empire of Rome, which was unlike any other.

Manent offers an extended study of Rome that consists in a comparative examination of the transition of the Greek cities to empire with the Roman transition; so much an important part of his science of Rome. It is indeed this science that likewise adds further analysis to the Church as a political form. In comparing the Greek and Roman situation, Manent is very adamant about the fact that the Greek empire did not radically transform the cities; while there were changes to the cities, the “profound transformations...did not affect the city as such.” In other words, “Athens submitted to Philip of Macedon while retaining its form as a city.”<sup>219</sup> As previously mentioned, classical Greek political philosophy resigned itself to studying *regime* change, and neglected consideration of changing forms, even perhaps denying the possibility as such; at any rate, dramatic transformation in form was outside of Greek experiential reflection.<sup>220</sup> In contrast, what makes Rome so fascinating is that “it underwent the greatest political transformation ever seen”—a change of the regime that included, or better yet led to a transformation of form. Roman thought was both brought to bear on this event while likewise contributing to it.

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<sup>219</sup> Manent, *Democracy without Nations?*, 92. “Athens was an imperialist city but it never managed to constitute an empire, or at any rate to maintain one. Rather, it was Alexander, emerging from the periphery of the Greek world, who constituted the Greek empire.” Manent, *Le regard*, 150.

<sup>220</sup> One should hesitate before charging Manent with a variety of historicism. If on the one hand he focuses on “dynamics” and “metamorphoses,” and suggests certain experiences that transcend the Greek context, the bottom line is that “context” is not some abstract or purely historical moment—not a sealed “horizon” that must otherwise be “fused” (à la Gadamer)—for the relevant context is *always* political, and what is static in and across history is man’s political nature.

## **An Important Intermediary Term: The Science of Rome**

There is something “enigmatic” about Rome, partly because of its difference with Greek political experience, but it has uniqueness beyond the Greek comparison. Indeed, the central section of Manent’s book engaging the question, *Les métamorphoses de la cité*, is entitled “L’énigme de Rome.” This section is further divided into three sections: “Rome and the Greeks,” “Rome under the gaze of the Moderns,” and “The study [*l’enquête*] of Cicero.” While forming the bulk of Manent’s science of Rome in the text, it is not isolated to this part, for the third division of the work, entitled, “L’Empire, l’Église, la Nation” devotes two out of three of its sections to an interpretation and discussion of St. Augustine, particularly his *Civitas Dei*. A science of Rome consists in examining Rome from the point of view of its three primary forms—the group of which Manent refers to as “the Roman series”—namely, the city, the empire, and the Church. We will discuss the first two of these three here, reserving our discussion of the Church as a political form in the following chapter, when we engage the theologico-political problem in greater detail.

Manent addresses the question of why Rome took such a different course from Athens even though both began similarly as cities, and so how it came to be that a city could give rise to an empire from within—how “the city itself could give birth to the empire, the city itself that experienced such an extension, which made this nearly unbelievable effort unto itself to transform itself from a small city into a global empire.”<sup>221</sup> He traces the causes and consequences, or the human motivations and effects related to such an extraordinary event, revealing the political meaning of such an occurrence and its effect on human life. In his discussion he reveals how “the most

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<sup>221</sup> Manent, *Le regard*, 150.

delicate questions of morality, and even the most difficult question of ontology (such as the status of individuality) find themselves related to the question of political form.”<sup>222</sup> If historians face the question—both in terms of comparing Athens and Rome, and Rome’s transition itself—political scientists, he argues, rarely engage the problem systematically.<sup>223</sup> Thus, a “comparative political physics” is in order.<sup>224</sup>

One finds many of the same elements in the political history of both Athens and Rome, the numerical division between the few and the many and their associated dissensions, as well as the notable personages who led either of the parties as all bearing especial importance—these being the primary sources of regime change. However, the class war developed differently in the two instances. Manent recounts that the spring of political development in Athens was in the fact that the power of the people grew due to a succession of eminent men, from Solon to Pericles, who took the side of the people, meeting their demands and guiding them. This succession of brilliant and aristocratic leaders *drove* the growing power of the people in Athens. In contrast, Manent argues, in Rome, the peoples’ demands were *controlled*, and thereby used, diverted, and hindered,

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<sup>222</sup> Manent, *Métamorphoses*, 180.

<sup>223</sup> Consider some recent work on the matter, for example, Egon Flaig in “Transition from Republic to Principate: Loss of Legitimacy, Revolution, and Acceptance,” eds. J.P. Arnason & K.A. Raaflaub, *The Roman Empire in Context: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2011), 67-84, treats the transformation conventionally as a conflict between two regimes. Kurt Raaflaub in his essay from the same volume, “From City-State to Empire: Rome in Comparative Perspective” (39-66) suggests that the real cause of transformation was external, namely the necessity, for over 150 years, “to resist intensive outside pressure” (46). Raaflaub’s comparative perspective leads him to deny the uniqueness of Rome’s polis-to-empire transition, arguing that “three out of four Mediterranean-based empires (Athens, Carthage, and Rome, as opposed to Macedon) originated in clusters of city-states.” He adds that “analogies might be found in the earliest forms of Mesopotamian and Chinese empire-building...as well as Central American (Maya and Aztec) empires [...]: they too emerged from a world of city-states racked by constant rivalries and power struggles.” (49). However, Raaflaub does qualify his generalizations, especially in contrast with Athens, by noting the uniqueness of Roman citizenship that integrated outsiders, its oligarchic constitution, and the geopolitics of its enemies.

<sup>224</sup> Manent, *Métamorphoses*, 132ff.

by an aristocratic body, namely the Senate.<sup>225</sup> No such equivalent body existed in Athens; however, the difference does not reside in institutional controls alone. For while Athens' chain of great leaders came to an end with Pericles' death, the invitation of corruption through election of men of ill repute such as Cleon, and the final ignominious defeat by Sparta in the Peloponnesian war, the equivalent instillation of corruption in the Roman city did not take a parallel course. Again, something unique happened, for if Athens was consumed by a spiral of corruption that included simultaneous internal faction and external conflict, typical of all cities in demise, Manent writes that Rome was "wholly renovated or renewed" in the midst of similar disorder. The self-destruction of the republican city in this case signified the coming into being of the empire. In Rome's case extreme corruption meant neither death nor end, but the introduction of a novel metamorphosis. As Manent profoundly and provocatively puts it: "if in Rome alone extreme corruption did not prove mortal, then it signifies that Rome is a phenomenon that enters in contradiction not only with political ontology, but even with ontology tout court: in Rome, death is not mortal [*la mort n'est pas mortelle*]." <sup>226</sup> No doubt the figure that best resembles or summarizes this problem of the transformation from city into empire and the defiance of ontology is that of Caesar.

Caesar's name is itself associated with a new phenomenon, "Caesarism," and his name remained a title of rule well after his death. Once again, Manent describes how such novelty was beyond the purview of Greek political science. In doing so he addresses Aristotle as well as Strauss and the latter's unequivocal defense of classical political philosophy. Reading Aristotle's *Politics* as an account providing "a natural

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid. 140.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid. 141-43.

history of the city” and as the most exhaustive account of the city’s development as a political form, Manent finds that its course moves towards a situation where a democratic regime is increasingly the only possible regime. The natural history of the city follows something like a natural course of democratization; democracy, whether of the good or bad variety, is the final regime of the city. It is therefore no accident that the good form takes for itself the generic term for regime, *politeia*. Consequently, Manent argues that a “caesarian” future—a truly stable and genuine rule of one—was not foreseen; especially as a regime that *follows* upon a republican or democratic one. True government by one alone was foreign to the Greek city, and the traditional cycle of regimes erstwhile had an order, or chronology to it.<sup>227</sup> The numerical interplay of the few and the many dominated the ancient *polis*, as accounted for by Aristotle, and while the latter eventually discusses a variety of monarchies in the *Politics*, there is only one that turns out to be effective and not merely a species of another kind of regime: the royalty of “heroic times.” But this singularly effectual form of royalty in the Greek world was only ever a momentary phenomenon, akin to a founding moment rather than a concrete regime—*before* a republic’s existence—and Aristotle himself treats it hastily. The long and short of Manent’s argument here is that royalty and tyranny, the two forms of rule by one, are ultimately “two modalities” of oligarchy in Greek experience: “there is no regime of one” in the Aristotelian analysis of the city.<sup>228</sup> Novelty of a caesarian kind presupposed a

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<sup>227</sup> On the critique of Aristotle’s understanding of monarchy, see Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, who entitles Ch. 8 of Bk. XI, “Why the ancients had no clear idea of monarchy,” followed by a chapter entitled, “Aristotle’s manner of thinking,” that begins by saying: “An awkwardness is clearly seen in Aristotle’s treatment of monarchy,” concludes thus: “The ancients, who did not know of the distribution of the three powers in the government of one alone, could not achieve a correct idea of monarchy.” So far as “the kings of heroic times,” Montesquieu writes that it was “a kind of monarchy [that] was established [but] that did not continue to exist” (167-9ff). Manent is herein explicitly following and citing Montesquieu.

<sup>228</sup> Manent, *Métamorphoses*, 157ff. The “greatness of the Greek city rested on the fact that the monarchical part existed only in the guise of the leading *democratic statesmen*, that is, it existed only in its activity or



transformation of the political form itself and its emergence indicates a reversal in the normal course of regime succession, for Caesarism is the case where monarchy succeeds a republic no longer capable of governing itself.<sup>229</sup> Manent herein argues that it is Rome that made genuine monarchic experience possible, and the “vector of European political history is the victory of monarchy, properly understood.”<sup>230</sup>

Political life, always and everywhere, is a question of numbers. Political life always rests upon a certain relation, a certain mixture, between the many and the few; between the people and the nobles, or the “greats.” It was the particular case of the ancient cities to ignore the essence of the third number, for there was no third number. The third number, that of One—the monarch, the prince. To be sure, one member of the few could appropriate power, and become a tyrant. But tyranny was merely an extreme modality of oligarchy, and did not introduce a qualitatively new number; it did not clearly constitute the one. Certainly Caesar can be called a tyrant and he was. Cato, said Cicero, preferred to kill himself than be forced to raise his eyes to the face of a tyrant. But Caesar was also something else. At the moment of extension, the interplay between the few and many, the republican challenge, could no longer order the city. Thus the city fell beneath the power of the one. It was not however only a matter of power...for the very idea of being together changed.<sup>231</sup>

The “political physics” of Rome—the extension of the city’s dimensions—can be examined through the parallel distance that emerged between one citizen by the name of Caesar and his equals. The “question of Caesar” is inextricably bound up with the “enigma of Rome.” The case of Caesar is one of a man having detached himself from the regime and rulers, garnering sufficient power so that his death and divinization serve to found a new form, that of the empire.<sup>232</sup> For a citizen to have been so “extraordinarily

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operation.” Manent, “Political History and Political Philosophy: Making Sense of the West,” *Perspectives on Political Science*, 41 (2012), 104.

<sup>229</sup> To invoke Montesquieu once more on this important matter of chronology and distinction between princes before and after constitutional orders (raising again Manent’s “Montesquieuan” orientation), he famously wrote that “there is no authority more absolute than that of the Prince who succeeds a Republic” for this prince “finds himself in possession of all of the power of a People incapable of putting limits on itself.” *Considerations*, 15.100-3.

<sup>230</sup> Manent, *Métamorphoses*, 284. In contrast he is explicit about Greek experience: “The original Greek political experience, if I dare say, is through and through republican.” *Métamorphoses*, 233. Cf. Paul Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, Ch. 1 “The Primacy of Politics in Ancient Greece.”

<sup>231</sup> Manent, “Rome comme problème philosophique.” in *Sans le latin*, eds., Hubert Aupetit et Cécilia Suzzoni (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2012), 116-17.

<sup>232</sup> Christian Meier discusses how Caesar came to see Roman reality differently from his opponents, and that he saw it “from without” while the latter still perceived it “from within,” even as this postulated reality (i.e., regarding its form and regime) had changed, to the extent that the old was “in fact non-existent.”

elevated” above those who were erstwhile his equals “presupposes a considerable modification in the form of the city. For such an elevation to have been possible it was necessary that its base—which is to say the city itself—experience a prior extension capable of supporting this elevation.”<sup>233</sup> But what most characterizes the Caesarian period is the confusion and indeterminacy of the political and moral order, and Manent argues that precisely this problem of indeterminacy, this confusion about order and form, and the blurred nature of the human association, is witnessed and expressed in “one of the works that in truth has been the most influential in the moral history of Europe, and a work that precisely seeks to add order in the moral and political landscape in the time of all disorders,” namely Cicero’s *De Officiis*.<sup>234</sup>

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“Caesar and his opponents thus represented two disparate realities: the old reality, which had once been the whole and was suddenly reduced to a part, and the new, which had detached itself from the old and could hardly have been realigned with it even if war had been avoided—so wide was the gap, so great the mutual alienation. It was this disparity that characterized the situation—not just conflicting interests, mistrust, fear, hatred, or the pathological exaggeration of individual pretensions.” Meier, *Caesar*, trans., D. McLintock (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 10-11ff.

<sup>233</sup> Manent, *Métamorphoses*, 167ff.

<sup>234</sup> Elsewhere Manent speaks of the “terrible mistreatment” of Cicero over the years. *Le Regard*, 154ff. The importance of Cicero is a view shared by some. Not least, one should consult Montesquieu’s “Discourse on Cicero,” trans. D. Fott, *Political Theory*, Vol. 30, No. 5 (Oct., 2002): 733-5. Sellers writes: “The modern world would not have developed where it did, when it did, nor as it did were it not for the life and the writings of Marcus Tullius Cicero” and in addressing Cicero’s influence he concludes it was “never so much nor so directly as in the emergence of modernity and in the development of modern law and constitutional government.” M.N.S. Sellers, “The Influence of M.T.C. on Modern Legal and Political Ideas,” *Colloquium Tullianum Anni MMVIII*, Feb. 2, 2009 (avail.: [papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1354102](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1354102)). Compare James Holton’s remarks in “Marcus Tullius Cicero,” *History of Political Philosophy*, eds. Strauss and Cropsey, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), 155-75. He discusses how Cicero has “traditionally been regarded” as a “less inspiring Greek and Roman...who followed in the wake of Plato and Aristotle,” “a dilettante rather than a serious student of philosophy,” whose political works are “little more than ambitious attempts to justify the ideals and practices of a moribund aristocratic order,” and ultimately whose “special talent is thought to have rested in the skill with which he synthesized the diverse and often conflicting teachings of these schools, thus making them available in a form congenial to the Roman taste and adequate to satisfy the demands of the practical Roman mind.” Holton adds: “Such an assessment contains a measure of truth,” but goes on to say that alone this is inadequate. In questioning the method, purpose, and substance of Cicero’s works one may see him as a “statesman and a serious student of philosophy” who “sought in his writings to place his considerable talent and experience as a rhetorician in the service of philosophy,” while restoring “the primacy of the political sphere,” guided, however, “by an awareness of the limitations of the political or active life.”

Manent's analysis at times privileges the transformation of the form and then otherwise suggests that it was Caesar's action that gave rise to the transformation. Additionally, he speaks of the role of philosophy and Cicero's impact upon Roman thought and action. It would seem that searching for one cause of human change is to belie the complexity of human and political phenomena. The science of Rome as situated within a science of political forms does not offer a static model for political development; rather it seeks to understand the political and moral disposition of actors within their respective communities—the form that delineates as well as informs political and moral possibilities. It is the kind of science that is sometimes referred to as “non-linear.” If the character of politics changes, as does the shape or form of community, its essence nonetheless remains the same, which is precisely why one can and must continue to speak of both “the city” and its “metamorphoses.”

### **Rome and “the Ciceronian Moment”**

Manent writes of the “perplexity of Cicero.” The latter grappled with of a period of “indetermination,” or a “gray zone” between two forms, facing the dual task of understanding and response. Thus Cicero is “really the first to have confronted the political problem of the West, that of the viability of the city, of the “exit” from the city, and the passage from one form to another.”<sup>235</sup> Such a remarkable extension of the city and transition of forms leaves political and moral things blurred and uncertain, the sources and forces of authority insecure. No less distorted was the relation between theory and practice, and here again the contrast with Greece is helpful. For in the Greek city, philosophy, or political philosophy, appeared only *after* the flourishing of the city,

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<sup>235</sup> Manent, *Le regard*, 155.

and even amidst its decline. “Greek philosophy played, so to speak, no role in the *political* history of the Greek city. This is altogether different in Rome.”<sup>236</sup> In fact, so great is the political role that “Greco-Roman philosophy” played in Rome Manent argues the Roman empire “effectively realized the union of philosophy and the political order.” Or, to put it differently, “something like a “passage from the Ancients to the moderns” is already produced in Rome at the end of the republican period.”<sup>237</sup> Thus, taking Cicero seriously in and through Manent’s science of Rome helps make intelligible the fact that the original, or classical, political-philosophical experience was spiritually present even while its very concreteness was receding and the difficulty of recovery was setting in. Reading Cicero in light of political forms and their transition makes manifest the great significance of his thought.

For Manent, Cicero appears as something of both a passive witness to the transformation—as a classical philosopher reflecting on the truth of the situation—and a sort of active agent of transformation—as a modern philosopher effectuating the truth of a new situation. It is not that Cicero consciously developed a wholly original approach, for he himself freely admits to adopting and introducing Greek philosophy to Rome. However, Manent argues that it is precisely the absence of intended originality that is of interest, which itself constitutes the originality of his position: “he sought to illuminate an experience that did not produce its own light by way of a light from without,”<sup>238</sup> and in the process, because of the emergent political context he was pressed to make certain modifications to the classical categories. All he had learned (i.e., from the classical

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<sup>236</sup> Manent, “Rome comme problème philosophique,” 113-14. On the *ineffectiveness* of Platonic philosophy from becoming the source of order for the city, see, Eric Voegelin, *Order and History Vol. III: Plato and Aristotle* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 58-9, 187 *et passim*.

<sup>237</sup> Manent, *Métamorphoses*, 180.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

understanding of the republican regime, the notion of the mixed regime, etc.) was no longer adequate to make sense of a Rome that sundered its original civic boundaries while submitting to a single, divinized man—a Rome that did what no city had done before: stretch itself to embrace the entirety of the known world under the rule of one.

We cannot follow the intricacies of Manent's profound textual exegesis here, but suffice it to say that Cicero's resultant adaptation of classical thought offers a redefinition of political order, approaching or anticipating the moderns in various ways, even as it seeks consistency with classical thought. The developments intimated include: the "instrumentalization" of politics, the privatization of virtue and the importance of private initiatives, the concomitant attention to the individuality or particularity of each, the protection of private property as a priority of politics, the new definition of the magistrate as embodiment of the public person, and the separation of morality from a concrete or particular community and its strictures.<sup>239</sup> So far as monarchy is concerned, Cicero adds a princely part to the classical notion of the mixed regime. The sum of these changes amounts to raising, or energizing, the numerical one over an expanded but politically thinned out, or tamed, many.<sup>240</sup> Stated otherwise, the erstwhile Greek relation of man and the city is profound modified:

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<sup>239</sup> Manent acknowledges that many such ideas can be attributed to the "Stoics" as well, which is no surprise given that they too already faced a political order that was no longer properly civic, but the vagueness associated with such a category as "Stoic thought" as well as the apoliticism leads him to prefer the precision and directness of Cicero.

<sup>240</sup> The redefining of citizenship in Rome as compared to Greece is often noted, largely due to the expansion of the former. See, Pocock, "The Ideal of Citizenship Since Classical Times," *Queen's Quarterly*, 99 (Spring 1992): 33-55, who discusses the shift as one from an active to an increasingly passive form. Bradshaw summarizes the claim nicely: "The shift is dramatic, because the deliberative and *active* participatory element of citizenship is no longer central to this Roman conception. If citizens are no longer conceived as equal partners in the shaping of their political life, but as subjects who are protected by a uniform law, the boundaries of political territory are opened to expansion. Citizenship as equal access to jurisprudence lends itself to empire in a way that the ancient Greek understanding of citizenship does not." Bradshaw, "Empire and the Eclipse of Politics," 78. This is consistent with what Manent finds in Cicero's "new comprehension of republican government," with its "displacement of the center of political gravity

For the Greeks, the individual citizen, dependent as he was on the city, was likewise the equal of the city, insofar as the city in its turn was dependent upon him, on his command and obedience. This equality took on a spiritual sense and became paradoxically visible with the person of Socrates, who treated Athens as if he was dealing with an individual interlocutor to whom he might offer several reproaches. In Rome, the reciprocal dependence between the citizen and the city is loosened, and the city becomes definitively much larger than man.<sup>241</sup>

So large does the city become, so far are the citizens' souls stretched from the particularity of, and participation in, their city, that Cicero invokes something striking and wholly foreign to Greek thought: a "society of human beings as a whole [*universi generis humani societas*]." <sup>242</sup> The "*opération romaine*" consists of unifying, "miraculously," the two ancient and opposed political forms of the city and empire and so by extension its two principles: the ideas of liberty and of universal peace. No doubt this *opération* is constituted by great tensions, not least between republican virtues and imperial right. And in the process Rome moved close—the closest in Western experience at that time—to collapsing the distinction that is decisive for any particular form: the difference between the interiority and exteriority of its form.

Rome carries the promise to gather humanity, the hope for *l'humanité rassemblée*, in the universal combination of liberty and peace. Rome's chaotic and violent history notwithstanding, its authority persists today, under another name: "The promise of Rome is always present and tentative under the abstract name of democracy."<sup>243</sup> This promise

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towards the magistrate who, as carrier of the 'person' of the city, is the object of confidence of the citizens" insofar as he defends the dignity of the republic and applies its laws, but more significantly assigns to each his rights.

<sup>241</sup> Manent, *Métamorphoses*, 241.

<sup>242</sup> Manent, *Métamorphoses*, 169; Cicero, *On Duties*, eds. M.T. Griffin and E.M. Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21-2, 43.

<sup>243</sup> Manent, "Rome comme problème philosophique," 118. As Voegelin writes: "To be the heir of Rome has remained the supreme authorization of European governments for more than a millennium; and the line of tradition was kept up through the time of the national states, with diminishing prestige, until 1806. Even then, the idea was not dead..." Eric Voegelin, *Hellenism, Rome, and Early Christianity, History of Political Ideas, Vol. 1*, Ed. A. Moulakis (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 123-4. One can extend Rome's influence beyond European governments, even if not as direct inherited authority, certainly in the mediated form of influence and as serious object of consideration. The American Founders notably

has today become a temptation, even an illusion, which Manent refers to as the desire for “pure democracy,” or a *kratos* without a *demos*: “democratic *governance*, which is very respectful of human rights but detached from any collective deliberation.”<sup>244</sup> He argues it is particularly manifest in the European project. If there is something imperial about the European Union in its process of going beyond the national form, Manent argues that it lacks the “cruel dynamism of the Caesarian transition” and is “deprived of all real principles of movement, superimposing an empire without emperor to a republican liberty deprived of energy, under the authority of an undefined notion of humanity.” One may find a sign of progress in the fact that the European construction is a process as soft as Roman history was cruel, however, the European Union’s unlimited enlargement and absence of foundation—its lack of “Roman ambition”—really signifies, for Manent, that “nothing significant is taking place and nothing durable is being produced.”<sup>245</sup>

Contemporary Europeans are therefore in a “gray zone” anew, but now the political ambition requisite for founding is replaced by the hope of going “beyond politics,” of living “post-politically,” in a truly global or universal community: the community of humanity. So much of this ambition arises from a certain form of progressivism, and one altogether lacking in—or dismissive of—a political perspective, a *regard politique*, and thus of an understanding of the political nature of human beings.

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attended to Roman experience, and the political science of the *Federalist Papers* found much to draw from Rome. To be sure, the legacy of Rome was somewhat ambiguous, and it would be incorrect to suggest the Founders had a monolithic view of Rome. For points of both admiration and critique, see, *The Federalist Papers*, Nos. 17, 18, 34, 38, 41, 63, 70; cf. Louis J. Sirico, “The Federalist and the Lessons of Rome,” *Mississippi Law Journal*, Vol. 75 (2006): 431-94.

<sup>244</sup> Manent, *Democracy without Nations?*, 7.

<sup>245</sup> Manent, “Rome comme problème philosophique, 118.

## The Ambiguity of Progress: History and the Universal

Putting off until the next chapter further elaboration of the genesis of the nation, and indeed why and how it came about as a proposed solution to a problem—the theologico-political problem—which emerged through the presence of another form, the Church, we are nonetheless in a position to introduce discussion of a certain conviction that Manent argues has dominated Western consciousness since the eighteenth century, and one that is still very alive today.<sup>246</sup> It is a conviction that represents the drive for universalism in Europe today, and is a belief suggesting that the only possible meaning of human history is its progress towards the universal. History, according to this view, is intelligible to us only insofar as we understand it to move along a trajectory constituted by major stages of increasing universality. One shorthand way of describing this view is to refer to it as the “Hegelian” understanding, insofar as the progress of civilization entrails ever-greater universality and liberty—or the universalization of political liberty—for example, as passage was made from the familial or feudal order to the civic or national order. On some level this fact is undisputable, and one need not be Hegelian to agree with it; after all, we have seen with Tocqueville how real transformations occurred from the old regime to the new one of democracy, and equality has spread. What Manent wants to underline, however, is that with an increase in generalization there has been substantial change in the basic elements of the community and human life but always alongside the emergence or production of a new element, namely a new framework for real political action, and thus the possibility for self-government.

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<sup>246</sup> Examples abound, but one famous proponent is that of Jürgen Habermas. See, Jürgen Habermas, “The European Nation-State: On the Past and Future of Sovereignty and Citizenship,” in *The Inclusion of the Other*, 105-28 [“Die europäische Nationalstaat—Zu Vergangenheit und Zukunft von Souveränität und Staatsbürgerschaft,” in *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), 128-153].



As discussed, the Greek city created the common (*koinon*), and in turn Rome established the public thing (or *res publica*). While things changed, and citizenship was extended, there was nonetheless a new human association or framework for *opération*, or action. With the later birth of the European nation, along came the *public* in its various manifestations, such as public interest, public opinion, public space, and so on. To reiterate, the operation has otherwise been that of “self-government.” The transformation of the framework has initiated what he refers to as a “quantitative” change—an extension of universality insofar as the modern nation is undoubtedly more general than that of the ancient city: all the nationals of the former are citizens while only a select few are of the latter, not to mention the real difference in size. However, alongside this change—the increase in political rights and freedom, at least of the formal kind—is the matter of its “qualitative” transformation, and here we encounter a certain amount of ambiguity. In light of the quantitative change, the operation of self-government has necessarily taken on a different form: ancient democracy or ancient republicanism is different from the modern form due to the fact of *representation*. Thus, if the modern form is more general or universal than the ancient, it is not self-evident that its form of self-government is actually better, or more complete, or in fact a further realization of what the very word “democracy” entails and aspires toward.

To be sure, this is not a new debate, and it is one with deep roots in the French tradition, as well as in the broader tradition of political thought. However, Manent’s history of political forms opens it up anew, and forces us to reconsider it with great seriousness. This is his most poignant probing of the question regarding the Ancients and the Moderns. And if it sounds like Constant’s inquiry, he certainly gives the Ancients

more voice than Constant, or at least seeks to let their perspective speak for itself; unlike Constant he does not side prejudicially with the Moderns. In fact, his history of political forms questions the validity of such progressivism. For it goes further by adding the complicating fact that philosophy itself emerged in the more restrictive political landscape of the Greek *polis*: “the citizens are not numerous, but one of them—Socrates—is a citizen of the world.” Thus, over and against the political operation of the ancient city and its particularity there emerges the activity and experience of philosophy that detaches itself from the city, in turn accomplishing a further progress in generality or universality. The operation proper to philosophy is the “theoretical life,” which emerges as a new human possibility so that “the philosopher separates himself from other men at the very moment when he otherwise defines man in his universality as a “political animal” and “rational animal.””<sup>247</sup> There is an interesting relationship, as it were, between particularity in politics and universality in ideas, so to speak; or, alternatively how the universal progresses in and through the production of new and different human associations or communities.

Manent likewise discusses this connection in light of the Israelite experience, suggesting that Israel’s election is no surfeit of particularity when compared to the particularism of the ancient pagan city with its “gods of the cities.” To the extent that Israel is separate from the other nations, the novel divinity that reveals itself at this time is one that is Creator for every and each creature. One can say that a theological universalism emerges amidst the separation of peoples. At bottom, universalism is extended through separations: the philosopher from the many, and the Israelites from the nations, both by way of new associations. So far as Christianity goes, it too produces a

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<sup>247</sup> Manent, *Metamorphoses*, ch. 8.

new association in the form of the Church, which represents real universality as a community, creating the framework for the operation of charity. But this universality no less comes about through a further separation between the city of God and the city of man, not to mention Christianity—or Christendom—comprises only a part of the larger human world, not to mention the further separations that follow upon doctrinal differences and confessional disputations. In the wake of this ambiguous progress of the universal Manent argues that the modern political and philosophical movement has taken upon itself the task of overcoming the sundry preceding separations by establishing a truly effectual universality. Upon asking the questions regarding the form, framework, or association for unification as well as what operation or action it will be geared towards, the only sufficient response that follows is the association of humanity itself. But what this ultimately means, or as to whom this association encompasses, there is no clear answer, and Manent argues that part of this uncertainty further obfuscates the issue regarding humanity's proper *opération*: what does humanity *do*? Self-government seems to be out of the question, and without an alternative, there is no evidence to believe that humanity can or would constitute an effective political community.

This range of problems can be seen in the microcosm of the present political situation of Europe. It is not clear what new framework or human association the European project will establish, and whether the *opération* of self-government will continue amidst the process of dismantling the nation. For while there is much talk about a European public interest, a European public opinion, or a European public space, no actual political form—or cadre—to realize this public has yet emerged. It is not from mere discussion alone, as Habermas and others would have us believe, that political

orders are born. Habermas himself argues that there are already various examples of “new forms of organization for continental ‘regimes’ ...emerging above the level of the state [*suprastaatliche*],” which he proclaims are “regimes which could one day provide the requisite infrastructure for the currently rather inefficient United Nations.”<sup>248</sup>

Altogether consistent with the conviction that Manent describes, Habermas claims that there is an “unprecedented increase in abstraction,” and so an inevitably rising tide of universalism, which “is merely the continuation of a process, the first major example of which was the integration achieved by the nation-state.”<sup>249</sup> The nation-state was simply one step along an inexorable historical course towards greater abstraction, universality, or globality—a process towards the final integration of the *Weltgesellschaft*. Nevertheless, Habermas curiously says he thinks, “we can take our orientation on the precarious path toward postnational societies from the very historical model we are on the point of superseding.” The nation-state, despite its ultimate contingency, as well as its particularity lamented by universalists, and its past and present failures to fully socially integrate from this perspective, somehow nonetheless remains the model for the future.

Habermas and similar universalists wants to move beyond the nation—he welcomes and advocates the “postnational constellation”—and yet he cannot imagine an altogether different “model.” The nation is both a way station between past and future, as well as the model for the future. Interpreting the same facts differently, however, one can just as easily conclude that Europeans are not yet beyond the nation. It is then more

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<sup>248</sup> Op. cit.; Cf. Habermas, “Toward a Cosmopolitan Europe.”

<sup>249</sup> Habermas’s conviction regarding a directional philosophy of history is sufficiently strong that he believes it to be a guide for action, insofar as “a theoretically guided praxis of life was extended by the philosophy of history.” Philosophy of history accounts for the fact that “the realization of the good, happy, and rational life has been stretched out along the vertical axis of world-history” and “praxis has been extended to cover stages of emancipation.” Habermas, “Dogmatism, Reason, and Decision: On Theory and Praxis in Our Scientific Civilization,” in *Theory and Practice*, 253-82.

likely a hope than an empirical claim that “new forms...for continental ‘regimes’” are truly “emerging,” inasmuch as one understands “forms” and “regimes” in any strongly political sense, as a definite and delineated political thing, having had a concrete foundation. At any rate, the real alternative to the national form for such thinkers as Habermas is a cosmopolitan individualist, which follows a Kantian understanding of universal morality that appears as one of the most effective ideational vehicles thus far in attempting to overcome the separations of Christianity, despite its erstwhile political failures—all of which we shall elaborate in the following chapter.

The desire to move beyond the nation in Europe, however, is altogether intelligible. For it is well known that modern democracy emerged within the framework of the nation, but in so giving democracy a body through the nation, it later became democracy’s worst enemy in the form of virulent nationalism. This “terrible dialectic,” as Manent evocatively calls it, had become manifest in the wars and totalitarian movements of the past century, and has inspired the desire to altogether detach democracy from its originating condition. However, Manent argues, this democratic movement seeks to make “democracy unconditional, to free the democratic soul from the national body, and to endow democracy with the purity of angels,” which is to deny any limits or circumscription: thus “democracy could create for itself a body without limits, a body of indefinite extension, all to ensure that democracy could never become the slave of its own condition.”<sup>250</sup> If this sounds ridiculous, Manent argues it is exactly what the European Union pretends to be: “‘Europe’ is indeed the astral body of angelic democracy.” But what is key is for such a development to succeed, Manent writes, is that “we need to suppose that the human condition has been radically altered such that man as

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<sup>250</sup> Manent, “The Autumn of Nations,” *Azure* 16 (Winter, 2004): 32-49.

a political animal has undergone a decisive modification, or else that man is simply no longer a political animal.” To this he rightly adds: “it is a risky wager to make when embarking on an enormous political enterprise.” Even as we aspire to construct a world on the universal principles of equality and rights it is far from self-evident that an “empire of law” and an “empire of morality” can persist without concomitant political bodies, or that the law and morality alone can and will be the sole regulator of social life.<sup>251</sup> Thus, it can be said that if “Europe” or “Europeans” do not a community make, then we are a long way from one of Humanity. The European project’s own failures and difficulties of coordinating action in a state of formlessness intimate as much. “Humanity” cannot act, and there is no correlative discourse, or *opération*, to make such action possible. In light of Manent’s *histoire raisonnée des formes politiques* there is no *reason* to believe life will be more satisfying or better ordered without a plurality of properly constituted political bodies. Moreover, we ought to be weary of the desire to overcome all divisions and separations in seeking pure universalism, or total unification of humanity; or at least not be so naïve as to presume no further divisions may follow.<sup>252</sup> Thoughtful consideration of Western political history—and of the *dynamique de l’Occident*—helps strip us of such risky wagers and dangerous illusions.

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<sup>251</sup> Manent, *A World Beyond Politics?*, 171ff.

<sup>252</sup> For an important critique of the false universalism of certain forms of “humanitarianism,” and on the political abuses of the concept of “humanity”—how indeed it can be an attempt to circumvent divisions of religion, economics, law, etc., while they nonetheless remain present—see, Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans., George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), esp. Ch. 6.

**7. MANENT:  
THE CITY IN METAMORPHOSIS:  
THE WESTERN DYNAMIC AND AMERICAN DYNAMISM**

“[I]n the political order, the self and the other have something in common: precisely the political order, the body politic, the republic that is a common thing. In the political order, as a consequence of this commonality, there is a sort of active confusion of the self and the other. It is then possible for individuals to forget themselves and to be willing to sacrifice themselves in a sacrifice that is both selfish and generous, the patriotic sacrifice.”

—Manent, *A World Beyond Politics?*, 205

We concluded the preceding chapter by discussing the widespread conviction of our day, particularly alive among European thinkers since the eighteenth century, that the only possible meaning of human history is its progress towards the universal. We begin this chapter by tracing the original problem behind this conviction, or better to say the problem that this conviction holds to be no longer problematic, namely the theologico-political problem. The historical conviction supplants, or at least covers over, this problem, for it is a problem that gave rise to the political form of the nation; indeed, the nation was one proposed solution to the theologico-political problem. Manent’s thoughtful analysis of the nation, at a time when the nation has itself become either problematic or irrelevant for some, is such that it returns the theologico-political problem to consciousness while demonstrating the questionability of the progressive historical conviction. Even as the Church brought the theologico-political problem into full light—that is to say, Christianity and the Catholic Church heightened the theologico-political problem—the so-called ‘secularization’ of Europe and the West, and the decreased role of the Church in Western life, does not negate the original problem, but perhaps obscures it. The religion of humanity—that is, the strong faith in the ultimate unity of humanity under the aegis of universal human rights—is, therefore, only the latest proposition

directed at the problem, even as it is largely oblivious to it.<sup>253</sup> Thus, there is no perfect solution to the problem, but only different, as well as better and worse, modes of living with, as well as within, it.

In fact, as a number of thinkers have highlighted, the very strength of Western civilization has come from the tension brought forth by the problem. That is to say, the spiritual substance of the West derives from its constant grappling with the relationship between religion and politics. And while Europe, as well as the preponderance of present-day European intellectuals, seems to hope for more than a resolution to this tension, insofar as they hope to create a world beyond both religion and politics, the same cannot be said about America. And while American public life consists of ongoing debates over religion and politics, it is a nation that was consciously created without many of the same pressures and powers that gave rise to European nations. Indeed, as The Federalist famously put it, America is an answer to the question of whether the establishment of good government could emerge “from reflection and choice” rather than be “forever destined to depend...on accident and force.”<sup>254</sup>

Thus, after addressing these concerns, we will turn to discuss the American exception, in order to demonstrate that America is, on the one hand, an exception to the ultimate universalizing tendency so prominent in Western Europe, and, on the other hand, serves as an exception to Manent’s theorizing, due to its political character and

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<sup>253</sup> Consider Michael Ignatieff, *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), who raises concerns that advocates of human rights risk engaging in “idolatry,” and thus their cause is sometimes akin to a secular, or ersatz, religion. All of this is in the wake of what he calls the “juridical revolution” in human rights, post-1945, and its excesses beyond protecting human agency and the individual’s negative freedom. Consider the essays in, *Religion and Human Rights: Competing Claims?*, Eds., Carrie Gustafson and Peter H. Juviler (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999).

<sup>254</sup> Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist*, eds., George W. Carey and James McClellan (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), No. 1, pg. 1. All future references to this work will indicate first paper and then page number, separated by semicolon (e.g., 1;1).



constitution. America declared its sovereign independence as a nation from the outset, and founded a government on the basis of its own proper constitution, which likewise limits the government. To whatever extent observers are inclined to think of America as approximating a universal state, or empire, or would otherwise like to see America subordinate to a global scheme of governance, the American Constitution precludes such possibilities, making it something of an outlier in Manent's generalized view of things Western.<sup>255</sup>

### **The Theologico-Political Problem I: A Universal Problem**

The “theologico-political problem” is a technical phrase with a disputed meaning that otherwise embraces a complex set of problems. At bottom, it refers to the relationship between religion and politics—between God, or the gods, on the one hand, and the city, or human community, on the other. It is neither a new problem, nor one that

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<sup>255</sup> The question of America's relation to empire is an interesting one. Manent himself notes curious relationship between representative self-government and imperialism, which he adds that on the one hand accounts for the continued discussion of America as some kind of empire, and on the other hand the inability of certain thinkers to consider Europe as a form of empire. Manent, *Metamorphoses*, 253. Thus it may be the case that the strength of modern self-government requires a certain balance with expansion or an outward glance in order to survive, and that the two are not, in a certain sense, mutually exclusive. Nonetheless, to whatever extent America is an empire, or imperial, it is only so informally, despite what certain advocates might insist upon, or detractors might lament. Niall Ferguson has rather famously declared that America should formally adopt the role of an imperial power, the way Victorian Britain once did, in Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), see especially “Conclusion.” Andrew Bacevitch has most vocally denounced American imperial ambitions, while not shying away from the necessity of military strength, while persisting that there is a “myth” of America as a “reluctant superpower,” insofar as American has continually adopted what he calls a “strategy of openness”—that is, openness to international engagement—particularly since Wilson's presidency. Bacevitch, *American Empire: The Realities & Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). For an updated, as well as increasingly cynical and even fatalistic account, see, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008). America's pursuit of freedom, Bacevitch herein concludes, has “induced a condition of dependence—on imported goods, on imported oil, and on credit. The chief desire of the American people, whether they admit it or not, is that nothing should disrupt their access to those goods, that oil, and that credit. The chief aim of the U.S. government is to satisfy that desire, which it does in part through the distribution of largess at home (with Congress taking a leading role) and in part through the pursuit of imperial ambitions abroad (largely the business of the executive branch)” (173).

has lost relevance.<sup>256</sup> In fact, it has become a matter of renewed interest as of late, particularly in the wake of the resurgence of religious forms of terrorism and fundamentalism. That said, for a number of thinkers it ever remained a central problem, insofar as it is a universal problem—one inherent to the human condition, irrespective of what might be the level of religiosity of the day. It was of fundamental importance for Leo Strauss, for example, and Strauss likely did more than any thinker of the twentieth century to return it to consciousness within modern liberal thought. It appears he even coined the phrase, “theologico-political problem,” that is now prominently used.<sup>257</sup> According to Strauss, the heart of the problem consists of competing sources of authority—that is, whether the foundations of political authority reside in the claims of reason or of revelation, or, as Strauss liked to say, in Athens or Jerusalem.<sup>258</sup> Thus, as has often been argued, the matter of sovereignty is at the heart of the problem.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Thomas Pangle, *Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), esp. “Introduction.”

<sup>257</sup> Micah Watson, “The Theologico-Political Problem: From Spinoza to Manent,” Paper Presented at The Northeastern Political Science Association Conference, 2012; received upon request from the author.

<sup>258</sup> See, Leo Strauss, “Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections,” and the extended commentary, in, Susan Orr, *Jerusalem and Athens: Reason and Revelation in the Works of Leo Strauss* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995).

<sup>259</sup> Most famously, Carl Schmitt argues that sovereignty, or a theory of sovereignty, is irreducibly a theological problem, and is something that can only be understood from the perspective of political theology. Schmitt’s line of thinking examines extreme circumstances, or moments of exception, which transcend legal or constitutional orders, and moments that, as he argues, in turn constitute such orders. In the midst of great violence or dramatic decision-making, the sovereign is the one who decides and the one who decides is sovereign; thus, legitimate political order resides in the will. The sources of order emerge—insofar as Schmitt suggests that sovereignty is theological—from the revelational and non-rational sphere. See, Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans., George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). For a combination of commentary and an attempt at revitalizing political theology in light of contemporary political issues, see, Paul W. Kahn, *Political Theology: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011). Kahn argues that despite the appearance of living in a secular world, the modern state in fact continues to exhibit elements of the sacred; irrespective of the absence of any explicit religious doctrine or creed upheld by the state, the state itself depends especially on sacrifice from its citizens, even at times of a ritually violent nature, which in turn spiritually unifies citizens with the sovereign. Whatever one makes of Kahn’s work, it demonstrates that the theologico-political problem persists, no less in the intellectual level, in terms of the opposition between political philosophy and political theology, or reason and revelation.

For Strauss, the problem can be found, and was explored in classical Greek thought, but was given especial emphasis by modern thinkers like Spinoza and Hobbes. Early modern thinkers sought to make religion safe, as it were, for politics, in an age of great religious controversy and war. For example: “Because, or so long as, men believe in the power of other men, acting as ministers of powers invisible, to grant them eternal bliss or eternal torment, theology, according to Hobbes, cannot be separated from political philosophy.”<sup>260</sup> Thus, both Hobbes and Spinoza “try to modify the claims of religion by a radical reinterpretation of Holy Writ,” not least since both believed men to be largely moved by their passions, and men in their time were especially passionate about their religious beliefs. Political philosophy, for them, aimed at reconstructing men’s religious beliefs. The strategy for this reconstruction was one of modifying prevailing passions by substituting the objects that most gratify men. Insofar as religion—or the objects of religion, as well as in the case of ersatz religions—is gratifying, even by nature, political philosophy cannot avoid the matter: “The fundamental political book is a *theologico-political* treatise because it is based upon the recognition that the relationship between religion and politics is not just an accident of history, but stems from man’s nature.”<sup>261</sup> It was Spinoza’s objective to steer men’s desires away from God and his Law—that is, his Law as revealed, and thus the experience of revelation—towards the truth of science, or philosophy, and ultimately human reason, strictly speaking.

Spinoza sought to offer a new and wholly rational interpretation of the Bible as well as provide the requisite political structure to establish this interpretation as

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<sup>260</sup> Laurence Berns, “Thomas Hobbes,” in *History of Political Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, ed., Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 390.

<sup>261</sup> Stanley Rosen, “Benedict Spinoza,” *Ibid.*, 433, 438.

politically authoritative, or sovereign. He sought to champion Athens—his Athens, as it were—over and against Jerusalem. For example, by demonstrating that every miracle results from natural causes, and that there is a rational approach—a scientific or philosophic interpretation—to all phenomena, the achievement would be to free peoples from the violence and bloodshed that occurs on the basis of priestly power and visceral religious disputations.<sup>262</sup> While modern rationalism certainly expanded its reign in the wake of Hobbes and Spinoza, the debate nonetheless continues as to whether it has, or even can, offer an exhaustive interpretation of all things. The apparent triumph of reason over revelation may be just that: the appearance of victory, insofar as modern reason has more mocked revelation than actually engaged and defeated it on its own terms. Rather than having epistemologically, or philosophically, refuted the claims of revelation, it has belittled religion and attacked it rhetorically. So much is seen in the Enlightenment’s critique of religion, and out of which is born a new set of passions: hope for a peaceful and unified humanity of the future.<sup>263</sup> Part of the difficulty, however, is due to the fact that the two claims of reason and revelation rest on precisely different—even incommensurate—terms, and cannot actually refute one another but must stand abreast in tension.<sup>264</sup> This very tension, Strauss has argued, has served as a great source of strength

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<sup>262</sup> Steven B. Smith, “Strauss’s Spinoza,” *Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 65-83.

<sup>263</sup> Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>264</sup> This problem is at the very core of the fascinating dialogue and disagreement between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin. Voegelin’s understanding of reason is largely based on his readings of Plato and Aristotle, the texts of which he argues to be symbolic representations of experiences in consciousness. Thus, he speaks of the “classical *experience*”—the experiential side of things is underlined. He is by no means unaware of the truncation of classical reason in modern thought, and his critique of this reduction is not dissimilar from Strauss’s. However, the real difference lies in the fact that with respect to revelatory (or “pneumatic”) experiences, Voegelin finds them to be “equivalent” to the robust rational (or “noetic”) experiences of classical texts. Judaic, Christian, Islamic, and other revelatory experiences fall under the same category, despite their differences, and despite this categorization stand in immediate relation to the category of experiences in reason. Ultimately, both sets of experiences occur in consciousness, for

for Western civilization, intellectually, spiritually, and politically, for it is not, in truth, about the tension between rationality and irrationality; rather, two irreconcilable starting points with two wholly irreconcilable criteria for even establishing the point of departure. Thus, the difficulty, or better to say the impossibility, of either revelation or reason (ancient or modern, for that matter) wholly refuting one or the other is what makes the “theologico-political problem” a universal, and indeed permanent problem. By contrast, the modern (scientific) denial of the incommensurability between reason and revelation has been fatal to both revelation and to modern philosophy, whereby the former is no longer taken seriously (i.e., atheism) and the latter has culminated in the denial of any rational standards at all (i.e., nihilism). So much is no small part of what is referred to by Strauss and others as the “crisis of the West.”<sup>265</sup> Those treading somewhere between atheism and nihilism hold firm in their belief of a progressive future. Convinced of a future with a new international order, such progressives imagine a world constituted by a global legal apparatus—a rational scheme comprising all the world’s peoples—yet they fail to acknowledge the very fideistic elements of their own position. There is no rational

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Voegelin, such that the object and subject are the same, the only structural difference is the directionality of the experience: man seeking God or God seeking man. In contrast, Strauss speaks less about Christianity and takes his point of departure of revelation from the Jewish Law. For Strauss, the *objective* experience of revelation is that of revealed law—the Law of God—and is altogether different from philosophical knowledge. The revealed law in fact establishes the pre-philosophical context that allows for philosophy to emerge at all, and it erstwhile offers an entire way of life and account of things, in submission to God, that is ultimately at odds with the searching, inquisitive, and otherwise *subjective* way of life of philosophic reason that emerges clandestinely, or better to say, esoterically, in a religious and political context imbued with a strong sense of law. Thus, it might be said, Strauss largely addresses revelation *politically* (at least exoterically), on the basis of what he learned from reading premodern Medieval interpreters of the Law (e.g., Maimonides, Alfarabi, etc.), while Voegelin does so *epistemologically* on the basis of his elaboration of a philosophy of consciousness. Furthermore, a decisive difference between them follows from Strauss’s distinction between Christianity (or a religion of faith), on the one hand, and Judaism and Islam (religions of Law), on the other hand, whereas no such distinction of philosophical import exists for Voegelin. See, for example, the epistolary exchange and interpretive essays in, *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964*, eds., Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1993).

<sup>265</sup> Leora Batnitzky, “Leo Strauss and the ‘Theologico-Political Predicament,’” in *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, ed., Steven B. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 45.

evidence, as it were, that the world will be one day so ordered—that law alone can govern all peoples, or that politics can be supplanted by law so that sovereignty and self-government ultimately become anachronistic concepts. We return to these matters below.

It is from the very title of Spinoza's work, *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, that Strauss draws the language for the "problem." The problem, for Strauss, can be characterized as operating on two "levels," those of which have just been indicated, namely the practical and the theoretical. For, to the extent that there is ever a concern regarding the misuse or abuse of religion for political power (as well as vice versa), which may culminate in violence or tyranny, there is the relation between reason and revelation, or Athens and Jerusalem, as an irresolvable philosophical problem.<sup>266</sup> However, Strauss largely focuses on the theoretical, or philosophical side of the problem. Thus, one may wonder at the fact that the real issue seems to be the challenge to philosophy from revelation, and why the problem is nonetheless overtly deemed to be political. The answer, it would seem, as Heinrich Meier puts it, is the following: "it is only by wrestling first with the concerns of politics that one can work to understand the framework within which the conflict between revelation and philosophy must take place."<sup>267</sup> After all, as previously noted, reason and revelation provide alternative sources of political authority.

It has likewise been argued that Strauss employs the term and engages the problem in the two following senses: the "diagnostic" and the "reconstructive." The former refers to Strauss's interest in the endeavor and successes of early modern thought

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<sup>266</sup> For alternate discussion of "Strauss's two theologico-political problems, see, Watson, op. cit., 62ff.

<sup>267</sup> Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 26.

to separate theology from politics, and the latter to his attention to earlier, premodern, thinkers who “thought it necessary to grapple and live with the tensions, if not contradictions, that by definition arise from human society.”<sup>268</sup> Suffice it to say that the various questions, approaches, and aspects raised by the broader problem were central to Strauss’s thinking, such that he could go so far as to label it “*the* theme of [his] investigations.” Consequently, there is no shortage of literature on the matter.<sup>269</sup>

### **The Theologico-Political Problem II: Through a History of Forms**

These preliminary remarks only outline the larger issue, and are but a sketch of one approach to the problem. But as previously mentioned, Strauss’s thought has been of especial importance and influence for Manent. However, for our purposes, the difference in their approach is of greater interest. As can be gathered from the aforementioned, Strauss’s approach is primarily philosophical, which is to say that he engaged the problem textually and exegetically. This is not to deny that he had political, or practical, intentions, for so much of his work was pedagogical; however, he did not historically situate the problem in any thorough sense. In contrast, Manent’s approach to the problem is intentionally historical. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Manent makes the theologico-political problem one of the central axes of his history of political forms. While his analysis is still textual and exegetical, it is ever mindful of the political institutions and associations, their real historical interactions, and the outcomes of the tensions and relations between

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<sup>268</sup> Leora Batnitzky, “Leo Strauss and the ‘Theologico-Political Predicament,’” 41-42.

<sup>269</sup> Quoted in, Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, 4. For Meier, however, this theme and tension is one that Strauss exaggerated, insofar as he strengthened the case of revelation (in which Meier argues Strauss did not believe) so as to make the case on behalf of philosophy. Whatever the case, the consequence has been a revitalized awareness of the tension, if not of the tension itself. This much is true even among so-called Straussians. See, Michael Zuckert, “Straussians,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, 263-86.

them. Of especial interest is that the political forms of Europe had to deal with the Church, and what Manent sometimes calls “the Christian proposition.”

In a work that is largely one of interpretation, as suggested by its title—*Histoire intellectuelle du libéralisme*—Manent nonetheless begins by outlining an interpretation of European history that precedes liberalism. In the Preface he notes that the book is not “a political history of Europe” at large, “but rather a scale model of this history, a summary of its major articulations.” Focusing on “major articulations” allows the observer to interpret history in broad strokes with particular incidents that exemplify key themes. As guides for this history, he has taken “some of the principal works of political philosophy, from Machiavelli to Tocqueville,” since, in his view, the history of political philosophy “sheds the most light on the unfolding of our history and on the nature of our political regimes.” Manent does not offer a systematic philosophy of history, but is ever engaging in an “*essai sur la dynamique de l’Occident*.” As the French, “*essai*,” would have it, it is an ongoing attempt, a sustained thoughtful reflection on political history, which is open-ended. In so doing, Manent draws an immediate relation between theory and practice, or between texts and regimes. And this is not by accident, for he argues the following: “A singular feature of the present historical situation is that political thought and political life are, in modern times, intimately linked. This is something new.”<sup>270</sup> The present is a consequence of conscious decisions made in the past, and made on the basis of certain new and powerful ideas. Such ideas largely have to do with the relationship between power and opinion—opinions regarding God, salvation, eternity, and the like—and thus permutations of theological opinion and political power. What is more is that the remarkable history of European political development is not simply the past but is our

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<sup>270</sup> Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, xv.



present. “Not only are our roots in it, not only does it pervade our memory. Our present political regime remains determined, in its generating principle, by this origin. Its singularity still dwells in us because we continue to feel the consequences of the solemn decisions taken three centuries ago.” Consequently, Manent opens this book of intellectual history with a chapter entitled, “Europe and the Theologico-Political Problem.”

The chapter offers a quick overview of a history of forms from the fall of the Roman Empire, while highlighting the confrontation between the particularity of the *polis* and the universality of empire and Church. The polis and empire were the only known available forms by which to organize, or re-organize political life, after the fall of Rome. However, with the entrance of the Church, a new dynamic emerged. Despite this, given the outstanding prestige of Rome and empire in Europe, as well as the continued emergence of so many powerful cities in its history, it is no insignificant fact that Europe did not continue to organize itself more or less durably in the form of cities or an empire, but instead produce a radically new political form. The Church, of course, operates on a different level since its ultimate objective is not to organize the social and political life of men; however, it inevitably posed a political problem. For it purports to be a perfect society, even if on some level an imagined one, and as such cannot help undermining to some extent the moral constitution and conditions of both the city and empire as given communities. Manent argues that its principle is “charity,” which speaks directly to its teachings on virtue and salvation, but is no less a principle that binds men together, and is therefore inescapably political, even as it points beyond politics. “The mere notion of charity—love of neighbor for the love of God—opens up perspectives and possibilities

that are enough to reorder the way we look at the human association.”<sup>271</sup> Being at least in part political, it necessarily posed challenges for overtly political institutions and men. Insofar as charity never did (nor arguably could) become the ultimate principle animating political associations—after all, the Church’s own founder stated it is not of this world—the Church was sufficiently influential to pose a problem but insufficiently strong to outright govern men politically. The consequences of this can be summarized as follows:

This point must be stressed: the political development of Europe is understandable only as the history of answers to problems posed by the Church, which was a human association of a completely new kind. Each institutional response created in its turn new problems and called for the invention of new responses. The key to European development is what might be called, in scholarly terms, the *theologico-political problem*.<sup>272</sup>

One can see how Manent would find the tension between religion and politics to be a great source for European strength and creativity, even if in something of an agonistic sense—the necessity to face problems and invent new responses to them requires men to bring their intellects, imaginations, and wills to bear on matters of importance. Thus, the theologico-political problem is not only an Ariadne-like thread of interpreting Europe’s past, but has itself been a vector of European history.<sup>273</sup> For part of the problem has to do with “a remarkable contradiction” at the heart of the Catholic Church; its operation is logically ambivalent. While the Church grants men the freedom to organize and govern the temporal sphere themselves—according to their natural reason—it cannot help but tend towards imposing a theocracy upon them—insofar as their natural reason

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<sup>271</sup> Manent, “What is a Nation?” in *Democracy without Nations?*, 96.

<sup>272</sup> Manent, *Intellectual History of Liberalism*, 4.

Elsewhere, Manent states matters as follows: “From at least the Investiture Controversy of the eleventh century between the pope and the German emperor, to the serious crisis in France at the start of the twentieth century between the Catholic Church and the Republic, European history turns on the complicated, often conflicted relation between the political and religious jurisdictions.” *A World Without Politics?*, 21.

<sup>273</sup> Manent himself uses the term “vector.” The very title of Chapter 2 of *A World Without Politics?* Is, “The Theologico-Political Vector.”

insufficiently realizes truth and the highest good, which the Church professes as the gift of its founder. Thus, the Church both liberated and constrained at once, freeing the secular sphere while imposing upon the religious one. Both cities and empires had to respond to the problem—to this problematic logic—and often did so contentiously. The competition for authority made for great instability, and the city and empire were only able to manage for so long. The particularity of the cities gave way to the universality of the empire, while the empire ever competed in universality with the Church that had a wider and deeper reach. Such being the case, the great political problem for Europe that emerged was that “the nonreligious, secular, lay world had to be organized under a form that was neither city-state nor empire, a form less ‘particular’ than the city-state and less ‘universal’ than the empire, or whose universality would be different from that of empire.” Presented in mathematical form, Manent summarizes as follows: “given the characteristics of the Catholic Church, find the political form X that makes it possible to ensure the secular world’s independence.”<sup>274</sup> The apparent answer to the problem—the form that was sufficiently but neither overtly particular or universal—first emerged as the absolute or national monarch.

The king made no extended claims to universal monarchy, and thereby was not at odds with the Church’s universality, while he nevertheless paid homage to the teachings of the Church and Christian virtues. This new national but Christian king could appeal to “divine right” but did so within the limits of his realm, and thereby avoided threatening the universality of the Church outright. This both placated the Church and allowed for distance or independence of the political body from the Church, bringing about a new sort of balance. Additionally, the people of the realm had greater freedoms from political

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<sup>274</sup> *Intellectual History of Liberalism*, 7, 9.

life than those in city-states; they were not as consumed by the energy of the latter, which we discussed previously. The people could therefore pursue with greater zeal what Machiavelli famously called “the things of this world”—or, if so inclined, the things of heaven, as it were. Nevertheless, the people were subordinate to their monarch, and were in a position of obedience to him, which was in accordance with the general disposition of the Church and its hierarchical view. In sum, monarchy and the Church were more compatible with one another than were the Church and the city-states.

However, as Manent insightfully points out, this new national monarchy “appeared to be less a regime than a *process*,” for with time, each such monarchy slowly tended towards absolutism and eventually incorporated the Church within its borders. The kingdom became the “nation” once it became the supreme political body, while the clergy were brought under the imposition of the civil laws. So much is one part of the emergent history of sovereignty.<sup>275</sup> This unfolding process was the king’s continued action, as the monarchy continually worked towards establishing the political body as a whole, independent from the Church. The nation, as Manent says, “could come into being only through the action of the form itself, of what is the most formal in the form—that is, its unity. The entering wedge of the nation-to-be was the Christian king. The European nation came into being through obedience to the Christian king.”<sup>276</sup> While the king as head of the nation speaks to the substance, or soul, of the new political form, to be sure, the body of each nation was contingent upon various things natural and human, which contributed to the variety of the European peoples. But at heart, the body of the form served as “a kind of mean between the powerful localism of the city (a Florentine

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<sup>275</sup> See, Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), Ch. 5 “The Coming of the Leviathan.”

<sup>276</sup> Manent, “What is a Nation?,” 97.

citizen is loath to venture very far from the Ponte Vecchio) and the imperial impulse to look toward unsubdued regions beyond the horizon (there is always an expedition being prepared against the Parthians).”<sup>277</sup>

Alongside this mean—or in this mix—was the continued importance of charity, which teaches that each human being is one’s neighbor, mitigating the pressures of those naturally close while drawing closer together those farther away. Charity “weakens the grasp of localism while it assuages the vertigo of faraway domination.” In short, this virtue helped shape the perspective and imagination of the nation. So much was an important step along the way to the eventual emergence of the secular, neutral, abstract, or simply modern, state.<sup>278</sup> The continued presence of charity, embodied in the church’s teaching, if not in its own universal and politically unmediated presence, in what Manent refers to as the “conjunction of a neutral state and a Christian nation,” all of which approximated something of a solution to the original theologico-political problem as conceived by Manent.

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 99. Cf. Martin Van Crevald, *The Rise and Decline of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), who speaks about rise of the state as a struggle against the Church, the Empire, the nobility, and the towns, until the monarch as a middling force triumphed (59-118). Van Crevald thus speaks of the state’s emergence from the Middle Ages “by fighting, and overcoming, ecclesiastical and imperial universalism on the one hand and feudal and urban particularism on the other.”

<sup>278</sup> Consider Mark Lilla’s work, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), who argues that the modern West is born in the rejection of “political theology,” which is remarkable, considering just how natural it has been and continues to be for the religious impulse—a human religious instinct—to shape politics and the broader life of peoples. The “Great Separation” of politics and theology that resulted in the institutional “separation of church and state,” is for Lilla a great achievement but an unstable one—an altogether fragile one that can take on perverse forms anew, as in the case of soteriological politics exemplified by Nazism and Stalinism. Compare with Remi Brague’s work, *The Law of God: The Philosophical History of an Idea*, translated by Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), who argues that in fact there has always been a “separation” notwithstanding the various “marriages” between the political and religious, or the practical from the divine. Brague ultimately raises the question as to whether “the ‘separation of church and state’ ever actually took place” and discusses the deceptive nature of such a phrase, insofar as it presumes both an initial union as well as the universality of such institutions. “We would do better to speak of the parallel development of two institutions that never formed a unit” (257ff.).

This original and dynamic form of European monarchy “set history in motion,” Manent argues, and we are still living with the consequences. Modern politics and its concomitant concepts were born in, and emerge from, this “polemical situation”—a situation where different forms of human association were at odds with one another in terms of their structure and orientation, their degree of universality and their principle, and the drive to separate the powers in and of this world from the opinions regarding God, salvation, and eternity. The “conjunction” of modern state and nation allowed European peoples to each chart their own course, under their own set of laws and institutions, with a connection to past traditions alongside the freedom to act in the present. Each nation, as Manent repeatedly underlines, may be understood to be a particular window into the universal—each nation representing a part of humanity at large.

Manent’s political science and his approach to the theologico-political problem take off from where Strauss left off—in terms of the alternatives of revelation and reason as sources of authority—resulting in something like a simultaneous complication and simplification of the problem. Revelation and reason, examined politically, may each be seen to be either universal (e.g., universal Church, universal empire), or particular (e.g., ancient civic religion or national church, on the one hand, *polis* or homogeneous nation, on the other hand). The dynamic of the West has been fertile and complex as a result of the competing political forms that otherwise extend and contract in size as well as have their wellsprings of authority in more or less universal or particular sources. The theologico-political problem takes on a truly historical and live sense in reading Manent; it is no mere intellectual problem, but underpins both the thought and action of the West.

To be sure, the more recent history of the nation is well known, regarding the withering of Christian charity and its supplanting by an eventually toxic form of imperialism and nationalism. In today's Europe, however, both Christianity and national sovereignty have been largely curtailed. Furthermore, any notion of a transcendent destiny is discarded, which is to say that the theologico-political problem appears to be solved once and for all.<sup>279</sup> Revelation—universal or particular—is dismissed as irrational, and reason is circumscribed by the logic of human rights, the legal manifestation of the sentiment of humanity. Europe presents itself as the embodiment of such an unfolding; as proof of the historical progression towards an “empire of universal fellow-feeling.” The once-problematic matter of discovering and establishing the most legitimate source of authority—in either divine or human wisdom—and the equally difficult matter of how to properly mediate or represent it—linguistically, institutionally, and otherwise—has been supplanted by the conviction that History is the source of truth, and its veracity emerges in universal form. The progressive unfolding of history will deliver people towards a more peaceful, less divisive, and ultimately unified existence on the level of humanity, under a rationally orchestrated legal structure.

What might be called the progressivist's dream, is a vision of the future constituted by the act of doing away with the nation, and therefore all national constitutions, since the nation's logic is condemned to be one of virulent nationalism—

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<sup>279</sup> A theme of repeated discussion throughout David P. Goldman's work, he argues that the European demographic crisis and the slow death of European peoples is a direct consequence of secularism and enlightened rationalism. “Rather than pave the way for universal peace, loss of faith has turned important parts of the world into a nursing home, and then a cemetery.” The weakening of religion results in what he calls “ethno-suicide.” See the essays in, Goldman, *It's Not the End of the World, It's Just the End of You: The Great Extinction of Nations* (New York: RVP Publishers, 2011). His expanded thesis, additionally accounting for the actions of certain Islamic states in sudden demographic decline due to an unprecedented degree of secularization—that is, actions that may appear irrational but are consistent with a suicidal mindset—see, Goldman, *How Civilizations Die (And Why Islam Is Dying Too)* (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2011).

the nation is passé, and those defending it are retrograde. More than do away with the nation, however, the progressivist perspective sees no substantial need for anything particular to hold human things together, other than the vague notion of universal humanity itself. It is a vision of post-political world. Thus, elements of human life that bind individuals to the past, to a place, to a religion, or to a given tradition and a particular culture, are equally dismissed. This dismissal, however, likewise results in the inhibiting, if not inability, of peoples to govern themselves, which is to say that particular peoples will no longer have the freedom to choose to act as a smaller collective on matters of politics and policy, not least of all with respect to self-defense. For without a common language, a particular set of institutions, and a known and established tradition, no basis or means exist for individuals as a particular group to act. The nebulous bureaucracy of an emergent world government, the international legal community and transnational courts, NGO activists, or idealist scholars—all unelected and unaccountable—would seem to replace the erstwhile consensual, national, sovereign, and constitutional community. If it is the strange dream of some, it remains the nightmare of others, and is far from being a self-evident reality outside of Western Europe. Among the most resistant in the West to this dismissal is America. And its resistance is perfectly consistent with its foundation, as well as with the American peoples' understanding of self-government.

### **Exceptional America: A Formal People, or a People with Constitutional Form**

America has always been a political experiment where the particular and universal have been in tension, where politics and religion have coexisted and contended,



and where the nation has assumed a different form than in the European context. America retains a particular form while its citizens nevertheless understand themselves to be a universal example to the rest of humanity. Moreover, America has increasingly become something of a workshop for progressivist ideas, yet one where the debate continues with vigor—both defenders and detractors are alive in the national conversation—such that the jury is out regarding the success of proleptic prophets of universalism. America is therefore the perfect topic for discussion to both conclude the present dissertation and to question some of Manent’s views on the West in general. For there is reason to believe that rather than submit, America will remain sovereign, by remaining true to its founding as a formal people, thus retaining, through adherence to its constitution, a proper and particular political form.

In the 2004 “Preface to the American Edition” of his work, *A World Beyond Politics?*, Manent notes the audience for whom he initially intended the book, namely students at Paris’s *Institut d’Etudes politiques* as well as the general French readership, adding that it was his hope to offer an “impartial overview of the political order—or disorder—of today’s world.” Therein he suggests that while something of a rift has emerged between Europe and America, there is much more that remains in common. The two sides, he argues, are “being driven apart by the very thing which is supposed to hold them together—their *common commitment to democracy*,” and while both sides identify with democracy, each understands it in different, or possibly opposing, ways. He summarizes his oft-made argument about the European project of “building Europe,” and its problematic proposal for a “pure democracy,” whereby the regime is separated from any sense of a people; that is, of creating a democracy without a people, and thereby

breaking altogether with the past. Manent then argues that the opposite development in America is taking place insofar as its people “seem more than ever willing—and this disposition extends well beyond the partisans of the current administration—to *identify* everything they do and everything they are with democracy, as such.” Thus, he charges, “Americans increasingly identify American democracy with the universal as such.”

While the two positions appear at odds, Manent concludes that at bottom, there is something deeply similar: there is an equal degree of discounting “the political and human meaning of a mankind naturally divided among different peoples.” Drawing Americans and Europeans together, it appears that each understand the right and just political ordering of the world as a mere extension of their own “brands of democracy.” Both Americans and Europeans, he concludes, “wildly exaggerate the docility or plasticity of the peoples of the world, including Western peoples.” The real consequence of such an error is to misunderstand the extent and limits of Western power in the world.

There is certainly some truth to what Manent writes here, for Americans have, since the beginning, and sometimes with more or less justification, been accused of universalizing their way of life, or of establishing it as a—even, the—universal standard of political right. Yet, while the American Founders genuinely believed themselves to be embarking on a novel experiment in government that would provide an important example to the rest of the world’s peoples, they were also very conscious of certain limitations—inherent to human nature and with respect to the intractability of the political world. If certain latter day Americans have held beliefs regarding the plasticity of the world’s people, their projects have been checked anew by reality’s constraints,

thereby affirming the wisdom of the Founders. Over the course of the history of American foreign policy “reality therapy” has continually reset thought and action.<sup>280</sup>

Thus, if America has consistently sought to establish and maintain order in the world, it has been conscious of the continued sources, and the very likelihood, of disorder. Americans then and now, while understanding their regime to be exceptional and exemplary, have overwhelmingly engaged the world with full regard of the importance of the state and the persistent reality of a world of multiple polities. To the extent that Americans see themselves as a light unto the political universe, and that others may be so inspired to mimic them, they likewise understand the landscape to be a pluriverse, and that any such mimicry will occur within the confines of other peoples’ borders. If, therefore, America can be characterized as a “dangerous nation,” it is largely because Americans have in turn consistently seen the world outside to be one filled with threats.<sup>281</sup> However, a world of multiple sovereign states, filled with competing powers that may come into conflict with each other, is also understood to have a positive side, insofar as it is a world where different peoples are free to pursue their own ways of life. So much itself is an image of the American ideal of freedom.

America, therefore, has neither given up on its own political form, nor on the fact that other communities with a variety of forms and substance have and will continue to emerge. As Jeremy Rabkin has noted, while many people in today’s world no longer find national independence to be self-evident, “[g]iven its own constitutional history and

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<sup>280</sup> Irving Kristol, “International Law and International Lies,” in *The Neoconservative Persuasion: Selected Essays, 1942-2009* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 217.

<sup>281</sup> Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation: America's Place in the World, from its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the 20th Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007). As far as general opinion is concerned, the obvious evidence for this view of a dangerous world is the overwhelming number of Americans that support gun ownership for self-defense.

culture, the United States was bound to resist,” and indeed has resisted, nearly all measures that subordinate individual states to transnational courts, laws, and global institutions.<sup>282</sup> While many European nations have already surrendered large amounts of decision-making powers and areas of sovereign authority to the European Union, Americans and America remain sovereign. There are, to be sure, certain Americans who would like to limit American sovereignty in the same way that European nations are doing; however, they must first constitutionally transform America.<sup>283</sup> It would ultimately require an act of destruction for the sake of creation that most Americans would surely resist.<sup>284</sup> The impact of elites in modern societies is of no mere minor

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<sup>282</sup> Jeremy A. Rabkin’s thoroughly convincing work, *Law Without Nations?: Why Constitutional Government Requires Sovereign States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), has been influential in the subsequent arguments and itself stands as a thoughtful critique of the Manent’s own generalizations and collation of Western European and American tendencies. Rabkin argues that constitutional government, with its defense of individual rights and liberties is not possible without a strongly sovereign state, for sovereignty is the key to governmental accountability. He provides overwhelming evidence to why America is and will remain both sovereign and constitutional. In his account, sovereignty’s emergence is precisely what offers the means to navigate between the instabilities of universalism and particularism: “The appeal of sovereignty in the modern world is that it seems to offer escape from the constraints of the tribe or the empire, without inviting the political instability of the polis” (253); “the nation-state is...a sort of compromise between the tribe and the empire in the demands it makes on identity”; through representative institutions it “seems to offer a compromise between the intensely politicized and unstable direct democracy of the city-state and the denial of all political accountability in the empire” (255). Sovereignty is central to all such compromises “because it supplies the idea of a political authority which can accommodate differences—precisely because it is distinguished from private life—and yet still demand (and sustain) ultimate political allegiance.”

<sup>283</sup> John Fonte has documented at length both international and American transnational progressives. “The goal of American transnational progressives is to turn the United States into a postmodern state whose elites agree to ‘pool’ or ‘share’ national sovereignty in order to establish a supranational political authority.” Fonte, *Sovereignty or Submission: Will Americans Rule Themselves or be Ruled by Others?* (New York: Encounter Books, 2011), 176-77. For an account advocating this view, see, Strobe Talbott, *The Great Experiment: The Story of Ancient Empires, Modern States, and the Quest for a Global Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009). Talbott, concludes with uncertainty about Obama’s ability to bring about a “more robust, activist *transnational* governance” (397, italics in original).

<sup>284</sup> We cannot herein address the larger question of progressivism and what might be referred to as the “transformation of American government,” for indeed many changes have been occurring in the past century, particularly since the mid-1960s; changes in the American government that amount to what has been called “the administrative state.” See, for example, the essays in, *The Progressive Revolution in Politics and Political Science: Transforming the American Regime*, Eds. John Marini and Ken Masugi (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005). However, such changes are not direct threats to the sovereignty of the state, per se, and not all progressives are transnational. To focus the issue, the discussion herein is mostly confined to the matter of national security.

degree, not least of all with respect to matters such as law and war.<sup>285</sup> Nevertheless, Americans guard their sovereignty with pride; they continue to exhibit that “irritable patriotism” that Tocqueville witnessed in his travels. And contrary to what certain modern elites argue, patriotism is a perfectly natural human sentiment, even as it may be more or less rational, as Toqueville likewise distinguished.<sup>286</sup> The most obvious sphere wherein this truth holds for Americans—as often as it apparently no longer does for many Europeans—is in the international, diplomatic, and martial one.<sup>287</sup>

The questions and concerns surrounding national security were front and center during the founding debates and are inscribed within the constitutional arrangement that continues to shape American institutions, opinions, mores, and actions. That said, the issue of national security is by no means a simple one, and has always been part of a competing set of problems, in tension with questions of liberty, virtue, and related aspects of the American way of life with its aspiration to the good. However, precisely because it is situated in direct relation with other pressing concerns, national security remains an ever-present problem both intellectually and practically. Thus, Americans remain awake to the human political condition—Americans generally remain political realists, in the broadest sense of the term<sup>288</sup>—and irrespective of their humanitarianism, or their display

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<sup>285</sup> For a general discussion of the phenomenon, engaged systematically and thematically by chapter, see, Thomas Sowell’s *Intellectuals and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

<sup>286</sup> For naturalistic accounts of the naturalness of patriotism, and even of the nation itself, see, Robert Ardrey, *The Territorial Imperative* (New York: Atheneum, 1966); and, Roger Masters, *The Nature of Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), esp. 117-87.

<sup>287</sup> While it may be true that “contemporary Europe is a search for an exit from hell,” due to the slaughterhouse that spanned from Verdun to Auschwitz, which so exhausted Europeans to the point of imagining “a world in which all conflicts were economic and bureaucrats in Brussels managed them all,” George Friedman has forecasted “Europe’s return to history,” and present-day events suggest he is not off the mark. Whether or not Europeans will in fact mobilize for action in history remains to be seen. Friedman, *The Next Decade: Empire and Republic in a Changing World* (New York: Anchor Books, 2011), 142ff.

<sup>288</sup> Consider Robert Kagan’s *Of Paradise and Power* (New York: Vintage, 2004), which draws striking contrasts between American and European views on politics and the world. He characterizes Americans as

of certain tendencies towards the universal, America remains an exceptional nation, as well as an exception to Manent's theorizing about the West. The remainder of this chapter offers a brief overview of how ultimately—or better to say, foundationally—America has and will likely continue to be a formally sovereign democracy.

The American constitution explicitly constitutes both a people and a government, and indeed, in the words, “We the People,” it makes very clear that a self-consciously sovereign people exist. This is not to deny the pluralism of Americans, and exactly when a truly “American” perspective emerged is much debated. “It would seem to be conceded on all sides, however, that a new political culture came to startling maturity in the creative period we call the founding.”<sup>289</sup> Despite the vast diversity of America, past and present, the American people have their constitution in common, insofar as they are governed under the Constitution. The Constitution explicitly establishes a political form to provide the means of self-government for its people, so that American citizens themselves may have the freedom to act, shape their destiny in the world as they decide, and otherwise sovereignly legislate, execute, and judiciously review their own laws, at both the federal and state levels. The Constitution offers no room or possibility for

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Hobbesians, still aware of the world's dangers and the concomitant need to use force, and Europeans as Kantians, believing that a global network of legal institutions establishing peace is around the corner, relegating the use of force to a backward way of thinking and acting. The work opens with the following stark lines: “It is time to stop pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world, or even that they occupy the same world.” The argument is elaborated, albeit from a different angle with something of a different intention, in, *The World America Made* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012). Compare with, Jürgen Habermas, *The Divided West* (Malden: Polity Press, 2006), which laments that America is so committed to sovereignty and not more Kantian in its commitment to global norms and universal human rights that transcend the authority of national governments. In broader terms, the division can be examined through Fonte's categories, elaborated in *Sovereignty or Submission*, of democratic sovereignists versus global governancers, which he argues represent “incompatible worldviews” that will be “locked in ideological combat throughout the twenty-first century” (182-87, *et passim*). The global governance project is the only serious ideological challenger *within* the West, as radical Islam (a form of violent antidemocratic transnationalism) and authoritaian (nondemocratic) nationalism as found in China and Russia, are external alternatives, or challenges, to liberal democratic sovereignists.

<sup>289</sup> Ellis Sandoz, *A Government of Laws: Political Theory, Religion, and the American Founding* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 221.

legislative power to be delegated to authorities operating outside of the Constitution itself, such as international or trans-national bodies. Any treaty entered into by the United States government is done so, and becomes binding, because the government itself has agreed to do so; however, the Constitution itself restricts the government in its treaty powers, not least in the most fundamental sense of not granting a treaty supremacy over the Constitution, substituting a treaty for the Constitution, or in any way altering the Constitution by way of a treaty.<sup>290</sup> So much is basic truth, notwithstanding the efforts of certain trans-national operatives, activists, lawyers and scholars, to maneuver outside or around the Constitution to effect change in the American government and its activities.

From the beginning, the Founders had consciously been involved in what is often called “state formation.” The argument of *The Federalist Papers* can be seen “as an attempt to convince the American public about the need to build a powerful state and to explain how this state would work.”<sup>291</sup> The need for America to establish a strong state arose from the challenge of facing powerful and efficient “fiscal-military states” in Europe—that is, states with professional armies, navies, public debts, and large revenues, as was standard among European powers of the eighteenth century. “A state that did not possess these institutions was exposed to the states that did.” The exigencies and constraints of the international system, therefore, framed the alternatives facing the

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<sup>290</sup> “When ratifying a treaty the United States is careful that so far as possible it has not given away the capacity to formulate and enforce the law to be applicable to US citizens in that issue area. Where the US does ratify an international human rights treaty the accession is always qualified by a reservation that denies any obligations inconsistent with the US Constitution.” Shirley V. Scott, “Is There Room for International Law in Realpolitik?: Accounting for the US ‘Attitude’ Towards International Law,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Jan., 2004): 85.

<sup>291</sup> Max M. Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government: Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2003), 219.

Founders.<sup>292</sup> Of course, in addition to concerns regarding “foreign war,” the Founders sought to secure against the dangers of “domestic convulsion.” Thus: “To a very great extent...*The Federalist* determines the role of government with reference only, or primarily, to the extremes of external and internal danger.”<sup>293</sup>

In this context the Founders—both Federalists and Anti-Federalists—shared what one scholar has called the “unionist paradigm,” which consisted of a variety of questions addressing “two competing fears—of the anarchy of states and the despotism of consolidated empire—and two mutually interdependent values: independence and union.”<sup>294</sup> While disparate and sometimes opposing views existed on how best to keep such fears at bay and realize these values, the writing and ratification of the Constitution may be viewed as a “peace pact,” settled among the particular sovereign states, which has been no small achievement. However, success on this smaller national scale does not logically give rise to any assumption of extended success on a global scale.

Having so intentionally formed a particular state—ensouling the political body, as it were, with the constitution—the bottom line is that due to its constitutional arrangement and traditions, it is less prone to enter into the framework of international

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 220. Edling is careful not to follow the sociological tradition of state-formation by saying the international system, with its pressures of war and competition, *determine* the development of states in an absolute sense, for while certain pressures exist, the state can nonetheless be formed according to “different trajectories.” Ibid., 221.

<sup>293</sup> Martin Diamond, “The Federalist,” in *American Political Thought: The Philosophic Dimension of American Statesmanship*, ed., Morton J. Frisch and Richard G. Stevens (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1971), 62.

<sup>294</sup> David C. Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 14ff. Hendrickson distinguishes the unionist paradigm from “liberal ideology” and the “republican paradigm” that historians generally use to characterize and categorize early American thought. While not disputing the relevance of these ideas, he argues that there is a deeper problem and set of questions. “Both liberal ideas of consent and individual rights, on the one hand, and republican ideas of civic virtue and community, on the other, were thus immensely complicated by the existence in America of different conceptions of the commonwealth—centering on state, section, and nation—to which the idea of consent, the vindication of individual rights, or the sentiment of virtue was appropriate.



institutions or into schemes of global governance that others today find so enticing.<sup>295</sup>

“The Constitution does not allow Americans to experiment with implant surgery on their common political body—not at least without first changing the Constitution.”<sup>296</sup>

Consequently, as long as it remains true to its Founding, America exemplifies what Manent calls the Western dynamic of self-government.

To be sure, America does not altogether deny the legitimacy of international law, for the Founders spoke of the law of nations, and supported traditional views of international law, such as was succinctly formulated by Vattel in his work of 1758, *Le Droit des gens*, as “the law of sovereigns.”<sup>297</sup> Thus: “The founders plainly understood that the nation could not flourish, or even survive, without giving due respect to the laws that governed peaceable relations among sovereign states.”<sup>298</sup> The idea of genuinely *inter-national* (rather than *supra-national*) institutions was something familiar and welcomed by them, whereby sovereign states could better coordinate their activities and cooperate as a result. The Founders were certainly interested in defending individuals’ rights—the inalienable rights with which each is endowed—the violations of such rights

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<sup>295</sup> For discussion of the constitution as “soul,” and therefore the requisite role of forms in preserving liberty, see, Harvey C. Mansfield, *America’s Constitutional Soul* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), esp. Ch. 14, “The Forms and Formalities of Liberty,” and Ch. 15, “Constitutional Government: The Soul of Modern Democracy.”

<sup>296</sup> Rabkin, *Law Without Nations?*, 266.

<sup>297</sup> James Leslie Brierly, *Law of Nations: An Introduction to the Role of International Law in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 36 [originally *The Law of Nations: An Introduction to the International Law of Peace* (North York: Wadlock, 1928)]. For an interesting recent theoretical account of international law, that seeks to transcend present-day strong advocates and vociferous detractors of international law, see, Jack L. Goldsmith and Eric A. Posner, *The Limits of International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Goldsmith and Posner argue that international law is neither meaningless nor is it an independent body of law with special normative authority, but is instead the result of states’ attempts at working things out among themselves when addressing problems that require international cooperation. Patterns of cooperation may congeal and form customary international norms, but such cooperation can be thin, and there is no reason to expect states to comply with certain treaties, or ineluctably follow previous patterns of behavior, when their insight into American resistance to so many international treaties and organizations.

<sup>298</sup> Harold Hongju Koh and Michael Doyle, “The Case for International Law,” *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 92, No. 6 (Nov/Dec 2013): 162.

having led to the outbreak of Revolution and the founding of a new government in the first place. However it was their belief that such rights could only be effectively defended by a strong federal government, one limited in important regards, and as such mindful of the peoples' aversion to government. So much was borne out in the elaboration of federalism, to which we return below. In short, it had been concluded that no powers beyond or outside the framework of the people's constitution could more successfully meet the aim of securing individual and collective rights of Americans.

To the extent that national independence may today be less of a self-evident claim, Rabkin poignantly reminds us, "American independence was launched with a Declaration." And while Americans felt obliged to justify such independence, acknowledging that others might hold different views, even at odds with the truths that Americans hold to be "self-evident," such a Declaration continues to emphasize "the readiness of the United States to fight for American independence."<sup>299</sup> American independence, moreover, is inextricable from the right of consent to government, not least considering American independence followed upon the British violation of this natural right. "The case for the independence of 'one people' from another rests on the right of revolution that 'the people' have against their own government, whenever that government becomes destructive of the rights it was instituted to secure."<sup>300</sup> Independence and consent are, it may be said, two sides of the same right, both of which rest upon the fact that all men are equal in these rights. Independence and consent are two fundamental aspects of self-government, for men cannot govern themselves if they are not independent, nor can they be said to be mutually and equally engaging in

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<sup>299</sup> Rabkin, *Law Without Nations?*, 233.

<sup>300</sup> Harvey Mansfield, *The Spirit of Liberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 75.

governing without consenting, as such. To elaborate on the matter, it is worth quoting Jefferson, from *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, where he writes: “From the nature of things, every society must at all times possess within itself the sovereign powers of legislation.” Commenting upon this passage, Harvey Mansfield adds the following: “The foundation of liberty is the supremacy of the legislative power; and this supremacy is understood not merely as a principle of internal organization but chiefly as the reason for the divisions of human beings into independent peoples. It is through political organization that men are united into a people, and by virtue of their union, divided from other peoples.”<sup>301</sup> Giving up one’s independence is akin to absolving one’s right to self-government; hoping to supplant the sovereign legislative capacity of distinct peoples through a supra-governmental structure that has no proper foundation or consent of the various peoples is precisely what Manent fears Europeans are in the process of doing as they slowly dismantle not only their borders, but their independent political forms and sovereign, as well as national, legislative powers.<sup>302</sup> American independence and self-government does not face such a threat, not least due to the difference in the American form. Furthermore, in stark contrast to the present European project, America was founded with the consent of the people through the

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<sup>301</sup> Mansfield, “Thomas Jefferson,” in *American Political Thought* (op. cit.), 25. The Jefferson quote is found herein.

<sup>302</sup> For a compelling and thoroughly documented account of how intentionally un-democratic the project of European unification has been, and that its original visionaries—i.e., Jean Monnet, Arthur Salter, Altiero Spinelli, and Paul-Henri Spaak—and present-day elites have had all along a strategy of stealth, avoiding popular consent, knowing electorates of member-states would otherwise dismiss it, see, Christopher Booker and Richard North, *The Great Deception: The Secret History of the European Union* (London: Continuum Books, 2005). The process amounts to what the authors call “a slow motion *coup d’etat*: the most spectacular *coup d’etat* in history” (3). Interestingly, they argue that more than nationalism, “a rival form of internationalism” has been seen to be the greatest obstacle, if not threat to the project, particularly in light of the failure of the League of Nations. Internationalism as voluntary co-operation between sovereign governments might seem to aspire to achieve the same ends as European supra-nationalism but from the outset was deemed the latter’s greatest rival (427). Apparently Monnet so hated “intergovernmentalism” that he compared it to a poison, or pollution.

process of ratification, while giving birth to a new kind of government in the form of a federal system that consciously balances the particular and universal.

While the American people are often referred to as a “nation,” as the word has come to have less strict signification, it should be underlined that Americans are of a distinct kind compared with European nations. As previously mentioned, America was founded upon reflection and choice, and so is distinct by emerging not over the course of a long period of time, but, as Machiavelli liked to say, was founded at “a stroke.” To be sure, America has now been in existence for some time, and there have been changes within the regime, as well as perhaps to the regime, but its original form remains largely present and indeed formative. Moreover, the American people did not emerge by way of what later became known as the right of national “self-determination.” Virulent forms of nationalism do not logically follow from the doctrine of popular sovereignty, as the American example proves. As just discussed, the Declaration of Independence makes no such claim to self-determination (of a cultural, historical, traditional or other variety), but rests upon the idea of free and independent government. The Declaration “is not a document of nationalism arguing for the necessity of revolution in giving expression to national aspirations.” Indeed, “it is as little a document of internationalism as of nationalism.”<sup>303</sup> The Declaration made possible a choice for the American people—the political choice *par excellence*—after declaring their independence from Britain due to the violation of their right to consent and free government, on the basis of the right of revolution. The Declaration granted the people of the United States the “most comprehensive choice that men can have or presume to have: how to govern themselves for their mutual safety and happiness.” As a consequence of this choice, the people

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<sup>303</sup> Mansfield, *The Spirit of Liberalism*, 75-6.

adopted the Constitution that outlined the kind of government that was thereby founded. American nationalism is therefore best categorized as a form of constitutional nationalism (or patriotism), which nevertheless may contain greater or lesser degrees of emotion and sentiment, but is different in form from various European varieties.<sup>304</sup> Not to any particular administration, but to the government as constituted and thus to the Constitution itself—to what might be described as the universal values inherent in the Constitution—Americans pledge their allegiance: to the particular government of the people with the express aim of securing their safety and happiness. Needless to say, achieving the latter rests upon guaranteeing the former.

From the beginning, the reality and idea of America centered on the problem of the nation's sovereign ability to govern and defend itself. The debates surrounding the Constitution that would eventually replace the Articles of Confederation indicate the centrality of national defense as an issue. In the *Federalist Papers*, Madison refers to the “security against foreign danger” as “one of the primitive objects of civil society” and adds that it is “an avowed and essential object of the American union” (41; 208). To the question of whether the power of declaring war is necessary, he writes, that no man could possibly answer in the negative, and it would be altogether superfluous to even “enter into a proof of the affirmative.” Thus, there must be sufficient power granted by the constitution to the federal government to raise armies, equip fleets, and carry out all requisite activities involved in the power of self-defense; so much is itself the precursor

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<sup>304</sup> Consider Jan-Werner Müller, *Constitutional Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2007). Being a largely conceptual work, he situates it between liberal nationalism and cosmopolitanism, while also distinguishing it from republican patriotism, and discusses its greater success of achieving “liberal political outcomes” (9). As a German scholar, Müller discusses constitutional patriotism as something that emerged in post-war and divided Germany as an attempted substitution for national identity. He offers a history of the concept, addressing the possibility of its application to the European Union, while drawing somewhat on the American experience. In this regard, he remarks that amidst European theorizing on the matter, Americans often respond in the following way: “Of course—it’s what we do every day” (6).

to the possibility for domestic self-government. Not only is sufficient power granted, but what is required is in fact what Madison describes as “indefinite power.” He reiterates in part what Hamilton already discussed in an earlier passage, where it is made clear that the powers essential to the care of the common defense “ought to exist without limitation” (23; 113). The reason for such limitlessness rests upon the impossibility of being able “to foresee or to define the extent and variety of national exigencies, and the correspondent extent and variety of the means which may be necessary to satisfy them.” What is more, Hamilton underlines that the very “circumstances that endanger the safety of nations are infinite.”

So potentially dangerous is the world—in its *infinite* permutations of danger—that the power of national defense must be correspondingly vast to address it. No man can possibly know the modes, means, kinds, and sources of future threats; however, one can be assured such threats will arise. Consequently, “no constitutional shackles can wisely be imposed on the power” entrusted with national security. The federal government established by the American constitution was designed to provide the tools and energy for whatever action might be necessary to defend the country. The preservation of independent republicanism necessitates a mighty fighting force. However, as Max Edling has argued, the American Constitution sought to establish this strength in a manner distinct from European states: “The Federalist program should...be seen as an attempt to combine the elements from the European state with respect for limits to state expansion inherent in the American political tradition and American political institutions.”<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government*, 4. As noted above, Edling reads the ratification debate not so much as an instant in the history of liberalism or constitutionalism, but in the context of state

It should be underlined that national strength is argued to be the case both during times of war and peace. Furthermore, the entirety of these statements made regarding national security and the constitutional means of defense must be considered in light of the long view held by the Founders. As Hamilton writes (34; 163):

In pursuing this inquiry, we must bear in mind, that we are not to confine our view to the present period, but to look forward to remote futurity. Constitutions of civil government are not to be framed upon a calculation of existing exigencies; but upon a combination of these, with the probable exigencies of ages, according to the natural and tried course of human affairs.

Hamilton goes on to speak about the error of deducing foundational rules based on the present situation, or even what might be narrowly imagined. The government must have the capacity to address future contingencies, which cannot be known in their particularities at this point, but are likely to arise and follow “the natural and tried course of human affairs.” He therefore encourages his contemporaries to broaden their imaginations well beyond quotidian politics to consider a broader “course,” which itself can only be vaguely grasped, and yet from which certain important principles can be derived—that is, immutable truths of politics. This “natural and tried course” is one that can be studied, understood, and expected, in general terms.

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formation, which, among other things, he argues, helps to make sense of the prevalence of matters military and fiscal. He buttresses his argument by comparison with a discussion of European state-formation. His interpretation is one that seeks, as he says, to go beyond a Madisonian understanding of the constitution, insofar as he addresses broader sources of both Federalists and Anti-Federalists, which culminates in the following: “What the Federalists had to do, and what they did, in the debate over ratification, was to develop a conceptual framework that made it possible to accommodate the creation of a powerful national government to the strong anti-statist current in the American political tradition” (219). The latter tradition, Edling demonstrates, is best captured by the Antifederalists, who did not devise their own alternative plan for a national government but largely brought forth a critique of the Constitution. They nonetheless made an important contribution to the founding: “they did so precisely by being nothing more than the bearers of the anti-statist arguments of the Country tradition” (222). Although the popular fear or aversion to government may have been strong in early modern Europe as well, the American situation differed by being able to translate this “aversion into action,” due to differences in “the socioeconomic structure and the political system—among the most important factors were the equal distribution of property and the absence of legal privileges, the widespread suffrage, and the short terms of government office.” Furthermore: “the government’s administrative weakness coupled with dominant political ideals made it possible to govern only with the cooperation of the governed” (222).

Knowledge of this “course” consists of at least two parts that otherwise underlie the Federalists’ strong argument regarding national defense. The first argument is the general understanding of human nature held by the Founders, which today remains a part of the American self-understanding. The relationship between human nature and government may be said to be the central problem of political science, and so much is no less true for the political science of the Federalists, as indicated by Madison’s famous rhetorical question, “But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature?” (51; 269). The Founders were well aware of the ambivalence of man’s pride and ambition, his tendency to succumb to base instincts and appetites, and otherwise fall short of the good, even as he may seek to know it and aspire to it, in politics and elsewhere. Thus, to whatever extent politics involves the pursuit of the good, it is an activity that inevitably falls short of perfection.

Notwithstanding certain Enlightenment ideals of the day, the Federalists were clear about a certain intractability in human nature: “Is it not time to awake from the deceitful dream of a golden age, and to adopt as a practical maxim for the direction of our political conduct, that we, as well as the other inhabitants of the globe, are yet remote from the happy empire of perfect wisdom and perfect virtue?” (6; 25). The debate and design of the Constitution and the institutions to which it gave rise reflect this truth, and while present-day progressives seek such a dream anew, reality and the broader will of the American public continue to press back upon such conceits. The second argument is a reasoned account of the weaknesses of confederacies, which in turn gave rise to the compromise known as federalism. Based on historical study and ample evidence, the Federalists conclude that anything less than a strong national government has little



likelihood of enduring. In a world of competing states, the attempt to amalgamate multiple communities in a loose association without a properly binding tie is tantamount to political irresponsibility, and yet this tie—to carry the metaphor—it was argued, must in turn be restricted in the degree to which it could be tightly drawn. While America is heavily involved in international endeavors and actions of various kinds, it continues to refrain from signing certain treaties, or “pooling” its sovereignty, with organizations that would stand athwart or above its own federal constitution. The limited degree to which America has tended towards universalism rests in the weight and powers retained by the states, just as America’s success in avoiding fragmentation (or anarchy) within out of particularist claims by the states, is due to the weight and powers granted to the federal government.

Before elaborating on federalism, returning to the aforementioned argument there is little denying that the Federalists had a most balanced view of human nature, aware of both the heights and depths—the virtues and vices—of which men were capable, based on both a theoretical and practical understanding of man: “As there is a degree of depravity in mankind, which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust: so there are other qualities in human nature, which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence” (55; 291). Thus, they were “disposed to view human nature as it is, without either flattering its virtues, or exaggerating its vices” (76, 395). This realist disposition, combining a measure of “circumspection and distrust” with “esteem and confidence” led the Founders to believe there was a need to not only encourage virtue, as political science had sought to do since its inception, but also to set certain vices against one another—that is, to channel particular passions. Rather than transform or do away with man’s

passionate nature, a properly designed constitution would rationally guide human passions to the point that individuals could govern themselves. Chief among the passions is the one most important for politics, namely ambition. The summit of ambition might be said to be the love of fame, which Hamilton refers to as “the ruling passion of the noblest minds” (72, 375).

Ambition, to be sure, is an ambivalent passion, insofar as it can indeed rule over noble minds, or be directed towards noble ends; however, it is equally capable of overextending itself, as well as becoming altogether self-serving. The nobly ambitious may raise themselves while bettering the lives of others, ruling over them to their benefit, whereas the ignobly ambitious may use others as merely means to their own glory. The Federalist makes it clear that “ambition must be made to counteract ambition” (51, 268), for while virtue may direct people towards proper action, relying upon virtue alone makes for a precarious situation. The entire institutional apparatus of the constitution, consisting of the rule of law, the separation of powers, and the recurrence of elections, speaks to the Founders’ insight into human nature—that while virtue can be promoted, ambition must be relied upon to spur action, and yet ambition itself must be counterchecked by a force equal in strength, namely ambition itself.<sup>306</sup> Indeed, it has been said that the very “principle of countervailing passion...was the foundation of the new state” in America.<sup>307</sup> For truly, “ambition and avarice” are two of the greatest threats that sever or dissolve the “sacred knot, which binds the people of America together” (15, 68)

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<sup>306</sup> Leonard R. Sorenson, “Madison on Sympathy, Virtue, and Ambition in the *Federalist Papers*,” *Polity* Vol. XXVIII, No. 3 (Spring, 1995): 431-46. Consider Hamilton’s discussion of how even within the heart of one man, “his avarice might be a guard upon his avarice” (72, 376).

<sup>307</sup> Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 30.

The power and ambiguity of the love of fame in the souls of men is additionally comparable in force to the love of wealth. Money may certainly be put to better or worse uses, and after all, founding a commercial republic, the Founders were well aware of the difficult task of both fostering such material desires and seeking to keep them within the exigencies of the good of the republic. According to the Federalists, the “love of wealth” is arguably “as domineering and enterprising a passion as that of power or glory” (6, 23). And it is these two passions that most strongly manifest themselves in the international sphere, found as they are in the activities of commerce and war. They were under no illusions that such passions could be eliminated in the human soul; taming them is no small feat, and they could only expect to succeed in affecting any positive change domestically, through a legally-ordered republic at home. The founding of such an order was a major accomplishment, replacing as it did the previously weak confederacy among states. To think that a certain confederation among all nations could definitively bring about peace would have been deemed fantastical by the Founders, for the achievement of peace among the American states was itself a grand achievement, not to mention even at the time one without certainty regarding its long-term success.

The Federalists make explicit the insufficiency of the Articles of Confederation for preserving the union; indeed, there is reference to the “impending anarchy” and the need to be rescued from the “material imperfections” of the erstwhile system among independent states (15, 69). *The Federalist Papers* offers and analyzes a history of confederacies, which in essence reads as a history of failure. Previous confederacies have ended either in natural or violent deaths. In the latter case, resort to armed force to compel members has culminated in civil war and despotism. In the case of natural

deaths, confederacies have dissolved because there is insufficient enforcement to compel members. The “proud and selfish love of power” has led to fragmentation within confederacies, as has the general reluctance of particular states to be the first making sacrifices for the good of the whole. Even “the most considerable” of the confederacies from antiquity, namely that of the Grecian republics under the Amphyctionic council, ultimately resulted in weakness, disorder, and finally destruction (18, 84-5). As Madison makes clear, such arrangements often seem sufficient in theory “and upon paper,” but very different, in the end, is “the experiment from the theory.”

Hamilton directly exhorts his countrymen, in light of the weakness of the present structure, in the following way: “let us make a firm stand for our safety, our tranquility, our dignity, our reputation” (15, 70). Listing safety and tranquility first, Hamilton underlines the primacy of national defense, while directly linking this with dignity and reputation as well, all of which can only be achieved and maintained through an independent people’s action in the world. A major flaw of the confederacy—a fact to which all parties admit, irrespective of their views on the newly proposed constitution—is that “the government of the United States is destitute of energy.” While the formal authority granted to Congress by the Articles of Confederation was, at least in principle, strong, in actual fact Congress was an agent of the sovereign state governments, precluding any truly competent national power.<sup>308</sup> A strong and independent national government, was deemed the only means of avoiding anarchy. However, the true

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<sup>308</sup> Thomas S. Engeman, “The Federalist,” *The American Experiment* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), 77. The Federalists and Antifederalists agreed “about the specific points where the union’s weakness was most critical: Congress had to become more powerful financially and militarily if the union was to protect American commercial and territorial interests with any hope of success.” Both sides of the debate, however, approached the question differently. Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government*, 220-21.

uniqueness of this government as constituted, especially when compared with the European nations that Manent has in mind, is its structure of federalism. Federalism, as devised by the American Founders, is America's key to balancing the universal and the particular—it is the central component of American moderation. After all, at the Constitutional Convention in large part the solution to the impasse among advocates of a unitary government versus those who advocated ultimately maintaining the sovereignty of the states is known as the Great Compromise.

To recall what we have previously discussed, among the many things one learns from studying Manent's history of forms, is just how remarkable a process it was for the European nation to come about, and how equally striking it is that Europeans are now willing to reject it. It is as though the European discovery and implementation of the principle of sovereignty was so successful as to be too successful. While certainly unaware of what was in store for the European nations in the twentieth century, the American Founders sought an alternative to the empires and city-states of past and present, as well as something different from the traditional unitary form of state that unfolded in Europe. Indeed, the distinctness of America resides in its "federative system," distinguished as a genuine attempt "to find a *middle ground* between anarchy and empire through cooperative ventures *among* states"—that is, cooperative on the national level among individual states within the union.<sup>309</sup>

It might be said that in founding a sovereign and united American state, the Founders remained aware of the limitations of sovereignty even as they worked to implement such a principle. After all, the federal government they constituted had to reckon with the power and sovereignty of the existing states while establishing strength

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<sup>309</sup> Hendrickson, *Peace Pact*, 264 (emphasis added).

within the federal government. This challenge resulted in devising something new—something akin to a layered republic, or a republic upon republics. Despite the strength and energy of the national (or general) government, the states retain reserved powers, derived from the states’ peoples in and through the respective state governments and their constitutions. Each state remained a “self-governing political community...possessing all the features of an independent state except a foreign service, including a legislature, an executive, a judiciary, the power to tax and punish, and a militia.”<sup>310</sup> American federalism is, therefore, no mere form of decentralization, for the original states existed before federation, do not owe their genesis to the central government, and could indeed continue to exist in the event that the union was dissolved. In sum, As Madison notes in *The Federalist Papers*, when examined closely, the government “appears to be of a mixed character, presenting at least as many *federal* as *national* features” (39, 197; emphasis in original). Depending on the various aspects that one examines, or the questions and perspectives one brings to the Constitution, it can take on more or less of a national or federal character; it is, therefore, “in strictness, neither national nor a federal Constitution, but a composition of both” (39, 199).

The achievement of federalism in balancing the sovereignty of the general government with the particular sovereignty of the states by no means precludes the United States from entering into alliances and treaties with other sovereign nations. However, it certainly makes for a less than likely scenario that America would disturb this otherwise remarkable balance by pooling sovereignty with other nation-states or granting powers and authority to supra-national organizations. There is, nonetheless, “nothing absurd or impracticable, in the idea of a league or alliance between independent

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<sup>310</sup> Kenneth M. Holland, “Federalism,” in *The American Experiment* (op. cit.), 61.

nations, for certain defined purposes precisely stated in a treaty,” which otherwise regulate “details of time, place, circumstance and quantity.” So much is a necessary and an important part of diplomacy; it always has been. But, to reiterate, such treaties and alliances are limited and are among *independent* sovereign nations. As is so often the case, and as the Founders well knew, such treaties are regularly broken, which offers an instructive “lesson to mankind,” regarding “how little dependence is to be placed on treaties which have no other sanction than the obligations of good faith” (15, 72). The only successful form of union is one where there is a “superintending power.” Of course, the idea of world government with such authority and actual power to stand above nations and punish them upon deviation from the treaty was something the Founders hardly needed to consider given its remoteness in possibility. Not to mention, even today’s advocates of global governance often sound like those criticized by the Federalist for arguing “upon abstract principles” and tending to “set up supposition and theory against fact and reality” (34, 162).

Any assumption that “common interest would preside over the conduct of the respective members” of a confederate grouping, and that such interest would sufficiently “beget a full compliance” could only appear to be “wild” (15, 73). The “best oracle of wisdom,” namely, experience, would suggest otherwise, for interest alone does not sufficiently bind men; good will or good intentions are ineffectual in ultimately restraining the passions or precluding conflict among particular interests. The present United Nations is a perfect example of just how unlikely full compliance is among nations operating without any superintending power and working on the basis of good

faith.<sup>311</sup> The challenges that the United Nations, or even the European Union, face, would be no surprise to the American Founders. Indeed, when Hamilton raises the very question, “why has government been instituted at all?” he answers it in the following way: “Because the passions of men will not conform to the dictates of reason and justice, without constraint.” While such dictates exist, the most reasonable way in which to bring men round to them is to establish a national government that legislates laws on the basis of consent and one that can uphold them with the requisite energy and force.

Based on the evidence of the weakness of confederacies, the general tendencies of human nature, and the constitutional achievement of a federal system for the United States, there is good reason to believe that America has the political and philosophical—the institutional and theoretical—resources to continue to tame both extremes of universalism and particularism. Not only would the American Founders stand athwart to any form of universal union of the world’s peoples, or an international arrangement set above the central government of the United States, but most contemporary Americans are skeptical, and many directly opposed, to such projects that would diminish America’s sovereign ability to act as a particular nation among nations. To whatever extent America aids the world’s peoples in their own national attempts at developing democratic institutions, Manent is incorrect in suggesting America is analogous to Europe regarding universalist tendencies. Rather, on the basis of its constitutional arrangement, America is best seen to be, in Manentian fashion, one more “metamorphosis” of the “city” in which the western dynamic of self-government is manifest and persists.

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<sup>311</sup> For sound critiques of the UN’s operating difficulties, among other things, consult the writings of former US permanent representative to the UN, John R. Bolton, often published through the American Enterprise Institute, available at: <http://www.aei.org/scholar/john-r-bolton/>



## 8. CONCLUSION

“Our statesmen deny the relevance of differences—of other peoples’ loves and hates, calculations and intrigues—treating all as if they were not foreign at all, confusing the human race with *homo economicus californianus*. But you must keep in mind that foreign relations are about dealing with foreigners—people whose identities and agendas are inalienably their own. Because this has ever been so, the art of international affairs developed as it did over millennia”  
—Angelo M. Codevilla, *Advice to War Presidents*, xvii

This essay opened with the example of President Obama’s being awarded the Nobel Prize, partly given because it was the Nobel Committee’s belief he was more than simply President of the United States, but a citizen of the world first. It was the Nobel committee’s belief and hope, as shared by many European elites and internationalists the world over, that President Obama would in fact subordinate American interests to the values and interests of “humanity,” on the very presumption that such a singular community of a unified form is emergent, if not already present. Whatever judgment one may have of the Obama administration, his time in office has revealed a central truth of this essay: in the political sphere the very values and interests of “humanity” are often unclear and contested, for humanity consists of different peoples and polities, separated as they are by opinions, beliefs, religions and cultures, sometimes as much as they are by geography. Insofar as groups of individuals in certain communities so desire to act in the world, upon their opinions and beliefs, they require the mediation of a particular political form. Only by way of a concrete form, with a respective regime intact, does the possibility emerge for a freely self-governing community.

Self-government is an achievement of politics, and the continued struggle for it is central to understanding the dynamic of Western political development. Self-government is something to be especially welcome in times of crisis, or when a community faces questions of national security, for it presents the opportunity for a community and its

representatives to deliberate, debate, and execute a course of action in the world, not otherwise determined by extraneous forces, or the wills of others. To be sure, action in the world on the part of one group is likely to impact others, causing disagreements, conflicts, and suffering; however, so much is sometimes the price of freedom. While peace is certainly a primary objective of any community, it is never the sole value of a freely self-governing one. Thus, as the American case continues to demonstrate, the United States does not simply consist of people, or peoples in general; rather, with a government of, by, and for *the* people, it is constituted by the *American* people. Its free activity of self-governing is therefore conducted with the specific interest of the American people in mind, which need not necessarily, but may at times, be at odds with the interests of other peoples—or, that is to say, with the so-called interests of “humanity.”

Contrary to the hopes of some, a globalized economy and other mechanisms of proposed unification will not bring the world’s peoples together into a single and unified political form, nor will economic or cultural projects of one kind or another offer an escape from politics, or from the fundamental political dilemmas—such matters best addressed by way of respective governments among the world’s peoples. The diversity of the world’s peoples is evident to the most casual observer, not least as indicated by the inability for genuine global consensus on a host of issues, ranging from matters martial and economic, to those environmental and ecological. So much indicates a deeper variance of opinion regarding some of the most profound matters, such as regarding the best form of life, of government, and the like—self-government itself may not necessarily be something aspired to by all. Even on matters heralded as far too important to be left to

individual nations or governments, insofar as they are alleged to affect all peoples equally, unanimous agreement is a rare phenomenon. Despite the convictions of Western elites and of the attendees of international conferences regarding such matters, not all the world's people aspire to live like and cherish the values held by such individuals. And yet it nonetheless appears to be the case, as George Grant noted some years ago (and as quoted in the Introduction of this essay), that, "The drive to the universal and homogeneous state remains the dominant ethical 'ideal' to which our contemporary society appeals for meaning in its activity."

This very ideal for a global state, or a community of humanity, void of distinctions and differences, is the antithesis of politics, and so too, therefore, of the achievement of self-government: as a dominant ideal, it is predominantly anti-political. The advocates of such an ideal fail to realize that political mediation is fundamental to a happy, good, and satisfying human life. It is in and through the political community that the various ideas and ideals, as well as other aspects of human life, are ultimately manifest, and thereby contend, compete, and realize themselves. Particular political communities offer the requisite circumscription, or embodiment, that the various human goods require for their realization, which the undifferentiated plane of humanity can never provide. It is telling that the most memorable acts associated with "humanity" are precisely what we now call "crimes against humanity," and yet such crimes are always carried out by representatives of one particular community against another—the leading example being a case where the victims were a diasporatic people, lacking sufficient political mediation and thereby formal protection of any particular kind. In their vehement drive towards the universal and homogeneous state, advocates disregard the

potential dangers of universality and homogeneity as well as the benefits of a certain degree of particularity and heterogeneity. Defenders of this ideal exaggerate in blaming politics and political forms single-handedly for the evils they decry. There is no shortage of irony to the fact that many of the same elites who praise “diversity” in so many things, fail to acknowledge the importance and benefits of diversity across the political landscape—that a political pluriverse of various particular communities is more conducive to freedom than a singular *universe* of humanity.

The human condition being a political condition requires political mediation. In fact, such political mediation is precisely the mode through which the particularities of universal humanity best represent themselves. Presently, the modern national and state forms to which early liberal political thought contributed in forming and articulating remain the predominant form of such mediation. Thus, as we have seen herein, the totality of globalization—the drive towards world government, or a universal and homogeneous state—is no simple extension of liberalism, for there is a liberal tradition that capably and thoughtfully considers, questions, probes, as well as endorses, certain aspects of globalization. Liberalism, therefore, contains some of the resources with which to moderate the tension between universalism and particularism. However, it is through thinkers like Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Manent, who each draw on resources from outside modern liberal thought, that the liberal tradition becomes enriched and moderate.

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## VITA

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