

# Locke, Tocqueville, Liberalism, and Restlessness

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**Boston College  
The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences  
Department of Political Science**

**LOCKE, TOCQUEVILLE, LIBERALISM AND RESTLESSNESS**

**a dissertation  
by**

**STEPHEN D. EIDE**

**submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements**

**for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**August 2010**

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2010

## **Abstract**

### **Locke, Tocqueville, Liberalism, and Restlessness**

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Why are men in modern societies so busy and anxious? Modern, liberal democratic society is distinguished both by the unprecedented strength and prosperity it has achieved, as well as its remarkable number of psychologists per capita. Why is this?

This dissertation explores the connection between restlessness and modernity by way of an examination of the themes of liberalism and restlessness in the thought of Locke and Tocqueville. “Restlessness” refers to a way of life characterized by three features: limitless desires, mildness, and an orientation towards material goods.

Tocqueville argues in *Democracy in America* that democracy, by way of individualism, makes men materialistic and restless (*inquiét*), or restlessly materialistic. The intense, limitless pursuit of material well-being is a historical phenomenon, one of the many results of the centuries-long development of equality of conditions. Modern democrats are restless; pre-modern aristocrats were not.

Tocqueville is ambivalent about restlessness. According to him, the incessant, energetic movement of American life conceals an underlying absurdity and mediocrity. Many of what Tocqueville views as the more undesirable qualities of democratic American life are associated with restlessness, but any solution is likely to be worse than the problem. It could be worse: we must tolerate restlessness if we want to remain free. “All free peoples are grave.”

Locke by contrast could be described as a partisan of restlessness. The anxious understand the world better than the complacent or vegetative. There are two dimensions to Locke's teaching on restlessness, an "is" (found in *Essay concerning Human Understanding* Book II Chapter 21) and an "ought" (found in "Of Property," Chapter Five of the *Second Treatise*). Our desires are naturally limitless-this we can only understand, we cannot change it. But if we know what's good for us, we will orient ourselves towards a milder and more materialistic way of life. We master restlessness by becoming more restless, or restless in a more enlightened way. Locke's teaching on restlessness in the fullest sense is partly his account of necessity, and partly his recommended response to necessity.

This difference in their views on restlessness points to certain important differences in their liberalisms. Tocqueville's liberalism is more pessimistic than Locke's: some fundamental problems have no solutions, and some of the highest goods cannot be reconciled with one another. Lockean liberalism is more confident about its ability to find solutions to the fundamental problems of political life, and there is no problem of the harmony of the goods for Locke.

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Had [our ancestors] been absorbed or amused as we are by the inexhaustible trivialities of the day, had their sense been dulled by speed, sport, luxury, and money-making, they could never have taken consciously the dire decisions without which England would not have been preserved. There were many solid citizens, secure in their estates, who pondered deeply and resolved valiantly upon the religious and political issues of the times...[T]here were in every capital grave, independent men who gave lifelong thought to doctrine and policy. Their business was transacted by long personal letters, laboriously composed, in which every word was weighed, and conversations, few and far between, the purport of which was memorable. Government was then the business of sovereigns and of a small but serious ruling class, and, for all their crimes, errors, and shortcomings, they gave keen and sustained attention to their task...Above all, they were not in a hurry. They made fewer speeches, and lived more meditatively and more at leisure, with companionship rather than motion for solace. They had far fewer facilities than we have for the frittering away of thought, time, and life.

-Winston Churchill, *Marlborough: His Life and Times, Book One*

I wake up most mornings very early, and spend the first hour or so of each day reading the morning newspapers. I usually arrive at my office by nine, and I get on the phone. There's rarely a day with fewer than fifty calls, and often it runs to over a hundred. In between, I have at least a dozen meetings. The majority occur on the spur of the moment, and few of them last longer than fifteen minutes. I rarely stop for lunch. I leave my office by six-thirty, but I frequently make calls from home until midnight, and all weekend long. It never stops, and I wouldn't have it any other way...I don't do it for the money. I've got enough, much more than I'll ever need. I do it to do it.

-Donald Trump, *The Art of the Deal*

# Introduction

## I.1 On *“restlessness”*

This dissertation will examine the relation between restlessness and liberalism in the thought of Locke and Tocqueville. Since the first of these four terms is the one most in need of clarification, a brief explanation of it is in order.

Restlessness refers to a way of life characterized by three features: limitless desires, mildness, and an orientation towards material goods.

- Restlessness implies a disjunction between desire and capacity. A restless man is in constant motion basically because he cannot satisfy his desires. His desires are limitless. A restless person never takes anything for granted, nor rests content with what he has.
- A restless existence is often intense and unhappy, but it is not violent, or not in the sense in which the term is being used here. The restless soul is characterized by an overall or effectual mildness. A restless man is uneasy but peaceable. Restlessness should not be confused with eros or vainglory, although they, too, may be seen as conditions of limitless desire. They do lead to violence and are often, for that reason, self-destructive. Restlessness however is not, which means it is more sustainable and can be perpetuated for a long time. People, many people,



can endure it. Unlike eros and vainglory, it is experienced by the many as well as the few.

- Restlessness implies desires which are limitless but not manifold. Its desires are oriented towards “lower” or material things. A restless way of life is one in which material well-being is of paramount concern.

Restlessness is a distinctly modern condition: the contrasting epigraphs from the lives of the Duke of Marlborough (1650-1722) and Donald Trump (1946- ) were meant to suggest so much. When we speak of the difference between “modern” and “pre-modern,” many differences come to mind, such as orderliness, softness, rationalism, secularism, freedom, democracy, individualism, and materialism. The following dissertation finds its point of departure in another difference which is somewhat more difficult to define than those themes, but is also familiar.

Many debates about modernity turn on the issue of restlessness. Take America. Americans are famous for their work ethic and “worldly asceticism,” but also for their fondness for gadgets, celebrities and insipid forms of entertainment. These perceptions of distinctive superficiality and seriousness cannot both be true-which is? Are we deeper than our forebears or more superficial? Do our incessant efforts at acquisition indicate a prudent realism, or a hopeless irrationality? Does the gap between our capacities and our desires

mean that we are strong or weak? Is restlessness good or bad, a sign of strength or weakness, enlightenment or ignorance? These are polemics not only about the merits of the American character, but about modernity itself, since America is the quintessentially modern nation. Any response to any of these questions betrays a preference for modern or pre-modern life.

The following dissertation intends to explore this connection between restlessness and modernity by looking into its connection with liberalism, the predominant political theory of the modern world. This will provide a useful tangibility to the investigation into “modernity,” a genuinely meaningful term but one which is overused and almost always used vaguely. Liberalism is a political theory best understood as one that holds that the chief task of government is to protect rights and that limited government is the best form of government. “How is restlessness a modern condition?” will be addressed by attempting to answer “What is the connection between restlessness and liberalism?” All of what will follow is premised on the notion that a greater understanding of the connection between restlessness and liberalism will offer insight into how restlessness may be seen as a distinctly modern condition, and, by extension, into the debate between modernity and pre-modernity.

That liberalism is the predominant political theory in the modern world is obvious; that restlessness is a characteristic feature of modern life is perhaps not as obvious, but is familiar enough. However, what the connection is between the

two is, is most unclear. Why do people who live in liberal democracies tend to be restless? Does restlessness cause liberalism or is it the other way around?

To help to sort through these matters, Locke and Tocqueville have been singled out as liberal political theorists of high rank who devoted significant thought to restlessness. Locke does so in his uneasiness teaching in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding (ECHU)*, Book II Chapter 21, and in Chapter Five of the *Second Treatise (2T)*, “Of Property,” and Tocqueville does so in his discussion of inquietude in *Democracy in America (DA)*. There are many thinkers who could be said to offer insight into modern restlessness, such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Kierkegaard, Weber and Heidegger. And of course, there are even more who offer insight into liberalism. But Locke and Tocqueville are the only two who may be said to be liberals in a conventional sense and who also offer sustained discussions on restlessness.

The following study, which will consist of one chapter on Tocqueville on inquietude, one on Locke on uneasiness and another on Locke on property, will treat many themes, including commerce, justice, happiness, freedom, among others. But the two central questions are how do these thinkers understand restlessness and what is its connection with liberalism?

## II.2 Problems and solutions: the state of nature, freedom and legitimate government<sup>1</sup>

What are the similarities and differences between Locke and Tocqueville's conceptions of liberalism? This must be addressed in order to provide a basic framework for the discussions and comparison which will follow. Tocqueville and Locke are not in direct, explicit dialogue with each other. Tocqueville never mentions Locke in *DA*, nor does he give any serious attention to Locke in any of his other works or correspondence.<sup>2</sup> Unlike Louis Hartz and many contemporary scholars of political theory, Tocqueville believes that it is possible to understand everything one needs to know about America without understanding Locke's thought and its influence, because Locke was not that important in shaping America. In the grand "Introduction" to *DA*, Tocqueville ascribes to modern philosophy a negligible influence in shaping the history of the modern world (although contrast Rahe 2009, 159). The purpose of this Introduction will be to show that, despite the lack of historical interchanges and direct influences between Locke and Tocqueville, there is nevertheless a

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Locke's texts (*ECHU*, *STCE*, *IT* and *2T*, *RC*) are to chapter and section. All references to Tocqueville's texts (*DA* and *OR*) are to volume, book, chapter and page, except in the case of very short chapters or when the intention is to refer to the whole argument of a chapter. All Tocqueville translations are from the Mansfield and Winthrop edition of *Democracy in America*.

<sup>2</sup> Although it is worth mentioning that when *ECHU* was translated into French, "inquietude" was the word used to render "uneasiness." For more on this historical point, see Rahe 2009, 41.

stimulating dialogue between the two thinkers, and to suggest that more could be gained by exploring their differing understandings of liberalism.

Liberalism can be defined as an understanding of either the fundamental political problems or of the solutions. As an understanding of problems, liberalism's founding premises are human freedom and human rights. No one possesses a natural right to rule over anyone else (1T 67, 2T 1, 4, 7 and 54); men are equal insofar as they are free. As an understanding of the solutions, the term "liberal" connotes certain political prescriptions, all of which consist of protections of individual freedom in civil society: rule of law, religious toleration, commercial freedom, the separation between the public and the private. Hobbes is an example of a liberal who falls into the first category but not the second. Tocqueville falls into the latter but, strictly speaking, not the first, or only in a complicated way. Locke cleanly falls into both.

Locke proposes the liberal solution to solve what he implies are eternal problems of human nature. Only by recognizing that men are naturally free from civil society and authority, and thereby denying the validity of all traditional or customary forms of authority, can a reliable, incontestable ground for obedience and legitimate authority be established. This method follows that of Descartes' universal doubt and of course Hobbes. Men are naturally equal and independent and thus no one has the natural right to rule or compel anyone else. This is a problem, for Locke is equally certain that human political life

cannot do without ruling and compulsion. As with Hobbes, Locke looks to establish legitimate political authority through identifying the most basic threat to man's existence. However, unlike Hobbes, Locke believes that this threat is originally rooted in hunger, not the threat of violent death at the hands of others. Violence is an *indirect* effect of the Lockean state of nature, owing to what Locke refers to as the "great inconveniences" of life outside of civil society, when there are no common, legitimate authorities and every man is his own judge and executioner of the law of nature. Hobbes is vaguer than Locke on the problem of hunger in the state of nature and the role it places it causing violence (aside from saying that men are "poor" in the state of nature). It could even be argued that he is, in general, vaguer than Locke on the origins of natural violence altogether (Manent 1995, 41). In any event, although Locke does see life in the state of nature as coming to experience a Hobbesian level of violence, this is the effect of even more basic, natural qualities of our beings.<sup>3</sup>

The question-*the* question-thus arises, how does legitimate authority become established and maintain itself? Men begin, naturally, free and faced with certain necessities, and must establish civil government in order to contend adequately with these necessities.

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<sup>3</sup> For useful analyses of the differences between the state of nature and state of war in Locke, see Goldwin, 1987, 452-60, Tarcov 1981, and Zuckert 1994, 230-7.

In *DA*, Tocqueville states that he addresses the problems of modern democracy, not the problems of the state of nature.<sup>4</sup> The modern world faces new political challenges, all resulting from the gradual development of equality of conditions over the course of centuries, which has placed modern man in a state of freedom relative both to others and to political authority. Tocqueville locates the source of individual freedom in history, not nature, but this is not the most important difference between him and Locke. More significant is the purpose of freedom in his political science. Locke and Hobbes are chiefly concerned with legitimacy, partly because, in their view, establishing the most legitimate form of government is a more realistic goal for man than that of the best form of government, the goal of ancient political science (Strauss 1953, 186-192). They employ the state of nature not only in order to discredit all forms of traditional authority (clerical, aristocratic), a negative or critical effect, but also to provide a new contractual basis for political authority and obedience (Manent 1995, 39, 84). All authority is naturally illegitimate but obedience is not necessarily illegitimate, provided that it is grounded in a contract between free and equal parties. Thus, the state of nature is a problem from the perspective of morality and politics, but from the perspective of political theory, it's a solution,

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<sup>4</sup> On the similarities between modern society according to Tocqueville and the state of nature as conceived by modern political philosophers, see Manent 1996, 26-8.

because it provides an “Archimedean point” on which an entirely new and, for the first time, right and true, political order may be balanced and supported.

The equivalent of the state of nature in Tocqueville’s thought is individualism, but he presents it in a much different spirit than Locke does the state of nature. Individualism is for Tocqueville a description of the character of life in modern democratic society and it is purely a problem. He does not invoke it for the purpose of discrediting traditional authority and establishing a new basis for legitimacy. Rather, he invokes it to explain the fragility of modern civil society especially with regard to its inability to prevent the onset of despotism, Tocqueville’s foremost concern. Tocqueville thinks that modern society and despotism have a dangerous affinity and the cause of this affinity is individualism. Democracy breeds independence, which leads to isolation and weakness, and an inability to resist a determined despotism, especially if it professes egalitarian principles. Tocqueville fears that Hobbes may be right, that nothing short of despotism can master a state of radical independence.

Pre-modern man was spared this dilemma, according to Tocqueville. The essence of the difference between modernity and pre-modernity for Tocqueville is the difference between democracy and aristocracy. In pre-modern life, all human relations were organized around inequality. The principle of inequality served both to differentiate people from one another and arrange them into separate wholes such as families and estates, but also, paradoxically, to connect



them. In aristocratic times, there was more natural coherence and intelligibility to civil society and the web of duties, privileges and connections that constituted it. Loosely speaking, men were more naturally social in aristocracy, because men were viewed not as abstract, free, equal individuals, but rather as members of some group, such as family, community, or profession. Additionally, aristocracy did not hide, as democracy does, the fact of ruling, of one individual exerting influence over others. Everyone in aristocracy was understood to be part of ruled and ruler relations. Ruling, like sociality, was natural, and thus obedience in aristocratic times did not carry the stigma that Tocqueville says it does in modern democratic life. These two features of aristocratic society are related. The corps-family, profession, community-existed as a sort of matrix for the relations of ruled and ruler. This gave ruling and obeying a greater tangibility than they possess in democratic times, when rule by others is only countenanced as some form of indirect rule, and obedience, as much as possible, is only granted to abstractions, such as one's own will, or the general will, or the sovereignty of the people. Because rulers did not have hide what they were doing, and everyone knew where they stood with each other, aristocratic society possessed a kind of built-in coherence than democratic society must create artificially.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "Two individuals are separated and placed side by side 'without a common bond to hold them.' That is the nature of democracy (Manent 1996, 26)."

The centuries-long decline of all forms of legitimate hierarchy destroyed the fabric of aristocratic society without replacing it with anything (*DA* I.1.3). In democracy, everyone is equal, similar and also independent. “The man of democratic societies, encountering and only wanting to encounter around him equal and similar individuals, does not want to submit to the influence of others (Manent 1996, 53).” Modernity means equality and equality implies independence. This is one of Tocqueville’s key insights.

Tocqueville is ambivalent as to whether or not the rise of democracy is a good thing, but he is determined to face up to it as a matter of necessity. All human relations will be arranged somehow in accord with the principle of equality in modern times. The emergence of the modern world over many centuries has been effected by the gradual discrediting of the various forms of rank and privilege that structured pre-modern aristocratic society, and so men are forced to create the whole social order anew.

In making the point that Tocqueville thinks of himself as addressing the problems of democracy, not the state of nature, the implication was not that Tocqueville is a historicist, because he isn’t. Evidence for Tocqueville’s non-historicism may be found easily in his reliance on the concept of human nature when discussing, for example, man’s eternal yearning for the divine (*I.2.9*, 284,

II.2.12) or love of freedom (II.2.1).<sup>6</sup> Aristocracy and democracy are, for Tocqueville, sort of “super-conventions.” They are the most important norms that political science must take account of when studying any particular society or government. Every community will embrace a different set of beliefs, habits and desires, depending on whether it is organized around inequality or equality. Imputing so much significance to the question of whether the few or the many have the upper hand in any given community does not make Tocqueville any more of a historicist than it does Aristotle (*Politics* IV.4-11, esp. 1296a22), Hobbes (*de Cive* I.4), or Machiavelli (*Prince* IX).

In sum, the first important difference between Locke and Tocqueville’s respective liberalisms is that Locke believes the fundamental problems are rooted in nature, Tocqueville in modernity.

### ***I.3 Freedom and legitimacy***

Liberalism is above all a teaching about human freedom, but in a complicated way. Freedom is a problem for both Locke and Tocqueville. On the one hand, men are too attached to it, and people, especially those in positions of authority, tend to fail to appreciate this fact. For Locke and Tocqueville (in modern democratic times), most forms of authority tend to overstate their

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<sup>6</sup> For other examples of Tocqueville’s recourse to human nature in *DA*, see I.1.5, 57, II.1.9, 429 and 431, II.2.16, II.3.11, 568, II.3.13, and II.3.18, 589.

influence over men and their mastery of freedom. Patriarchal authority, religious authority, and political authority have, generally speaking, confused men, conflicted with one another and have influenced men's behavior and beliefs much less than they think. As a consequence of their inability to face up to the genuine naturalness and intractability of individual human freedom, virtually all authorities end up justifying themselves by some mixture of force, fraud, accident, and hypocrisy.

On the other hand, men also seem to be not attached enough to freedom. A brief glance at the sad history of republican government confirms that men are often willing to trade freedom for ease. If men are so simply resistant to authority, why has despotism been the norm for most of human history?<sup>7</sup> Why does Montesquieu call it the "most natural" form of government?

So men are both too susceptible to absolute government and too resistant to government simply. The challenge of liberal political philosophy is to bring to an end these vacillations between willful naysaying and abject slavishness by teaching men what legitimate political authority is, how and why they should consent to it, and how to sustain it.<sup>8</sup>

How should legitimate political authority and political freedom be sustained? First, there must be the right institutions and procedures: rule of law,

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<sup>7</sup> *2T* 74-6, 105-12; Faulkner 2001, 14.

<sup>8</sup> On balance, both Locke and Tocqueville (at least in the case of modern democrats) seem to think that slavishness is a greater problem than naysaying (*2T* 223, 230 and *DA* II.4).

constitutional protections for property rights and freedom of religion, separation of the executive and legislative functions of government, and free, fair and regular elections. Locke and Tocqueville differ in terms of how much they are inclined to rely on institutions, as is reflected in our own day with Locke's popularity among free-market libertarians and Tocqueville's amongst communitarians. But Locke's preference for institutions and Tocqueville's for civil society are in neither case absolute. Tocqueville does discuss at much greater length than Locke the need for extra-institutional protections of individual rights such as religion and civic associations. Through these, Tocqueville argues, a certain liberal civil society or way of life may be shaped which will more effectively achieve the ends of liberalism than simply the parchment barriers of a constitution. The clearest and most decisive place to see this is in Tocqueville's argument about why mores are more important for sustaining democratic republics than laws and physical conditions in *DA* I.2.9, "On the Principle Causes Tending to Maintain a Democratic Republic in the United States." There is no doubt that the emphasis on mores and civil society is one of the chief departures of Tocqueville's form of liberalism from classic liberalism (Ceaser 1990, 33-6). But we also find in Tocqueville extensive explorations of the American constitution, as well as of the writings of Joseph Story and the *Federalist* (not common reading amongst contemporary communitarians), and in Volume I of *DA* especially he emphasizes how much

the strength of America is owing to the Constitution and its wise arrangement of powers and offices.<sup>9</sup>

And Locke is more concerned with the private character of the citizenry and less trusting of institutional measures than is sometimes recognized. Locke, too, in his own, way, sought to foster a certain liberal way of life, what has been described as a “free society of strivers” (Faulkner 2001, 6). Most obviously, there is *Some Thoughts Concerning Education (STCE)*, which argues not only for the importance of the right form of education for youths, but also that this can only be accomplished in private domestic life. Finally, there is the undeniable moral appeal of the doctrines of property rights and the right to rebellion in the *2T*. With these doctrines, Locke is not simply enlightening men about their rights (“raising consciousness”), but clearly trying to encourage a kind of public-spiritedness, to protect those rights and sustain legitimate liberal government.<sup>10</sup>

Liberalism undoubtedly implies a certain lowering of the end of government, relative to how ancient political science viewed things. This may be seen in its emphasis on legitimate government instead of the best government and in its attempt to structure political orders such that they are less reliant on wise and virtuous leaders. But this does not mean that liberalism, certainly not

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<sup>9</sup> For a good discussion of Tocqueville which stresses his analysis of liberal institutions, see Kraynak 1987.

<sup>10</sup> Faulkner 2001 argues that this popular spiritedness or pride, illustrates a truly radically democratic character of Locke’s thought, distinguishing it from many other more moderate voices, such as Blackstone, Hume, Montesquieu (and perhaps therefore Tocqueville, too?).

in the case of Locke or Tocqueville, dispenses with concern for either state or society.

Locke and Tocqueville both devote their political sciences to warning men about the dangers of unfree government, but their definitions of “unfree” government are different. Tocqueville is primarily concerned with what he calls soft despotism. This is a form of despotism in which the people are kept in a condition of servitude not so much by the open threat of violence as by their own weakness and complacency. Due to the mildness of modern men, soft despotism is a greater threat than the hard despotism experienced in the ancient world. Hard despotism was violent but restricted; soft despotism is milder but more extensive, in the sense that it comes to dominate over men’s minds as well as their bodies. “[I]t would degrade men without tormenting them” (*DA* II.4.6, 662).

Locke is more concerned with violent, hard despotism, defined as any government which is not only founded on violence, but under which arbitrary violence towards one’s person and property remains a constant threat. Locke is uninterested in drawing distinctions between ancient and modern, “enlightened” (Hobbesian) forms of despotism. Locke believes that men have much more to fear from their government than just lassitude and mediocrity. Unjust, illegitimate government necessarily poses a threat to men’s lives and properties. More to the point, Locke does not recognize the sort of softening effect on mores

induced by modernity which Tocqueville, Montesquieu and others claim to have observed. Modern man remains an extremely dangerous animal, according to Locke.

#### ***1.4 Fundamental principles, greatness and pride***

Perhaps the most illuminating difference between Locke and Tocqueville's liberalism is the place of pride in them. The remainder of this introduction to Locke and Tocqueville will be devoted to exploring this difference, because not only does the issue of pride usefully differentiate between Locke and Tocqueville in a general way, it also points to differences in their understandings of restlessness.

The two principles of legitimacy, according to Locke, are right and preservation. Legitimate government is distinguished by its commitment to preserving its citizens' lives and protecting their rights. The argument of the *2T* proceeds as a "geometrical proof,"<sup>11</sup> similar to Hobbes' method in *De Cive* and *Leviathan*. Locke posits our natural rights to life, liberty and then property, and then derives the character of legitimate civil government based on what sort of institutions best protect these rights. For Locke, there is a negligible difference between what governments must do to secure right and to secure preservation. Once right and preservation are properly construed, we will see that we do not

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<sup>11</sup> Grant 1987, 7 and 22.



need to choose. At the center of Locke's political philosophy is an effort to reconcile justice and advantage, by redefining them. Justice, in order to be justice, must be advantageous and the same thing goes for advantage, according to Locke. The content of justice is defined by our most natural rights, and our most natural rights are our needs: necessity defines both advantage as well as justice and thereby reconciles them.

*DA* is a very different work than the *2T*. Tocqueville does not present his political science as a series of conclusions drawn from certain principles laid out at the beginning of the work. Tocqueville does have what we might call fundamental principles, by which he orients his judgments about human things, but their basis or origin is somewhat more elusive than Locke's fundamental principles. The equivalents of right and preservation for Tocqueville are justice and greatness.

The distinction between justice and greatness parallels the distinction between democracy and aristocracy in Tocqueville's thought. Democracy is more just than aristocracy because it is more natural than aristocracy: equality is more natural than inequality (II.4.8, 675; Manent 1996, Chapter Seven).

Tocqueville does not view democracy and aristocracy as two equally conventional social orders, but aristocracy as in fact more conventional than democracy. The hyper-conventional character of aristocracy does violence to human nature and leads to pervasive injustice in aristocratic society. The most

important form of this injustice for Tocqueville seems to be inequality of opportunity. In democracy, equality of conditions produces equality of opportunity. In democracy, an individual's opportunities for distinction are not contingent on the arbitrary fact of rank. Family relations, order of birth and connections at court, are factors over which an individual has little to no control, but which nonetheless exerted immense influence over his prospects in aristocratic times.<sup>12</sup>

But though democracy is more just, more natural and less dependent on illusion, this does not decide things in favor of democracy because aristocracy was more conducive to greatness than democracy. Why? Aristocracy means hierarchy and difference. The entire aristocratic moral outlook is disposed towards drawing distinctions about same and other, higher and lower, and better and worse. In Tocqueville's view, this inevitably tends to encourage a concern for human perfection and to produce a certain elevation of spirit (Manent 1996, 77-8). Democracy tends not to develop such an outlook, because of its emphasis on the equality and also the sameness of all men. Not everyone was great in aristocracy, but at least a few individuals were. In democracy, far fewer will be.

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<sup>12</sup> "What held together societies that preceded democratic society was a hierarchy of patronage (Manent 1996, 10)."

Like Nietzsche (*Beyond Good and Evil* 257), and unlike Thomas Jefferson ("Letter to John Adams, October 28, 1813"), Tocqueville is uninterested in any sort of "natural" aristocracy through which democratic equality of opportunity might reconcile justice and greatness. Democracy is more just than aristocracy because of equality of opportunity, and aristocracy is greater because of inequality of opportunity (*DA* II.1.10, 436): "When some men perceive that without contest and without trouble they are first, when they daily have before their eyes great objects with which they are occupied, leaving the details to others, and when they live amid wealth they have not acquired and do not fear to lose, one conceives that they experience a sort of superb disdain for the little interests and material cares of life, and that they have a natural grandeur of thought that their words and manners reveal (II.3.14)." Though Tocqueville does speak of great nations,<sup>13</sup> the greatness that truly matters to him is that of great individuals.<sup>14</sup> The aspiration to greatness, encouraged by the basic structure of aristocratic society, could be seen in many of the more characteristic features of aristocratic life such as the high-mindedness or haughtiness of aristocratic manners (II.3.14). It can also be seen in their tastes, in the types of poetry and history they favored, both of which ascribe primary importance in human affairs

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<sup>13</sup> One of the more interesting discussions in *DA* Volume I is about how America is the first example of a great republic—both big and strong *and* free (formerly only small communities were free).

<sup>14</sup> As Lawler (1993, 188) notes, a good source for what Tocqueville means by greatness may be found at the beginning of his *Recollections* (of the revolution of 1848), when he discusses the character of the "bourgeois king" Louis-Philippe, and what qualities he did *not* possess (*Recollections* 5-13).

to outstanding individual men, as opposed to impersonal forces or races, which is the tendency of the democratic imagination (II.1.17).

There is a clear connection between aristocratic greatness and debauchery and cruelty (II.2.8, II.2.11, II.2.15, II.3.18, 590-1, and "Introduction to *DA*," 9).

Democrats are more attuned to material necessity than aristocrats. This exerts a chastening effect on democratic morality, and makes democrats less morally erratic than aristocrats tended to be (I.2.6, 235, II.2.11, and "Introduction to *DA*," p. 9).<sup>15</sup> The perceived freedom from necessity encouraged by the structure of aristocratic society led to eccentricity, debauchery, but also sometimes magnificence. Democratic morality is lower but more solid; in democracy, men are less great, but they are also less depraved. Democracy stifles the moral imagination. This leads to fewer legendary love affairs and less chivalry; women are much less charming, but domestic life is generally more stable. Aristocratic morality was more extreme: idle and warlike, slavery and freedom, tenderness and cruelty, intense affection towards *semblables* and cold indifference to outsiders.

Tocqueville gives his most interesting explanation of the tension between democratic justice and aristocratic greatness in *DA* II.3.19, "Why one finds so many ambitious men in the united States and so few great ambitions." Through

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<sup>15</sup> "[T]he men who are the greatest nuisance to their country are those who are allowed the greatest leisure" Hobbes *de Cive* (V.5; XII.10). See also Machiavelli, *Prince* IX, and *Genealogy of Morals* I.2 on the complete absence of any notion of "utility" in master morality.

the institution of equality of opportunity, democracy secures justice but stifles great ambitions. The effect of the crush of all to rise at once is exhausting and discourages men's aspiration to be the best. Tocqueville identifies an essential similarity between the desire to be the best quickly and the desire to be the best simply (II.3.19, 601-2). Democratic meritocracy stifles great ambition because it extinguishes all hope of getting to the top immediately. Elsewhere, Tocqueville does say that impatience is characteristic of democratic ambition, but in the context of discussing how democrats are too willing to settle for "easy successes and present enjoyments (II.1.3, 414)." Great ambition is impatient, but it is also exacting and unwilling to settle for any instant gratification that it takes to be a *false* gratification.

The aristocratic system of advancement, one based largely on arbitrary connections and patronage, although more unfair, was in fact, more encouraging of the moral imagination, of ambition, and therefore of greatness. (In pre-modern times, it was possible to become a high-ranking political or military official before the age of 25.) Democracy discourages greatness because meritocracy discourages greatness. The tension between aristocracy and democracy is due to the tension between justice and greatness. Whatever may be the case for individuals, the same social order cannot be oriented towards producing and securing both greatness and justice, according to Tocqueville.

Aristotle says that greatness of soul is the “crown” of moral life (*Ethics* 1124a1), meaning it perfects it, meaning it also presupposes all the other moral virtues, and not least justice.<sup>16</sup> Thus there is no tension: justice is a condition for greatness. In Volume I of *DA*, Tocqueville seems to agree that a great man must necessarily also be a just man (I.2.6, 227); in his own life and actions, he clearly aspired to be both great and just.<sup>17</sup> We could even say that, for Tocqueville, greatness is in some sense fundamental to justice because justice is defined by greatness. Why does he believe democracy is more just than aristocracy? Not because of its superior respect for universal human rights, but because of equality of opportunity, which for Tocqueville primarily means the opportunity to rise and achieve distinction. Democracy does not forcibly constrain and frustrate ambition for many people as aristocracy did. In France, the violent destruction of the old order at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century led directly to one of the most intense surges of passionate ambition and love of glory in world history.

But tensions between greatness and justice quickly emerge the more Tocqueville explores the conditions required to produce either of them. What sort of mores does democracy produce, and what sort of moral characters are democratic mores, in turn, likely to encourage and support? Although there

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<sup>16</sup> See also Strauss, 1953, 140, Faulkner 2007, 7, and 16-25, and Collins 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Compare also Tocqueville’s assessment of Napoleon, that he “was as great as a man can be who lacks the least shred of virtue” (quoted in Herrold 1958, 214).

sometimes will be examples of great men in democracies and just men in aristocracies, on the whole, democracy tends to support justice more than greatness, and aristocracy greatness more than justice. This implies that justice is not absolutely necessary for greatness, or at least that the greatest man might not also be the man most distinguished for his justice. He may be just, but there certainly are men more just than he. If greatness required justice in the most complete sense, aristocracy would clearly be superior to democracy, because it would be superior both in terms of greatness and the justice implied by greatness. But Tocqueville is reluctant to say that aristocracy was superior to democracy or vice versa. In any event, the most important point for Tocqueville is that it is impossible for any society to be distinguished for both its greatness and justice, and for this reason, Tocqueville is doubtful about any final or completely satisfying political solution.

The fact that democracy discourages greatness is problematic not only because greatness is a moral end in itself, but also for very practical political reasons. The fact that democracy discourages great ambition in general does not mean that *no one* wants to be a tyrant. A few most certainly will, and Tocqueville thinks that democracy will have difficulty accommodating soaring ambition because it is so unaccustomed to it. The result will be soft despotism. So what to do to prevent great ambitions from destroying freedom in democratic times? Find ways to encourage more greatness:

I avow that for democratic societies I dread the audacity much less than the mediocrity of desires; what seems to me most to be feared is that in the midst of the small incessant occupations of private life, ambition will lose its spark and its greatness; that human passions will be appeased and debased at the same time, so that each day the aspect of the social body becomes more tranquil and less lofty. I think therefore that the heads of these new societies would be wrong to put citizens to sleep in a happiness too even and peaceful, and that it is good to give them difficult and perilous affairs sometimes in order to elevate ambition and to open a theater for it. (II.3.19, 604)

Tocqueville is making no “devil’s bargain” in promoting greatness in modern times, for, from his perspective, he is doing so partly for reasons of genuine political necessity. Promoting the cause of greatness in democratic times does not mean promoting disorder.

Aristocracy is totally dead, and much of *DA* is intended to drive home this point and root out any nostalgia for the *ancien régime*. Tocqueville is far more inclined to emphasize the enormous gap between aristocracy and democracy than the possibility of any sort of “best of both worlds” mixture of them. But at the very least, there is a benefit in simply appreciating the tension between greatness and democracy, in that it produces a healthy skepticism towards the promise of the modern world. As Pierre Manent puts it: “[according to Tocqueville], To love democracy well, it is necessary to love it moderately (Manent 1996, 132),” and a good way to cultivate a moderate love for democracy is to appreciate the ways in which aristocracy was superior.



Tocqueville's appreciation of greatness may be understood as an integral part of his liberalism and helps explain a number of differences between him and Locke, such as his sympathy both for aristocracy and the French Revolution (in its initial stages), his greater fondness for imperialism and part of why he believes strengthening religion is so important (II.1.5, 418, II.2.15, 520, Manent 1996, 86-7, and Lawler 1993, Chapter Eight).<sup>18</sup> We also see it in Tocqueville's manner of political action and how it differed from Locke's. Like most philosophers, both Tocqueville and Locke were involved in politics at a high level. Tocqueville for his part was a very ambitious man from early on in life and sought to satisfy his ambition by influencing the direction of political affairs directly and in such a manner that others would recognize.<sup>19</sup> Locke may well have been equally ambitious (it goes without saying that only an intensely ambitious individual could have written the *ECHU*, *DA* or *2T*), but he was more content to be the voice behind power, to influence affairs indirectly. Tocqueville wanted to be loved and famous. Locke was more influential than Tocqueville, both with respect to his thought and his actions, but he seems to have had little interest in fame. Locke was a much colder fish than Tocqueville.

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<sup>18</sup> “[T]he spiritual hero or great man was the most intense concern of [Tocqueville’s] life (Salomon 1935, 406).”

<sup>19</sup> On Tocqueville’s political actions, see Jardin 1988 in general, Drescher 1964 Chapter One on the relation between his actions and his thought, and Watkins 2003 is extremely thorough. On Locke’s, see Cranston 1957.

What does all this have to do with pride? Because only proud men are concerned with greatness. It is not enough that democratic societies aspire to be fairer than aristocratic societies. They, or at least some individuals within them, must also be concerned with moral excellence, which means Tocqueville's liberalism truly depends on pride. Pride is Tocquevillian liberalism's most important non-institutional element. A society without any prideful individuals is one on the verge of soft despotism, the greatest evil to be feared in democratic times.<sup>20</sup>

The place of pride in Locke's liberalism is much more complicated. In the Lockean state of nature, it is not quite true to say that men are concerned only for material goods: there is also liberty, as well as life and property.<sup>21</sup> Locke places much importance on the self-consciousness of a free individual, and the desire to have one's consent solicited and to have one's way, all of which seem to be concessions to pride. And, if popular spiritedness is part of the political solution for Locke, how can there be spiritedness without pride? This natural right to and desire for liberty can only be understood as a form of pride, and one which Locke wants to rely on, not eliminate.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The best discussion of the importance of pride to Tocqueville's liberalism is found in Mansfield and Winthrop 2000.

<sup>21</sup> See also *STCE* 41, 73-4, and 148.

<sup>22</sup> See also *IT* 10, 106, 2T 93, 111, 222, and 175. Pride is addressed even more directly and thoroughly in the *STCE* (35, 103-5, 109-10, and 119).

But what is Lockean pride? What are we expected to take pride *in* for Locke? The first option would have to be freedom. Montesquieu defines the political liberty of the citizen as “that tranquility of spirit which comes from the opinion each one has of his security.”<sup>23</sup> There are many passages in Locke that suggest that he, too, shares this fairly reductive conception of freedom, and by extension, pride.<sup>24</sup> “The idea of liberty is, the idea of a power in any agent to do or forbear any particular action, according to the determination or thought of the mind, whereby either of them is preferred to the other (*ECHU* II.21.8).” As will be discussed in Chapter Two, *ECHU* II.21, entitled “Power,” holds that individual freedom is nothing more than a form of power, which would seem to imply that the desire for freedom is indistinguishable from the desire for power.<sup>25</sup> Is there any genuinely moral dimension in the natural desire for freedom? Does it differ from the desire for life or property? Do we want to be recognized as free because it affirms our sense of our own virtue or dignity, or because it affirms our strength, our sense of security? Is pride the satisfaction that comes from an individual’s recognition of others’ recognition of his power, or of his excellence of character?

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<sup>23</sup> *Spirit of Laws* XI.6. Hobbes is, of course, even blunter: “Liberty...is simply the absence of obstacles to motion; as water contained in a vessel is not free, because the vessel is an obstacle to its flowing away, and it is freed by breaking the vessel” (*de Cive* IX.9). “When private citizens...demand *liberty*, what they are demanding in the name of *liberty* is not *liberty* but *Dominion* (*de Cive* X.8).”

<sup>24</sup> Faulkner 2001, 19.

<sup>25</sup> *STCE* 103, Tarcov 1984, 8.

In Locke, freedom and restlessness are closely connected. "Power" is the title of the chapter in which Locke gives a lengthy analysis of the concepts of uneasiness, and freedom. The desire for freedom is the desire to find relief from uneasiness, which means the desire for power. If we then connect the concepts of power and property, then the best way to satisfy the desire for freedom and to find relief from restlessness, according to Locke, is through possessing and acquiring property. The desire for freedom, when thought through, reveals itself to be the desire for power, which, when it, in turn, is thought through, reveals itself to be the desire for property.

If we cannot take pride in liberty, what about virtue? Locke expresses grave doubts about any understanding of morality which makes moral character an end in itself (*ECHU* I.3.5, II.28.10-2, *STCE* 143, and *RC* 241-5). At the very least, virtue is politically insignificant for Locke, having little to do with the question of legitimate government (*2T* 124). To the extent that virtue is preserved at all in Locke's philosophy, it seems to reduce to nothing more than an elevated and enlightened concern for reputation (Pangle 1988, 223). Pride without virtue (or with virtue, when it is defined simply as "the Law of Opinion or Reputation" (*ECHU* II.28.10-2)) reduces to socialization.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See *ECHU* II.28.13. Pangle even goes so far as to accuse Locke of fostering tyranny of the majority through the stiflingly conformist teaching of the *STCE* (Pangle 1988, 227-9).

The difficulty we come to in trying to understand the place of pride in Locke's liberalism is that, although it does not seem possible to have spiritedness without pride, neither does it seem possible to have pride without virtue.<sup>27</sup> This ambiguity does not exist in the case of Tocqueville. Tocqueville makes even greater use of pride in his practical teaching and nowhere submits greatness or liberty to the sort of searching theoretical critiques to which Locke submits liberty and virtue.<sup>28</sup>

Pride helps to anticipate Tocqueville's views on restlessness and how they differ from Locke's. Someone for whom greatness has such a high place is not likely to be but so fond of a way of life which is moderate and peaceable, which the many partake of as well the few, and which places so much importance on material goods. And if pride is possible, then self-satisfaction and perhaps even contentment, is possible. But restless men experience little self-satisfaction and even less contentment.

### ***1.5 Conclusion: Locke, Tocqueville and the harmony of the goods***

There are three main differences between Tocqueville and Locke with respect to their fundamental principles. The principles themselves are different (right and greatness vs. right and preservation), Tocqueville's are also partially

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<sup>27</sup> The best account of the ambivalence of pride in Locke is Mansfield 1987, 197-211.

<sup>28</sup> "Do not ask me to analyze this sublime desire [for liberty], it must be felt" (*OR* I.3.3; see also Manent 1996, 117-20).

historically-influenced, and Tocqueville's are in some tension with one another whereas Locke's are not. Tocqueville devotes much of his work to solving the problems of democracy, but there is no such thing as a genuinely satisfying political solution for Tocqueville, because no society can accommodate and promote both justice and greatness. There is therefore a certain tragedy to political life for Tocqueville.

The case is very different with Locke because right and preservation are so conceptually similar. Locke's whole enterprise is founded on the premise that justice rightly understood (as natural rights) and advantage rightly understood (as preservation) are in perfect harmony with one another (*1T* 86-8, 92). Leo Strauss famously argues that Locke posits this harmony out of an intention to establish *effective* standards of right. Like Machiavelli and Hobbes, Locke "limit[s] his horizon to get results" (Strauss 1953, 178; see also *Ibid.* 183, and Cox 1982, 68, and 87-9). Prior political theories had left morality and justice "unendowed," which caused Locke to doubt their very status as morality or justice. How to make morality effective is a central concern of Locke's political philosophy: many of his more famous doctrines and discussions stem from it, such as the executive power of the law of nature<sup>29</sup> and the question of the need

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<sup>29</sup> On the executive power of the law of nature, see Zuckert 1994, Chapter Eight.

for divine rewards and punishments to support morality.<sup>30</sup> Hence he looked to base his own theory on an undeniable moral fact, something that is always effective. This must be some form of natural desire, and not just any natural desire, but our strongest and most persistent one, which exists in all societies and even prior to society itself. He settled, of course, on the desire for self-preservation.<sup>31</sup>

The relation between right and advantage (desire) is perhaps the most challenging and interesting problem in Locke's philosophy. For instance, the moral ambivalence of the attachment to private property, so essential to what is often referred to as "bourgeois morality," may very well find its roots in Locke.<sup>32</sup> We stand up for what is ours in order to survive and to protect ourselves, but also, to some extent or in some cases, simply because it is ours.<sup>33</sup> But does this attitude, so obviously attractive to many people, hold up to theoretical critique? Can Locke succeed in equating justice and preservation so closely with each other without collapsing them? If right is redefined to be more in accord with our desire for self-preservation, is it still right? The best commentators on Locke

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<sup>30</sup> RC 241-3, *ECHU* IV.13; on this point more generally, see the unpublished writings "Of Ethick in General," "Morality" "Voluntas" and "Ethica B" in *Political Essays*.

<sup>31</sup> "Natural right does not accept that anything that arises from the need for self-preservation is a vice" (*de Cive* "Epistle Dedicatory"); Strauss 1953, 227.

<sup>32</sup> "[T]wo hundred years before Queen Victoria he was a Victorian in essence (Santayana 1967, 4)." Marx characterizes Locke's political thought as "the classical expression of bourgeois society's ideas of right as against feudal society" (*Theories of Surplus Value*, quoted in Dunn 1969, 204).

<sup>33</sup> See Mansfield 1987, 197-8, 208-10 and Mansfield 1979.

recognize not just the importance of these questions, but also how difficult it is to answer them.<sup>34</sup>

An equivalent controversy does not exist in Tocqueville's thought, for Tocqueville is genuinely grappling with a "harmony of the goods" problem. We find in Tocqueville, through all his works, a constant vacillation between a love of freedom, greatness and nobility, and a respect for bourgeois order, fairness, equality and stability. The best way to account for this and absolve Tocqueville of charges of inconsistency is to say that he appreciated all of these qualities as goods, and lamented the fact that we can't have it all. Greatness and justice are both goods, but we can't have them both, or not at the same time and to the same degree. The tragic character of Tocqueville's liberalism is one of its most important differences from Locke's liberalism. Locke's view of things is not tragic: realism is the opposite of tragedy.<sup>35</sup> From Locke's point of view, only ineffective moral teachings recognize a problem of the harmony of the goods.

Let's bring this to a close and return to the theme of restlessness. Locke, we could say, endorses restlessness, and even promotes it. Locke believes that there is a certain moral-intellectual superiority to the restless individual, that only the restless understand the world as it is. An anxious disposition is an enlightened one. Tocqueville's attitude towards restlessness would be better

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<sup>34</sup> See Myers 1998, Chapter Five (esp. 138), Josephson 2002, Chapter One, Blitz 2005, Chapter Eight, Grant 1987, 88-98, and Pangle 1988, 18-20.

<sup>35</sup> Strauss 1958, 292.



characterized as qualified toleration. "It could be worse": Tocqueville believes that restlessness is useful, that it wards off greater evils such as soft despotism, but in itself a restless soul is hardly praiseworthy. Unlike Locke, Tocqueville does not think the restless soul is morally or intellectually superior. The difference between their two outlooks on restlessness is rooted, ultimately, in the differences between the fundamental principles which define their liberal political philosophies.

Let this suffice as a general introduction to the theme of restlessness and the liberalism of Locke and Tocqueville. Having given some flavor of the differences between their respective liberalisms, we may now proceed to Locke and Tocqueville on restlessness. Chapter One will treat Tocqueville's inquietude teaching in *DA*. Chapter Two will be a reading of Locke's uneasiness teaching in *ECHU* II.21. Chapter Three will then connect Locke's teaching on uneasiness with his liberalism by means of a brief discussion of chapter five of the *2T*, "Of Property." The Conclusion will then conclude with a brief comparison between the two thinkers on their respective views of the connection between restlessness and liberalism.

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# Chapter One: Tocqueville on Inquietude

## I.1 Introduction

This first chapter will explore Tocqueville on inquietude. It has two parts. Part one attempts to explain what Tocqueville means by inquietude and how democracy causes it. How do we know it when we see it, what are its main features? From here, the second part moves into a discussion of Tocqueville's teaching on inquietude: what audience is he addressing, and of what does Tocqueville mean to disabuse them? Also, how does it fit within the teaching of *DA* as a whole?

In contrast to Aristotle's *Politics* and Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*, *DA* does not purport to be a comprehensive work of political science. To be comprehensive, by Tocqueville's own standards, would mean to give equal time for aristocracy, which he does not do. But *DA* is a work of impressive breadth that is at least comprehensive with respect to modern democracy. In *DA*, Tocqueville discusses architecture, agriculture, oratory, manners, the theatre, the family, the relations between men and women and masters and servants, and many other topics. The common thread running through all these discussions is

Tocqueville's concern with distinguishing between the factors that support modern democracy and those that undermine it.<sup>36</sup>

Scholars have struggled to define precisely what Tocqueville means by "democracy,"<sup>37</sup> but Raymond Aron is surely right when he says that it is a "condition of society rather than a form of government (Aron 1970, 9, emphasis in original)." It's a mode of what Tocqueville calls "the social state," which is itself not so easy to define. It is closer to "society" than "state," but it is a more directly political term than "society." Tocqueville says at one point that the democratic social state "has naturally suggested to [the Americans] certain laws and political mores," the subject of Volume I, and it has also "given birth to a multitude of sentiments and opinions [the subject of Volume II]...that were unknown in the old aristocratic societies of Europe (DA II "Notice")." The essential feature of the democratic social state, as opposed to the aristocratic social state, is equality of conditions, which exerts enormous influence over all aspects of modern life, and especially the types of political choices men may make. Democracy, or the democratic social state, is not itself a form of government but it does limit the number of possible forms of government to two: despotism and constitutional

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<sup>36</sup> Compare *Ethics* 1181b16-20, and *Politics* 1319b33-40. On this definition of political science more generally, and for useful comparisons of Tocqueville's and Aristotle's political sciences, see Ceaser 1990 2, 24, 39, 41 and 73, and Kraynak 1987, 1177-81.

<sup>37</sup> See Aron 1998, 185-9, Lamberti 1989, 15ff., Mansfield 1996b, viii-ix, Manent 1996, Chapter One, and Manent 1995, 104-5.

democracy. "Supporting modern democracy" for Tocqueville means supporting the choice of free, constitutional democracy over despotism.

As discussed in the Introduction, Tocqueville's ultimate interests are freedom, justice and greatness. However outré some of his topics may seem for a work of political science, he only takes any of them up because they have some bearing on the health and perpetuation of free government. He does not discuss everything. Tocqueville does not, for example, discuss food, even though we must presume the food he encountered in Jacksonian America was notably awful and far inferior to what he was used to. And why not? Because he did not find the topic of American vs. French cuisine politically significant.

The question this chapter seeks to answer is what is the political significance of inquietude? If it is somehow a quality intrinsic to democratic life, does it undermine or support democracy? Incidentally, is it democratic or American? This question should be explained.

After America, nothing else about the nature of democracy need be revealed. The clarity with which the democratic principle manifests itself in America justifies Tocqueville, he believes, in speaking as authoritatively as he does about the nature of democracy. Tocqueville is as excited about the example of America as a chemist would be about the discovery of a new element or a physicist a new law of nature. The task of modern political science is to understand democracy, and America is the best example of a democracy because

it is the most successful one. This is not to say that the title's two terms are synonymous. Tocqueville sometimes uses the example of America to make the point that America does *not* exhaust the possibilities for democracy. On some issues, such as the taste for material well-being that democracy inspires, America is an extreme from which a more desirable mean may be measured. Tocqueville would resist calling 1830s America a pure democracy, although neither because it is a representative democracy nor for those reasons commonly cited today (slavery, the treatment of the Indians, the place of women). A pure democracy for Tocqueville would mean a nation dominated exclusively by the democratic principle, wherein geographic, religious, tribal, historical, and natural factors play no role whatsoever: a pure abstraction, in other words. There is no doubt that America's long coast, terrific harbors, limitless expanse of land, religious and tribal uniformity, New England's rocky soil, and other factors have shaped America in addition to the democratic principle (*DA* II "Notice"<sup>38</sup>). However, America comes closer to a pure democracy than any other nation because there has never been any significant aristocratic influence on American habits, desires and beliefs (I.2.5, 187). Because America, unlike Europe, has no aristocratic past

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<sup>38</sup> Tocqueville does say that democratic historians tend to place too much emphasis on "general causes" like "the physical constitution of the country" (II.1.20). See also his discussion of pantheism (II.1.7).

from which to disassociate itself, American democracy is both the purest democracy in terms of origin, and at present the most complete.<sup>39</sup>

Tocqueville does not accord America the status that Locke and Montesquieu do Britain or Machiavelli republican Rome. Nor does Tocqueville reinterpret America as they do with their respective exemplars. Tocqueville is truly interested in getting America right as well as looking beyond it to democracy itself. This goes not only for its mores, its constitution and its fundamental principles, but even details such as how many ships the American navy has, and how much the Governor of Ohio makes. To get a sense for what Jacksonian America was really like, one could do worse than turning to Tocqueville. Historians often read *DA* in this manner, and with profit.<sup>40</sup> Tocqueville's America is not "America," a stand-in for some philosophical project independently conceived of by him.

Those contemporary political scientists who look to Tocqueville for support of the view that America is "exceptional" in both senses of the word—unique and the best—are right, because on the most important issue of the day, political freedom, America excels. Tocqueville does find America exemplary. In its institutions, in the habits, desires and beliefs of its people, America has met the greatest challenge of democratic times, namely how to stay free. That, more

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<sup>39</sup> "The only history that remains for the American Republic is its spatial expansion" (Manent 1996, xvii).

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Meyers 1960, Chapter One and Appendix A. Tocqueville's passion for laborious research and historical accuracy is also evident in his work on pre-modern France and the French Revolution. See *OR* "Preface" and Furet and Melonio 1998, 8-12.

than any other reason, is why Tocqueville thinks America's example is so vital. All that is necessary to know about democracy and the fate of modern man can be gained from the study of France, which illustrates the hazards of democracy,<sup>41</sup> and America, which illustrates its promise. The challenge for Tocqueville's political science is to distinguish between the ways in which democratic society and government are the best, better than aristocracy, and the ways in which they are simply necessary, preferable to the alternative, which is despotism.

So within the context of the overall aims of Tocqueville's political science, the following chapter will try to determine if inquietude is one of the factors that support liberal democracy, or that undermine it.

## ***1.2 The intense, limitless pursuit of material well-being***

The surface of American society presents the image of vigorous, ceaseless motion, "the moving spectacle of human things" (II.1.5, 422).<sup>42</sup> Americans, even wealthy ones, work harder and longer hours than other peoples, they are constantly moving up and down the social ladder, constantly changing jobs, communities, fashions and houses, they are populating the vast American continent at an astonishing rate, and they seem to be unbound in their mores by

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<sup>41</sup> Furet and Melonio 1998, 5; Incidentally, the degree to which French history should be seen as somehow illustrative for all modern civilized Europe is an important point of debate between Tocqueville and Burke about the significance of the French Revolution (*Ibid.* 16-9).

<sup>42</sup> For other passages which capture the immediacy of the impression of inquietude that Tocqueville tries to convey, see I.2.6, 231-4, I.2.9, 285, I.2.10, 387-8, II.1.16, 453, II.3.6, 555, II.3.11, 571, II.3.15, 584, and II.3.17, 587.

the restraints of tradition and form. No observer can fail to be struck by the remarkable busy-ness of American society. Restlessness infuses their tastes in art, their reading habits, how they take vacations, their style of architecture, the state of artisanship in democracy and a number of other elements of American life.

Many distinctive characteristics of democratic and American life may be described as restless or the result of restlessness, but Tocqueville's account of inquietude in *DA* begins with the insight that these various forms of restlessness of spirit stem from the pursuit of material well-being. "The taste for material enjoyments must be considered as the first source of this secret restiveness revealed in the actions of the Americans and of the inconstancy of which they give daily examples (II.2.13)." Most basically, inquietude may be defined as "the (1) intense, (2) limitless, (3) pursuit of material well-being." This does not mean that inquietude applies *exclusively* to commercial life, but, at its core, the famous restlessness of the Americans refers to their desire for a particular type of good or end, material well-being, and the character of their efforts at pursuing it, limitlessly and intensely.

The first task in this account of Tocqueville's teaching on inquietude is therefore to explain how democracy causes commercial restlessness. This will explain why democracy causes inquietude, and also why Tocqueville views



inquietude as a distinctly modern phenomenon. We will then go into the intensity of the pursuit of well-being and the limitlessness of it.

## ***I.2 Material well-being: why does democracy make men materialistic?***

Tocqueville contends that the Americans are quite possibly the greediest, most materialistic people the world has ever known. “Love of well-being has become the national and dominant taste; the great current of human passion bears from this direction; it carries everything along in its course” (II.2.10; see also I.1.3, I.1.8, 153, I.2.10, 394, II.1.9, II.3.18, 593, and II.3.21, 610). He also contends that this is connected with the fact that 1830s America is the most egalitarian society ever known (II.1.5, II.2.15, and II.3.17). Many foreign travelers who visited America remarked on the American obsession with material goods.<sup>43</sup> What distinguishes Tocqueville’s account from that of the Duc de Liancourt, Frances Trollope etc., among other things, is the clear connection he draws between American democracy and materialism. “America” the particular reveals the true nature of the universal “democracy”: democracy tends to make men materialistic. The difference between democratic and American inquietude is a difference of degree, not kind. All democracies will be distinguished by the

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<sup>43</sup> Adams 1986, Volume I, Chapter VI, Stiles 2009, 13, and Meyers 1960, Chapter Five.

restless pursuit of material well-being, if not necessarily with the same intensity seen in America. Men in democratic societies tend to be more obsessed with material goods than men in pre-democratic aristocratic times and because they live in democratic societies.

Now there is a reason, a principle behind this connection between democracy and materialism, which we will get to in a moment, but Tocqueville's argument really begins with the surface. Tocqueville does not claim that love of lucre is an American invention, but that only in democracies is material well-being a universal concern of entire societies. There always have been and always will be rich, poor and middling (I.2.5, 200), but in modern democracy the poor and the rich adopt the beliefs, desires and habits which formerly only characterized the middle classes. Specifically, the rich and the poor possess an anxiety about material well-being in modern democratic countries which formerly only characterized the middle classes (II.2.10, II.2.19, II.3.7, II.4.5, 653-4; "Preface" to *OR*, 87, and II.11, 178). Before the democratic revolution, only the middle class of societies were distinguished by a concern for acquisition (II.3.21, 608). In democratic times, both poor and rich are overcome by this traditionally middle class passion. The poor begin to wonder whether that necessity keeping them poor might not be just a perceived necessity, and the rich wonder whether

they might not be able to increase their fortune or better secure it against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.<sup>44</sup>

Tocqueville's claim about the Americans' desire for material well-being, and how democracy causes it, is worth dwelling on since so much hinges on this connection. The claim is really two claims. First, America is the most egalitarian country the world has ever known, which, for him, means never has the middle class been as dominant as it is in America. Tocqueville's account in his "Introduction" to *DA* of the progress of equality of conditions is also the account of the rise of the influence of the middle class. The middle class is politically dominant, but more to the point, democratic mores are middle class mores. Equality means sameness, and the principle of sameness or homogeneity turns out to be middle class mores. A more traditional understanding of democracy would be the dominance of the many poor over the few rich, but to describe modern democracy as a rule of a part over the whole would be inadequate, according to Tocqueville. It would miss the true, deep homogeneity amongst modern democratic peoples, in addition to the unique dominance of the rule of popular sovereignty in America.<sup>45</sup> Democracy exerts a powerful homogenizing force over all human things such as art, manners, and nationalities.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> For an especially clear and convincing account of the distinctive modernness (and Westernness) of widespread unlimited acquisition, see the "Introduction" and Chapter II of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

<sup>45</sup> This is an essential feature of Tocqueville's understanding of modern democracy, by which he departs from Aristotle's notion of regime. In modern democracy, there is no part ruling over the whole; there is

Rigid hierarchical aristocratic society, by contrast, exhibited genuine differences of belief, desire and habits (II.4.7, 671-2).<sup>47</sup> Aristocratic times were the golden ages of human diversity. In democracy, the situation is entirely different because there are no longer separate races of the rich and poor (II.3.21, 607). The rapid changes of fortune characteristic of democracy frustrate the formation of separate “corps” or “estates” with their different interests, privileges and duties. Tocqueville argues that the main causes of homogeneity in democratic societies are, first, the predominance of the passion for material well-being (aristocratic society knew of a greater variety of passions) and second, the non-existence of guilds, great families and the clergy. Such “intermediate powers” placed in between the individual and the sovereign also served as natural buffers against despotism.<sup>48</sup> It is for this reason that Tocqueville writes in *OR*: “of all forms of society, the one where aristocracy does not and cannot exist is just the one which will have the most difficulty escaping absolute government for long (“Preface”).” The Americans have been able, through the art of association, to create new intermediate powers, which serve the same political purpose as pre-modern

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just the whole, and either a despot rules over it (*OR* I.2.8-9), or it rules over itself (in Tocqueville’s phrase, “society acts by itself and on itself,” I.1.4, 55). See Kraynak 1987, 1179 and Manent 1996.

<sup>46</sup> “The mass crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and select. Anybody who is not like everybody, who does not think like everybody, runs the risk of being eliminated (Ortega y Gasset, 1957, 18).”

<sup>47</sup> A good illustration of what Tocqueville has in mind about the vivid diversity of pre-modern life may be found in Johan Huizenga’s *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, Chapter One, “The Passionate Intensity of Life.”

<sup>48</sup> On this point, George 1922 is outstanding.

estates, but do not seem to be able do anything about the crushing sameness of all democratic belief, habit and desire.

In democracy, both respect and wealth are much more fluid than they were in aristocracy. It is simply a matter of fact that in pre-democratic society the distribution of material goods was more regular and fortunes were more stable: leases were made for 99 years, primogeniture facilitated that money and land stayed with the same family for generations, the same bloodlines stayed in service or in some particular trade for generations, and many fewer opportunities for advancement were available to those without the right family connections. There are still inequalities of wealth in democracy-indeed, there may be *great* inequalities of wealth-but the beliefs, desires and habits of modern democratic societies are derived from the middle class. In other words, everyone in America is middle class, even those who are not.

The second major claim Tocqueville is making is that the taste for material well-being is a middle class passion (II.2.10). The middle class has always had the most immediate sense for the instability of fortunes and the potential for man to master them for his own benefit.<sup>49</sup> Putting these two together (everyone is the

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<sup>49</sup> “[M]en who live in an ease equally distant from opulence and misery put an immense value on their goods. As they are still very near to poverty, they see its rigors from close by and they dread them; between it and them there is nothing but a small patrimony on which they immediately fix their fears and their hopes. At each instant they become more interested in it by the daily efforts they make to augment it. The idea of yielding the least part of it is intolerable to them, and they consider its entire loss as the ultimate misfortune. Now, the number of these eager and anxious small proprietors is constantly increased by equality of conditions (II.3.21, 608).”

same in democracy because everyone is middle class, and middle class people are materialistic), we arrive at the claim that America is unique because the pursuit of material goods has never been the primary orientation of a whole society.

Tocqueville believes that America illustrates with special clarity that the more egalitarian a society becomes, the more acquisitive it becomes. Tocqueville is not the first to suggest a connection between democracy and acquisitiveness,<sup>50</sup> but his claim calls for scrutiny. As with all such abstract propositions about human things, it is very easy to think of counter examples. History offers numerous examples of aristocratic societies which did not seem so indifferent to acquisition, even some which are typically regarded as *distinguished* by their penchant for commerce. This is especially so if we use Tocqueville's own extremely expansive definition of "aristocracy," which applies to virtually all of pre-modern civilized society.<sup>51</sup> Take for example Carthage, Venice, 14<sup>th</sup> century Flanders, 17<sup>th</sup> century Holland. How can Tocqueville seem so oblivious to so many instances of aristocratic acquisitiveness?

Tocqueville takes this challenge up with his concept of the "aristocracy of wealth" (endnote XIX (699); see also I.2.7, 240-1 and II.3.2). Aristocracies of wealth resemble true aristocracies, because concerns about honor and rank hold

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<sup>50</sup> See Faulkner 2007, 205.

<sup>51</sup> Athens for example was an aristocratic republic, not a democracy (II.1.15, 451). See Manent 1996, xii-xiii for an argument that dividing up history in this manner is not a crazy idea, at least in the sense that many other eminent minds in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Marx, Nietzsche) viewed history in a similar way.

great sway. However, they are more accurately understood as an unstable transition phase between democracy and aristocracy: an aristocracy of wealth is really aristocracy in decline and democracy in ascent. This is not necessarily a bad thing; rank based on wealth is at least as absurd as rank based on birth, but England's aristocracy of wealth helped it to avoid the violent extremes that afflicted France during its transition from the pre-modern to the modern world.<sup>52</sup>

Whatever the case with that may be, Tocqueville's main point in *DA* about aristocracies of wealth is that it's very easy to mistake an aristocracy of wealth for a true aristocracy because people continue to support the notion of rank long after rank has lost any sort of substantial, constitutional meaning. This goes especially for parvenus, who are always the most aggressive in protecting the meaningfulness of rank. Tocqueville says that, paradoxically, it is at times of such uncertainty that men are even *more* concerned about honor and rank, because it is harder to tell where anyone stands (II.3.2).<sup>53</sup> Those who do not possess these privileges hate them more and those who do possess them guard them with equal zeal. Hence why, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so many wealthy American and European bourgeoisie not only consented to, but actively sought out marriages between their daughters and fortune-hunting bounders from old, noble but destitute families. But in real aristocracies, it is not so easy for the

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<sup>52</sup> Himmelfarb 1997, 12-3, and Drescher 1964, Chapters Four, Nine, and Ten.

<sup>53</sup> For an application of this thesis to late 20<sup>th</sup> century America, see Fussell 1983.

claims of birth to be trumped by the claims of wealth. In a real aristocracy, the ultra-rich bourgeois seethe with resentment over being regarded less highly than an impoverished clergyman or knight. Regardless of how stably standards of rank seemed to be established in public opinion, if rank can be bought, then behind the aristocratic fiction, democracy is in the offing. Tocqueville uses 19<sup>th</sup> century England as his example of aristocracy of wealth, correctly predicting the eventual decline of the English aristocracy.

But, with regard to what a “true” or “real” aristocracy” is for Tocqueville, it should be made clear that what is most important for him, even more than the non-fluidity of rank, is whether or not being a member of the nobility has any *political* significance. A true aristocracy is characterized more by its exercise of political duties than its enjoyment of social privileges (*OR* I.2.1, 9).<sup>54</sup> This is the central theme of *OR*, in which Tocqueville is focused less on the difference between aristocracy and democracy, but between genuine aristocracy and its decayed or false forms. The “*ancien regime*,” in Tocqueville’s understanding, was the period in French history immediately prior to the French Revolution when the monarchy had risen to become all-dominant and the nobility politically non-existent and therefore purely a “caste.” The pre-Revolutionary French

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<sup>54</sup> In *OR*, the later work, Tocqueville uses “caste,” not “aristocracy of wealth” as the corrupted version or foil of aristocracy. Furet and Melonio define caste as “a closed group deprived of political power (which would have united them with the rest of the French) and possessing privileges that separated them from others (Furet and Melanio 1998, 33).” The difference is that in the passage on aristocracy of wealth in *DA*, Tocqueville is less directly focused on the political significance (or lack thereof) of the aristocracy.



aristocracy enjoyed special honors and privileges such as freedom from taxation, but had virtually no role to play in the actual politics of France. This was bad for the nation as a whole, because the decline of the aristocracy strengthened despotism, and it was bad for the aristocrats themselves because it made them weak and frivolous. Tocqueville argues that when the nobility ruled, paradoxically, its relations with the bourgeois and peasantry were less fraught with suspicion and resentment. It actually had to have dealings with them, which formed the core of the self-government that Tocqueville admires in feudal French society. Feudal French society was genuinely free in a way that 18<sup>th</sup> century French society was not due to the existence of local government. Local government and aristocracy are naturally connected in Tocqueville's mind (he compares the aristocratic medieval rural parish and the democratic New England township in *OR* I.3.3, 129).<sup>55</sup> But by 1789, both local government and the nobility were a shadow of their former selves, and this made the nobility's enjoyment of privileges without any corresponding duties or services all the more outrageous to the Third Estate.

There are a couple more points to add in defense of Tocqueville's claim about the link between democracy and acquisitiveness, and the lack of one between aristocracy and acquisitiveness. First, there is no companion volume to

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<sup>55</sup> Bizarrely, some have taken issue with Tocqueville's exaltation of feudal France as a beacon of freedom and self-government. On this controversy, and the important similarity Tocqueville discerned between pre-modern France and modern America, see Maletz 1998.

DA which takes up democracy vs. aristocracy from the perspective of aristocracy. Although when Tocqueville speaks of aristocracy he clearly has in mind feudal Europe prior to the rise of powerful, centralized and absolute monarchies (OR I.2.1), he does not go into what the equivalent of America is for aristocracy with any real precision or depth.<sup>56</sup> Feudal France was clearly superior to the *ancien regime*, but how superior was it simply? Of course, we need not consider all societies in the past as *exclusively* defined by the aristocratic principle anymore than we need consider all societies of the present as animated by the democratic one, because they were not and are not. Physical conditions, differences of history, tribe, religion, etc., would still prevent the possibility of a “pure” aristocracy as much as they prevent a “pure” democracy.<sup>57</sup> It is also possible that “aristocracies of wealth” were the norm throughout the distant past, and the world never knew the aristocratic equivalent of America. Tocqueville’s claim in the “Introduction” to DA that democracy has been progressing for at least 700 years would imply that, at least within that time frame, there were no aristocratic equivalents of America. But none of this conflicts with the notion that the more democratic any society becomes, the more acquisitive it becomes. That connection does not change with history.

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<sup>56</sup> Tocqueville does give an account of the origins of the feudal aristocracy in his “Memoir on Pauperism” (see 40-43). Incidentally, OR is not the equivalent of DA for aristocracy because, like DA, it treats true aristocracy indirectly or by contrast.

<sup>57</sup> Furet and Melonio at one point make reference to an “ideal type of aristocracy that governed [Tocqueville’s] intellectual life (Furet and Melonio 1998, 25),” which his historical researches into pre-modern Europe pointed towards but, *qua* ideal, never quite existed in itself.

Furthermore, there is a difference between saying that a given city or country is uniquely successful at commerce, and saying that the desire and pursuit of well-being is the primary desire and pursuit of each level of society, rich, poor and middling. And that is what Tocqueville thinks is unprecedented—as if the whole society sculpted, cooked or studied the stars. It is a matter of empirical observation that no society has been as *universally* preoccupied with material well-being as American society. Even those in the lowest, most desperate positions are incessantly cooking up get-rich-quick schemes, and those at the top, who already possess more riches than they can ever make use of, never seem to retire. The universality of American materialism puts materialism beyond the status of a mere “distinguishing feature” as it was for Carthage, Venice et al., and raises the possibility that there might be something truly unprecedented going on in American society, which then raises the possibility that it might be connected to the correspondingly unprecedented level of egalitarianism in American society.<sup>58</sup> Again, everyone in America is middle class, even those who aren’t.

In order to see more clearly what Tocqueville considers to be the uniqueness of the universality of American materialism, consider the following. Traditional moralists and political philosophers regarded the unrestricted

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<sup>58</sup> As a corollary to this, Tocqueville argues in II.2.13 “Why Americans show themselves so restive in the midst of their well-being” that misery amidst abundance isn’t unique, but rather *universal* misery amidst abundance.

pursuit of wealth with caution, not only from a moral perspective (the simple sinfulness or viciousness of greed and luxury) but also from that of political advantage. Commercial prosperity may provide certain benefits to the polis or nation, but this must be weighed against commerce's tendency to fragment society along various lines and frustrate the aspiration towards the common good: industrialist vs. agrarian, supplier vs. demander, management vs. labor, Coke vs. Pepsi, local vs. national, and, most of all, rich vs. poor. Nothing causes factionalism like opposing material interests.<sup>59</sup>

There's no doing without money-making, but if not confined to a circumscribed, preexisting fragment of the population like the Jews or the metics, and/or restrained, old partisan divides will become hardened, new partisan divides will emerge, and revolution and civil war will become more and more likely. Tocqueville knows all of this (II.4.21, 607), hence his belief that something truly novel is happening in America. Not only has the Americans' hyperactive commercial activity *not* produced the effects predicted by the moralists, it even serves to unite the society more than before, because of its universalism. What the example of America shows is that, not only is a society not necessarily

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<sup>59</sup> “[T]he most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property. Those who hold and those who are without property have ever formed distinct interests in society. Those who are creditors, and those who are debtors, fall under a like discrimination. A landed interest, a manufacturing interest, a mercantile interest, a moneyed interest, with many lesser interests, grow up of necessity in civilized nations, and divide them into different classes, actuated by different sentiments and views. The regulation of these various and interfering interests forms the principal task of modern legislation and involves the spirit of party and faction in the necessary and ordinary operations of government (Madison, *Federalist* #10).” Madison’s solution to this problem may not be traditional but his analysis of it is.

divided by materialism, materialism may serve to unite. This goes not only for the division of labor, and for Americans' collective adherence to the moral doctrine of "self-interest well understood," but something even subtler and more fundamental. The Americans' hearts are all moved by the same commercial passions, facilitating sympathy; in America, commerce creates community (I.2.10, 369). The universality of the desire for well-being serves to unite the numerous, indifferent-to-tradition, centrifugally-tending Americans into a people. In America, paradoxically, focused concern for one's personal material good is the basis for compassion, because compassion can only exist between men equal and (more importantly) similar (II.3.1; see also *Emile* IV), and the desire to acquire is the principle of similarity in America. The great fellow-feeling Tocqueville observed amongst the Americans, which far surpassed that of the English, is even more remarkable in light of the great competitiveness characteristic of a capitalistic people. But that just goes to show that the desire for material well-being is not only an effect of equality, it is also a *cause* of it.<sup>60</sup>

How exactly does democracy cause materialism? Let us now move from Tocqueville's claim that democrats are more materialistic than aristocrats and delve further into his explanation of how and why this happens. We will go through three links between equality of conditions and the desire for material

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<sup>60</sup> This is but one example of the "deliberate confusion of causality" central to Tocqueville's concept of the social state and his political science more generally (Mansfield 1996b, viii, Mansfield and Winthrop 2000, xliii). He may have learned this from Montesquieu (See Rousseau *Confessions* VIII, 317).

well-being. The first and by far the most important is individualism, one of the most famous teachings in *DA*.<sup>61</sup>

Individualism functions as Tocqueville's state of nature teaching.<sup>62</sup>

Earlier, in the Introduction, it was discussed how, while Locke argues that men are naturally free, Tocqueville sees this as a condition only of modern, democratic man. In making men equal, democracy also isolates them (II.2.2 and II.4.3). Democracy discredits all forms of rank, privilege and inequality, and thus dangerously weakens the bonds that kept men and society together. No more is there any real *definition* in human relations, as there was in aristocratic times. In aristocracy, men were not only more different, more diverse, they were also closer and more dependent. Aristocratic society was natural; democracy's is manmade. The hierarchical arrangement of aristocracy provided for this, by allowing for a system of tight social bonds and "individual influences," a system of interlocking relationships of ruled and ruler.

In times of aristocracy, each man is always bound in a very tight manner to several of his fellow citizens in such a way that one cannot attack him without having the others rush to his aid. In centuries of equality, each individual is naturally isolated; he has no hereditary friends from whom he can require cooperation, no class whose sympathies are assured him; one easily sets him apart and rides roughshod over him with impunity. (II.4.7, 668)<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> There are many useful accounts of Tocqueville on individualism (Villa 2005a, Villa 2005b, Ceasar 1990, Maletz 2005), but few focus on its connection with materialism.

<sup>62</sup> See Manent 1996, Chapter Six, and Manent 1995, Chapter Ten on the similarities between individualism and the state of nature.

<sup>63</sup> See also I.1.3, II.1.21, 472, II.1.11, 439, II.2.2, II.3.1 and Manent 1996, Chapter Seven.

Tocqueville acknowledges that aristocratic exclusivity was one of the many forms of extremism in aristocratic mores, because it bred bizarre mixes of intense tenderness to one's own and equally intense cruelty towards others.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, he believes that aristocratic society functioned more easily than democratic society. Relations between all members of society were easier because men at all levels of aristocratic society were clearer about where they stood with one another. Paradoxical but true, it was because of inequality, because of the defined differences between men, that their bonds could be, so to speak, natural.<sup>65</sup> This does not mean that men were not selfish (II.2.2), but rather that aristocracy lacked the generalized tendency to separate men from one another that is built into the structure of democratic society. However clear the concept of obedience to the general will or (or, more precisely, one's own will) may be on an abstract, theoretical level, obedience to another individual's personal will always be much clearer, practically speaking. This fact favors aristocracy, because all social life depends on obedience. In democracy, Tocqueville says, "obedience has lost its moral character" ("The Social and Political State of France Before and After 1789," quoted in Manent 1996, 19). In

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<sup>64</sup> See especially the letter from Madame de Sevigne quoted in II.3.1 "How mores become milder as conditions are equalized." See also Allan Bloom on Polemarchus' (and also apparently Lessing's) conception of justice (Bloom 1991, 317-8). Incidentally, it is not true that these extremely tight bonds of affection and loyalty only existed within particular families and estates; they often also existed between masters and servants (II.3.5).

<sup>65</sup> Tocqueville's appreciation for how difference conduces more to stronger bonds than similarity can be seen in his discussions of the relations between American men and women (II.3.12). Just like in Rousseau's theory of the sexes, the relations between men and women in America are so harmonious because the natural differences between them are so well respected.

aristocratic times, it was not thought immoral or below one's dignity to obey another, but in democracy, "the only legitimate obedience is obedience of a person to himself (Manent 1996, 21)."

Because men are all equal in democracy, they tend also to view themselves as independent. Individualism is the name for the unenlightened love of independence that arises out of this separateness. Originally caused by equality (II.4.1), individualism is a "sentiment," an active force, which, if left unchecked, leads to abject selfishness and civic apathy.<sup>66</sup> When Tocqueville uses the term "individualism," he is always referring to a problem.<sup>67</sup> Individualism is the name for the tendency of equality of conditions to separate men from one another and dissolve the bonds of loyalty, trust, obedience which had held pre-democratic society together, and that's a problem, both for society and the individual.<sup>68</sup>

In order to fight individualism, society must be remade anew, and a new principle for order and harmony must be discovered since hierarchy is out. The American example proves that such principles can be discovered, that individualism can be tamed, "defeated (II.2.4, 486)," even, and that order and

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<sup>66</sup>Mansfield and Winthrop 2000, xxxviii.

<sup>67</sup> See Villa 2005a, 664.

<sup>68</sup> Although individualism is most typically associated with *DA*, it is useful also to compare Tocqueville's use of the same teaching in *OR*, to explain the problems of pre-Revolutionary France (see "Preface," 87, II.8, 9 esp. 162-3; Furet and Melonio 1998, 31-41). In *OR*, Tocqueville speaks of the "collective individualism" of aristocratic society in its decayed form, wherein civil society is fragmented into independent and alienated groups, not different individuals.



harmony can be engineered without hierarchy. The Americans' success in taming individualism may be expressed as a paradox: although the Americans are "the greediest people on the globe (I.2.10, 317)," Tocqueville is not worried about their selfishness. Americans have selfishness under control because they have found a solution to individualism, at least in terms of its political dimension. In some sense this confidence that individualism can be mastered is what's most distinctive about Tocqueville's teaching on individualism in the modern age, distinguishing it from doomsayers such as Ortega y Gasset and Maistre. Tocqueville devotes most of *DA* II.2 to showing the various means by which the Americans have accomplished their victory over individualism's political effects, through both habits (civic associations), and doctrines (self-interest well understood).

For now, we must leave aside Tocqueville's discussions of individualism's political effects and the Americans' defeat of them, fascinating though they might be.<sup>69</sup> Here we are interested in the effect of individualism on the individual's soul, and how it causes materialism. This has political consequences, too, but in a more indirect way. Individualism undermines authority as such, and one form of authority is tradition. Traditionally, tradition

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<sup>69</sup> For discussions of individualism (and how the Americans have prevailed over it) from a more directly political angle, see Villa 2005b, Maletz 2005 and Ceaser 1990.

was the main source of habit, belief, and desire.<sup>70</sup> As a result of their passion for equality, however, the Americans “take tradition only as information (II.1.1, 403).” Tocqueville does not view this modern disposition to doubt traditional sources of authority as a good and liberating thing. By what will men take their bearings? How will they determine the content of the good, the true, the right, all of which must be articulated, at some level of consciousness, for human life to be possible? From a very young age, Tocqueville was skeptical of the possibility of living with doubt.<sup>71</sup> Radical doubt is harmful not only for society but for an individual soul (II.1.2, II.1.5, and *OR* I.3.1-2). Tocqueville at one point even goes so far as to imply that doubt about fundamental religious questions is humanly impossible (II.1.5, 417) Answers must be provided for the fundamental questions and clearly nearly all men cannot find them by means of an independent exertion of their faculties (see *ECHU* I.3.24). But neither are men disposed to “take the superior reason of one man or one class as a guide for their opinions,” as they did in aristocratic times.<sup>72</sup>

Something must give, since neither the natural light of their individual reason nor traditional authority can provide democrats with the guidance they

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<sup>70</sup> “Originally, the authority par excellence or the root of all authority was the ancestral (Strauss 1953, 91).” Ortega y Gasset argues that modern man is distinguished by his “radical ingratitude...[like that of] the well-known psychology of the spoilt child” (Ortega y Gasset 1957, 58; see also Chapter Six). Tocqueville does not seem to be concerned about the ingratitude implicit in individualism.

<sup>71</sup> Jardin 1988, 61-4 and Lawler 1993, 92-3.

<sup>72</sup> Contrast also Constant’s account of ancient societies’ “complete conviction in all matters.” (*Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation* II.6 and “The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns.”)

need. There are two results of the effect of individualism on belief: one, the absolute tyranny of public opinion in American society and two, materialism. In the first case, deference to authority is revitalized as conformism, justified by either self-deception (“How dare you accuse me of not thinking for myself-I’ve read Al Gore’s *The Assault on Reason!*”) or respect for majority rule (“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 (I.2.7, 236).”<sup>73</sup> Tocqueville famously argues that the tyranny of public opinion over the individual intellect in America is far more complete than in pre-democratic society (I.2.7, 243-5, II.1.1, and II.1.2). Democratic society goes beyond the horse sense found in all societies because certain opinions are *totally* unopposed.<sup>74</sup> Intellectual life in modern democratic times is more homogenous than in pre-modern aristocratic times, even under absolute monarchies (II.1.2, II.3.17, and II.3.21, 615). It is paradoxical but true that never have there been times so conducive to dogmatism and narrow-mindedness as “the centuries of doubt” (I.2.3, 179-180, II.2.17, and II.3.21, 613) in which people now live.

As for the second effect of individualism on moral belief, equality casts into doubt all moral goods. This effect will provide, at long last, the primary

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<sup>73</sup> Related to this point is Tocqueville’s claim that the real cause of the strength of religious conviction in America is not the belief that that it is revealed truth, but because it possesses the force of majority opinion (Manent Chapter Four). “[R]eligion itself reigns there much less as revealed doctrine than as common opinion (II.1.2, 409).”

<sup>74</sup> Manent 1996, Chapter Four is the best explanation of this.

answer we seek to the question “how does democracy make men materialistic?” Certainly all thoughtful individuals in all times have recognized and struggled with the difficulty of distinguishing between the various human goods. Which good is the greatest good? Can it be harmonized with the lower goods? If not, how to negotiate the tension? In democratic times, all the natural uncertainty about the good is intensified by individualism. Due to individualism, men receive less guidance from trustworthy sources in dealing with the question of the moral good. And as moral goods become more uncertain, *material* goods show themselves as that much more certain and therefore fetching: “[I]n their doubt of opinions, men in the end attach themselves solely to instincts and material interests, which are much more visible, more tangible, and more permanent in their nature than opinions” (I.2.3, 180; see also II.3.17). Material goods become more distinct as moral goods become fuzzier. This is how equality, by means of individualism, tends to make men materialistic.<sup>75</sup> In democratic times, the only things which are certain are material, and thus men take to them more aggressively. What is left when all ends are cast into doubt? The need to live is what is left. When all authority is destroyed, material ends become the most compelling ends to pursue. Although Tocqueville initially presents his concept of individualism to explain *how* people believe in

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<sup>75</sup> “One must recognize that equality...tends to isolate [men] from one another and to bring each of them to be occupied with himself alone. It opens their souls excessively to the love of material enjoyments (II.1.5, 419).”

democracy, in the end, it also accounts for *what* they believe. When neither tradition nor reason is available, men's "only star and compass" is material goods (Manent 1996, 59).

Individualism provides the best explanation for the difference between aristocracy and democracy with respect to the pursuit of material well-being. In aristocracy, material goods were treated not as ends but as means (II.2.10).<sup>76</sup> Tocqueville retains the traditional aristocratic perspective in that he believes that this tendency to focus more and more exclusively on material goods is a prime defect of democracy. The historical development of democracy has changed man in many ways, but it has not changed him so much as to make him satisfied with only material well-being.<sup>77</sup> But democracy does have the power to change men's beliefs, habits and desires enough such that means tend to be *taken* as ends. This confusing of means and ends is essential to the phenomenon of restlessness. Americans treat material goods as the exclusive ends, but this indicates a fundamental confusion on their part, for there is for Tocqueville such a thing as human nature, intrinsic to which are spiritual needs as well as material needs.

To return to the point made earlier about how individualism functions as Tocqueville's state of nature teaching, in this connection between individualism and materialism, we see a close similarity between Tocqueville and Locke.

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<sup>76</sup> See *Ethics* I.8. On Aristotle's influence on aristocratic morality, see Strauss 1952, Chapter IV.

<sup>77</sup> See Manent 1996, 59.

Democracy makes men individualistic and, connected with this, it instills in them a preference for material things. Locke's state of nature doctrine implies not only that men are naturally independent of one another but that they are concerned primarily with lower, material goods. There are no gods in the state of nature; when men are "in nature," they seem to be outside of both political and religious authority. Both democratic individualism for Tocqueville and nature for Locke are active forces that set men apart from one another and turn them toward material goods.

So with respect to the American obsession with material well-being, individualism's effect is essentially negative-it tends to rule out all goods other than the non-rule-outable material kind, thus explaining the utter centrality of material goods in American moral life. Just as with Hobbes on power and Locke on property, means transform into ends when it is recognized that means are more certain than ends.

Incidentally, this account of how democracy leads to materialism by way of individualism is not so different from the most famous account of the connection between modernity and materialism, Max Weber's. It could be said that Tocqueville's teaching on inquietude is an attempt to answer the same question that Weber is trying to answer: how did the limitless pursuit of wealth come to be morally accepted in modern times after having been denounced by virtually every moralist for centuries? In Weber's account, the Protestant-

Calvinist believer is motivated by a desire to know that he is saved, and anxious about his prospects because, as a Protestant, he cannot look to his works and guidance by the church. Inevitably, in his desperate search for signs that he is one of the elect, and for relief from the “feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual (Weber 1948, 104),” he will look towards how he fares in the world. Tangible worldly success becomes hugely important for the certainty-seeking anxious believer. Both Tocqueville and Weber describe a scenario in which the condition of doubt leads towards the pursuit of material goods. The inability to live with doubt, to tolerate uncertainty, leads to limitless acquisition.

We might also note a certain “Pascalian” character to the link between individualism and materialism in Tocqueville’s thought. Many scholars have attempted to look to Pascal to explain Tocqueville, to varying degrees of plausibility (this will be discussed later at greater length). Whether or not Tocqueville made this connection as a result of his Jansenist education, there is a resemblance to Pascal’s understanding of diversion and the turn towards material goods in Tocqueville’s account of democrats (Manent 1996, 58-9). Material goods are attractive in the sense that they provide more solidity to people who are spiritually adrift as a result of the doubt that the age of equality has instilled in them. The differences are that Tocqueville says this is more of an issue for democrats, and that the pursuit of material well-being is just one form of diversion for Pascal.

Let's pause to get our bearings. We are still trying to account for the dominance of the concern for material well-being in democratic American life, which is the most crucial element of Tocqueville's teaching on inquietude. Individualism is the most important part of the explanation, because it explains how, by rendering doubtful the goodness of most other moral goods, it makes material goods that much more desirable.

There are a couple other factors which also turn democrats towards the pursuit of material well-being, relating to certain aspects of democratic and American mores. Tocqueville does not say that the Americans are *only* interested in material well-being. The democratic revolution has not been so total as to eradicate all the higher yearnings natural to the human soul. But what happens is that Americans seek to fulfill those higher yearnings through commerce. Even when material goods are not the *end* which motivates the action, the pursuit of them often defines the *form* of the action. Men are still attracted to virtue in democracy, but their pursuit and exercise of virtue takes on different character: they pursue virtue through commerce.

In order to understand the full moral appeal of the pursuit of material well-being in democracy and America, certain revaluations of values with respect to commerce must be understood. For example, in America, a slavish single-minded pursuit of gain is more likely to be considered having a good work ethic than a slavish single-minded pursuit of gain (II.3.18, 594). Also, in



America, Tocqueville observed that bankruptcy is much less morally stigmatized than in Europe (*Ibid.*). This could simply be attributed to the fact that in democracy, more people are borrowers than lenders and the majority rules, but this is not Tocqueville's interpretation. He claims it is because Americans honor "audacity" and "recklessness" over caution in commercial life.<sup>78</sup> As a result of democracy, men possess entirely new moral dispositions, and with respect to both intellectual and active virtue, these new dispositions direct them towards the pursuit of material well-being. There are two important ones: the new conception of practical reason and the attractiveness of commerce to the American moral imagination. Let's first take intellectual virtue, the new democratic understanding of practical reason.

Americans believe that someone who acquires without any defined end is more likely to understand the world as it really is than someone who doesn't. A favorable orientation towards limitless acquisition constitutes American prudence. The premise of this attitude is a belief in the fundamental instability of worldly goods (I.2.10, 387-8, II.2.17, II.2.19, II.3.6, and II.3.18, 594). Men in democracies believe that worldly goods are unstable and, what is more important, this motivates them to do something about it. This latter feature distinguishes the American moral outlook from many pre-modern instances of

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<sup>78</sup> Though not directly about the topic, TR's "Man in the Arena" speech (given at the Sorbonne on April 23, 1910) helps to explain why Americans are so easygoing about bankruptcy.

belief in the instability of worldly goods, such as the medieval image of Fortune's wheel, or the book of Ecclesiastes. The democratic mind equates fortune or the instability of worldly goods with opportunity. Most of the great American capitalists either founded or significantly expanded their fortunes during times of economic depression.

Goods are unstable, so we must strive to secure them through acquisition. The goods of the world are more unstable because the moral and political barriers placed on acquisition no longer exist. Sure, nature and chance still affect the distribution of material goods: there are still hurricanes, earthquakes, locusts, boll weevils, etc., in a modern democracy. But to the extent that human intention exercises at least some influence over the fixity and thus availability of worldly goods to all comers, aristocracy and democracy maintain opposite positions on acquisition. The whole intent of primogeniture, perhaps the most distinctive institution of aristocratic society, was to prevent the dissolution of property, of great estates, and thus to thwart fortune as much as possible.<sup>79</sup> In democracy, there are not only laws outlawing primogeniture, there is also the estate tax, whose purpose is to disrupt the inter-generational transfer of wealth. Also, equality of opportunity inevitably causes the distribution of worldly goods to be less regular and orderly. "There is no country in the world where particular

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<sup>79</sup> See also the discussion of leases in *DA* II.3.6. The critique of primogeniture is of course an important part of Locke's liberalism. See *IT*, Chapter VI and *2T*, Chapter VI (esp. 72-3).

fortunes are more unstable than in the United States. It is not rare that in the course of his existence the same man rises and falls back through all the stages that lead from opulence to poverty” (II.3.10; see also I.1.3, 51). Here we are of course reminded of Machiavelli, Bacon, Locke and in some sense modern philosophy more generally, which tends to hold that a favorable disposition towards unlimited acquisition is the sign of practical or “worldly” wisdom. This does not mean that the Americans learned this new moral attitude from Machiavelli or Bacon: as with Descartes, the Americans follow Machiavelli without having read him. And to pursue this logic to its ultimate moral conclusion, because goods are necessarily unstable, there cannot be any natural or legitimate limits on acquisition. What would be the justification for ceasing to acquire, or to grow or to save? Either the economy is growing, or it is receding.<sup>80</sup>

Democracy, in the short term at least, renders the world and its goods unstable. This is an objective fact, from which men draw the subjective, moral implications we have just discussed. But of course, the question could be raised if this new, Machiavellian definition of prudence should not be more accurately understood as a *cause* of the democratic world’s instability more than a moral imperative derived from it. The problem is as follows. Democracy encourages

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<sup>80</sup> “The great manufacturing or commercial concern which does not earn at least interest upon its capital soon becomes bankrupt. It must either go forward or fall behind: to stand still is impossible” (Carnegie 2006, 3). See also *2T* 157, *Leviathan* XI.1-2, *Discourses on Livy* I.6.4, *Prince* III, XXV and Mansfield 1996a, 290. This has great implications for the fate of moderation in democratic times, as well as prudence. Moderation will be discussed below, in connection with luxury.

more men to rise, because it instills in them pride in their individual capacity. Elsewhere, aristocratic vestiges or limited natural resources might hinder this effect of democracy, but the example of America shows that, when left unhindered, democracy does or can have this emboldening effect on men. Thus, from the perspective of the naïve observer, worldly goods seem tremendously unstable and up for grabs. People rise, lots of people rise, then others notice this effect and interpret it as evidence that “all the things of men are in motion.” But they are deluded because what they observe is the direct effect of human intention, art. The instability seen and experienced in America is not simply given by nature. Aristocrats would say human choice made the world unstable or at least more unstable, and therefore this new definition of prudence is just democratic ideology. Democratic “prudence” excuses greed by exaggerating necessity. Democrats don’t want any stigma attached to their desire to get rich quick and so they dream up an extreme view of the world to justify it.<sup>81</sup>

How would Tocqueville the consummate non-partisan settle this? He would allow, to some degree, the aristocrats’ contention that this is a self-fulfilling prophecy: Machiavellian prudence does make the world more objectively unstable. However, he would probably give more weight to the democratic perspective and say that the change in American moral attitudes is a

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<sup>81</sup> It is not necessary to be an aristocrat to make this argument. See also John Kenneth Galbraith’s *The Affluent Society*.

fairly minor factor relative to the grand historic march of equality. Equality of conditions opens up new opportunities and makes the world more unstable, and the vast broadening of equality of conditions was not effected by human choice. The most important factors in the rise of equality of conditions-the invention of the printing press, the Catholic church, Louis XIV-contributed to democracy's rise accidentally, without any conscious effort of furthering equality, and their effects are matters of necessity. Because of the instability of goods in democracy, democrats, rich, poor and middling alike, possess a keener sense of necessity and of the main chance than aristocrats did. Many of the more distinctive features of democratic mores are owing to this.

Another interesting thing about American greed (in addition to its universality and its mildness) is that it is *not* rooted in or in anyway related to cynicism. The greed of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century French after the Revolution and Napoleonic wars is sometimes equated with the cynicism resulting from the experience of having seen man at his worst. After nobility and liberty have shown themselves to be chimerical, stand-ins for the most barbaric actions, then it is tempting to conclude that money and power are only the things that are real. The years following the American Civil War were also marked by a remarkable degree of greed, cynicism and corruption; similarly so for Britain and Europe following the Great War. But this is not the case of the Americans' greed when

Tocqueville is writing. The Americans have not endured unspeakable sufferings and are not jaded. They are both worldly wise and innocent.

We are dealing with the effect of democracy on mores. The gradual development of equality of conditions has made the pursuit of material well-being more attractive. We have gone through two examples of this-how individualism makes men more materialistic, and the new, democratic understanding of practical wisdom. The third has to do with the attractiveness of commerce to the democratic moral imagination. In America, commerce is an honorable activity. Not only are those who succeed in commerce in America *not* apt to be regarded as cheats and scoundrels, but they are likely to be held up as positive exemplars of moral good. It is assumed that only the intelligent, strong and daring succeed in commerce. Commerce calls forth virtue, which means that, as a corollary, Americans are attracted to commerce not only because of the promise of financial gain, but because of the natural attraction of virtue. They discern “a sort of heroism in [their] greed for gain (I.2.10, 333).” “In democracies there is nothing greater nor more brilliant than commerce; it is what attracts the regard of the public and fills the imagination of the crowd; all energetic passions are directed toward it” (II.2.19; see also I.2.9, 268-72, II.1.17, II.2.18, II.3.18, endnote XX, 700-1, Mansfield and Winthrop 2000, xxxv and lxxix, and Winthrop 1988, 163-4).

Of the three ways in which democracy inclines men to commerce, this third one is the most distinctively American, because it is common in America but rare elsewhere. But Tocqueville does not want to say that it is only American or caused by incidental factors which have nothing to do with democracy (geography, coastlines, etc.). The honorability of commerce, commercial virtue, is caused by democracy-it is not incidental to it.<sup>82</sup>

What's the relationship between commerce and greatness in America? For Tocqueville, the attraction to greatness is natural to the human heart, and transcends democracy vs. aristocracy and pre-modernity vs. modernity. Commerce on the grand scale in which it is found in America is found to encourage *human* development, not just economic development. This was envisioned by Alexander Hamilton, who argues in his "Report on Manufactures" that a great, complex economy will "Furnish...Greater Scope for the Diversity of Talents and Dispositions which Discriminate Men from Each Other" (the title of Section Five).<sup>83</sup>

This is interesting. Many of the modern political philosophers who promoted commerce and unlimited economic development did so in a deliberate

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<sup>82</sup> Manent 1996, 57. Tocqueville is interesting to compare to Weber on this point. For Weber, there have always been daring entrepreneurs: there is nothing modern about that. What *is* modern is the level of organization, rationalism and sobriety in service to the pursuit of unlimited acquisition in modern society (Weber 1948, 24).

<sup>83</sup> "When all the different kinds of industry obtain in a community each individual can find his proper element and can call into activity the whole vigor of his nature, and the community is benefited by the services of its respective members in the manner in which each can serve it with most effect ("Report on Manufactures," Section Five)."

effort to simplify human life even if that meant stunting human development. Human perfection is a goal both too high and ineffective for politics. In order to create a more effective basis for morality and politics, they looked to the passions in order to locate the one which would provide the most peace and stability, isolate it, and then rely on it even at the expense of human perfection. The queen passion, or “interest,” that was singled out to perform this function was the desire for material well-being.<sup>84</sup>

Tocqueville is saying that this is not entirely the case in America, that the higher aspirations of the human soul (in a further departure from much modern thought, Tocqueville does use “soul”) are not totally left unfulfilled. The desire for virtue or greatness is an important motivation behind American commercial life.

As discussed in the Introduction, democracy is more just, but aristocracy greater. But we do find, at least in the case of America, a slight qualification on democracy’s anti-greatness tendency, in the exalted, poetic language Tocqueville uses to describe daring, strenuous American commerce. Like Montesquieu in *Spirit of the Laws* XX, Tocqueville sings a hymn to commerce, not to poeticize a mundane prosaic thing, but because poetry is somehow appropriate to great commerce. Tocqueville is clearly very impressed by the imperialistic-

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<sup>84</sup> See Hirschman 1977, Part 1 and also 129, 132-3. Hirschman discusses Hume, Montesquieu and other minor modern philosophers.



materialistic exertions of the daring pioneers, despite their being not the best examples of democracy's justice.<sup>85</sup>

Commercial virtue, poetic commerce is not simply American because it owes its existence also to the fundamental mildness of democracy. Democracy makes men materialistic and also softer. Men are more compassionate because they are so much more alike. Consequently, they view commerce as a more suitable arena for heroism than conquest or war. The effect is similar to Montesquieu's teaching on *doux commerce*,<sup>86</sup> but with the difference that democracy is the root cause of everything for Tocqueville. In Tocqueville, democracy makes men materialistic and soft, independent of the fact that it also makes them commercially-minded (II.3.1, II.3.4). Commercial-mindedness softens men, too (II.3.21, 609), but democracy is what is fundamental, because it causes commerce directly, and indirectly, by making men milder and less inclined to pursue greatness in war. Democracy causes mildness and commerce, which, respectively, cause commerce and mildness.

Tocqueville stops short of claiming that commerce supplies "the moral equivalent of war." He does not expect men with an especially high-minded and exacting attachment to virtue to be satisfied with commerce. But it is true that the qualities summoned by both endeavors are similar-sangfroid,

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<sup>85</sup> Manent 1996, 58-59.

<sup>86</sup> *Spirit of the Laws* XX-XXI, Manent 1998, Chapter One. "The spirit of commerce has a tendency to soften the manners of men, and to extinguish those inflammable humors which have so often kindled into wars (Federalist #6)."

resourcefulness, determination.<sup>87</sup> Democracy is, generally speaking, less vainglorious than aristocracy, but also simply vainglorious in different ways.

Commercial honor in America only slightly qualifies the tendency of democracy to stifle greatness, and among the three factors which incline democrats towards the pursuit of material well-being (individualism, prudence, honor), it is the least important. But it does serve to illustrate the uncanny tendency of democracy in America to commit all focus and energy towards commerce, because even what few heroic souls there are tend to turn towards commerce.

For the purposes of explaining why democracy makes men inclined towards the pursuit of material well-being, our discussion is complete. However, before leaving this section on material well-being, perhaps we might state, in a more general way, Tocqueville's views on commerce. Democracy and commerce are intrinsically connected; democracy is the cause of the widespread pursuit of material well-being, and is also, historically speaking, its effect. Commerce contributed much to the rise and spread of equality of conditions, but equality of conditions also, through individualism and a revaluation of values, inclines men towards the pursuit of material well-being.

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<sup>87</sup> Tocqueville believes there is *something* to the democratic peace theory (II.3.26, 631), but does not think we should go too far with it. Democracy, through commerce, contains tendencies to make men prefer peace, but it also, in less noticeable ways, can incline men towards war.

Does Tocqueville view this as good or bad? We will take up this question more directly in the second part of this chapter, but here are a few thoughts in anticipation. The universality of the pursuit of material well-being provides a bond of unity and fellow-feeling which the desire for something higher such as virtue or salvation could never provide. This is good. However, left untutored, the intense obsession with material well-being is bad for both the individual soul and society. It stifles and weakens the spiritual dimension of men and can lead to drastic inequalities. Commerce makes men mediocre, thisworldly, and, most ominously, it also can cause them to neglect their rights and duties as free citizens of a democratic republic.

Tocqueville's attitude towards commerce in the modern world is best described as one of resignation. In democratic times, materialism/commercialism is inevitable, and so the wise legislator and political scientist will look for ways to leverage this attachment and use it to support political freedom. Tocqueville is anxious to emphasize that an inordinate attachment to material well-being is one of the main causes for the appeal of despotism, because it can make people weak and short-sighted. Freedom is more conducive to commercial prosperity than despotism of any form, and this popular belief can provide a reliable, if mercenary, support for freedom in democratic times. The Americans understand that free peoples tend to be more prosperous than non-free peoples. But not all peoples will realize this; on

balance, materialism is more of a threat than a support to freedom (II.2.14). It is eminently possible that democrats will sacrifice their freedom for comfort, because in the short term, despotisms are often in a better position to offer material well-being than democracies.

However, on the whole, Tocqueville is willing to go along with the other modern political philosophers who argue that the partnership between political freedom and commerce is mutually beneficial. This partnership was promoted by philosophers such as Hume and Montesquieu in a conscious attempt to replace the ancient partnership between political freedom and war.<sup>88</sup> Freedom is good for commerce because free peoples tend to be more prosperous than those under monarchies and especially those under despotism. Commerce is good for freedom because commercial prosperity is simply essential for national strength, and because men can be taught to view freedom as an essential means toward the end of greater prosperity.<sup>89</sup>

American materialism is an extreme; a number of factors which have nothing to do with democracy also encourage Americans toward commerce, such as their vast expanse of land, the lack of revolution and general peacefulness in its past, their having no serious rivals near them, and their descent from the English (who were also a most industrious, commercial people).

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<sup>88</sup> See Randal Hendrickson, "Montesquieu and the Problem of Republicanism: A Reexamination of the Treatment of Ancient Republics in the *Spirit of the Laws*," and Pangle 1973, 86-89.

<sup>89</sup> See Hume's essays "Of civil liberty," "Of commerce," and "Of refinement in the arts."

But the taste for material well-being will be found in all democracies. Towards the end of Volume II, Tocqueville famously raises the threat of soft administrative despotism. Democrats possess powerful, intrinsic tendencies toward relinquishing their freedom in exchange for greater equality and/or greater material well-being. And this discussion seems to be aimed at democracies *other* than America, who have not instituted the array of curbs against despotism that America has. Tocqueville did not write *DA* for Americans. At the end of Volume II, he is clearly looking past America to argue that *all* democracies need to be wary of keeping their desire for material well-being under control, lest they consent to exchange their freedom for it.

Tocqueville views commerce and democrats' powerful attachment to it with equanimity. He acknowledges the many lamentable aspects of the heightened commercialism of the modern West, but seeks to make the best of it. He sees good and bad things about it, and provides counsel about the difference between what is inevitable and what may be changed.

### ***I.3 Intensity***

At the outset of this chapter, inquietude was defined as "the intense, limitless pursuit of material well-being." The preceding account of the material well-being part of the definition also explained how democracy causes

inquietude. These next sections will concentrate less on its causes and more on elaborating its characteristic features of intensity and limitlessness. How do we know it when we see it?

The intensity of Americans' efforts at satisfying this desire was also touched on earlier, in the discussion of individualism. When all human ends are cast into doubt, all the energies which would be devoted towards other pursuits are absorbed by the pursuit of secure material well-being (II.1.9, 429-30). Consequently, it becomes more intense. It's so easy to make a fortune in America. No wonder that art, theatre, belle-lettres, philosophy, music, romantic love, and architecture stagnate, and commerce flourishes (II.1.9). Much of the time, effort and attention which in other places would be devoted to cultivating these pursuits are instead directed towards commerce, and that makes it more intense. In other times and places, commercial progress has been concomitant with progress in the fine arts, but in America, commerce seems to prosper at the expense of civilization.

In America, an important reason for why the pursuit of material well-being is so intense is because idleness is stigmatized:

In America I sometimes met rich young people, enemies by temperament of every painful effort [!], who had been forced to take up a profession. Their nature and their fortune permitted them to remain idle; public opinion imperiously forbade it to them, and they had to obey. I have often seen, on the contrary, in European nations, where aristocracy is still struggling against the torrent that carries it away, I have seen, I say, men whose needs and desires constantly spurred them on remain in idleness in

order not to lose the esteem of their equals, and submit more easily to boredom and discomfort than to work. (II.3.18, 595)<sup>90</sup>

Contrast this with the following passage from Nancy Mitford's *Madame de Pompadour*:

Versailles, in the eighteenth century, presented the unedifying but cheerful spectacle of several thousand people living for pleasure and very much enjoying themselves. Pleasure, indeed, had an almost political significance since the nobles, removed from their estates and drugged with useless privilege, had to be kept contented and amused...Nineteenth century historians, shocked by the contemplation of such a merry, pointless life, have been at great pains to emphasize the boredom from which, they say, the whole Court, and the King himself, suffered. No doubt a life devoted to pleasure must sometimes show the reverse side of the medal, and it is quite true that boredom was the enemy, to be vanquished by fair means or foul. But the memoirs of the day, and the accounts of those courtiers who lived through the Revolution and remembered the *Ancien Regime*, do not suggest that it often got the upper hand; on the contrary they speak, one and all, of a life without worries and without remorse, of a perfectly serene laziness of the spirit, of perpetual youth, of gambling in the great wonderful palace, its windows opening wide on the fountains, the forest, and the western sky (Mitford 2001, 93-4).

This passage is brought up not to stress how much more hedonistic aristocrats were than democrats (although that's true, too), but to illustrate how much easier aristocrats' consciences were about leisure. That these 18<sup>th</sup> century aristocrats could idle so much time away, confident in already having achieved human perfection, apparently without going insane with boredom, implies that

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<sup>90</sup> Tocqueville says that those rich Americans who do not accept that they "[owe] it to public opinion to devote [their] leisure to some operation of industry or commerce or to some public duty" often abscond to Europe where "they find the debris of aristocratic societies among which idleness is still honored (II.2.18)."

they were able to take their leisure with a good conscience. Pascal famously contended that literally doing nothing and just being is extremely challenging for all men as such (*Penseés* 136, 622).<sup>91</sup> Tocqueville seems to think that it was at least somewhat easier for aristocrats. Because democrats have a bad conscience about leisure, what Oscar Wilde called “the great aristocratic art of doing absolutely nothing”<sup>92</sup> is to them unknown and uncultivated. Democrats are impatient (II.1.3, 414) and ill at ease in the present.

To characterize aristocrats as lazy seems at odds with the “extremist” characterization of aristocratic morality given in the Introduction, until it is recognized that laziness is in fact itself an extreme, whose opposite is spiritedness. Aristocrats, like primitives, were known for being both lazy and warlike.<sup>93</sup> Getting up late was a distinctive aristocratic custom,<sup>94</sup> but so was dueling (Locke addresses dueling and aristocratic morality in *ECHU* II.28.15). Democrats are very different: they work harder but are more peace-loving. Democrats live their lives more at an even keel than aristocrats, the impression they give of their restlessness notwithstanding.

Restlessness and leisure with a bad conscience are two sides of the same coin. Democrats cannot live in the present; the present discomfits them and so

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<sup>91</sup> This is also addressed in Eric Rohmer’s *La Collectionneuse* and Rousseau’s “5<sup>th</sup> Promenade” in the *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*.

<sup>92</sup> *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Chapter Three.

<sup>93</sup> Hence Tocqueville’s likening the American Indians to aristocrats (I.2.10, 314).

<sup>94</sup> Contrast the entry for “Early Riser” in Flaubert’s *Dictionary of Accepted Ideas* with *Poor Richard’s Almanac*, 5, 15, and 17.



they constantly strive to leave it behind and live in the future. All accounts of restlessness, including those of Locke, Tocqueville,<sup>95</sup> Pascal (*Pensées* 47, 148), and Rousseau (*Emile*, 410-1) cite this as an essential feature of it. A restless man is always somehow extended into the future, and never at home in the present. Hobbes claims that this “anxiety for the future time” is the origin of all science and religion (*Leviathan* XI.24 and XII.1-5).

“There exists...in democratic societies agitation without a precise goal (I.2.5, 202).” This was not so in aristocracy. Aristocratic society was characterized by “repose” (II.1.13, 447, II.1.16, 453, II.1.17, 458, and II.3.21, 610) and “immobility” (II.1.11, 439; II.1.17, 461), each individual viewing himself as part of a fixed, greater whole, such as his family or estate or (in ancient times) city. This belief in the immobility of human things was good and bad. It tended to produce elevation of mind and spirit. It was also responsible for the characteristically aristocratic vices of fatalism (II.1.8), complacency (too much “maintaining [instead of] perfecting” (I.2.5, 202; II.1.8) and lack of seriousness, especially with respect to material goods, but also, to some extent, with respect to spiritual.<sup>96</sup> Democracy, by contrast, implies a mobile, restless life in which

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<sup>95</sup> “Vague restlessness and an incoherent agitation of desires have always been a chronic malady with me...I lack the greatest of all conditions of happiness: the tranquil enjoyment of present good” (“Letter to Sophie Swetchine, February 11, 1857,” *Selected Letters*, 248.)

<sup>96</sup> For a discussion of aristocracy’s tendency to produce complacency and amateurism, a discussion which is on the whole sympathetic to aristocracy, see “The World” from David Cecil’s *Life of Melbourne*. Amateurism/non-professionalism is a classic critique of aristocracy, which did much, over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, to lead to a decline in aristocracy’s hold over many institutions, such as the civil and

change, within certain limits, is constant. “Democratic nations...like movement for itself (II.1.16, 453).”

This “leisure with a bad conscience” phenomenon, characteristic of democratic life, is one example of the intensity of the pursuit of material well-being in democracy. So is the seriousness of democrats.

It has occasionally been alleged throughout our history, by both non-Americans and Americans, that Americans are a singularly frivolous people.<sup>97</sup> Whatever may be the case with 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans (and always remember when reading Tocqueville that his arguments about the nature of democracy are not necessarily discredited if America changes), Tocqueville does not describe the Americans he encountered as frivolous. Tocqueville in a few instances describes the Americans as “serious” or “grave” (II.3.3, II.3.11, 571, and II.3.15). Democrats are more serious than aristocrats in Tocqueville’s view; they are less fun (I.2.5, 205, II.2.19; although southerners are an exception to this I.2.10, 360-1), more care-full, and more anxious. Tocqueville certainly questions whether the Americans are serious about the right things, but they are definitely, in their way, serious men. Tocqueville thinks the aristocratic and democratic forms of religion differ in many ways (the political influence of the clergy, the arguments in favor of religion that people are most likely to find persuasive), but

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foreign service and the clergy. See also Max Weber’s “Politics as a Vocation” and Strauss on the gentleman’s “noble contempt for precision (Strauss 1953, 142).”

<sup>97</sup> See for example Solzhenitsyn’s “A World Split Apart.”

he refrains from saying that either democrats or aristocrats were more deeply religious. Aristocrats may have been overly easy going and complacent at times, but at least such seriousness that they did possess and exercise occasionally was directed towards the highest, greatest things.

Not only may this gravity of the Americans be understood as a form of intensity in itself (isn't it always implied that someone who is said to be grave is also intense?), but it also may be understood to cause the pursuit of material well-being to be more intense, through its effect on the Americans' exercise of instrumental reason. America is a place in which unprecedented consensus reigns about ends-the pursuit of material goods is universally respected. With respect to means, the means towards material well-being, the main object of Americans' intense anxiety, the case is different. "It is a strange thing to see with what sort of feverish ardor Americans pursue well-being and how they show themselves constantly tormented by a vague fear of not having chosen the shortest route that can lead to it (II.2.13, 521)." How to know if there is not an easier path towards to ease? Democracy causes men to be grave and anxious about means (Manent 1996, 56).

Aside from being superficial, Americans have the reputation of being an "innovative" people, good at tinkering, at finding and making new tools, and not

at all constrained by traditional ways of doing things: “a nation of engineers.”<sup>98</sup> This also is not Tocqueville’s view. Tocqueville does believe that tradition has a negligible influence over Americans, but he does not believe that Americans excel in terms of instrumental reason. Americans are an energetic people and are extremely persistent with respect to the ultimate end of greater well-being, but they are also restless and impatient. Americans lack the capacity to see some machine, art or technology through to the end. They get frustrated easily, which is okay, since their sheer limitless energy ensures that, through trial and error, chances are good that they eventually will prevail in the end. But they will not do so in a smooth, efficient manner. Restlessness breeds faddishness, which is harmful to progress (II.1.10).<sup>99</sup> Tocqueville describes the Americans’ knack for achieving progress despite their ineptitude as a “privilege”: “The great privilege of the Americans is therefore not only to be more enlightened than others, but to have the ability to make repairable mistakes (I.2.5, 216).”

Americans are innovative in the sense that they are open to trying new means to a given end, but they have a short attention span. If some innovation does not yield results immediately and convincingly, they toss it. Tocqueville’s discussion of Robert Fulton’s initial failure to interest his fellow countrymen in the steamboat illustrates this point (I.2.9, 289). For Tocqueville, the example of

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<sup>98</sup> See, for example, Adams 1986, Volume I, Chapter VI, 123-4, and Ortega y Gasset 1957, 138-9.

<sup>99</sup> Incidentally, this nexus of restlessness and a penchant for fads also gives democratic literature a bias towards the shocking and sensational (II.1.13, 449).

the Americans illustrates that instrumental reason leads not only to wholesale irrationality, but also retail irrationality (contrast Strauss 1953, 4-5).

Aristocracy does not have the same taste for technological progress that democracy does (II.1.8, 427), but aristocracy is actually better suited to executing it. Aristocracies can plan and implement progress from the top down, in the form of projects whose overall ambitions may be maintained in the event of temporary setbacks or confusions. The accelerated modernizations of Japan and Germany, which made them so formidable, so fast, were greatly facilitated by the aristocratic structure of those countries.

What's the relation between this impatience about means and the gravity of the Americans? Should we say that the phenomenon is democratic, or is it just an American quirk? Their gravity is the cause of their impatience. In Tocqueville's account, they intensely exercise their instrumental rationality because of their constant contact with necessity. The instability of worldly goods-the awareness of which is a constant preoccupation of the democratic mind-is the primary form that this contact takes. (Tocqueville also observed a constant obsession with mortality in the Americans, which could be understood as a sensitivity towards the instability of fortune (II.2.13)). Democracy places more men in direct and constant contact with necessity than aristocracy did. Aristocrats tended to take too much for granted; democrats take nothing for granted. Democrats' familiarity with necessity makes them concerned about

their well-being, and imbues in them a sense of responsibility for it, but in a manner detrimental to their rationality. (We will return to the question of restlessness and rationality shortly.)

Necessity makes men “realistic,” but it also makes them impatient and hasty in their deliberations. Thus Americans obsess constantly over their ability to gain some measure of control over the instability of worldly goods, which spurs them on to find the best means to secure well-being. In the meantime, obviously, they fail to notice how much well-being they have already secured and are too busy to enjoy.

The intensity of American commercial activity is best understood as an extreme—all democracies will experience democracy’s materialistic tendency, but not necessarily to the degree of America. Democrats will be more energetic, graver, and more anxious in their deliberations than aristocrats were. But their energies will not necessarily be as exclusively absorbed in commerce as the Americans are. From Tocqueville’s perspective, this means that there is hope for a democratic higher civilization, although, as with democratic freedom, this will take work to achieve.

#### ***I.4 Limitlessness: Tocqueville on worldly asceticism***

We have proceeded quite far in our account of inquietude in America, but we have one last part of the initial definition to explain, namely the restlessness of inquietude. Why is the pursuit of material well-being limitless? To say that Americans are restless is to say that there is no limit to their activity. Why is this? Why don't their intense strivings after material well-being ever end? Why does satisfaction elude them? It is strange that we should be asking this question at all. "Material well-being" is a particular type of material good. It refers to stable comfort, commodious living, what is often referred to as a "bourgeois" existence, one materialistic through and through but not at all dissipated. Though Rome under the Caesars or 18<sup>th</sup> century Versailles may be said to have been materialistic times (indeed, even *intensely* materialistic), men pursued material goods of an entirely different stamp than in America, ones rare, exquisite, and cruel (II.2.11). In times of aristocratic decadence, men were constitutionally incapable of satisfaction because their idea of the good life was coming up with new and exotic desires and satisfying them. Their vaunted ambitions sometimes expressed themselves as the desire to rule the world, at others in purely sensual ways.<sup>100</sup> However, in democratic times, fewer people aspire to rule the world, and their sensual or materialistic ambitions are similarly limited:

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<sup>100</sup> See Plutarch's "Life of Anthony."

The taste for material enjoyments does not bring democratic peoples to similar excesses. There, the love of well-being shows itself to be a tenacious, exclusive, universal, but contained passion. It is not a question of building vast palaces, of vanquishing and outwitting nature, of depleting the universe in order better to satiate the passions of a man; it is about adding a few toises<sup>101</sup> to one's fields, planting an orchard, enlarging a residence, making life easier and more comfortable at each instant, preventing inconvenience, and satisfying the least needs without effort and almost without cost. These objects are small, but the soul clings to them: it considers them every day and from very close; in the end they hide the rest of the world from it, and they sometimes come to place themselves between it and God. (II.2.13)

In light of how low the Americans aim in their materialistic ambitions, why is it they have such a deuced hard time fulfilling them? American materialism is at once intense and mundane.

Another way to pose this question is: in light of the fact that the Americans are so materialistic, why is there no luxury in America? Americans are constantly engaged in commerce, but apparently not because they want to enjoy a more refined life. They certainly don't seem to ever experience that life. This lack of a correlation between commercialism and luxury in America was particularly interesting to Tocqueville and is at the heart of the phenomenon inquietude. Americans are an intensely commercial people, maybe the most intensely commercial people ever, but they are not luxurious. What accounts for this?

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<sup>101</sup> This is a measure of land (like "acre").



In some sense, the Americans can be viewed as exemplars of the new moderation promoted by modern philosophers such as Montesquieu and Hume. Modern moderation is explicitly utilitarian. It is not to be practiced for the sake of itself—because it is simply morally good to be moderate—but to increase wealth by making possible a more enlightened and prudent pursuit of it. This is an integral component of what is sometimes referred to as “the new republicanism,” because this form of moderation provides a link between the tameness in mores and reasonable, reliable attachment to liberty that republicanism needs, but which is compatible with the modern commercial disposition.<sup>102</sup> While classical republicanism castigated commerce and luxury, accusing them of undermining all support for virtue and freedom, the proponents of the new republicanism say that they have identified, in commercial mores, a more reliable support for freedom than the warlike classics ever found.

One reason why democracy does not favor luxury in the traditional sense is because it does not favor the conditions required for great artisanship. With respect to the prospective clients of great artisans, democratic taste is too utilitarian: “Democratic nations...will cultivate the arts that serve to render life convenient in preference to those whose object is to embellish it; they will habitually prefer the useful to the beautiful and they will want the beautiful to be

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<sup>102</sup> “What is praised is not so much a divine or noble and graceful coordination of appetite with reason for its own sake, but rather the enlightened, calm, and prudent pursuit of security and ease for oneself and for the society in which one finds oneself (Pangle 1988, 92).”

useful (II.1.11).” In aristocracies, the artisan’s view of his profession and his clients’ demands conspired to produce high art. Artisans during aristocratic times had more professional pride than democratic artisans: it wasn’t just a job to them. In many cases, the practicing artisan expected to ply his particular trade for his whole life, as did his ancestors and as would his descendants. The guild system blurred the lines between occupation, family and class (*Ibid.*).

The clients of these artisans in aristocratic times, the aristocrats themselves, tended to possess tastes which were at once exacting, fixed and coherent. “As this aristocratic class is held immobile at the point of greatness where it is placed, without either contracting or expanding, it always experiences the same needs and feels them in the same manner. The men who compose it naturally draw from the superior and hereditary position they occupy the taste for what is very well made and very durable (*Ibid.*).” Many exquisite marvels resulted from this happy coincidence between aristocratic clients’ desire and artisans’ capacity.

Democratic progressivism (II.1.8) is also the enemy of craftsmanship and thus luxury, according to Tocqueville. Believing in progress makes it difficult to believe that perfection is achievable. If it is widely assumed that watches (Tocqueville’s example-II.1.11, 441) will improve inexorably with the march of time, then watchmakers may not be inclined to devote themselves to making the best watch they can in the present. Watchmaking may be still be a serious craft,

but the focus shifts from how to make the best watch possible to how make watches as cheaply and efficiently as possible. In aristocratic times, craftsman of all varieties had more of an incentive to make things that would last. Tastes and desires changed little in aristocracy; aristocrats in some sense thought of themselves as existing outside of time and change (II.1.11, II.2.2, 483).

Aristocracies did not deny the possibility of progress, but, unlike democrats, they certainly did not assume it nor did they believe that it would extend to all things. Not only did they believe in the possibility of perfection, but for all they knew, they had already achieved it in most things (II.1.8, 427). Democrats are humbler about their own perfection because they are such deeply optimistic believers in progress. So there will be no democratic equivalents of Mont St. Michel and Chartres, even though, in principle, there's no reason why there couldn't be. Engineers are just as smart, materials and labor are abundant, but democratic mores won't allow it.

In democracy, the clients are less exacting, their tastes always in flux, and they are more willing to accept compromises at a lower price. Restless democrats are always up for shortcuts, and this goes for both artisans and clients. The clients' desires are unstable and ever-expanding and thus ever-changing. And the artisans are then in turn inclined to take a more utilitarian view of their trade, and doubly so if they are not planning to ply it for the rest of their lives (II.1.11). Sometimes, this means greater efficiency in production, but inevitably,

it also means cheaper stuff. "Democracy not only tends to direct the human mind toward the useful arts, it brings artisans to make many imperfect things very rapidly, and the consumer to content himself with these things (*Ibid.*)."<sup>103</sup> Tocqueville says that a good indicator of how far the democratic revolution is advanced in any place is how many Wal-Mart's are there: "if I perceive that the products of the arts [in any given modern society] are generally imperfect, in very great number and at a low price, I am assured that among the people where this happens, privileges are weakened, and the classes are beginning to mix and are soon going to be confused with one another (*Ibid.*)."

Of course, on the question of luxury, it's important to note that the Americans' utilitarianism does not make them absolutely resistant to superfluities. There is a sort of "democratization of luxury," which qualifies the extent to which Americans have severed the connection between commerce and luxury. Egalitarianism restrains the extravagance of the rich, but there is a thriving trade in lower and middle class luxuries, which are no less useless for being inexpensive. (There is even a word for this distinctly modern, democratic form of luxury—"gewgaw."<sup>104</sup>) This modern democratized version of the problem of luxury is what Tocqueville attempts to explain in his short work "Memoir on

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<sup>103</sup> The doctrine of perfectibility also provides something of a justification for shoddy artisanship (see Tocqueville's anecdote about the shipbuilder II.1.8).

<sup>104</sup> Of course, some contend that luxury is natural to man as man, and that the lower classes have always had at least some affinity for it: "O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars/Are in the poorest things superfluous (*King Lear* II.2.453-4)."

Pauperism.” Why do the wealthiest modern nations have the highest rates of indigence? Because wants turn most easily into needs for their inhabitants, including those amongst the lower classes. The modern lower classes experience a greater degree of comfort than any medieval baron, and are in this sense provided for to a historically-unprecedented degree. But satisfaction still eludes them because the modern poor have greater desires than the pre-modern poor. (Tocqueville also concedes that the middle ages’ system of private and religious charity would not suffice in modern times.)

Luxury and comfort are extremely different types of goods. Indeed, it often seems as if luxury is not a material good at all. Who is more superficial—the free-spending dandy or the obsessive miser? Who is more spiritual? Perhaps a truly materialistic individual is one only concerned with comfort or material well-being. Luxury and comfort are often found separate from one another. Only men in modern times truly know of comfort. In Medieval times, “life was brilliant, ostentatious, but not comfortable. One ate with one’s fingers on silver or engraved steel plates, clothes were lined with ermine and gold, and linen was unknown; the walls of their dwellings dripped with moisture, and they sat in richly sculptured wooden chairs before immense hearths where entire trees were consumed without diffusing sufficient heat around them. I am convinced that there is not a provincial town today whose more fortunate inhabitants do not have more true comforts of life in their homes and do not find it easier to satisfy

the thousand needs created by civilization than the proudest medieval baron (“Memoir on Pauperism,” 44).”<sup>105</sup>

Tocqueville implies that comfort is more difficult to achieve than luxury because “comfort presupposes a numerous class all of whose members work together to render life milder and easier (*Ibid.* 44).” There definitely are luxurious desires in modern times. But the conditions for fulfilling them, or fulfilling them in a way that will do credit to modern democratic civilization, are not good.

Tocqueville’s ultimate position on luxury is complicated. Commercial progress is inevitable, but high civilization is not, or will take more time. Tocqueville does not expect that America will lack a taste for finer things indefinitely. Inequalities of wealth are certainly inevitable. And despite his fear about the emergence of a new industrial aristocracy, he does see possible benefits from it, namely patronage of the arts and thus a new, modern, democratic civilization.<sup>106</sup> The democratic philistinism rooted in the preference for the useful over the beautiful may therefore be countered. Let commerce produce inequalities, and inequalities will produce an idle rich who can devote their time to endowing universities, supporting the opera, buying up Old Masters from

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<sup>105</sup> See also Lewis 1957, Chapter Two on the architecture of Versailles (“Magnificence was what was aimed at in a seventeenth-century house, not comfort”) and Ortega y Gasset 1957, 57.

<sup>106</sup> Louis Auchincloss argues that this essentially did happen during the Gilded Age, which witnessed capitalism at its most unrestrained, but also the produced most of the great American artists such as Edith Wharton, Henry James, Mark Twain, and John Singer Sargent (Auchincloss 1989).

Europeans in need of liquidity, and so on. For Tocqueville, this is to be looked forward to. It is a disappointment that commercial progress has not produced higher civilization, and he stresses that this need not be the case for all democracies in the future, and maybe not even for America. Tocqueville is pro-luxury in the sense that, unlike Rousseau, he is pro-civilization.<sup>107</sup>

The fundamental reason for the lack of a connection between aggressive commercial activity and luxury in America is central to Tocqueville's understanding of inquietude. Inquietude, for Tocqueville, is really a mix of restlessness and orderliness. The example of the Americans shows that democratic restlessness does not preclude orderly mores. This is seen in the hyper-commercialism and non-decadence of American society. Order and restlessness even support each other. Commerce implies restlessness, but success in commerce requires orderly mores.

American domestic life is also a safe haven for orderly mores amidst the otherwise turbulent, restless American landscape. Tocqueville does not see an incongruity between the wild, open-endedness of public commercial life and stable domestic life ("...a morality so relaxed and so austere in the same people" II.3.18, 595). On the contrary, his thesis is that the constraint in domestic matters is *caused* by the intense commercial focus. People are generally inclined against

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<sup>107</sup> The best place to look at for the purpose of comparing Tocqueville's views on civilization and progress with Rousseau is his "Memoir on Pauperism."

adultery, or any other domestic disorder, because it is a distraction from business, the business of America.<sup>108</sup>

This notion of a nexus of order and restlessness leading to limitless desire and activity we see in Tocqueville's discussions of religion in America. At some level, the restless, materialistic American way of life is contrary to nature. The American character is out of accord with human nature because, in focusing so intensely on their material needs, Americans neglect their (equally natural) spiritual ones. Like Augustine, and Psalm 41 (the text for Palestrina's sublime motet *Sicut Cervus*), Tocqueville did believe that central to human nature was a natural restless, erotic yearning for the divine (this is a major difference between him and Locke).<sup>109</sup>

The soul has needs that must be satisfied; and whatever care one takes to distract it from itself, it soon becomes bored, restive (*inquiet*), and agitated amid enjoyments of the senses.<sup>110</sup> If the minds of the great majority of the human race were ever concentrated on the search for material goods alone, one can expect that an enormous reaction would be produced in the souls of some men. The latter would throw themselves head over heels into the world of spirits for fear of remaining encumbered in the too narrow fetters that the body wants to impose on them. (II 2 12)

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<sup>108</sup> "They do best, who, if they cannot but admit love, yet make it keep quarter, and sever it wholly from their serious affairs and actions of life; for if it check once with business, it troubleth men's fortunes, and maketh men that they can no ways be true to their own ends (Bacon "Of Love")." See also Winthrop 1986, 241-244.

<sup>109</sup> Kraynak even argues that "Christian natural law, is the ultimate foundation of Tocqueville's constitutional theory (Kraynak 1987, 1194)."

<sup>110</sup> Mansfield and Winthrop note that this sentence is almost a direct quotation from Pascal (Mansfield and Winthrop 2000, xxxi).



This results in dissatisfaction, which they misunderstand the roots of, and respond by redoubling their materialistic efforts.

Now, to say that Americans neglect their spiritual needs might sound surprising, in light of the Americans' religiousness of which Tocqueville makes so much in *DA*. It is true that Tocqueville often portrays religion as existing as a kind of stable constant reserve of order and moderation, but this has more to do with religion's influence on politics and less on the individual soul. With respect to the latter, American religion does not present the image of order and stability. There is something unhinged about American religious life, not necessarily in a dangerous way, but in a way that causes American society to vacillate continually between material and spiritual extremes. This comes out especially in chapter II.2.12, which immediately precedes "Why the Americans show themselves so restive (*Inquiets*) in the midst of their well-being," his most extended discussion of inquietude. Here Tocqueville discusses what historians of American religious life refer to as "The Second Great Awakening," a time of renewed religious enthusiasm occurring right around when Tocqueville visited America. The central tenet of the "Great Awakening" school of American religious history is that America goes through *cycles* of religious seriousness, alternating periods of straying and then feverish, repentant enthusiasm.

In II.2.12, Tocqueville professes the Great Awakening theory and also gives his own explanation of it. He compares what he saw at revival meetings to

the extremes witnessed during the time of the late Roman empire, when it was going through its height of materialistic decadence, and the early Christian church was at the height of its purity: "It is said that the persecutions of the emperors and the tortures of the circus peopled the deserts of the Thebaid; but I think that it was rather the delights of Rome and the Epicurean philosophy of Greece (II.2.11)." Of course, the extremes found in America are less extreme than in Rome—revivals and itinerant preachers as opposed to stylites and desert-dwelling, and commodious well-being as opposed to gladiator combat. Tocqueville does not portray these religious excesses as in any way dangerous or violent, a threat to the abiding freedom and enlightenment of American society. But they do betoken dividedness of soul and thus misery and restlessness. The tameness of these vacillations may be seen as a cause of their perpetuation, which goes for the mundaneness of American restlessness more generally. So to respond to the initial paradox—how can American materialism be at once limitless and mundane—part of the answer is that the mundaneness facilitates the limitlessness.

According to Tocqueville, the Americans' restlessness with respect to material things causes them to be restless with respect to spiritual things. We are saying here nothing different than what was said above about "gravity" and the intensity of the pursuit of the quickest means to material well-being in America, except that now the picture looks more cyclical. Their experience of necessity

and concerns about death make them serious about acquisition (II.2.13, 512). Americans would not be so religious if they were not so obsessed with acquisition throughout most of their lives. Intense commercialism is the cause of the “Great Awakening” phenomenon and of evangelical Christianity altogether. (As with the above discussion of heroic commerce, all moral phenomena in America seem to be somehow related to, even if not always derived from, their relation with material goods (II.3.17-18).)<sup>111</sup> At the most fundamental level, religion is based in the deep and permanent spiritual needs of human nature, but as to *how* those needs tend to be fulfilled, this is influenced by convention, which in the case of democracy means having to contend with the intense materialism of men.<sup>112</sup> That’s why American religious history has this cyclical character, which parallels the interior religious and commercial life of the individual American.

To put the point differently, and without reference to religion, we recall that what originally draws Tocqueville’s Americans to the pursuit of material well-being is material goods’ relative stability. In discerning something especially solid and reliable not only about material goods, but also the limitless *pursuit* of material goods, there is no denying that the Americans are onto

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<sup>111</sup> “Equality makes the passion for material enjoyments and the exclusive love of the present predominant in the human heart; these different instincts mix with the sentiment of ambition and tinge it, so to speak, with their colors (II.3.19, 603).” See Winthrop 1986, 249-50.

<sup>112</sup> Tocqueville explicitly says that religion will have to change to shape itself to democracy. See II.1.5, “How, in the United States, religion knows how to make use of democratic instincts.”

something. Several of the acutest minds who studied the human passions in modern times noted a unique “constancy” in the passion for material well-being. In Albert Hirschman’s words, the passion for material well-being’s “very insatiability now became a virtue because it implied constancy.”<sup>113</sup> Most passions such as love and vainglory are fickle, fanciful and unreliable. But not the passion for material well-being, which, due to its constancy, possessed a unique appeal for those thinkers, such as Montesquieu, Hume, and, in his own way, Locke, who sought a queen passion around which to order political and moral life. These thinkers turned what was traditionally thought to be an absurd or vicious quality of this passion into a virtue. There is thus a way in which, in addition to softening mores, the all-consuming character of the endless pursuit of material well-being gives a *scientific* character to moral and political life which provides a new basis for order and peace. The orderliness that characterizes American life in *DA* is evidence that the passion for material well-being can serve this purpose.

The remainder of Tocqueville’s explanation of the limitlessness of the pursuit of material well-being has to do with the rupture between desire and capacity, which in turn has to do with how democracy has changed both desire and capacity. Equality of conditions, because it means equality of opportunity, increases both the number of men’s desires and their strength. However, it also

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<sup>113</sup> See Hirschman 1977, 54-6 and Myers 1998, 9.

prevents men (along with natural inequality) from satisfying all these new and stronger desires (II.2.13). Although democratic nations are stronger in a collective sense, their citizens are weaker. Relative to the size of their desires, individuals in democracies are weak because they lack the capacity to fulfill them.

Also relevant is the democratic mind's penchant for abstract ideas, and its effect on desire. The democratic taste for abstract ideas has two causes. First, Tocqueville says that equality gives men "a taste for abstraction." Abstract ideas are pleasing to the democrats' minds, because they provide relief from the painful necessity of having to reason for oneself. This taste originates out of intellectual laziness generated by individualism: lacking recourse to tradition or authority and lacking also the capacity to work things out for oneself, a common solution for the restless democratic mind is to seek comfort in a one-size-fits-all abstract idea or theory (II.1.3, II.1.7, II.1.16, and II.3.19). Busy men have lazy minds (II.1.3, 414, II.1.4, 416). The restlessness of American life alters desire by giving vaguer, abstract forms of expression a "certain secret charm" (II.1.16, 457). "[I]n the case of language, democratic peoples prefer obscurity to workmanship (*Ibid.*)."<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> The democratic penchant for abstractions also accounts for the poor quality of American rhetoric (see "Why American writers and orators are often bombastic," II.1.18, 464).

The second, and more legitimate cause for abstract ideas' influence is less of a desire or taste and more of a habit or disposition. Democracy simply makes men used to thinking in terms of abstractions, because it is hostile towards the distinctions of form and kind which characterized pre-modern life and made it so vivid and diverse (II.1.3).

We have discussed already Tocqueville's account of how democracy effaces the difference between rich, middling and poor. Democracy is a great force for homogeneity over all human things such as manners, rituals, dress, and forms of address. Democracy attacks human diversity because of the lack of publicly recognized forms of rank and because of the universal and all-consuming nature of the desire for material well-being among democratic souls. Democracy is premised on an abstraction,<sup>115</sup> so democrats should not be faulted but so much for tending to think and speak in terms of abstractions.

Democracy encourages an over-reliance on abstract ideas and abstract ideas stimulate desire by tainting particular satisfactions and spurring on further efforts. There are two desires especially characteristic of democracy-the desire for material well-being and the desire for equality. Both are insatiable due to the democratic mind's tendency to believe that only abstractions are true and real. In the case of the "ardent, insatiable, eternal, invincible" passion for equality

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<sup>115</sup> "The [French] Constitution of 1795, like its predecessors, is made for *man*. Yet there is no such thing as *man* in this world. I have never seen one in my life; if man exists, it is without my knowledge" (de Maistre quoted in Ceaser 1990, 148-9).

(II.2.1, 482, II.2.13, and II.4.3), abstractions point out each new inequality as the next object of the will, and persistently focus attention away from the particular and present toward the general and future.<sup>116</sup>

As for the desire for material well-being, the desire more of interest here, abstract ideas hinder democrats' ability simply to drift in the present and enjoy what they have without thinking of their next scheme. Is this as good as it gets? Is there something better? (The threat that reason and abstraction pose to happiness will be treated at greater length in the next chapter, on the connection between rationality and happiness in Locke.) Simpler beings less given to abstractions because their rational faculties are less-developed have an easier time accessing ease. The democratic reliance on abstract ideas gives an expansiveness and thus limitlessness to the desire for material well-being.

Turning now from democracy's effect on desire to its effect on capacity, the capacity of primary interest here is reason.<sup>117</sup> Are the Americans a reasonable people? The answer is complicated. On the one hand, Tocqueville often describes them, especially in their practice of politics, as an exceedingly rational or "enlightened" people, far more so than their French counterparts. This Tocqueville makes clear in all his discussions of, for example, the American constitution and federalism, free institutions, and estate law (I.1.6, 95, and I.1.8,

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<sup>116</sup> See *Spirit of the Laws* VIII.3, "Of the Spirit of Extreme Equality" and Manent 1996, 9.

<sup>117</sup> See II.3.11 for Tocqueville's discussion of the effect of democracy on imagination.

149, 155-6). Throughout all these discussions, Tocqueville advances the propositions that (1) America proves that there *can* be political order in democracy, and (2) political order in America is not just “spontaneous order,” reasonableness in effect not intention. In the case of politics, the Americans really do seem, at some level, to understand why they are doing what they are doing. Tocqueville makes clear that the Americans’ enlightenment-their rationality-is not of an especially high, elevated, refined character, but it is real, and, to a remarkable extent, distributed throughout all levels of American society (I.2.9, 289).<sup>118</sup> “[I]f the passion of the Americans for material enjoyments is violent, at least it is not blind, and reason, though powerless to moderate it, directs it (II.2.14, 516).” Reason directs the passion for material well-being, specifically, by convincing the materialistic Americans that only free peoples are prosperous.

Political rationality in this sense is not caused by democracy as such. The American example shows how the rule of reason in politics is *compatible* with democracy. Reason can rule in democracy, but there is certainly no necessity to this. Tocqueville predicts that democracy will most likely only work for peoples who have had a long experience of freedom and enlightenment. That claim, in a phrase, sums up most of Tocqueville’s explanation of why American democracy

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<sup>118</sup> For a good discussion on what Tocqueville means by the enlightenment of the Americans, and its differences and similarities from the Enlightenment proper, see Maletz 2005, 11-2.



has been a success and French democracy has not. Not all democracies will have the blessedly long experience with self-government that America has had.

Most basically, democracy promotes a different, more utilitarian form of reason than does aristocracy. Tocqueville has serious reservations about purely instrumental reason. He claims that the exclusively instrumental employment of reason is a primary cause of the limitlessness of the pursuit of material well-being, and the rupture between desire and capacity. An overly instrumental bent leads towards haste and stupidity in reasoning. This is the argument of II.2.16, "How the excessive love of well-being can be harmful to well-being" and "On the gravity of the Americans and why it does not prevent their often doing ill-considered things (II.3.15)." In these two chapters, Tocqueville develops his conception of restless rationality, and its tendency to produce dumb, half-baked ideas:

In democracies men are never settled; a thousand accidents make them change place constantly, and there almost always reigns something unforeseen and so to speak improvised in their lives. Thus they are often forced to do what they have learned badly, to speak of what they scarcely understand, and to engage in work for which they have not been prepared by a long apprenticeship. In aristocracies each one has only a single goal that he constantly pursues, but in democratic peoples the existence of man is more complicated; it is rare that the same mind does not embrace several objects at once, and often objects very foreign to one another. As he cannot know them all well, he is easily satisfied with imperfect notions. When the inhabitant of democracies is not pressed by his needs, he is so at least by his desires; for among all the goods that surround him, he sees none that is entirely out of his reach. *He therefore does all things in haste, contents himself with approximations, and never stops but for a moment to consider each of his acts* ....The habit of inattention ought to be considered

the greatest vice of the democratic mind. (II.3.15, 584, emphasis added; see also II.1.10, 434)

Aristocracy promoted the use of pure, theoretical reason more than democracy does. This is a shame in itself, for philosophical greatness is yet another form of greatness for which aristocracy seems to have provided a more fertile soil (II.1.10, 435-6). But it is also a shame for the cause of utilitarian science. Reason in any form, exercised towards any object, best performs its function when not pressed to produce hastily (II.3.15) and when not directed towards such a narrow range of ends. These conditions are more likely to be fulfilled in an individual or people with some experience with the non-instrumental or philosophic exercise of reason. Even though the instrumental use of reason is, by definition, not for wisdom for the sake of itself, the same conditions are required: a patient, meditative spirit and the freedom from having to produce right away. Thus, restless, impatient American society thwarts instrumental reason just as much as it does philosophic reason (II.1.9, 429, II.1.10, 438). "The soul must remain great and strong, if only to be able from time to time to put its force and its greatness in the service of the body (II.2.16)."

Americans are an admirably rational people when it comes to politics, but when it comes to the pursuit of the moral good and happiness, they are deeply

confused. Utilitarian reason is neither as rational, nor as useful, as it purports to be.<sup>119</sup>

Let's sum up. With respect to the distinction between America and democracy, America is at once more rational than democracy on its own and perfectly representative of democracy's antipathy to reason. Although both democracy and enlightenment are associated with the modern world, there is no natural connection between them. Democracy as such does not lead to enlightenment, and "the Enlightenment" was but one of the many causes of the gradual rise of democracy. Enlightenment is an extra-democratic factor which, in the case of the Americans, helps to support freedom, and to demonstrate that democracy is compatible with the rule of reason. America also shows that democracy threatens reason. Democracy means inquietude-restlessness, haste, constant motion. The busy-ness of American life puts tremendous strain on reason to produce, which is bad for reason, and explains why so many purportedly "enlightened" Americans make so many stupid decisions.

Perhaps the simplest thing to say about the disjunction between desire and capacity in America is that the Americans experience the classic paradox of progress, as criticized by Rousseau in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Discourses. All their extravagant, intense, focused efforts at satisfying their desires only serve to

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<sup>119</sup> This relates to a debate between Spengler and Ortega y Gasset. Spengler believes that technological development will be able to continue in the absence of a genuinely philosophical natural science that addresses fundamental philosophical problems but Ortega y Gasset disagrees (Ortega y Gasset 1957, Chapter Nine and Twelve).

multiply and produce new ones rather than satisfy the ones they already have.<sup>120</sup> Tocqueville knew Rousseau's argument and drew from it in his understanding of modern progress. However, there are two differences worth mentioning between Tocqueville and Rousseau. First, Rousseau sees the connection between progress of the arts and sciences and moral corruption and misery as a kind of natural law of civilization. Tocqueville is interested in the same sort of effects as Rousseau, but for him the fundamental cause is not the progress in the arts, sciences and commerce, but democracy. Second, Tocqueville is *for* the progress of the arts and the sciences and worried that democracy won't produce enough of it. He is concerned that the connection between commercial progress and the progress of the arts and the sciences won't be close enough. Like Rousseau, Tocqueville is definitely concerned about democracy's tendency to make men focused exclusively on material goods, and does think that it poses a real threat to political liberty. But Tocqueville is more tolerant than Rousseau and more willing to make compromises.

As should be clear by now, "equality of conditions causes all" is a deceptively simple statement. Not all of the tension within modern societies and individual souls is due to the conflict between democracy and aristocracy. Democracy gives rise to certain qualities that are difficult to reconcile with one

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<sup>120</sup> See Mansfield and Winthrop 2000 on how art and nature conspire in America to increase desire without limit (lxvii), and on reading *DA* II.2.13 as a critique of modern political philosophy (xxxix).

another. Democracy sets the soul against itself, by giving us both the desire for freedom (II.4.1) and a desire for material well-being. Democracy attacks the very qualities it needs to survive.<sup>121</sup> Democratic political science must grapple with two types of tensions: those between qualities inherent to democracy and between democracy and extra-democratic factors. Unlike Robert Dahl, John Dewey, and Al Smith, the solution for Tocqueville is never “more democracy.” There are good qualities natural to democracy, but these require art, care and freedom to be brought out. This challenge defines the scope of human freedom in the democratic world and the task for “a new political science needed for a world altogether new.”

The fundamental fact of the modern world is democracy. The character of democracy is best apprehended in the example of America. America shows us that democracy makes men restless. It does by inclining them to the pursuit of material goods, by making it intense, and then by making it limitless. This explains why restlessness is a uniquely modern condition.

## **II.1 *The dark side of inquietude***

The discussion of “what is inquietude, and how does democracy cause it?” is now complete. We proceed now to Tocqueville’s teaching on inquietude. As mentioned at the outset, like all traditional political scientists, Tocqueville is

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<sup>121</sup> Mansfield 1996b.

concerned with the forms of political arrangement and what factors support and undermine them. The preceding discussion has attempted to show the connection between inquietude and democracy. Democracy produces inquietude, but does inquietude support or undermine democracy?

Tocqueville is ambivalent about inquietude. On the one hand, inquietude is associated with all the more undesirable aspects of American life, such as the unhappiness of the Americans and their lack of greatness. On the other, inquietude seems to be connected with freedom, and therefore essential to preventing democracy's drift towards despotism. The following discussion will explain this ambivalence. First we will go into Tocqueville's criticism of inquietude, how it is part of his teaching on what to avoid in American democracy. In Volume II of *DA*, Tocqueville spends a good deal of time detailing the unhappiness and mediocrity of the Americans. Those who believe Tocqueville to be anti-democracy, and even anti-modern political philosophy, base their reading on these discussions. Essentially what will be emphasized here is what is obvious to most readers of *DA*, that, despite the Americans' immense strength, wealth and freedom, you wouldn't necessarily want to be one. After this, it will be argued that Tocqueville counsels tolerance of inquietude, due to its connection with freedom. Tocqueville's political teaching is primarily concerned with supporting freedom, and there turns out to be an important connection between inquietude and freedom. We will conclude with

some words on Tocqueville's audience. To whom does Tocqueville counsel tolerance for inquietude?

## **II.2 *Neither virtuous nor happy***

America never will be a nation envied for either its greatness or its happiness. This Tocqueville makes clear in his most comprehensive statement on inquietude, II.2.13, "Why Americans are so restless [*inquiets*] amidst their well-being." In this chapter, "inquietude" and "misery" are virtually interchangeable terms. Tocqueville claims that Americans are constantly tempted by suicide and would do it, too, were it not that their religion forbids it. The fact that unhappiness exists amidst conditions of remarkable material abundance is not new, he says. What *is* new, is that a whole people would be so blessed and at the same time such utter strangers to the sweetness of life. What accounts for this? In this case, it seems to be more democratic than uniquely American factors that make the Americans unhappy. Men are unhappy because their desires are limitless, because equality both expands desires and prevents their fulfillment (II.2.13, II.3.19). Men are also unhappy because they neglect their natural spiritual needs in their endless quest for material well-being. This is to say that the more democratic a people becomes, the unhappier it will become (unless, perhaps, it was absolutely wretched before democracy). Not to be overly

dramatic, but the situation is, in a sense, tragic: “In the absolute monarchies that custom and mores temper, [men] often display an even and cheerful humor because, having some freedom and great enough security, they are diverted from the most important cares of life; but all free peoples are grave because their minds are habitually absorbed in the view of some dangerous or difficult object (II.3.15).”<sup>122</sup>

Americans are constitutionally incapable of savoring the fruits of their strenuous labors. They are unhappy because they can't live in the moment-to-stop and enjoy what they have, before immediately moving on to the next thing. Democratic individuals display the opposite tendency of democratic governments, who often seem incapable of focusing on anything except the present or the short term (I.2.5, 212-4, I.2.7, 238-9, II.2.17, and II.3.19, 603). The situation in aristocracy was opposite. Aristocrats tended, as individuals, to drift in the present but, as collectives, they often proved themselves capable of very far-sighted policies. Democratic individuals are chained to the foresight they lack collectively.

This existence has been described, unfavorably, as the “joyless quest for joy,” but there is an argument for it, made, as we shall see in the next two

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<sup>122</sup> Presumably this would apply to aristocratic republics as well, although Tocqueville never applies the “all free peoples are grave” point to aristocracy. Montesquieu seems to have come to a similar conclusion through his studies of the system of English liberty (see *Spirit of the Laws* XIV.13, XIX.27, Manent 1998, 47, and Rahe 2009, Chapter Two). In an effect very similar to Tocqueville's description of democratic individualism, Englishmen are said to possess “*esprit inquiet*” as a result of being isolated from one another.



chapters, by Locke. Maybe it is better not to drift in the present, and to maintain awareness of the fact that pleasures are fleeting, and that they are not simply given but have conditions. To resist this notion is to live in an illusion. Weak, untutored human nature inclines us to think that just because the good times are here now, they will be here forever. Yes, an anxious disposition does result in the production of new desires before the old have been fully satisfied, but more desires also means more industry and thus more increase and security. Despite all the restlessness and misery of civilized life, who, given the option, sincerely would prefer to be a Lotus Eater or South Sea Islander?

This is Locke's view; it is not Tocqueville's. Tocqueville thinks that there is something stupid and transparently unattractive about the Americans' inability to be happy. In democracy, inquietude is inevitable, for the reasons covered in Part I, but there is no point in deceiving ourselves by making a virtue out of necessity. All things being equal, it would be better to be happy. Tocqueville believes that the restless, inquiet American existence runs the gamut of all characteristically modern vices: misery, absurdity, dividedness, mediocrity, blandness and weakness (II.4.2-3, II.4.7). Put in terms of Glaucon's dilemma from *Republic II*, Americans are neither virtuous nor happy.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Tocqueville does remark several times on the "happiness" of America in Volume I (see I.1.5, 65, I.1.8, 127, 154 and 160-1, I.2.6, 231, I.2.9, 272 and 279), but this may be accounted for by the fact that Volume I is more about politics and institutions, and II about individuals (II.2.14). When one looks more carefully at the nouns to which "happy" is appended in all these passages from Volume I, they are usually political arrangements, customs or physical conditions. In many of these cases, they could just as well be rendered

### II.3 *Tolerably restless, or conservatism and the teaching of inquietude*

Two things are astonishing in the United States: the great mobility of most human actions and the singular fixity of certain principles. Men move constantly, the human mind seems almost immobile. (II.3.21, 611)

But despite the manifestly unattractive qualities of inquietude, Tocqueville counsels people to learn to live with it. Inquietude is at least the cause of other good things, even if it itself is not good. This is its political significance, how it connects with Tocqueville's overall political teaching. Due to the fundamental changes that have shaped democratic society, only two forms of government are now possible: democracy or despotism. Perhaps aristocracies could be free without being restless, but aristocracies are no more, nor for that matter are benign monarchies like under Henry IV (of France-Tocqueville's example), due to the fact that there is no longer an aristocratic corps to prevent monarchy's slide into despotism.<sup>124</sup> In light of this choice between despotic government or a restless existence, Tocqueville thinks men should accept inquietude.

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"blessed" or "fortunate." And of course, the fact that America is a fortunate place is by no means forgotten in Volume II-the central question of "Why the Americans show themselves so restive in the midst of their well-being" could be restated as "Why are the Americans so miserable amidst their immense good fortune?"

<sup>124</sup> The existence of a functioning nobility is also what Montesquieu (*Spirit of the Laws* II.4) and Bacon ("Of Nobility") say distinguishes monarchy and despotism.

At the beginning of this chapter, brief mention was made of the importance of surfaces to Tocqueville and that inquietude could be described as the “form” of American life-its immediately striking look that suggests deeper truths about it. This must now be qualified. Tocqueville does draw a distinction between the superficial impression of American society and the deeper truth about it, because the impression some have of restless disorder is incorrect. Tocqueville wants to demonstrate to his readers that, despite the seemingly wild, uncontained look of inquiet American society, there exists an underlying regularity to it.

Tocqueville addresses *DA* to all thoughtful Europeans concerned about their inevitably democratic future, but he addresses the inquietude teaching especially to conservatives, those distinguished by the high priority they place on peace and stability and their preference for traditional means of securing peace and stability. Conservatives take one look at the wild restlessness of democratic society and see in it nothing but more Usurpers and Committees of Public Safety. According to Tocqueville, this interpretation is incorrect. It is the unavoidable fate of modern democratic society to be restless, but this does not mean civil war and a seemingly endless cycle of regimes. Tocqueville will walk these well-meaning but confused conservatives through the American example to show them inquietude’s secret structure, its inner source of stability. This is central to Tocqueville’s teaching proper on inquietude: in it, he teaches conservatives to be

careful what they agitate for. In many ways, Tocqueville shares their sympathies, but were their interpretation of inquietude to carry the day, some of the most catastrophic potentials of the democratic age would be realized.

In his book *The Restless Mind*, the most impressive treatment of inquietude in Tocqueville, Peter Lawler argues that Tocqueville saw in the inquietude of the Americans the true source not only of democratic greatness, but greatness simply (Lawler 1993, 40, 109, 121, 138-9, and 168). Inquietude is good *in itself*, according to Lawler's Tocqueville-indeed, it is one of the highest human goods. Lawler makes a great deal out of the influence of Pascal on Tocqueville's thought, claiming that Tocqueville not only agrees with Pascal about the content of the good, but believes that Americans do as well, even if, as goes without saying, they have not read him. Americans are an unusually deep, spiritual people, with an instinctive sense for the fallenness of our nature and wariness towards any quick fixes for contentment such as administrative despotism. Americans insist on their freedom, even though they are aware that they thereby diminish their chances for happiness. Americans willingly trade happiness for political freedom and psychological depth.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Incidentally, Lawler actually believes this. In his other works he has applied this thesis about the connections between restlessness, greatness and freedom to American politics more generally, and other sorts of quick fixes than soft despotism, such as medical technology. Modern democracy is besieged on a number of sides by offers of numerous quick fixes for many varieties of restlessness. But the application of Pascal filtered through Tocqueville can help us understand why we should resist these, and affirm the strength of free, inquiet American democracy (see Lawler 2002).

Despite what anyone must admit is a fresh, most original approach (we should look to *Pascal* to restore the moral foundations of liberalism?), Lawler's book has a number of difficulties. To begin with, the influence of Pascal on Tocqueville is well-documented and many commentators stress it, but Lawler takes things too far. Lawler does not sufficiently appreciate the aspects of Tocqueville's thought and action which are in direct contradiction with Pascal, most of all his own personal very non-Pascalian attachment to pride, worldly recognition, and deep, sincere sympathy for aristocratic morality.<sup>126</sup> Tocqueville's involvement in politics at a high level, his tremendous ambition, his appreciation of aristocracy, all point to a vast difference in spirit between his own thought and Pascal's. Pascal is an extremely reductionist thinker—he shares this with Enlightenment atheism. Tocqueville's liberalism stands out in contrast to Locke's and others in its lack of reductionism, and aptness to appreciate the high as high.

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<sup>126</sup> Mansfield and Winthrop 2000 point this out as a criticism of Lawler. Other mistakes Lawler makes in giving insufficient attention to aristocracy include collapsing aristocracy and democracy's differing understanding of rights (Lawler 1993, 135), arguing that Tocqueville advocates a kind of Aristotelian "mixing" of aristocracy and democracy's better features (*Ibid.* 132-3, 138-9), an overly critical view of the morality of obedience in pre-democratic times (*Ibid.* 37) and, more generally, the importance of (non-natural) inequality as a condition of greatness and the importance of justice to Tocqueville. In general, scholars who play up the Pascalian influence on Tocqueville do so at the expense of the aristocratic one, which is in fact more basic for him. In addition to Lawler, see McLendon 2006 and even Rahe 2009, to some extent. Manent 1996 (esp. Chapter Six, 68-9) alone seems to maintain the just proportion between the aristocratic and Pascalian elements in Tocqueville's thought.

Second, Lawler does not give enough weight to American greed, and how truly, utterly disgusted with them Tocqueville sometimes is.<sup>127</sup> Why wouldn't it be better to be virtuous and happy instead of mediocre and miserable? Fair enough, soft administrative despotism would be an ignominious end for modern democracy, but what about being a red Indian or an aristocrat? If Tocqueville were confronted with Locke's famous choice between being a day laborer in England or an Indian chief in America, would he not almost surely prefer to be the latter? Third, Tocqueville does think there is some sense in which Americans have traded happiness for freedom ("all free peoples are grave"), but not for depth. Tocqueville is not impressed by Americans' depth of soul. As discussed above, Tocqueville does describe the Americans as serious, not frivolous, but this has to do with their seriousness regarding commerce and material goods.

The argument here, in contrast to Lawler, is that Tocqueville does affirm inquietude, but not because of its status as a good in itself. The restlessness experienced by Pascal, by Augustine, expressed in Palestrina's *Sicut Cervus*, is not the same thing as the restlessness of the American tea merchant. Yes, both are intensely individualistic conditions. But souls in the first condition cannot find the rest they seek among spiritual things, whereas those in the second find

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<sup>127</sup> For a vivid account of Tocqueville's disgust with the Americans, see Winthrop 1986.

no rest among material things.<sup>128</sup> There is *no* evidence that Tocqueville thought democrats were spiritually deeper, or somehow closer to God than aristocrats. Yes, democrats do manifest a restlessness of spirit with respect to other facets of life-art, manners, religion, but it is rooted in their restlessness towards commerce and the pursuit of material well-being.

#### ***II.4 Inquietude and political freedom***

First a few remarks on the status of freedom for Tocqueville. Tocqueville is obsessed with political freedom, both in terms of its precariousness in democratic times, and its importance as a good simply. Much of *DA* consists of warning men about the danger of despotism and its strong appeal in democratic times. Why is despotism uniquely appealing in democratic times? First, modern democratic society lacks the natural barriers against despotism which existed in aristocratic times. Such barriers must be constructed, by art and with much effort. Second, although democrats do desire freedom, the desires for material well-being and equality are much stronger, and they could easily conceive that despotism is the best way to satisfy these desires. Democracy makes men greedy and envious and satisfying these passions sometimes seems to come easier to a

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<sup>128</sup> More precisely, Augustine argues that restlessness is the result of original sin and our fallenness (*Confessions* 1.1; see also Montaigne “On Vanity” and Rahe 2009, 40).

dole-dispensing administrative Leviathan than it does to a democratic republic (II.2.14, II.4.4-5).

When discussing Tocqueville on the threat of despotism and the perilous state of freedom in democratic times, it often sounds as if Tocqueville's political science takes its bearings only by what to avoid, not by any positive good in mind. Is political freedom a genuine moral end or merely the absence of evil (despotism)? The two chief moral goods for Tocqueville, as discussed in the Introduction, are justice and greatness. Political freedom is a necessary condition for achieving either of these goods. Neither democratic justice or aristocratic greatness could exist without freedom. In a despotism, there is neither justice nor greatness.

Political freedom may be said to be the end of Tocqueville's political science, but only in a qualified way. "Freedom" is an inherently derivative and partisan concept.<sup>129</sup> Freedom can never be a true end because it always owes its meaning to some prior, more fundamental political principle. Hence why aristocracy and democracy define "freedom" in such different ways. Aristocracy understands freedom as "privilege."<sup>130</sup> Aristocratic freedom is something that could only be possessed by a few, and moreover could only exist at the expense

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<sup>129</sup> "Freedom has manifested itself to men in different times and in different forms; it is not attached exclusively to one social state, and one encounters it elsewhere than in democracies. It therefore cannot form the distinctive characteristic of democratic centuries (II.2.1, 480)." "No word has received more different significations and has struck minds in so many ways as has *liberty* (*Spirit of the Laws* XI.2)." On the ambiguity of "freedom" in Tocqueville, see Aron 1970, Chapter 1.

<sup>130</sup> See Ceaser 1990, 13.



of the many's lack of freedom (or even outright servitude). Anything else is not true freedom, for it would not support greatness, which can of course only be the preserve of a select few. Freedom is defined in relation to greatness, the aristocratic good.

Democrats understand freedom as the possession and exercise of universal natural human rights. Democracy's freedom is possessed, in principle, by all. Democrats view aristocratic freedom as false because founded in injustice and arbitrariness (II.4.7, 667). Aristocrats view democratic freedom as abstract, fabricated and so watered-down as to be meaningless. "The aristocratic notion of liberty (liberty as privilege) appears among those who have inherited an elevated sentiment of their individual value, an impassioned taste for independence. It gives to egoism an energy and a singular power. Experienced by individuals, it has often brought men to the most extraordinary acts" ("The Social and Political State of France Before and After 1789"<sup>131</sup>).

Tocqueville also discusses the difference between the aristocratic and democratic understandings of freedom in *OR* I.2.11 (see Furet and Melanio 1998, 36). Both conceptions are derivative in that they are each premised on a certain understanding of human social and political life. Those who cherish aristocratic liberty begin with the belief that inequality and dependence are inevitable. There

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<sup>131</sup> The source for much of this distinction between aristocratic and democratic liberty in Tocqueville is found not in *DA* but in this article he published slightly before *DA* Volume I, which is quoted at length in Manent 1996, 18-9. See also Aron 1970, Chapter One.

must always be ruled and rulers, master and servants, those who command and those who obey. Consequently, "freedom" can only legitimately be possessed by those at the top if it is to be something not only good and desirable (all definitions of freedom, like all definitions of justice,<sup>132</sup> imply that it is something good) but meaningful. Democrats, on the other hand, reject the inevitability of inequality. Societies may tend to arrange themselves in terms of ruled and ruler, but if we scrutinize these particular arrangements and apply the standard of nature to them, they will surely appear at least partly illegitimate. All forms of authority are unnatural according to democrats. Thus, "freedom," in order to be just and in accord with nature, must apply to all men.

Tocqueville does not come out in favor of either definition of freedom, any more than he does aristocracy or democracy. Democratic freedom places more importance on nature and justice, and the aristocratic conception of freedom places more emphasis on pride. Both can degenerate into corrupted versions of themselves when they become purely civil, and stripped of all political content. Aristocratic freedom/privilege becomes "a title to be separated from one's fellow citizens" (Furet and Melonio 1998, 7, 33 and 36). Democratic freedom becomes an abstract commitment to the possession of natural rights. True freedom, for Tocqueville, must somehow transcend this division between aristocracy and democracy: in all times and places, it must be something active and exercised.

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<sup>132</sup> Stauffer 2001.

In sum, the attachment to freedom, according to both Locke and Tocqueville, always proves to be derivative of an attachment to something else, such as justice, power, pride, self-interest or greatness.

Tocqueville is intensely focused on securing freedom both because it is integral to his conception of greatness and because of the threat of despotism in modern times. The threat of despotism is so great, that simply to ward it off, to achieve the success that the Americans have, is in itself a signal achievement. This is so even if, as in the case of the Americans, greatness itself is not achieved. So although not ultimately adequate, it's not misleading to say that the practical intention of Tocqueville's political science is to teach men how to avoid the political evil of despotism.

These two motivations for Tocqueville's advocacy of freedom-avoiding despotism and promoting greatness-overlap in large measure. The passionate urgency that characterizes Tocqueville's discussions of the threat of democratic soft despotism at the end of *DA* II.4 can only be accounted for by the threat that he thinks it poses to human greatness. However unjust soft despotism may be, this is clearly not what raises Tocqueville's dudgeon.<sup>133</sup> The close connection

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<sup>133</sup> "Democratic societies that are not free can be wealthy, refined, even splendid, powerful because of the weight of their homogeneous mass; one can find there private virtues, good family men, honest merchants, and very worthy squires; one will even see some good Christians, for their country is not of this earth and the glory of their religion is to bring them forth amidst the greatest corruption of mores and under the worst governments: the Roman Empire in its greatest decadence was full of good Christians. But what will never exist in such societies are great citizens, and above all a great people, and I am willing to state that the

Tocqueville discerns between liberty and greatness causes him to both denounce soft despotism and praise the French Revolution (in its initial phase) (*OR* I.3.2, 208; III.8, 244).

For Tocqueville, liberty is dependent on greatness and greatness is dependent on liberty (*OR* I.3.8, 244). Recognizing this close connection between these two themes also helps to understand what he means by them. First of all, enlightened self-interest could never be enough for Tocqueville, certainly not in terms of an assurance of the perpetuation of free government, nor as satisfying to an individual. Self-interest well understood cannot satisfy the natural desire for freedom, to participate in self-government, nor an individual's desire for greatness (*OR* I.3.3, 217). Love of freedom is an important sign of greatness, and indifference to freedom mediocrity.

The close connection between liberty and greatness in Tocqueville's thought explains his fairly critical view of Napoleon.<sup>134</sup> Tocqueville, unlike Burke, does think that there was some greatness and beauty in the initial stages of the French Revolution, but he does not think that there was anything ever redeemable about Napoleon. For someone so anxious about the leveling, mediocritizing spirit of modern democracy, this is surprising. Many, many others in the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw Napoleon as a rare exception to the lack of

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average level of hearts and minds will never cease to decline as long as equality and despotism are combined (*OR*, "Preface")."

<sup>134</sup> See *OR* II, 27 and 239, Herrold 1958, 214, and Mansfield and Winthrop 2000, xxiv.

greatness in modern times, but not Tocqueville, because for him, greatness without liberty is as empty as liberty without greatness.

This is not the place to scrutinize Tocqueville's concept of greatness in depth, but his fastidiousness regarding Napoleon ("as great as a man can be who lacks the least shred of virtue," "more extraordinary than great") does raise questions about whether or not his understanding of greatness holds up. If Napoleon doesn't count as great in the truest sense of the term, who does? John Winthrop? Tocqueville's elevation of greatness distinguishes him from early modern enlightenment philosophy generally speaking, but when he subjects greatness to liberty in such a severe manner, his method is somewhat reminiscent of the blunter, doctrinaire elements of the enlightenment. Many philosophers throughout history have been criticized for their endorsement of unfree government, either in their thought or their actions. But a passionate, even noble commitment to free government may also produce biases that are incompatible with philosophy and clear-mindedness.

Tocqueville thinks that it is possible to transcend the debate between aristocrats and democrats about the true meaning of freedom. The appeal of both greatness and liberty is transcendent (this is further evidence of Tocqueville's non-historicism). Whether a society is structured around inequality or equality is less important than whether or not its citizens have some share in rule. Yes, aristocrats and democrats define liberty differently, but

neither can claim to define liberty in a truly meaningful way without it meaning free government: republicanism, either in a democratic or aristocratic form, self-government, participation in rule. Only liberty in this form can truly be experienced and exercised.<sup>135</sup> This is the freedom that Tocqueville says we have a natural desire for and that is for him inextricably connected with greatness.

To come then, to the main argument, what's the link between inquietude and freedom? It is somewhat paradoxical. Inquietude is both the cause of the problem and the problem's solution. At the core of inquietude is the limitless desire for material well-being caused by democracy. This and the limitless passion for equality are responsible for much of the appeal of despotism in democratic times. The desire for material well-being is so great that we should expect that men will occasionally be willing to give up their freedom in hopes of satisfying it. Men will trade freedom for relief. But this also means that so long as men remain restless, so long as they can tolerate restlessness, they will have avoided the siren song of soft despotism. Possessing a restless soul and knowingly tolerating it is therefore a sign of freedom's persistence, a way of knowing they are yet free (I.2.6, 231-5, I.2.10, 388). Perhaps this sounds strange, to say that men need signs informing them of whether or not they are still free. But isn't it true that despotism usually emerges stealthily, without openly

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<sup>135</sup> Compare Constant's definition of ancient liberty: "active and constant participation in collective power" (or "sharing of social power among the citizens of the same fatherland"). The point of Constant's essay is that this form of liberty is simply impossible in modern times. Tocqueville, contrarily, seems reluctant to give it up.

announcing itself by name or true intention (II.2.14, 2T 208-9, 223, and 230)? This is an even greater threat for soft despotism than hard.

Thus, inquietude, restlessness of soul, may be understood in the same class as free associations, religion, self interest well-understood, as ways to prevent despotism in democratic times. Tocqueville does not believe that men should be made more restless than the Americans, but modern democracy requires a healthy tolerance for restlessness of soul. In democratic times, as long as there is inquietude, there will be freedom (I.2.9, 285), which may mean unhappiness, absurdity and mediocrity, but it will not mean servitude.

Tocqueville does not embrace inquietude for the sake of itself but for its effects. As argued in the previous section, Tocqueville's position is that it would, all other things being equal, be better to be happy (contrast Lawler 1993, 27, 31, and 40). But since they cannot, and there must be a *quid pro quo*, it's better to be free, unhappy and mediocre than unfree, content (in the short term) and mediocre.

Who needs to hear this? To whom is this teaching directed? Perhaps democrats, like all men, are always in need of straight talk (*DA* II "Notice"), but Tocqueville does not address this argument about the link between inquietude and freedom to democrats. He addresses it to conservatives.<sup>136</sup> The conservatives Tocqueville is addressing are aristocratic partisans who nourish a futile yearning for the past out of both an appreciation for the virtues of

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<sup>136</sup> Mansfield and Winthrop 2000, liii.

aristocracy, which Tocqueville shares, and a rejection of democracy, which Tocqueville believes is delusional. In the conservative understanding, democracy begets freedom and freedom begets disorder, violence and revolution. Of course, given their experience of the democratic revolution in France, this is understandable. Over the course of the fifty years prior to the publication of *DA*, France had endured one protracted and bloody revolution, a World War of twenty years duration, and then yet another revolution. At the time of the publication of *DA*, neither Tocqueville nor his conservative audience saw a settlement on the horizon (a judgment confirmed by the 1848 revolution). France, when Tocqueville is writing, is a mess, and because it has consented to democracy, according to Tocqueville's conservative audience.<sup>137</sup>

Tocqueville often insists that he is above partisanship, but he clearly has much sympathy with the conservatives, arguably more than with the progressives. He even seems to let their nostalgia for the *ancien régime* rest undisturbed, in the sense that aristocracy comes off looking better than democracy in *DA*. Tocqueville does not give aristocracy the "warts and all"

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<sup>137</sup> The Revolution of 1848 and the accession of Louis Napoleon tragically confirmed, in Tocqueville's mind, the tendency of France to democratic tyranny. Although he was prescient about Louis Napoleon's intentions, like so many other things, it should be mentioned that, after the war with Prussia and the Paris Commune, with the establishment of the Third Republic, France did settle into something like a free liberal democracy which lasted (by French standards) for quite a long time, until WWII. Although democratic despotism ended up being the fate of other nations throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, France did eventually break from the Revolution's cycle of tyranny and democracy.



treatment that he gives democracy, and possibly out of a desire to appeal directly to conservatives.

How does Tocqueville expect to win over conservatives with all this emphasis on the inherent restlessness of modern democracy? Inquietude should be understood as the outlier case in Tocqueville's general argument towards conservatives. If he can reconcile conservatives to inquietude, then he can reconcile them to anything about democracy. The first truth that conservatives must accept in order to reconcile themselves to the modern democratic world is that aristocracy really is over (*DA* "Introduction," II "Notice," and II.4.7, 666). Aristocrats underestimate the real force of democracy. Or they misinterpret it as only capable of abrupt, violent paroxysms which eventually pass, instead of something with deep roots and real staying power. The latter is of course Tocqueville's view. The second truth is that the inquietude of the Americans, at least, contains an inner resource of order, peace and stability.<sup>138</sup> We discussed this earlier with respect to luxury, domestic life and religion. In "Why great revolutions will become rare" (II.3.21), Tocqueville applies this idea of the coexistence of restlessness and orderliness to politics:

Because men in democracies always appear excited, uncertain, breathless, ready to change will and place, one fancies that they are suddenly going to abolish their laws, to adopt new beliefs, and to take up new mores. One does not consider that if equality brings men to change, it suggests

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<sup>138</sup> The "very violence of their [materialistic] desires...troubles their souls, but it arranges their lives (II.3.17)."

interests and tastes to them that need stability to be satisfied; it pushes them and at the same time it stops them, it spurs them and attaches them to the earth; it inflames their desires and limits their strength. (II.3.21, 616; see also 607-8, 610)

The difference between aristocracy and democracy is not order vs. disorder (as aristocratic partisans would have it) or oppression vs. liberty (as democratic partisans would have it) but order vs. order.<sup>139</sup> Inquietude teaches conservatives to qualify their insistence on order, or to teach them that they are mistaken to see no order in democracy. America is not France and inquietude is not the Reign of Terror. In other words, America can and should be understood as a conservative country. How does inquietude reveal the nature of a new, democratic conservatism?

First, as discussed earlier, inquietude does not characterize all elements of human life. Moral life in America is remarkably stable. We have, for example, Tocqueville's discussion of the American family, in which he is probably the most unqualified in his praise of democracy. In the case of the family, democrats live in accord with nature, and it's lovely. The American family, which Tocqueville calls "the natural family," is perfectly orderly, moral and happy. The family plays a crucial role in educating civic virtue, and is also appealing in itself, thereby giving Americans a direct material stake in the orderliness of

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<sup>139</sup> "Contrary to the thinking of many of Tocqueville's contemporaries who belong to an aristocratic milieu, democracy is not simply disorder that leads to the dissolution of any healthy social life; it is, rather, the comprehensive principle of a new society (Manent 1996, xviii)."

society more generally. Even aristocrats concede the greater attractiveness of the democratic family (II.3.8).<sup>140</sup> “It is in the family that democracy pleads its case most eloquently, that it reveals its happy conformity with the nature of man (Manent 1996, 83).” Tocqueville’s account of democracy’s triumph over aristocracy in domestic matters is the account of harsh convention losing out to sweet natural goodness.

The two elements of American life which are most distinctly restless are commerce and politics. It is not clear that Tocqueville’s conservative audience is *deeply* opposed to commerce, if at all. Officially speaking, of course, aristocratic morality often did look down on moneymaking/working for profit (II.2.10, 507, II.2.17, 525, endnote XIX (699)), but there was always much hypocrisy to this attitude. It’s very complicated, the relation between aristocratic morality and commerce, and this is not the place to go into it in detail.<sup>141</sup> The point for now is simply that, according to Tocqueville, conservative aristocrats must rid themselves of any hang-ups they might have about commerce and moneymaking, and accept commercial restlessness, just like equality of conditions, as a *fait accompli*. Democrats will be more commercially-oriented than aristocrats, and

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<sup>140</sup> See also Tocqueville’s praise of American gregariousness in II.3.2 “How democracy renders the habitual relations of the Americans simpler and easier” and his discussion of American manners (II 3 14) for other places in which he praises American private life.

<sup>141</sup> For an entertaining discussion of this question, see Nancy Mitford’s *Noblesse Oblige* (1956). Mitford argues that, although the British aristocracy always held that “effort is unrelated to money,” they always allowed themselves the freedom to engage in commerce if they felt like it because they allowed themselves the freedom to do anyone that they felt like. Shame is a bourgeois virtue: aristocrats have an easier time being hypocritical and breaking with conventional opinion than democrats.

commerce means busy-ness. The American example proves that commercial restlessness does *not* violate conservative principles of order, not only because it is compatible with political orderliness, but because it causes it. As Tocqueville argues in II.2.14 “How the taste for material enjoyments among Americans is united with love of freedom and with care for public affairs,” Americans understand that they need political order and freedom in order to satisfy their passion for material well-being. They understand that administrative despotism is but a short-term fix and that the example of history proves that, in the long term, freedom is much more conducive to commercial prosperity than servitude. This line of thinking involves a denigration of politics below economics, seeing it as a means to an end, but in democratic times, we must take what we can get, and do all that can be done to fight despotism.<sup>142</sup>

American politics only *looks* chaotic. This is a general truth about American democracy: underneath the surface of direct, active participation, constant electioneering, the idiotic, incessant chattering of the media and civic associations, there exists a core orderliness. “This political existence impresses on society a continual, but at the same time peaceful, movement that agitates it without troubling it” (I.1.5, 65; see also I.1.8, 127 and 154, I.2.10, 382, and II.3.17). The elections, newspapers and civic associations tame restless democratic

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<sup>142</sup> As further evidence for the link between inquietude and freedom, it should be mentioned that II.2.14 follows immediately after II.2.13, the most arresting and sustained treatment of inquietude in *DA*.

energy-they contain it, channel it and allow its expense in a harmless manner. Understood in this way, the restlessness of American politics is better understood not as the surface impression belied by the underlying orderliness, but as the very *cause* of that underlying order.<sup>143</sup> Tocqueville's arguments for the importance of freedom of the press and the absence of great parties also may be understood along these lines. "Now in America, political life is active, varied, even agitated, but it is rarely troubled by profound passions (I.2.3, 175)." Precisely because there is so much agitation, there are no great parties, which is a good thing because great parties resist compromise and easily become impatient with parliamentary procedure. The notorious stubbornness of the Federalists, the only great party America has ever known, is a perfect illustration of this point (I.2.2, 168-9).

The real importance of this truth about the nexus of inquietude and order is seen when it is applied to the case of revolution. Tocqueville's audience bases much of their opposition to democracy and the restlessness it produces on its tendency towards revolution. Tocqueville is sympathetic: "The same causes that render citizens independent of one another push them every day toward new and restive desires and spur them constantly. It therefore seems natural to believe that in a democratic society, ideas, things and men must change forms

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<sup>143</sup> "In Europe, [Tocqueville] was well aware, it was customary to regard 'uneasiness of mind [*inquietude de l'esprit*], the immoderate desire for wealth, the extreme love of independence' as 'a great social danger.' But in America, he was convinced, the *passions inquietes* evoked by the opportunities afforded by an empty continent were, in fact, favorable to orderly government (Rahe 2009, 179-80)."

and places eternally and that democratic centuries will be times of rapid and incessant transformations (II.3.21, 607).” But for the same reason, Tocqueville believes they should take heed of America, which is at the same time one of the most restless nations ever and the one *least* inclined towards revolution.

This is a democratic quality, not just an American one. Tocqueville argues at length in “Why great revolutions will become rare (II.3.21),” that democracy in the long term turns men away from revolution. There are two main reasons—the predominance of the propertied middle class and the intellectual conservatism of democracy. The main cause of revolutions in the past has been conflict between the separate races of the rich and poor, but in democratic times there exists “an innumerable multitude of almost similar men who, without being precisely either rich or poor, possess enough goods to desire order and do not have enough of them to excite envy (*Ibid.*, 607).” As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the rise of democracy is the rise of the size and influence of the middle class. Not only will most of the inhabitants of a democracy own property, they will possess a uniquely strong attachment to their property, one “more fierce and tenacious” than the rich or the poor, or rather than the rich and the poor before they, too, acquired middle class mores. As Aristotle, too, believes, the greater the size and influence of the propertied middling class, the less likely a nation or polis is to suffer revolution, and revolution is, almost always, a great evil in politics. The greatness of the American achievement

largely consists of establishing a free, orderly political arrangement in whose perpetuation the great majority of people feel like they have a stake.

Generally speaking, democracy inclines men towards commerce and commercial peoples are not revolutionary.<sup>144</sup> To look at it, a commercial society *seems* disposed to revolution because it is so bustling, mobile and restless. On the one hand, change for a commercial people is a constant. On the other, a truly shrewd, commercially-minded people well understands the dangers that revolution poses toward increase. More than just being reconcilable with order and stability, inquietude, the intense, limitless pursuit of well being is the cause of stability. Commercial democratic peoples “love change, but they dread revolutions (II.3.21, 610).”

The second element of democracy which both strongly resists revolution and where we see the powerfully conservative effect of inquietude, is its intellectual conservatism. In democracy, men and material goods are in constant flux but ideas do not move. “Two things are astonishing in the United States: the great mobility of most human actions and the singular fixity of certain principles. Men move constantly, the human mind seems almost immobile...One encounters, in fact, few idle men in democratic nations. Life

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<sup>144</sup> “...the growing love of well-being and the mobile nature of property make democratic peoples dread material disorder. Love of public tranquility is often the sole political passion that these peoples preserve, and it becomes more active and powerful in them as all the others are weakened and die; this naturally disposes citizens constantly to give the central power new rights, or to allow it to take them; it alone seems to them to have the interest and the means to defend them from anarchy by defending itself (II.4.3).”

goes on in the midst of motion and noise, and men are so busy acting that little time remains to them for thinking....They are perpetually in action, and each of their actions absorbs their soul; the fire they put into affairs prevents them from being inflamed by ideas (*Ibid.*, 611-4).” The conditions in democracy for intellectual revolution are poor. Tocqueville claims that the Protestant Reformation was only possible in an aristocratic social state.<sup>145</sup> Had Martin Luther to contend with the tyranny of the majority, his cause would have never prevailed (*Ibid.*, 613). Persuading a few at the top will always be easier than persuading the many.<sup>146</sup> But the tyranny of public opinion is only one cause of the immobility of intellectual life in democracies. Another is the mobility of life, inquietude itself. The example of America shows that busy men are not curious (*Ibid.*, 614). The democratic mind “oscillates within itself and does not move (*Ibid.*, 613).”<sup>147</sup>

Tocqueville does not view this lack of any revolutionary spirit with unqualified gladness (*Ibid.*, 609). Taken to an extreme, this attitude could be extremely dangerous, since citizens who desire to remain free must retain a taste for some sort of “public agitation.” And, of course, the lack of revolutionary

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<sup>145</sup> “An aristocracy in its vigor not only runs affairs, it still directs opinion, sets the tone for writers, and lends authority to ideas (*OR* I.3.1, 198).”

<sup>146</sup> Compare Tocqueville’s account of the differences between the intellectual revolutions of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries in *OR* I.3.5, 230.

<sup>147</sup> It is with respect to intellectual inquietude that Tocqueville says “Great revolutions are no more common in democratic peoples than in other peoples; I am even brought to believe that they are less so. But a slight, bothersome movement reigns within these nations, a sort of incessant rotation of men over one another that troubles and distracts the mind without ever animating or elevating it (*II*.1.10, 435).”



ardor contributes significantly to the lack of greatness in democratic times.

Tocqueville is not willing to give up on greatness or spiritual life in democracy, although he believes its prospects are dimmer. Maybe there is some way to curb the intensity of the pursuit of material well-being, direct more energies to more spiritual pursuits, while still maintaining the benefits which restlessness brings in keeping men free.

Americans are strong and free when viewed collectively, and weak (II.4.3) and unhappy (II.2.13) when viewed individually. It is the individual soul who desires freedom who must live this inescapable tension. America is the first and only great republic (in all prior history, only small communities have proved capable of freedom), but greatness in the sense of individual virtue, excellence, is difficult to find in America. A main source of Tocqueville's fascination with the New World is how it seems to have found an answer to difficulties which prior to its example were believed irresolvable. In America, material self-interestedness serves as the basis for social unity and even compassion, instead of social fragmentation. And to the extent that America has managed to be both great and free, its achievement is impressive. But Tocqueville is not only in the business of solving problems; in some cases he wants simply to reveal and analyze them. The tension between democratic freedom and happiness is real and, apparently, irresolvable. "All free peoples are grave."

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# Chapter Two: The Uneasiness Doctrine and Human Liberty

## I.1 Introduction

We now leave Tocqueville for Locke, and a different account of restlessness and its connection to liberalism. It is different in two major ways: Locke argues that restlessness is not a historical condition, but one natural to all men, and Locke is on the whole more sympathetic to restlessness than Tocqueville. As with Tocqueville, there is both an “is” and an “ought” side to Locke’s teaching on restlessness. At a fundamental level, we cannot help our restless condition, but, understood properly, it does point the way to a more choiceworthy way of life, which we can do something about. This chapter will treat the “is” side, and as well as provide some transition towards the “ought.” The next chapter will flesh out in greater detail what Locke’s restless “ought” looks like.

*ECHU* II.21, “Power,” contains the entirety of Locke’s teaching on uneasiness. Rarely does he even use the word elsewhere in *ECHU*, or in the rest of his corpus, and never with the thematic significance it possesses in II.21. II.21 is a powerhouse—it is the longest chapter in the *ECHU* and easily the densest in terms of sheer number of themes treated in close proximity. In it, Locke

discusses cause and effect, the relation between good and evil and pleasure and pain, the difference between desire and volition, the afterlife, happiness, judgment, and, most of all, human liberty. In the same chapter where Locke gives a searching epistemological analysis of the concept “liberty,” he presents his uneasiness doctrine. In II.21, “Power,” Locke argues that, upon close examination, the desire for freedom is the desire for relief from uneasiness, which is also the desire for power.

The title “Power” refers to Locke’s intent to show how we come by the idea “power.” In this capacity, II.21 fits in seamlessly with Book II as a whole. In Book II, Locke executes the central task of the *ECHU*-to demonstrate the natural history of our ideas. Book II contains Locke’s famous argument that all our ideas come from experience. The other three books either prepare the way for II or draw consequences from it. Book I refutes the opposing thesis, that some of our ideas are innate, and not acquired through experience. Book III examines language, how we signify our ideas in words, rightly and wrongly, and Book IV treats knowledge-if all our ideas are grounded in experience, what can we know, and in what forms and to what degree of certainty?

So within the context of Book II and the *ECHU* as a whole, this is what II.21 proposes to give an account of the origin of the idea of power. However, it turns out that Locke devotes very little of II.21 to “power” proper. At roughly paragraph 6, human liberty becomes his main concern, and remains so for the

subsequent 66 paragraphs. “Liberty,” we learn retrospectively, would have been a more obvious (although perhaps not as revealing) title for II.21.<sup>148</sup> Locke never formally announces it, but the main aim of II.21 turns out to be to give an account of human liberty, of its true character and limits. More precisely, Locke believes he can derive a concept of “liberty” which satisfies both the demands of morality and science. It is possible to reconcile our subjective experience of being free and the demands of moral responsibility with our rational understanding of ourselves as distinct beings with natures and identities.<sup>149</sup>

Locke believes that men often aim too high in their attempts at justifying liberty. They fight determinism too doggedly, and as a result, the “liberty” they end up with is simply incredible. So instead of arguing that we are not determined in the ways often assumed, Locke argues, first, that we are even *more* determined than people think, but second, that “liberty” can accommodate a fair amount of determination. In fact, it must: “liberty” must be able to be reconciled with human nature and individual identity, if it is to be distinguished from “arbitrariness” or “caprice.”<sup>150</sup> It cannot be the case that only seizures and muscle spasms are truly free actions. “Liberty” cannot violate the law of

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<sup>148</sup> Near the end of the chapter, Locke refers offhandedly to the preceding as “this enquiry into human liberty (II.21.71).” Leibniz, in his commentary on the *ECHU*, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, titles II.21 “Of Power and Freedom.”

<sup>149</sup> “*Morality and Mechanism*...are not very easy to be reconciled, or made consistent (I.3.14).” “If the agent’s choice of reasons is ultimately determined, then he cannot be responsible for his actions. If, on the other hand, his choice is not determined, then it is unmotivated and arbitrary. If this is the case, however, responsibility will not make much sense either, for the agent is not ‘rational’” (Rapaczynski, quoted in Myers 1998, 140).

<sup>150</sup> Hume says it can’t be (see *Treatise on Human Nature* Part III.1-3).

sufficient reason. As a result, Locke gives to us in II.21 a “strange doctrine” of liberty. Most strangely, it denies free will. But, in his view, he must do this, in order to avoid an even stranger doctrine of liberty which attributes liberty to a faculty (will), not a person, and is indistinguishable from “whim.”

The uneasiness doctrine is the third of three critiques of free will that Locke presents prior to explaining the true nature of human freedom in II.21. The first two are essentially epistemological critiques that show the theoretical contradictions and confusions embedded in the very concept of free will as conceived by its proponents. With the uneasiness doctrine, Locke moves away from epistemology and takes up the question of what moves the will. He argues that uneasiness moves the will, and that this means that it cannot be seen as truly free. If we were free, then we would be able to move our wills with our understandings, but this is not what happens. Uneasiness, not the understanding, determines the will. The experience of uneasiness is the experience of pain, and also the desire to be freed from that pain. All action is the seeking to be free from some pain. Free will and restlessness are thematically connected in that those who believe in the possibility of free will deny uneasiness. They deny that we are constantly being urged by our desires, and that all action is a response to desire and pain. Freedom of the will means freedom from desire, and the existence of a state of rest which is guided by our intellectual faculties of understanding and reason alone. Locke denies this. The

central claim of II.21 that “uneasiness determines the will,” is an assertion that we are, in fact, determined by desire, that the experience of desire is the experience of uneasiness, and thus our will cannot be said to be free. Locke believes that he must deny free will in order to preserve the possibility of our being held responsible for our actions.

Locke’s general strategy for the theoretical problem of human liberty has two thrusts: first, through three critiques of free will, Locke will reduce liberty to its bare minimum, and emphasize how determined we are. Second, he will show that “liberty” is still liberty if it contains an element of determinism. As is the case with much of modern philosophy, Locke’s treatment of freedom is a mix of low and solid, humility and pride, good news and bad news. Or to use another metaphor appropriate to modern political philosophy, Locke inoculates his audience to determinism—he lets in just enough of it to neutralize its effects. We *are* determined to a large extent—there is no free will—but this fact does not threaten human liberty or moral responsibility in the way others have feared. To show this, Locke must elucidate a more precise understanding of “being determined,” and this is where he brings in his uneasiness teaching. The uneasiness teaching is Locke’s positive, deterministic account of human action and his third, longest and most decisive critique of free will. Within the context of II.21, the uneasiness doctrine is, above all, an expression of the extent and character of human determinism.

Chapter Two's main question is thus: how does Locke's understanding of "the uneasiness of man" function as a part of II.21's greater whole, the true meaning of human liberty? Locke the great liberal thinks that true human liberty can only be understood in light of the uneasiness of man. Although many philosophers (maybe all) understood themselves as *the* philosopher of freedom, a strong case could be made for Locke's deserving that title, especially in terms of "freedom" conventionally understood. "Political freedom," "religious freedom," "economic freedom," "freedom of mind"-how essential to the modern world are these concepts, and what philosopher contributed more to their meaning than Locke? Any understanding of Locke's philosophical position on political and intellectual "liberty" would be imperfect and unfaithful without an understanding of uneasiness.

## ***I.2 "Power" and "Liberty"***

The discussion of human liberty emerges out of the discussion of the origin of the idea "power," the ostensible purpose of II.21. "Power" is, of course, a hugely important concept to the *ECHU* (the term occurs on almost every page) and to Locke's conception of science more broadly. Science, and especially the modern natural science which Locke lauds so highly in the "Epistle to the

Reader," is knowledge of powers. Following Bacon and Hobbes,<sup>151</sup> Locke expresses both the limits, possibilities and character of knowledge in terms of "power." The *ECHU* itself (and the *2T* (*2T* 1-3)) is defined as an inquiry into power, specifically "the *Powers* of our own Minds (I.1.6)." Locke did not write an essay concerning human *nature*, but one concerning human *understanding*, a distinction helpful to keep in mind. Human nature, or human "substance," Locke argues, is unknowable (III.6.3-4, 21-27, III.11.20, IV.4.13-16, IV.7.16-18, and IV.8.6). Our knowledge the world and its beings is not only limited by the limits of our experience of it. Our senses are dull, and that places serious limits on what we can know (II.23.11-12, II.23.32, IV.3.6, IV.3.11-12, IV.3.23-27, and IV.12.10), but that's not our only problem, for we cannot even have knowledge of what we do have sensual experience (and thus ideas) of (III.6, IV.3.28-31, IV.6.7-16, and IV.12.9-12). This is central to Locke's empiricist theory: "[T]he extent of our Knowledge comes not only short of the reality of Things, but even of our own Ideas (IV.3.6)." We can collect all the qualities encompassed by "human nature"-corporeality, rationality, hair, legs-but we cannot know in what relation they stand to one another, or which are truly "essential" (III.6, III.9).<sup>152</sup> Which amongst these qualities, if removed, would prevent the substance from being itself? Do any of them cause, support or ground each other? Like all substances,

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<sup>151</sup> On Locke's debt to Bacon and Hobbes for his concept of "power," see Manent 1998, 113-5.

<sup>152</sup> Locke defines "essence" as "the real internal, but generally in Substances, unknown Constitution of Things, whereon their discoverable Qualities depend (III.3.15)."



“human nature” is impossible to know. We can, however, have knowledge of its component qualities or powers. This is why human understanding, a power, is infinitely more intelligible than human nature, a substance. Even if we cannot know how the understanding stands in relation to our corporeality, we can know what are its limits and proper function.

But despite its importance to modern natural science and Locke’s science of ideas, Locke does not think that it is necessary to dwell on “power” for more than 6 paragraphs. This is because “power” is a simple idea. Simple ideas cannot be defined like complex ideas, for simple ideas are homogenous and have no parts (II.2.1, II.32.9, III.4, III.11.14, and IV.18.3). We can only describe the experience by which the simple idea comes to us,<sup>153</sup> or refer to a more complex idea (“red is the color of apples,” “round is the shape of the moon”). Locke says that we experience “power” when we observe regular changes in our ideas. When a certain alteration happens between two ideas with such regularity that we expect the same changes to occur in the same way in the future, we infer a power. “Power” comes in two varieties: the agent which causes the change possesses an active power, and the patient which experiences the change

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<sup>153</sup> Locke does this with “solidity” at II.4.6.

possesses a passive power. A power is an attribute possessed by a substance to bring about, or suffer, change.<sup>154</sup>

Locke moves from the topic of “power” to liberty by drawing a distinction between how we experience active power and passive power, and claiming that we only truly experience active power from the experience of ourselves willing. Passive power, the power to suffer change, comes to us exactly as “blue” or “round” do, in observing the motions and interactions of bodies. But passive is only one part of power: “it is but a very obscure *Idea* of *Power*, which reaches not the Production of the Action, but the Continuation of the Passion (II.21.4).” It is only when we reflect on ourselves, and specifically on our ability to exercise the will and thereby bring thought and motion into being, that we really *experience* power.<sup>155</sup> “The *Idea* of the beginning of motion, we have only from reflection on what passes in ourselves, where we find by Experience, that barely by willing it, barely by a thought of the Mind, we can move the parts of our Bodies, which were before at rest (II.21.4).”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> See also the account of our experience of power that Locke gives in “Pleasure, Pain, the Passions,” (*Political Essays*, 244).

<sup>155</sup> To be exact, Locke does not insist “power” *only* comes from our reflection on our immaterial selves. At one point he claims outright that we can get it just as easily from external nature (II.7.8), at another he says he is open to that possibility, but just has doubts himself (II.21.4). It should also be mentioned that Locke says that how one body moves another is not any clearer than how the mind moves the body through the will (II.23.28).

<sup>156</sup> There is another dimension to the polemicism of “power”’s simplicity. Mansfield argues that to speak of abstract powers is an innovation of modern natural science, which both Hobbes and Locke appropriate for political science (Mansfield 1987, 151, and 170-5). *ECHU* II.21 provides epistemological support for this, by arguing that power is *not* an abstraction, but indeed, quite simple indeed.

Locke defines will as the “*Power* which the mind has, thus to order the consideration of any *Idea*, or the forbearing to consider it; or to prefer the motion of any part of the body to its rest, and *vice versa* in any particular instance (II.21.5).” Willing connotes endeavor towards producing some action we take to be in our dominion. Locke gives a very stripped-down definition of the will and willing. Specifically, both “good” and “reason” are absent from his definition: “an Act of the Mind knowingly exerting that Dominion it takes itself to have over any part of the Man, by employing it in, or withholding it from any particular Action (II.21.15).” Willing does not require the ability to conceive of the good. It only requires consciousness and sensitivity to pleasure and pain.

Locke soon makes clear that his main purpose in broaching the topic of willing is to enter into a discussion of free will. Many chapters in the *ECHU* have this character: a treatment of a classic philosophical problem is introduced through the question of how we come by a particular idea. This is how Locke’s method achieves its stated purpose, namely, to solve old problems through a new approach. In his ensuing discussion of willing and his critique of free will, Locke makes clear that he addresses not human liberty’s declared enemies, but its false friends, whose expectations for it undermine its credibility. In their thinking about human action, men tend to fall prey to the school of thought Locke terms “indifferentism.” Indifferentists would have us believe that freedom means freedom from all concern; they chafe at the manifold constraints

placed upon our actions simply by virtue of our possessing a nature and personal identity. Most specifically, they believe in freedom to will. The attractiveness of the idea of free will results from the tendency of “the inquisitive mind of man (II.21.22)” to believe that, at any given moment, our wills remain free, undetermined by forces outside of us. In II.21, Locke will give his audience freedom in accord with willing, but he will deny them freedom to will, freedom with respect to willing. For Locke, men can never be indifferent, only faculties and non-human nature can (II.21.71, 2T 13 and 125; see also *Beyond Good and Evil* 9). If we are to think clearly and reasonably about liberty, we must first come to realize how determined our lives truly are. We are never indifferent and are always determined because we are never free from desire or concern or uneasiness.<sup>157</sup>

### ***I.3 Uneasiness determines the will (before II.21)***

Locke makes three attacks on free will in II.21. In the first (II.21.16-20), Locke claims that the proponents of free will attempt, in effect, to attribute a power to a power. When the nature of powers, qualities and substances is properly thought through, it will be seen that the power “freedom” can only be attributed to “man,” a substance, not “will,” since it is only a power possessed by

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<sup>157</sup> “For if we take wholly away all Consciousness of our Actions and Sensations, especially of Pleasure and Pain, and the concernment that accompanies it, it will be hard to know wherein to place personal Identity (II.1.11).”

man. The very concept “free will” is therefore absurd. In Locke’s second critique (II.21.21-26), he argues that the free will hypothesis cannot provide an intelligible account of what moves the will, or the cause of action. What moves the will? Something, some action or passion other than the will must move it. It is an incoherent understanding of human action that asserts that the will moves itself, or that all human action is pure spontaneity. It is equally incoherent to say that the will moves the will, that each willed action is caused by a prior act of willing. For what then prevents *that* act of willing from being moved by a prior act of willing? It is not necessary to dwell on either of these critiques at length.

The uneasiness doctrine (II.21.31ff.) is Locke’s third, and most important and interesting critique of free will. With it, Locke gives a positive account of willing, and of what moves the will.

The most concrete way to ask the question “is there free will?” is “what moves the will?” If freedom is to be distinguishable from caprice, a freely willed action must be distinguished by a particular cause. Something has to move the will, something other than itself. Which of our powers can be said to cause our choices? As Locke frames the debate, there are only really two contenders, understanding and desire. Under the first scenario, our conception of the good determines the choices we make and the understanding is the power with which we conceive and contemplate our conception of the good. Reason/deliberation compares goods, relates them to one another, and judges them in light of the

greatest good, of which we are always somehow dimly aware. Which particular good is most in accord with the greatest good, most truly participates in the good simply? All willing is shot through with some consideration of what is good; deliberation proceeds by sorting through the goods that the understanding intuits and then selects based upon the participation of some particular good in the greatest good.

This is the conception of the will that Locke denies. In denying our conception of the good to be intrinsic to willing as willing, Locke has denied it the possibility of being free. For Locke, willing is not a pursuing of goods, but a fleeing from evil, or more precisely, pain. Willing is determined by present pain, not absent good, or in Locke's phrase, "uneasiness determines the will." Willing *qua* willing relates directly to desire (hence our occasional confusion of the two in speech-II.21.15), but only indirectly to the understanding. And willing relates to desire by being caused by it, which makes the notion of mastery of desire or of the other passions, so central to Aristotelian ethics, impossible for Locke.

Whatever role the will will now play in Lockean ethics, it will have to be one of "indirect management" of the passions, likely by "using certain passions to counteract other passions," instead of ruling them directly as in Aristotle (*Ethics* I.13).<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> On modern philosophy's turn away from Aristotle's understanding of ethics and the will's relation to the passions, see Mansfield 1995, 49-50, and Hirschman 1977.

The understanding by itself never moves the will. Desire does.

Understanding furnishes us with goods to contemplate, to varying degrees of clarity, distinctness and possibility. But contemplation of the good is not the same as desiring that good, especially not if desire means, as we shall soon see, pain or uneasiness. We pursue some good if we feel uneasy in its absence. We can't live without it, and so we will its attainment—that's the structure of all action, according to Locke, without exception. Locke contends that we are only ever able to exercise our will by virtue of the fact that we can experience desire and pleasure and pain. Being free to will would mean the capacity to choose our course of action from a position of complete objectivity or cool indifference, wherein we direct our faculties simply based on what we believe is good, and are not swayed by desire, present pain or uneasiness. Freedom of the will would mean freedom from desire, and this Locke denies. The understanding is never strong enough to overpower desire. If pleasure and pain did not make us predisposed in one direction or another, we would just drift, we wouldn't act (II.7.3 says this explicitly; see also II.21.48 and "Pleasure, Pain the Passions," *Political Essays*, 238). Locke is quite sure he knows something about what the understanding can and can't do, with respect to theory and practice, and because the understanding cannot move the will, the will is not free.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> 2T 58 and 63 provide interesting confirmation that the will would be free if the understanding moved it.

The experience of willing is the conscious setting ourselves to being free from some pressing uneasiness. Locke is aware that this thesis conflicts with most people's conception of action. Don't we sometimes say "I pursued X" unqualifiedly? Locke believes that saying "all men pursue the good" is not so much wrong as misleading, for our conception of what is good moves us indirectly and desire or uneasiness moves us directly. We cannot rely on speech to determine what moves us, for we are almost always deceived in our self-understanding due to the massive influence of custom in shaping our speech. There must be a standard outside speech, and that is experience. We must access our experience of action that is not tainted by speech and custom.

This is Locke's account of an action: (1a) we experience passion, which really means (1b) we experience some uneasiness, then (2a) we desire the good whose attainment we judge will bring relief to that initial uneasiness, which is to say (2b) we experience an additional uneasiness in the absence of this good, which concentrates the mind and makes us (3) will its attainment, and (4) attain it, if adverse circumstances do not obtain. To repeat, Locke is addressing an audience with an overambitious view of human freedom and self-determination. Here we see that this specifically means an overambitious view of the power of our understanding's role in practice. For his part, Locke is fairly unimpressed by the role the understanding typically plays in human action. He has nothing against greater clarity in our ideas-indeed, he wrote a long, ponderous 720 page



book about how to achieve it. However, his point here in II.21 is that all the understanding can do in practice is offer ideas to contemplate, and contemplation alone does not move the will (II.21.5).

Uneasiness not understanding determines the will-this is Locke's claim. Locke gives the impression that his argument for this claim is contained wholly within II.21, but II.21 does not stand on its own. As is often the case with Locke, most of the argument for the claim is found elsewhere. To exaggerate a little, II.21 mostly just provides confirmation for what has been laid out before Locke expresses any interest in the question "what moves the will."

In two crucial ways, Locke has prepared for his critique of free will prior to II.21. The first is his empiricism, and the second is his understanding of the nature of desire. Let us begin with empiricism, Locke's theory of the nature of experience and how all of our ideas originate therein. In two ways, Locke's empiricism makes it extremely unlikely that "the good" moves the will. First, "good" and "bad" are complex ideas and pleasure and pain are simple ideas. We only truly experience simple ideas, such as "soft," "blue," "round" (II.2.1). Experience *gives* us simple ideas, as themselves, but it only *suggests* complex ideas to us, if at all (II.12.1). Many complex ideas, such as moral notions, have no template in nature, but even those that we might call natural beings, such as "man" and "gold," are really only vaguely unified aggregates of simples. It is up to us to unify them, by distinguishing them from other complex ideas and

naming them. Human concern and convenience decide which qualities are essential and which accidental, and this explains why, from language to language, (or even within the same language, from use to use, as with “pig” and “pork”) the same things are called by different names. This especially goes for modes, the ways of being of substances (“justice,” “freedom”) but it also goes for substances themselves (“water,” “man”). So although we often dispute over complex ideas, we rarely, if ever, dispute over simples (III.4.15, III.9.18). Simple ideas are natural ideas, which just impress themselves on our senses and, through them, our understanding. Simples generate little controversy; we never mistake them for each other nor do we argue about their existence. Locke also believes it is fairly easy to distinguish between simple and complex ideas (“power” included). We can tell which ideas are simple based on which ones we are not free to reject, which ones we never have disputes about, and which ones cannot be defined (III.4.4-13), except with reference to a more complex idea.<sup>160</sup>

Locke bases the distinction between simple and complex partially on our direct, immediately observable experience (what do we have disagreements about?), and partially on what experience has to mean if there are no innate

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<sup>160</sup> Brief point of clarification. This discussion perhaps overstates the gap between simple and complex. It is arguable that it makes more sense to look at simple-complex as more of a spectrum, in that the simplest complex ideas (like simple modes like “good” and “will” and “five”) are closer to simple ideas like blue and round than complex ideas like “justice,” “gold” or “man.” This is unquestionably true with respect to our certainty about them and their contentiousness. However, with respect to the matter at hand-what moves the will-it matters a lot for Locke’s argument that we more truly experience pleasure and pain than good and evil, and that the former are much more certain than the latter.

ideas. At its absolute deepest level, Locke's critique of free will rests on his critique of innate ideas. How did we "experience" the world before we were fully aware of it and how do we do so now? It is fair to say that the simple/complex distinction conflicts with our common sense experiences of things-who experiences "water" or "man" as an aggregate, as a manifold of diverse sensory particulars? But Locke would say that our fully conscious experience of the world cannot be the only type of experience, since we are not always fully aware as adults and even more rarely as children.<sup>161</sup> Thinking is always conscious (this is crucial to Locke's philosophy-*ECHU* II.1), but experience is not. We cannot define "what's first for us" (*Ethics* I.4) as what is only first for fully conscious adults. Furthermore, this less-than-fully-conscious form of experience must be the truest form of experience, since it is the most universal kind. This is to say that for Locke, what experience is, is in one sense supremely self-evident, and in another not so. True, unadulterated experience we don't so much experience, but posit, due to the fact that there are no innate ideas. All our ideas must come from experience. From our state as fully rational adults, we derive "experience" from the nature of our ideas. If ideas are not just "in" us, somehow, at birth, they must be acquired through our unconscious or pre-conscious interactions with the world. *Experience must precede our possessing ideas*, and therefore "experience" must be stripped of all references to

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<sup>161</sup> See Aaron 1971, 47-48 on Locke's abiding fascination with the experience of children.

consciousness, reason and speech down to a bare minimum. What we experience are simples, discrete sensory impressions, which we then assemble into complex ideas so habitually and instantaneously that we do not notice.

Given this breakdown of all ideas into simple and complex, pleasure and pain are definitely simple ideas-what we find pleasant or painful may differ from person to person, but we don't mistake pain for pleasure, (except perhaps in rare instances such as tickling). We are never as certain about what good and bad mean for us as what "pleasure" and "pain" do. That pleasure and pain are simple and good and bad complex may also be discerned in the fact that we experience pleasure and pain in the womb (I.4.2, II.1.21, and II.10.5), but only conceive of good and bad much later. Locke says that no simple ideas are as prevalent, common, constant, as pleasure and pain (II.7.2-5 and II.20.1). Our experience of what gives us pleasure and pain is more truly "experience" than that from which we form good and bad, because it is more constant and direct. This then strongly suggests that "pleasure" and "pain" move us in a more fundamental way than "good" and "bad."

In Locke's view, our experience of pleasure and pain is entirely intelligible without any consideration of the good. It must be so, according to his "new way of ideas," for surely we experience pleasure and pain before we conceive of good and bad. Our experience of pleasure and pain tells us that we are moved by variety and novelty (II.1.8; *STCE* 74). If we care so much about *the* good simply,

why is our experience of pleasure so facilitated and increased by an assortment or rotation of goods?<sup>162</sup> Those who would argue that the good is prior to the pleasant might say that we feel the need to deserve our pleasures, that our very enjoyment of pleasure is increased by this thought of desert. Locke, however, thinks the matter must be simpler than this, since not all people feel this need, such as for example little children and tyrants. Locke does not think our pleasures are troubled by our fear of not deserving them so much as the thought that they will not last. It is not necessary to have recourse to the transcendent plane of good and bad to understand pleasure and pain: their origin and operation can be understood entirely with reference to themselves.

What follows from Locke's grouping "pleasure" and "pain" and "good" and "bad" into simple and complex is hedonism: "[W]hat has an aptness to produce Pleasure in us, we call *Good*, and what is apt to produce Pain in us, we call *Evil*, for no other reason [emphasis added], but for its aptness to produce Pleasure and Pain in us, wherein consists our *Happiness* and *Misery*" (II.21.42; see also II.20.2 and "Voluntas," "of Ethic in General," and "Pleasure, Pain, the Passions," (*Political Essays*)).<sup>163</sup> Because pleasure and pain are more original, more natural than good and bad, they must define them, not vice versa. Locke's analysis of ideas leads him to the conclusion that we are incapable of believing

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<sup>162</sup> "There is more pleasure in the recovery of health than in its undisturbed possession (Strauss 1952, 162)."

<sup>163</sup> "Locke's hedonism, which supports his morality, is in turn supported by his empiricism (Mansfield 1987, 206)."

something good is simply painful. When we seem to choose a painful course of action, we do so to avoid a more painful course, or because sometimes future pleasure requires present pain. A fully aware human cannot act expecting his course of action to lead to more pain than pleasure. Sometimes we are wrong and what we thought would be good turns out to be bad, but we almost never mistake the experience of pleasure for one of pain. We can never be as certain that what we believe to be truly good and bad are good and bad as we are about what is pleasant and what is painful. It therefore makes more sense to define what is less certain (good and bad) by what is more certain (pleasure and pain).

So although Locke does not directly take up “what moves the will” prior to II.21, his empiricism prepares the way by defining good as complex and defining it as that which causes pleasure. The second way that Locke has prepared for “uneasiness not the good determines the will” is in his discussion of the nature of desire in II.20. Locke’s specific claim about why the will is not free is “present pain not absent good determines the will.” Why pain, why not present pleasure? Because for Locke, the experience of desire *is* the experience of uneasiness or pain. In II.20, Locke discusses the passions. All passions are modes of pleasure and pain, that is, different experiences of pleasure and pain. Some passions are distinguished by their characteristic pleasure, others by their pain, but the experience of any passion is perfectly intelligible as just the experience of pleasure or pain in some way. Locke singles out one passion as

particularly prevalent, namely desire. Desire accompanies all passions—all pleasant ones and all painful ones. The experience of fear, anger or envy is intimately bound up with the experience of the desire to seek relief from them. And the experience of joy, hope and love also involves the experience of the desire to perpetuate and secure their pleasures for the future. So desire is what moves us to act, to do something about, or in response to, our passions. But desire itself is a painful passion: we only really desire something when we feel painfully incomplete, lacking in its absence. Yes, we always have a desire *for* some good (and this is how we would express our desire “I desire X”), but only insofar as that frees us *from* some uneasiness. The experience of desire is the experience of being pushed from below or behind, of avoiding something, not being pulled from above or in front, striving towards or pursuing something. Pleasure as such moves us hardly at all, so in order to define desire in the least misleading way, truest to the actual experience, Locke defines desire negatively, as uneasiness (the two terms are virtually interchangeable in his usage). Desire is uneasiness: desire is not the opposite of aversion, it *is* aversion (II.21.71). Anything less is not desire but “velleity,” a passion distinguished by its weakness and insignificance: “the term used to signify the lowest degree of Desire, and that which is next to none at all, when there is so little uneasiness in the absence of any thing, that it carries a Man no farther than some faint wishes

for it, without any more effectual or vigorous use of the means to attain it (II.20.6)."<sup>164</sup>

“Uneasiness” is a general term, equivalent to “pain” (II.7.2, II.20.15).

When Locke catalogues the various painful passions in II.20 and distinguishes them from one another, he does so in terms of their various uneasinesses.

“Sorrow is uneasiness in the Mind, upon the thought of a Good lost, which might have been enjoyed further (II.20.8),” “Fear is an uneasiness in the Mind, upon the thought of future Evil likely to befall us (II.20.10),” and so on. We know sorrow, fear, jealousy and anger from one another by the way in which we feel uneasy when overcome by them.

“Uneasiness” seems to have two distinct advantages for Locke. For one, it draws our attention to its special significance in his teaching. “The impulse which always and only triggers the will” would perhaps be more easily overlooked had he left things at “pain” or “discomfort” (like Nietzsche’s *ressentiment*, when “resentment” would have worked just as well). Second, the term’s breadth is essential for Locke’s teaching. We engage our wills in reaction to impulses both arrestingly painful and mildly discomfiting, both bodily and mental. “Uneasiness” usefully covers this whole spectrum of impulses.

Connected to this second advantage, “uneasiness” expresses the discomfort that

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<sup>164</sup> In his discussion of the difference between love and desire in “Pleasure, Pain, the Passions,” Locke seems to imply that love has a tendency to become “velleity” (although he doesn’t use the word), because possibility is not of the essence of love, although it is of desire. We can love something that is impossible, but we cannot, strictly speaking, experience desire over it (*Political Essays*, 242-3).



attends the expectation of pain better than mere "pain" would. The more or less vague awareness that love, joy and hope will not last or can only be secured by sometimes unpleasant efforts would seem to be better expressed by "unease" than "pain."

"Uneasiness determines the will" says in a more condensed way "the uneasiness which attends the passion desire moves the will." Not all uneasiness results in action. We experience despair when we feel uneasy, pained, due to a sense of our own impotence in the face of some evil. Also, we may genuinely desire something-feel uneasy in its absence-without being able to have it. The experience of thwarted uneasiness or desire can then in turn increase or decrease the intensity of the desire. (As we will see, Locke locates freedom in our capacity to influence our desires/uneasinesses.) But all action, that is, all change, results from "some present or pressing uneasiness," and the uneasiness of one passion in particular, desire. When we think we react to the uneasiness of fear or anger or envy, it is really the uneasiness of desire which activates and directs our will. This is why people sometimes confuse the experiences of willing and desiring-they do so because desire's uneasiness always determines the will (II.21.30).

Taking these two things together-the prevalence of desire and definition of desire as uneasiness-we have the fact that there is an asymmetry between pain

and pleasure, a fact Locke notes a few times (II.20.14, II.21.43, 64).<sup>165</sup> “[T]he sense of evil or pain works more upon us than that of good or pleasure; we bear the absence of a great pleasure more easily than the presence of a little pain (“Pleasure, Pain, the Passions,” *Political Essays*, 240).” This asymmetry has two dimensions. One, we respond more to pain than pleasure—more intensely and in more ways.<sup>166</sup> Pain moves us more because it focuses our attention more. We remember experiences and ideas better if they are accompanied by pain (II.10.3). This goes both for the immediate experience of pain and pleasure, and the expectation of pain and pleasure. We heed the threat of pain more than the promise of pleasure. Pain, relatively slight pain, can taint extreme pleasure much more easily than slight pleasure can alleviate extreme pain. If we are suffering a mortal illness and someone offers to fluff our pillow, this mocks our pain, it does not alleviate it. But no matter how glorious a philosopher’s godlike reveries may be at times, they are no match for a tummy ache, to say nothing of the fact that it is difficult to stand in the clearing of being when someone is

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<sup>165</sup> Many philosophers have noted that pain has a closer connection to the will than pleasure: see Tocqueville’s comparison of the South Sea Islanders and the New England Puritans in *DA, Prince XVII*, Hume’s “Of commerce” (*Political Essays*, 104) and “Of taxes” (*Ibid.*, 162); Hegel’s claim that “The History of the World is not the theatre of happiness. Periods of happiness are blank pages in it (*Philosophy of History*, 26-7),” and Montesquieu *Persian Letters* CXXV.

<sup>166</sup> Locke says that his list of the passions in II 20 is not meant to be exhaustive (II 20 18) but in “Pleasure, Pain and the Passions,” an unpublished, preparatory work for II.21, he says explicitly that there are more painful passions (“we are more sensible of, and in this world more accustomed to, pain than pleasure (“Pleasure, Pain, the Passions,” *Political Essays*, 241)”).

pulling out your toenails.<sup>167</sup> In a head to head, pain wins out; pleasure thrives at the mercy of pain. Pain, or the absence of pain, is the condition of pleasure.<sup>168</sup>

The second dimension of the asymmetry is that pain always taints our experience of pleasure. It must, if desire attends the pleasant passions (hope, love, joy) as well as the painful ones. If we really take pleasure in something, we desire to secure it, or to be able to reproduce it in the future, which is to say we experience some uneasiness over it. Locke defines love as the satisfaction that comes from the knowledge that we do have the power to reproduce or secure some future good (“Pleasure, Pain, the Passions”). Thus, unlike Aristotle (*Ethics* 1153a1, X.14, 1173a25, and 1173b15-20), there are no pure pleasures for Locke.<sup>169</sup> Speaking loosely, the purest pleasure for Locke would be the one we are most confident in being able to secure. But its “purity” would be totally circumstantial to the pleasure itself and, strictly speaking, consist of two pleasures, not one.

So empiricism tells us pleasure and pain are prior to good and evil, and an examination of the nature of desire tells us that pain is prior to pleasure.

Empiricism leads to hedonism, and examination of desire leads to “negative

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<sup>167</sup> The same goes for Machiavelli’s famous letter of December 10, 1513 (“...and for the space of four hours I feel no boredom, I forget every pain, I do not fear poverty, death does not frighten me.”) and Rousseau’s 5<sup>th</sup> Promenade. Locke would say that these experiences were either predicated on an willful, illusory belief that they will last indefinitely, or, what amounts to the same thing, not fully conscious experiences, and thus not the experiences of an individual self or person.

<sup>168</sup> In argument similar to Dr. Johnson’s “I refute him thus” criticism of Berkeley, Locke asserts in IV.10.2 that pain (and also sometimes pleasure, too (IV.9.3) is the most indisputable proof of existence (also IV.2.14 and IV.11.8).

<sup>169</sup> See also “Happiness A” in *Political Essays*, 251-2 and Montaigne’s “That we taste nothing pure.”

hedonism.”<sup>170</sup> Prior to any direct, thematic consideration of the relation between the understanding and the will, we know that if the understanding does *not* move the will, since the only other candidate would be desire and desire is uneasiness, it is likely that uneasiness moves the will. We will in the immediate present, and we only will one thing at a time, and so, given the prevalence of desire and the asymmetry between pain and pleasure, it is only natural the will would be dominated by present pain, unease, not the promise of absent good furnished it by the understanding. But we cannot be sure that uneasiness determines the will until we have considered more directly why the understanding does not.

### ***I.3 Same subject continued: uneasiness determines the will (II.21)***

Locke introduces his argument proper for why uneasiness, not the good, determines the will by saying “Experience, and the reason of the thing (II.21.33)” support him. “Experience” here refers to the same “experience” he relied on to define willing and distinguish it from desiring-direct, conscious observation of ourselves in action (I.4.25, II.1.1-2). Locke has in mind the particular experiences he will point out which are familiar and apparent to all. “Reason” refers to

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<sup>170</sup> Kraus 1984.

Locke's analysis of our constitution, of what faculties we have and what they are for.<sup>171</sup>

First, Locke notes that, well, humans just tend not to work very hard when times are good (II.21.34). Why has complacency proved to be such a persistent, intractable problem throughout political history?<sup>172</sup> Perhaps it is because uneasiness and only uneasiness moves the will. Locke also notes the close relation between certain (natural) pains and the goals of self-preservation and species preservation. This would seem to suggest that uneasiness' moving the will is part of God or nature's design. Have not these pains proved to be fairly effective in preserving the species and individuals, generally speaking? Obviously, the relation between what is required for preservation (of selves, organs and species) and what is pleasant is not absolute. But we should not be distracted by the fact that the most pleasant things are not in every case the things most useful to our preservation. What's more impressive is that, generally speaking and in our ordinary, unreflective daily lives, we are guided by pleasure and pain and they conduce to preservation. This is especially so for Pain, "the most importunate of all sensations (II.1.21)." In children, Pain "suppl[ies] the

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<sup>171</sup> For other examples of "reason" used in this sense, see II.7.6, II.8.18, II.23.12, and III.3.1. Of course, strictly speaking, an argument said to be based on "reason" cannot rest on a basis separate from experience. For Locke, everything must be founded on experience (I.4.25, II.1.2, and II.11.15), unless, perhaps, it is rooted in "the Wisdom and Goodness of the Sovereign [sic] Disposer of all Things" (II.7.6).

<sup>172</sup> "[O]pinion of store is one the chief causes of want, and satisfaction with the present induces neglect of provision for the future" (Bacon "The Great Instauration"; see also *New Organon* I.85, "Of Deformity"); "A Full Belly is the Mother of all Evil," *Poor Richard's Almanac*, 30).

Place of Consideration and Reasoning,” and even in adults, it “act[s] quicker than Consideration (II.10.3).” Pain “makes both the Young and Old avoid painful Objects, with that haste, which is necessary for their Preservation; and in both settles in the Memory a caution for the Future (*Ibid.*).” According to Locke, we are more purely hedonistic beings than we realize, in the sense that pain and pleasure, and especially pain, work remarkably well, unassisted by thought, in ensuring the preservation of our organs, selves and species (II.7.5, IV.11.8).<sup>173</sup> It is impossible to overstate the importance of pleasure and pain to our experience of the world and ourselves. Locke strains to fathom what conscious experience would be like without pleasure and pain (II.1.11). Not only are they probably all we know of before we are born (II.10.5), they remain the most important ideas during our adult life as well.

Next Locke brings up incontinence (II.21.35-6). What is going on when men neglect what they must know to be good? Locke believes that the most sensible conclusion to draw from the experiential fact of incontinence is that our rational conviction that some good is good is a necessary but not sufficient cause for our being moved by it. It’s not that incontinent people lack a sufficiently clear view of the good, but that they don’t feel uneasy in its absence.

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<sup>173</sup> It is worth mentioning that when Locke does reflect on how well pain and pleasure work to achieve the end of preservation, he often suggests that we see in this connection the excellence of God’s (or sometimes “Nature’s”-II.7.4, II.10.3) design (II.7.3-6). Although compare II.8.13, where Locke says that there can be no rational explanation for the connection between primary and secondary qualities established by God such as “the *Idea* of Pain” and “the motion of a piece of Steel dividing our Flesh.”

Incontinence is for Locke a particular which reveals the universal: men only ever pursue the good when they feel pain in its absence. Of course we are not always incontinent, but that is because sometimes we are uneasy about truly good things, which will satisfy us in a more than momentary way. The good *qua* good never operates directly on the will: present pain, uneasiness, does.

For Locke, it is a question of what *holds* the will more readily-present pain or absent good. What is more effective in convincing the alcoholic wastrel to change-giving him a clearer conception of penury's disadvantages, or hitting rock bottom? In our thinking about what moves us, Locke believes that we are not struck enough by how disproportionately a present pain arrests our attention relative to its true badness, and, *mutatis mutandis*, an absent good does not. We react immediately to any given uneasiness, especially if it is of a present and pressing variety, and we do so in exact proportion to its intensity. Absent goods don't have this effect on us, however clearly apprehended and sincerely acknowledged. There is not the strict proportionality between a good's goodness and the intensity and devotion with which we pursue it as there is between a pain's painfulness and our determination to alleviate it. We are constitutionally incapable of regarding pain with objective indifference, even if we wanted to. But absent goods easily can be something we just contemplate and do not pursue.

So what is the reason for this experience? What facts about our constitutions, our faculties confirm that incontinence is what Locke says it is? Well, the problem cannot be with the will itself, for, as we know in the cases of strong passions such as love or revenge, the will is certainly capable of being held, focused towards one particular task for some time. Rather, since the will is capable of only one determination at a time, the problem is with the “weak constitution of our minds,” which “weakness” consists in the fact that we can only will one thing at a time. Thus, given the aforementioned (1) constant onslaught of desire, that is uneasiness, and (2) disproportion between absent good and present pain, small wonder that not our conception of good but uneasiness determines the will. “[A]s long as any *uneasiness*, any desire remains in our Mind, there is no room for *good*, barely as such, to come to the *will*, or at all to determine it (II.21.46).” When uneasiness recurs with frequency and even the pleasant passions are touched by it, when do we even have the time to focus on absent goods? The other reason Locke invokes is a version of no action at a distance, applied to human things: “tis against the nature of things, that what is absent should operate, where it is not (II.21.37).” Absent goods are just like any other idea in the understanding-passively perceived to be themselves, but that’s it. The understanding is just a passive power. All it does is perceive: we have no compelling reason to believe it is active, that it also moves us. Absent goods must be “made present” so that we feel pain over their absence and pursue them.



What makes them present is desire: desire moves the will, not understanding, only and always.

We will return to these matters later, when we discuss the possibility of shaping our desires. For right now, the point is just how Locke views incontinence as support for “uneasiness determines the will”-incontinence is a matter of having the wrong desires, not lacking the right ideas. From this outlier case, Locke universalizes and says that all action is a matter of having the wrong (or right) desires, not lacking the right (or wrong) ideas. Locke’s argument is, that, clearly the good does not move the will in the case of incontinence and that the will can only be moved by one or the other, therefore, uneasiness must move the will.

The next fact of experience Locke brings up is the relative weakness of the afterlife to motivate us. “How many are to be found, that have had lively representations of the unspeakable joys of Heaven, which they acknowledge both possible and probable too, who yet would be content to take up with their happiness here? and so the prevailing uneasinesses of their desires, let loose after the enjoyments of this life, take their turns in the determining their wills, and all that while they take not one step, are not one jot moved, towards the good things of another life considered as never so great (II.21.37).”<sup>174</sup> Locke’s discussion of incontinence addressed the failure of particular goods to move us; his discussion

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<sup>174</sup> See also “Happiness B” in *Political Essays*, 271.

of the weakness of the effect of the afterlife addresses our failure to orient our lives with reference to our conception of the greatest good, which would presumably be “Heaven” for Locke’s audience. Why does the greatest good, the *Summum bonum*, move men so erratically, so disproportionate to its true greatness? Compare the effect of “Heaven” on our will with that of “tonight’s dinner.” “[I]n this life, there are not many, whose happiness reaches so far, as to afford them a constant train of moderate mean Pleasures, without any mixture of *uneasiness*; and yet they could be content to stay here forever: Though they cannot deny, but that it is possible, there may be a state of eternal durable Joys after this life, far surpassing all the good is to be found here (II.21.44).” This is because uneasiness, not the good, moves the will. The understanding is not strong enough to overcome the persistent, mundane uneasinesses of living. Locke asks us to imagine how different our experience of the world would be if Heaven really did determine us equal to its true goodness. How would we ever find time to do the dishes (II.21.38)?

Locke’s interpretation of why Heaven tends not to move our will is the same as why the drunken wastrel persists in being a drunken wastrel. Having the right conception of the good is a necessary but not sufficient condition for pursuing it. In some cases, it might be because men are not sincere enough in their belief about Heaven, but that cannot account for how strikingly weak Heaven is in moving the great majority of men. The real reason why Heaven is

so weak in moving us proportionate to its true, professed greatness is because it is an absent good, which means it is easily eclipsed by objectively inferior yet more immediate worldly concerns.<sup>175</sup> This explains the relative weakness of Heaven to move us, relative to its true greatness. If the good moved the will, then the greatest good would move the will, which means we would all be monks.

What to say, then, about those people who are in fact, monks? And to the extent that many others are not, well, first of all, maybe they should be, and second of all maybe the reason they are not is because they are not sincere enough in their belief. Maybe those who profess to believe in Heaven yet neglect it lack intellectual discipline. Later on, Locke does take up these questions somewhat-asceticism, the question of how the afterlife's possibility affects its appeal, the difference between the few and many-but let us put off the full treatment until the discussion of how we may influence our desires with our judgment. For now, the point is just that we have a constitutional disposition to forget the afterlife because uneasiness not the good determines the will. The

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<sup>175</sup> Locke also at one point says Heaven is "more possible" than "the attainment, and continuation of that pittance of Honour, Riches, or Pleasure, which [men] pursue; and for which they neglect that eternal State (II.21.44)," but elsewhere leaves the after life as a "possible consequence of a good Life here" (II.21.70). Even if it is only "a bare possibility" he argues, on the basis of hedonistic calculation (exactly as Pascal does in his wager) that the rational thing to do would still be to pursue it, since its promise of "infinite and eternal Joys (II.21.38)" outweighs its uncertainty (II.21.70). And obviously Locke's point becomes even stronger for the many who profess to find the Afterlife probable, more than possible. Both Pangle (1988, 202) and Manent (1996, 132) note the similarity to Pascal. Locke translated works by the Jansenist Pierre Nicole and describes Pascal at one point as a "prodigy of Parts (*ECHU* II.10.9)." For more on Locke and Pascal, see Rahe 2009, 40ff.

fundamental point is the same as with incontinence: if understanding did move the will, we could not account for why Heaven is so weak in moving us. As with incontinence, Locke invokes our neglect of the afterlife as a particular experience which reveals universal mechanism of the will because it can only be accounted for by the thesis “present pain not absent good determines will.”

With his account of the reason behind the experiences which suggest that uneasiness not understanding determines the will, Locke explains what role all our faculties (reason, understanding, will, capacity for pleasure and pain) play in action. Though in a general way, Locke does intend to disappoint his indifferentist audience with his account of liberty, he also intends to articulate the true excellence of each faculty in question. There are some ways in which we are better suited for action given Locke’s understanding of the arrangement of our faculties. This is the implication of Locke’s argument about “reason of the thing”: there *is* a reason for the way our constitutions are arranged, we just need to discover it. Our constitutions are not held together by string and chewing gum. Doesn’t uneasiness succeed fairly well in ensuring the preservation of our selves, our organs and our species? When do we have experience of understanding as anything other than a passive power? Why would we need practical reason, a capacity for judging between uncertain matters, if we were simply moved by greatest good in view? All our faculties have a place and excellence in this way.

Locke even claims that uneasiness' strength and the understanding's impotence in moving the will are providential, divinely mandated. How wisely and beneficently God designed things, by making uneasiness, rather than the "bare contemplation of the good" direct us towards our greatest needs, the preservation of species and self (II.21.34; II.7.4). Locke asks us to consider the difficulty we would have in attaining our good were contemplation the means to it. He brings up Paul's counsel from I Corinthians 7:9 to emphasize how much the sacrament of marriage owes to the pangs of lust. Furthermore, given how many more absent goods than present pains there are, what a relief God designed things as he did (II.21.44)! How miserable we would be if we were moved by *every* absent good! This attests not only to God's wisdom, but His beneficence: it is *better* that we are determined by uneasiness.<sup>176</sup>

Locke stretches things a bit with this argument about the providential basis for uneasiness. He goes way beyond what he says we can know about God's essence elsewhere in the *ECHU* (III.6.11, II.17.1) and blithely calls into question God's omnipotence, which, among other things, he elsewhere claims is one of the "Foundations of our Duty and Rules of Action" (IV.3.17; II.23.13, 34-5, III.6.11-2, III.9.23, IV.3.23, IV.10.4, IV.11.13, and IV.13.3). Why couldn't God design things such that contemplation not uneasiness moved the will? Surely

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<sup>176</sup> This is not the only example of such epistemological slave morality in the *ECHU*. For example, in II.23.12, Locke argues that it's good that we have imperfect seeing and hearing (see also IV.14.2).

this would be less difficult than to “give to some Systems of Matter fitly disposed, a power to perceive and think” (IV.3.6). And what to do with the claim that we see God’s elegant design in how effectively the pangs of lust lead us into marriage?

Locke gives his readers other causes to wonder about how seriously this should be taken. What sort of ethical teaching is this? What form of Christianity does hedonistic calculation lead us to? The next chapter will argue that the striking lack of ethical content to hedonistic Christianity (or any other ethical teaching in *ECHU* II.21) fits nicely with the specific teaching in “Of Property.” There, Locke does give a response to the question “given uneasiness, what should I do?,” namely, possession and acquisition.

But these suspicions about Locke’s orthodoxy should not distract us from the basic force to Locke’s argument about “the reason of the thing.” Given our constitutions and the world, it may be the case that a little uneasiness is a good thing, and it is definitely the case that it is vain to seek to escape it. Unease is not “dis-ease,” for in being moved by it, there is nothing necessarily unhealthy about the way we are functioning (“disease” would seem to imply sickness, incapacity, or deficiency). Pain is, if anything, more natural than pleasure (contrast *Ethics* 1173b10). To the extent that any providence or orderliness exists at all, Locke says that uneasiness is responsible for it.

## ***1.5 Uneasiness and human nature***

That completes Locke's argument for why "uneasiness not the good determines the will" and why we are not free with respect to willing. We always, only act in order to relieve some immediate, pressing uneasiness. We would be free if, simply by contemplating what is good, we then pursued it, regardless of whatever pain may be impinging on us. This is what Locke denies happens. Our understanding is a passive power: it can and does influence what we choose, but by itself it is powerless to motivate our wills. Only desire, present pain, motivates us to act. As we will develop at greater length shortly, Locke believes that the fact that we are determined to flee pain in all our actions, that there is no free will, does not rule out human liberty in some form. But however encouraging Locke becomes with respect to human self-mastery and freedom, he never retracts his original claim that "uneasiness determines the will."

Before moving on Locke's discussion of how we are free, we might pause and reflect on the uneasiness doctrine. The uneasiness doctrine is a hedonistic account of human action. Two general considerations incline Locke to hedonism. The first is his empiricism. If simple vs. complex ideas is such a fundamental distinction, it is likely that good is complex and pleasure simple, and thus we experience pleasure in a more direct, intelligible way than good. The second is

that Locke aims to give a universal theory of human action. The uneasiness teaching is, above all, a universal, doctrinaire account of the causes of human action: why do we ever work, act, move or *do* anything? Locke has a great appreciation for the variety of human desires and beliefs,<sup>177</sup> but, at some level, the structure of human action must be the same. This stems, no doubt, from Locke's conception of "nature" as, in Michael Zuckert's words, "pure immanence: what works everywhere the same."<sup>178</sup> The only way to locate this fundamental similarity of all actions, to give a truly universal account of human nature, is to focus on what is low and thisworldly. For Locke, there is no experience, or, what amounts to the same thing, no idea, more common than pain or unease (II.7.2-5, II.20.1).

The thisworldliness that results from Locke's interest in deriving a universal account of human action is worth emphasizing, because the term "uneasiness" sometimes sounds like it may refer to a spiritual or even revelatory experience. "Uneasiness" could mean a vague sense that something is not right,

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<sup>177</sup> See the discussions of cannibals and exposure of infants in Book I, women conceiving by Mandrills (III.6.23) and beast-men (IV.4.16), Prince Maurice's rational parrot (II.27.8) and "left-handed marriages" (*Political Essays*, 256). Indeed, so eager is the legendarily "doctrinaire" Locke (who "simplifies man to get results" Myers 1998, x, quoting Bloom) to note examples of the wild variety of human customs that some have accused him of being overly credulous in accepting travelers' accounts ("Then comes the credulous Mr Locke with his Indian, barbarian stories of wild nations..." (Shaftesbury, quoted in Dunn 1969, 102; see also Myers 1998 72-3 and 126, Zuckert 2002, 188 and Cox 1982, 98)).

<sup>178</sup> "Nature is the manifold of effective causes" (Zuckert 1994, 203). Zuckert contrasts this from the traditional concept of nature as a term of distinction. The context is Zuckert's discussion of Locke's radical revision of natural law.



which in turn motivates further thought or action.<sup>179</sup> But it seems to be the case for Locke that we are generally able to identify the cause of our uneasiness. Even if we cannot always do something about it (as with despair), it has a real, tangible cause. We are only moved by things which are somehow close at hand, or the pains caused by such things. Anything else would have difficulty qualifying as a cause, with a unique power to move us. Uneasiness concentrates the mind; it does not paralyze it, or even less, reveal some obscure distant truth to it. It gathers us together and gives focus and direction to our intellectual capacities through its intermediary the will. The experience of uneasiness is in no way a rare, spiritual experience for Locke, but a worldly, everyday one. As with many other elements of Locke's philosophy, the uneasiness teaching tends away from, not towards, an imaginative, poetic, mysterious view of things, because there he will find his doctrinaire, universal account of action. The uneasiness teaching is supposed to be disenchanting.

This universalistic and low-but-solid approach manifests itself even more clearly in the account Locke gives of pleasure and pain. Aristotle would insist on distinguishing between "pure" pleasures, such as those of friendship, contemplation, nice smells, music and mathematics, and "mixed" ones such as like those of eating and sleeping. This distinction may be made on a purely

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<sup>179</sup> Pierre Coste (the first French translator of *ECHU*) explains uneasiness (and his rendering of it as "inquietude" in this way: "By *inquietude*, the author means *the state of a man who is not at ease, the lack of ease & tranquility in the soul*, which is in this regard purely passive (quoted in Rahe 2009, 41)."

hedonistic plane without reference to the good's priority to the pleasant.

"Mixed" means preceded by pain; "pure" pleasures are those pursued simply for the sake of themselves, *not* in order to relieve some pain. What pains are we seeking to relieve in conversation, listening to music or doing geometry? On this basis, we may then establish a normative hierarchy of pleasures.

Locke allows some degree of distinction between pleasures and pains other than intensity. He distinguishes between natural and artificial pains, or as he puts it: "[t]he ordinary necessities of our lives...[such as] the *uneasiness* of *Hunger, Thirst, Heat, Cold, Weariness* with labour, and *Sleepiness*" and "fantastical *uneasiness*, (as itch after *Honour, Power* or *Riches*, etc.) which acquir'd habits by Fashion, Example, and Education have settled in us (II.21.45)." Natural pains are those which are more directly connected with our more fundamental concerns of preservation of species and self (II.21.34).<sup>180</sup> Locke does not claim that the natural desires are more easily satisfied than artificial ones, or that natural ones are, in every case, simply stronger than artificial ones. But they are more fundamental and recurrent, and so, although this is stated more clearly in the *Two Treatises*, it would seem to be implied that there is something enlightened in attending to them more than the others. Locke also distinguishes between those uneasinesses which are treatable and those we simply cannot help. He draws his

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<sup>180</sup> In *STCE*, Locke presents a similar, slightly more expanded distinction between "truly natural wants" ("...the pains of sickness and hurts, hunger, thirst, and cold, want of sleep and rest or relaxation of the part wearied with labor") which "all men feel," and "the wants of fancy," which "children should never be gratified in nor suffered to mention (107)."

distinction later on in his discussion of how we exert control over our desires, what we find painful. This overlaps with natural vs. artificial but is not exactly the same since sometimes we cannot realistically help some artificial pains either.

For Locke, mixed vs. pure amounts to a distinction without a difference.<sup>181</sup> “Pure pleasures,” strictly speaking, do not exist, because if something is really a pleasure, it will necessarily give rise to uneasiness about its future perpetuation and renewal. Take joy. Joy is a pleasant passion, which means that, unlike envy, anger, and despair, we recognize joy as joy by its distinctive pleasure, not its distinctive pain. But this does not mean joy is without pain. Our experience of joy is always more or less satisfying relative to how confident we are that it will last or can be relived at will. When we experience joy in a fully self-conscious manner, we cannot help but be saddened, or at the very least distracted, by its contingency. Hence Locke’s definition: “*Joy is a delight of the Mind, from the consideration of the present or assured approaching possession of a Good (II.20.7).*” We possess reason, which means we possess foresight, (the ability to compare present and future), and so it is our unique fate as intellectual beings for

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<sup>181</sup> So, too does mental vs. bodily: “By Pleasure and Pain, I must be understood to mean of Body or Mind, as they are commonly distinguished; though in truth, they be only different Constitutions of the Mind, sometimes occasioned by disorder in the Body, sometimes by Thoughts of the Mind (II.21.3).” “Delight and Joy on the one side; and Torment and Sorrow on the other; which, for shortness sake, I shall comprehend under the names of Pleasure and Pain, there being pleasure and pain of the Mind, as well as the Body...or, to speak truly, they are all of the Mind; though some have their rise in the Mind from Thought, others in the Body from certain modifications of Motion (II.21.41).” Socrates expresses disbelief in the pleasures of the body in *Philebus* 35d. See also “Ethica A” and “Pleasure, Pain, the Passions” (*Political Essays*).

joy to be “sicklified o’er with the pale cast of thought.”<sup>182</sup> Sure, joy and pleasure possess powerful charms which tend to make us forget their contingency (II.21.64), but we will do our best to withstand these charms if we know what is good for us. We will be, on balance, *happier* if we don’t lose ourselves in joy and forget how we got there. “So the greatest Happiness consists, in *the having* those things, which produce the greatest Pleasure; and in the absence of those, which cause any disturbance, any pain (II.21.55)” (emphasis added).<sup>183</sup> No great feat of reasoning is required to help us realize that any experience of joy is conditioned by efforts which are themselves joyless and perhaps even outright painful. If we do desire to secure or perpetuate joy, then, inevitably, new desires will emerge in us, desires for the means to ensure security or perpetuation. Self-consciousness causes our desires to be limitless.

Our natural experience of pleasure and pain does not point to any natural end to desire. Desire never ceases because pain never ceases. Due to the persistence of uneasiness, restlessness is the nature of man. This bears emphasis. Locke’s uneasiness doctrine does not refer to a fact to be mastered, an

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<sup>182</sup> Or as Theodore Roosevelt once put it (to make a very different point, in fact, the opposite one) “Black care rarely sits behind a rider whose pace is fast enough” (epigraph to McCollough 1982).

<sup>183</sup> In this context, we cannot fail to quote from Hobbes’ discussion of the nature of desire and happiness: “the object of men’s desire is not to enjoy once only, and for one instant of time, but to assure forever the way of his future desire. And therefore the voluntary actions and inclinations of all men tend, not only to the procuring, but also to the assuring of a contented life...So that in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death. And the cause of this is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight than he has already attained to, or that he cannot be content with a moderate power, but because he cannot assure the power and means to life well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more (*Leviathan* XI.1-2).”

unfortunate fact of nature about which art can do something. This is the universal structure of human action, as it was in the beginning, now and ever shall be. "Uneasiness determines the will" is a natural law, like unto gravity. Nature teaches us what we should avoid, not what we should pursue. Art (custom, education) then increases the variety of uneasinesses without giving any lasting relief to those given us by nature (II.21.45). Reason in concert with art can manipulate desire and increase our prospects for satisfaction, but we can do nothing to alter the basic structure of desire as orientated towards what to avoid. The central orientation towards pain in Lockean hedonism gives it its distinctive character as "Negative Hedonism," and accounts for why, despite his uncharacteristically brash, incautious endorsement of hedonism,<sup>184</sup> he has been taken far more often to be a killjoy than a libertine,<sup>185</sup> more Poor Richard than Cole Porter.

Locke's account of our pleasures and pains is universalistic-what is important about them is what is similar. But Locke also believes that his account best explains the remarkable individualism of our experience of pleasure and pain. Due to the flexibility of human nature with respect to both opinion and desire, variety and novelty are of the essence of our experience of pleasure and pain. What we take pleasure in depends on our particular palate, which in turn

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<sup>184</sup> "Locke is a hedonist; this no one denies," Kennington 2004, 258.

<sup>185</sup> Strauss 1953, 251.

is shaped by custom, education, nature, and accident. This diversity exists not only between different people but from moment to moment within the same man (II.21.43).

It's striking how suitable for liberalism this mixture of universalism and individualism is. At some basic level, all our desires are similar, but at another, they are all essentially different. We are, in principle, all equal and all free; since we know we are all the same, we may tolerate each other's differences. Locke's understanding of "uneasiness determines the will" is not quite the same as "the desire for self-preservation is a fundamental right," but it is, as Pamela Kraus argues, "decisive preparation" for that claim (Kraus 1984). For example, we have the aforementioned distinction between "ordinary necessity" and "fantastical uneasiness," and the direct association between the former natural pains and pleasures conducive to self and species preservation (II.21.34). Indeed, in one way the uneasiness doctrine is even more familiar to the liberalism into which we are born than that of the *Two Treatises*, for which Lockean writing contains the phrase "the pursuit of happiness"?<sup>186</sup>

## ***I.6 Uneasiness and human nature continued: no Summum bonum***

Locke's uneasiness doctrine explicitly challenges ancient philosophy's notion of the *Summum bonum*. "[T]he Philosophers of old did in vain inquire,

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<sup>186</sup> "Fortunately the author of the Declaration knew the *Essay*," Kennington 2004, 268.

whether *Summum bonum* consisted in Riches, or bodily Delights, or Virtue or Contemplation: And they might have as reasonably disputed, whether the best Relish were to be found in Apples, Plumbs, or Nuts; and have divided themselves into Sects upon it (II.21.55).<sup>187</sup> The doctrine of the *Summum bonum*, found in Book I of Aristotle's *Ethics* and various passages in Plato,<sup>188</sup> holds that all our beliefs, actions and desires, our pursuits of particular goods such as money, prestige, pleasure, and also, incidentally, justice and virtue, are in some way informed by some concept of what they are for and why they are good. The greatest good (or as Plato puts it, "the idea of the good" or "the good itself") is "what every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does everything (*Republic* 505d)," and therefore its study is "the greatest and most fitting study" for man (*Republic* 504d). All human action and desire must be understood with reference to human perfection. We must look to man at his peak to understand human nature in general, just as we would look to a healthy heart to understand hearts more generally.<sup>189</sup> Which human life most fully achieves the end for which we are intended? Plato and Aristotle were of course well aware of the great disagreement about the content of the *Summum bonum*. It would not be the greatest good if it wasn't controversial. But the fact that different men may

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<sup>187</sup> Although contrast IV.12.11.

<sup>188</sup> *Republic* 504d-513e, *Phaedo* 97c ff., *Symposium* 204e-206b.

<sup>189</sup> *Ethics* 1099a22-4, 1113a25-33, 1166a12-3, 1170a14-6, 1176a15 ("...in all such matters, it seems that a thing is what it shows itself to be to a person of serious moral stature."), and *Politics* 1254a36-38; Strauss 1953, 8.

disagree about the true meaning of human perfection is less important than the conviction *that* it exists. The study of the greatest good is both inexhaustibly controversial and the most important study of all.

But in II.21, Locke claims that the investigation into the nature of the greatest good is pointless, as well as, therefore, all other debates in classical philosophy premised on its existence, such as the question of the hierarchy of the goods and the relation between the noble/beautiful and the good. In fact, even before II.21, Locke attacks the concept of the *Summum bonum* without naming it in II.20, in his account of the passions and especially desire.<sup>190</sup> Our experience of desire is the battleground between the *Summum bonum* and uneasiness doctrines. In this context, it is worth quoting Locke's definition of good and evil: "Things then are Good and Evil, only in reference to Pleasure and Pain. That we call *Good*, which is *apt to cause or increase Pleasure, or diminish Pain in us; or else to procure or preserve us the possession of any other Good, or absence of any Evil*. And on the contrary we name that *Evil*, which is *apt to produce or increase and Pain, or diminish any Pleasure in us; or else to procure us any Evil, or deprive us of any Good* (II.20.2)." This definition rules out the *Summum bonum*. The notion that the greatest good enjoys some sort of architectonic or authoritative status, that all other goods are not only relegated to a subordinate status, but in fact owe their status as goods to it, as instruments or reflections, is too abstract. "Good" simply

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<sup>190</sup> For more on Locke's critique of moral perfection, see also *RC* 245ff, and *ECHU* I.3.5, and II.28.10-2.



means “that which gives pleasure,” according to Locke. We don’t want money, prestige, power, etc., because of their participation in a greater good, we want them because they give us pleasure: it ends there.

In other words, human nature is uneasy, not erotic. In rejecting the notion of the *Summum bonum*, Locke also rejects the classical notion of *eros*, as equally abstract and too foreign to our experience of desire to accept. (Again, the debate about the relation between the beautiful/noble and the good Locke completely looks past. This is of course consistent with his claim that it is pointless to dispute about what qualities define the transcendent good, beauty being classed with virtue, riches, honor, power, and pleasure.) There is no deep, fundamental human desire any more than there is an overarching, transcendent good *to* desire. In implanting desires in us, nature just makes us uneasy, without directing us towards any ultimate satisfaction. Our natural uneasiness is then only compounded by art, which heaps on more and more pains to be avoided without giving permanent relief to the natural ones. Human effort can do nothing to alter the basic structure of desire as an orientation towards what to avoid (II.21.45). Desire, all desire, is less a desire for something than a desire to be relieved from something. We are always, only moved away from things.

The *Summum bonum* seems to imply that, in principle, we could reach a state of secure, lasting contentment. Although we could never possess the good itself, we certainly could be more or less closer to it. This aspect of the *Summum*

*bonum* teaching suffers from an especially grievous misunderstanding, according to Locke. For Locke, desires are naturally limitless because uneasiness is naturally limitless. In Locke's view, though man desires contentment/happiness, he is not suited for it at its highest extent, due to the fact that he is self-conscious. We are bound to our self-consciousness, which means we are bound to realize when we are honest with ourselves that pleasure tends to be insecure and fleeting and uneasiness never lets up.

## ***II.1 Happiness and freedom***

We must now return to the theme of freedom. Locke defines human liberty as the "power to act in accord with will." We act freely when our attempts to relieve our uneasiness are not thwarted by external circumstances. This is an extremely restrictive view of human freedom (II.21.56). If "freedom" means nothing more than the power to act in accord with the will's commands, freedom is an entirely contingent thing. We are determined before we will, and our ability to will, to be free, can be limited by any number of bodily or environmental circumstances. Not only may our will be frustrated by any number of factors, we cannot even control what we will before it is frustrated.

This is a bleak "freedom," but it is not Locke's last word. Locke spends the second half of II.21 discussing happiness and judgment and developing a

redefinition of freedom. He does not retract anything he has said, but there is yet some hope that we are not simply the playthings of transient uneasiness.

Locke claims that we are free in that we can manipulate desire and influence what we are uneasy about. This places an important qualification on the previous definition of freedom in that it implies that not *everything* that occurs prior to the act of willing is out of our hands. Locke's argument about how we are free is, again, a combination of experience and reason. We are not the slaves of momentary pain because we desire happiness, which Locke defines as "the utmost pleasure we are capable of (II.21.42)." We know that we desire happiness from experience and because we are rational beings. We are capable of abstraction, memory and foresight, so, inevitably, we compare our pleasures and pains to one another. That we desire happiness and that we are rational beings are inseparable facts of our existence; the two propositions simply refer to different aspects of the same phenomenon. Only intellectual beings can be said to desire happiness. If we were not rational, we could still be sensitive beings, and react to pain and pleasure, but we would not be interested in the utmost pleasure of which we are capable. Rationality makes us want more and more secure pleasure.

What follows from this is the fact that we can and do use our reason to pursue happiness, or in other words, to deliberate. The desire for happiness means a concern for future, absent goods. Such goods are easily eclipsed by

present pain since, technically speaking, absent goods as such move us not at all. Under what conditions do we then pursue absent goods? When do we feel uneasy about absent goods? When we judge them to be necessary to our happiness. We know from experience that we may exercise some influence over our desires, prior to when they determine our wills. The question we ask ourselves when we perform this suspension of desire is “is this good necessary for my happiness?” This is the essence of deliberation for Locke, and also what constitutes our perfection as intellectual beings:

There being in us a great many *uneasinesses* always soliciting, and ready to determine the *will*, it is natural, as I have said, that the greatest, and most pressing should determine the will to the next action; and so it does *for the most part but not always* [emphasis added]. For the mind having in most cases, as is evident in Experience, a power to suspend the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires, and so all, one after another, is at liberty to consider the objects of them; examine them on all sides, and weight them with others. *In this lies the liberty Man has* [emphasis added]; and from the not using of it right comes all that variety of mistakes, errors, and faults which we run into, in the conduct of our lives, and our endeavors after happiness; whilst we precipitate the determination of our *wills*, and engage too soon before due *Examination*. (II.21.47)<sup>191</sup>

But let us back up a moment. Locke’s most basic claim is that happiness is the end of all human desire and therefore all action. We are always pursuing happiness: happiness is integral to our conscious experience of life (II.27.17, 25-6). In order to support such a universalistic claim, Locke must (yet again)

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<sup>191</sup> On the similarity between this understanding of deliberation and Hobbes’, see Zuckert 2002, 10.

abstract from the particulars and strip happiness down. Were happiness something rarefied or complicated, Locke would not be able to refer to it as “the unavoidable concomitant of consciousness (II.27.26).” To be a self just means to be conscious, and consciousness implies a concern for happiness, Locke says, so happiness must be a simple thing. “*Happiness* then in its full extent is the utmost Pleasure we are capable of, and *Misery* the utmost Pain: And the lowest degree of what can be called *Happiness*, is so much ease from all Pain, and so much present Pleasure, as without which anyone cannot be content (II.21.42).” Compared to other philosophers, Locke finds happiness to be a fairly simple, straightforward matter. Though a champion of freedom of mind and critic of convention in other contexts, Locke resists defining “true happiness” in a way that departs from the experience and belief of most men.<sup>192</sup>

The simplicity of Lockean happiness can be seen in how little time he spends searching out its true meaning and in the absence of two things from its definition. First, there is no mention of “activity,” which is interesting for a philosopher of restlessness. Second, unlike in book I of Aristotle’s *Ethics*, happiness does not have any important moral content, according to Locke. The term “virtue” is totally absent from Locke’s discussion of happiness. Locke also does not seem to believe that concerns about deserving happiness are in any way

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<sup>192</sup> On this point, see James Nichols’ comparison of Hobbes’ simplified conception of happiness and Lucretius’ philosophic one (Nichols 1976, 183-4).

intrinsic to the phenomenon. Two considerations lead Locke to believe that simplified happiness is the true happiness. One, because what motivates us is pain, unease, the pursuit of happiness must be defined negatively: "Happiness [is] the enjoyment of Pleasure, without any considerable mixture of uneasiness (II.21.62)." Any state in which pleasure predominates over pain qualifies as "a happiness" (II.21.44). Experience confirms that most men are satisfied with ease alone; relief from pain is the effectual truth of our pursuit of "the utmost Pleasure we are capable of."<sup>193</sup> If this is not the case, if relief is not usually enough, why is complacency or short-sightedness such a big problem in human affairs? Why do we regard sleep, the lack of sensibility altogether, as pleasant? Because it brings relief, which is satisfying to us ("Pleasure, Pain, the Passions"). Second, to the extent that not all are satisfied with relief, that some do pursue extremes of pleasure, it is not clear that such hedonistic ambitions issue in greater happiness because we seem so poorly suited for them. An insistence on the difference between relief and joy could lead to an underestimation of the danger of complacency for most men, and the danger of self-forgetting ecstasy for others. For most people, a life of occasional ecstasy may very well be, on balance, more miserable than life of sustained, moderate ease. Furthermore, it is harder to say we are suited for joy in the way that we are suited for ease. Recall the earlier discussion of joy and self-consciousness. Self-consciousness taints joy, but it does

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<sup>193</sup> II.1.4 cites "satisfaction" as the opposite of "uneasiness."

not necessarily affect ease so profoundly. Indeed, as he will say in his discussion about the causes of wrong judgment, Locke believes that far more unhappiness results from short-sightedness and living in the present than foresightedness and living in the future.

Locke's discussion of happiness simply restates the uneasiness teaching with reference to the fact that we are rational beings. "Uneasiness determines the will" and "Happiness is the end of all desire" are, for intellectual beings, two sides of the same coin. Just as with "uneasiness determines the will," we have no choice but to pursue happiness in all our actions, indeed, we are obliged, bound by our very constitutions to do so. We pursue happiness even when our language and/or our self-understanding might suggest otherwise. This of course implies that we never actually achieve happiness in any stable, lasting version.<sup>194</sup>

Understanding the centrality of happiness for Locke's understanding of freedom and human action helps to clarify the significance of Locke's rejection of the *Summum bonum*. To reject the *Summum bonum* must necessarily lead to a redefinition of happiness. Locke and Hobbes both retain happiness as the end of all our desires, but they develop a definition of happiness that does not include

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<sup>194</sup> "...more a goal to be sought than a state to be experienced" (Zuckert 2002 11; see also Zuckert 1994 283-4). "Happiness and misery are the names of two extremes, the utmost bounds whereof we know not (II.21.41)." See Locke's early, only partly ironic, essay "Can Anyone by Nature be Happy in this Life? No" (*Essays on the Law of Nature and Associated Writings*) and "Happiness A" in *Political Essays*. "Happiness is the continuation of content without any molestation. Very imperfect in this world. No body happy here certain." (quoted in Dunn 1969, 1)

any conception of the greatest good. “[T]he felicity of this life... consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such *Finis ultimus* (utmost aim) nor *Summum Bonum* (greatest good) as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers. Nor can any man any more live, when desires are at an end, than he, whose senses and imagination are at a stand. Felicity is a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the later (*Leviathan* XI.1).” Locke and Hobbes both posit a connection between the reality of “repose of a mind satisfied” and a belief in the *Summum bonum*, and they reject both at once.

Rousseau thinks that the inability to experience pleasures without anxiety is only a problem for especially reflective individuals such as intellectuals.<sup>195</sup> But Locke draws no distinction between Valais mountaineers and intellectuals. Reflectiveness does indeed spoil happiness, according to Locke, but reflectiveness understood in a very basic sense as rationality and self-consciousness. Rousseau once sympathized with one of his unhappy, intellectual correspondents that “one does not take off one’s head like one’s bonnet, and one does not return to simplicity any more than to childhood.”<sup>196</sup> Locke would say this to everyone.

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<sup>195</sup> See “Letter to Voltaire” (Rousseau 1992, 111-2), *Emile* 80-3, 483, and Kelly “Rousseau and the Bad Calculations of the Philosophers.”

<sup>196</sup> Quoted in Kelly, *Ibid.*



Locke and Hobbes may be said to reject the *Summum bonum* in the sense that that they may be said to reject the orientation towards the *Summum bonum*. We are simply not constituted in a manner that allows us either to gain true knowledge of the nature of the greatest good (it's epistemologically unsound), nor does our conception of the greatest good exert any sort of authoritative influence over our lives. We must therefore redefine happiness accordingly. Happiness is neither anything like repose of a mind satisfied, nor does it entail the possession of the greatest good. Happiness means restless motion, moving from desire to desire without attaining any lasting or secure satisfaction.

How odd happiness becomes when the greatest good is excised from its definition. What we really want, when we give it a moment's reflection, is not so much contentment itself, but the means or power necessary for "the assuring of a contented life." We want the means to achieve, obtain or assure the thing, not the thing itself. According to Locke, we are equally bound to pursue happiness as we are bound never to achieve it because (1) self-consciousness and our hedonistic constitution drive us constantly to pursue more and better pleasures and (2) the *Summum bonum* is out, and so, too, is repose and a satisfied mind.

Happiness makes us concerned for absent goods. Though "the weak constitution of our minds" gives the advantage to the short term, we cannot help but be concerned for happiness because we cannot help but be concerned for future pleasures, or that we might be missing out on a better deal. Our desire for

happiness gives a breadth of horizon and seriousness to our concern for pleasure. The core of this seriousness is deliberation, “the suspension of desire.” Desire determines the will, but deliberation may affect desire. “[I]n most cases we are able to suspend the present satisfaction of any desire (II.21.52).”<sup>197</sup> Deliberation consists in representing goods to our desire, that is, informing ourselves about what our desire is: “is this necessary to my happiness?” Our answer will determine our desire for the absent good in question, that is, whether or not we are uneasy enough in its absence to pursue it.

But unlike “uneasiness determines the will,” Locke seems to think “happiness determines desire” easy and uncontroversial. He says at one point that it is “past doubt” (II.21.68) and, in general, argues much less strenuously on its behalf.<sup>198</sup> Our concern for happiness opens up a space in which we can engage our intellectual faculties which otherwise would be useless to us. This space defines freedom, its scope and character; to deny freedom would be to deny concern, which, as Locke argues in *ECHU* II.27, would mean to deny consciousness. According to Locke, it is impossible to be both conscious and without concern for one’s self and one’s happiness at the same time. When people are said to perform “selfless acts,” such acts are, in truth, either taken without full consciousness (i.e. by a mad man) or, upon closer scrutiny, are not as

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<sup>197</sup> How much or how often? Locke says different things: sometimes not much (II.21.56), sometimes most cases (II.21.52). He probably thinks it varies from person to person (II.21.53).

<sup>198</sup> In Book I, the desire for happiness (and aversion to misery) is the only truly innate practical principle mentioned by Locke (I.3.3).

truly selfless as they first appear. Consciousness and concern are inextricable, conscious concern means concern for happiness, and this means a sort of freedom exists, from what is temporary and most immediate. All freedom from transient, accidental pain, all of our ability to orient ourselves towards future reasonable goods, ultimately rests on our concern for happiness. “The constant desire of Happiness, and the constraint it puts upon us to act for it, no Body, I think, accounts an abridgement of *Liberty*, or at least an abridgment of *Liberty* to be complain’d of (II.21.50).” We are free because we are concerned for happiness-this is what Locke means when he says happiness is the “foundation” of freedom (II.21.51).

Just as the Teutons discovered free government in the forests of Germany (*Spirit of the Laws* XI.6), Locke discovers freedom of action in our desire for happiness.<sup>199</sup> Our desire for happiness makes us free, but in a manner slightly different from freedom as defined before (“action in accordance with will”). What makes someone free is the ability to influence his never-ceasing desires by making judgments about what is necessary to his happiness. Freedom means freedom to pursue and achieve happiness by means of our own faculties, and above all our judgment. Contrary to the impression he gave before, Locke does not hold that freedom pertains exclusively to actions “consequent to volition (II.21.56).” What would it mean that liberty is *entirely* contingent, the result of

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<sup>199</sup> See Zuckert 2002, 11 and Myers 1998, 141.

external forces out of our control? Are all men in free countries free men? No, actually, not any more than all men in free countries are happy men. Locke has not sacrificed anything regarding his former teaching on human determinism, but by placing happiness on the table, he shows how we as whole persons may yet be said to be free though we are never free from desire, nor are our wills free.

## ***II.2 Judgment and freedom***

II.21 grounds and places judgment, thus fulfilling a main promise of the *ECHU*, that we are suited for practice, indeed, better suited than for theory, and that the understanding is “the Candle, that is set up in us, [which] shines bright enough for all our Purposes” (I.1.5; II.15.11, II.22.10, II.23.12-3, IV.12.10-11, and IV.11.8; see also Grant 1987, 12 and 39).

Locke claims that his argument is not only based on experience, but also perfection (of faculties, not substances). The perfection of our practical reason or judgment consists in determining which absent goods are necessary to our happiness—that’s what it’s *for*, what it’s good at. Absent goods affect us, move us towards their pursuit, by way of the intermediary of judgment, or, more specifically, through the opinions we with our judgments form about their necessity to our happiness (II.21.59). If we have judged correctly, we have “raised desire,” that is, made ourselves uneasy, “in due proportion to the value

of that good (II.21.46).” Judgment’s medium (or technically, the medium in which we work in accord with judgment) is then desire, uneasiness, not the will. It’s not so much a question of making ourselves more or less uneasy but of being uneasy about the right things. We can and “should take pains to suit the relish of our Minds to the true intrinsic good or ill, that is in things; and not permit an allow’d or supposed possible great and weighty good to slip out of our thoughts, without leaving any relish, any desire of it self there, till, by a due consideration of its true worth, we have formed appetites in our Minds suitable to it, and *made ourselves uneasy* [emphasis added] in the want of it or the fear of losing it (II.21.53).” Judgment enables us to correct our “palate” in accord with nature and circumstances (II.21.54, 56, and 69).

Judgment enables us to influence our desires in two ways. The first is through deliberation on the spot. If you find cod liver oil and beet greens repulsive, focus less on their taste and more on how healthy they are for you.<sup>200</sup> Second, we may influence our tastes over the long term with the aid of “practice, application, and custom (II.21.69).”<sup>201</sup> Deliberation, the first form, is the more fundamental form of freedom reason affords us, in the sense that it affords us freedom from any random transient present pain. How could we exercise

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<sup>200</sup> “To which the consideration of the pleasure there is in health and strength (to which that meat is subservient) may add a new Gusto, able to make us swallow an ill relish’d portion (II.21.69).”

<sup>201</sup> See also “Ethica B” *Political Essays*, 319-20.

judgment at all if we were simply the playthings of each arbitrary, immediate uneasiness?

But habit governed by reason is by far the more *effective* form of freedom: “Habits have powerful charms, and put so strong attractions of easiness and pleasure into what we accustom ourselves to, that we cannot forbear to do, or at least be easy in the omission of actions, which habitual practice has suited and thereby recommends to us (II.21.69).” Like other moderns,<sup>202</sup> Locke is greatly impressed with the flexibility of human nature. And what else does saying “human nature is really, really flexible” mean than “Custom [is] a greater Power than Nature” (I.3.25).<sup>203</sup> “Hunger, Thirst, Heat, Cold, Weariness with labour and Sleepiness” are pains we owe to nature, but all other forms of uneasiness are “fantastical” and owing somehow to “Fashion, Example, and Education” (II.21.45). So the influence of custom is vast and inevitable.<sup>204</sup> The question then becomes who or what is behind custom? Independent practical reason or “the busie mind of man” (1T 58)? In II.21, Locke emphasizes the responsibility for our own happiness which the flexibility of human nature imposes on us. The most effective way to do this is reason in concert with habit over the long term. Locke

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<sup>202</sup> “Man is the flexible being,” Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws* “Preface”; see also Rousseau’s *Second Discourse* (discussion of perfectibility), *Julie* (“Who is daring enough to assign exact limits to Nature and assert: Here is as far as Man can go, and no further?” (1997, “Second Preface,” 7)) and *Social Contract* II.7, and Strauss, 1959, 42-3.

<sup>203</sup> The work of Locke which discusses the influence of habit/custom/art on us with greatest depth is *STCE* (1, 106, 115, 164, 216).

<sup>204</sup> The all-powerful influence of habit/custom is also essential to Locke’s empiricist theory. Locke says that the only reason why his views on the nature and origin of ideas and language seem foreign to us is that the process by which we form them is so habitual (II.9.10 and IV.7.11).

wants us to focus less on how to improve our capacity to think through a present proposal when we are confronted with it and more on how to implant in ourselves the right inclinations.<sup>205</sup>

This emphasis on long term freedom we can see in an example Locke uses to illustrate the nature of vice, that of a crime committed while drunk (II.21.35).<sup>206</sup> This seems like an odd choice-doesn't drunken vice resemble an amoral phenomenon, not an immoral one? Aren't crimes committed while drunk more excusable than those committed out of calculation, with full awareness? But Locke suggests we hold someone accountable for his crimes-any crimes-for the same reason why we hold a drunkard responsible: "he has vitiated his own Palate, and must be answerable to himself for the sickness and death which follow from it (II.21.56)." The drunkard did not expect he would do X when he set out to get drunk, but he knew of the morally debilitating effect alcohol has on him. He made himself weak, and thus set himself up for X, which Locke implies is the case for all vice. We perform vicious actions because we have made ourselves weak, or have been complicit in our becoming weak. What the drunken criminal does over the short term is what all vicious people do over the long term. Our complicity in "vitiating our palate" vindicates punishment. We

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<sup>205</sup> "Reason can pronounce on the likely consequence of action in pursuit of one or another desire and on the coherence of this or that action with the agent's overall goal of happiness. It allows in principle the construction of a life with an overall shape and integrity (Zuckert 2002, 11)."

<sup>206</sup> Locke also discusses drunkenness in II.21.63 and II.27.22.

can and should be held accountable for our desires, for what we find pleasant and painful.<sup>207</sup>

For Locke, most men fail to attain happiness because they employ their judgment wrongly, not because they don't employ it at all. Because practical reason only deals with absent goods, it always deals in probabilities; judgment, practical reason, is calculation. "Judging is, as it were, balancing an account, and determining on which side the odds lies" (II.21.67; see also IV.14-15).<sup>208</sup> Present goods and bads we know with certainty, not absent ones (II.21.58). Wrong judgment consists in a mistaken calculation about some absent good. We judge wrongly when we underestimate an absent good's degree or certainty of goodness, or just reason that, since we are happy now without it, it *can't* be necessary to our happiness. We may judge wrongly about a good in itself, in the amount of happiness it will bring, or in what will follow from it: "were every action concluded within it self, and drew no Consequences after it, we should

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<sup>207</sup> Locke's argument about the justness of punishing drunk men is especially interesting in light of the fact that he does later argue that it is not just to punish genuinely mad men (II.27.20). Responsibility must be affixed to consciousness (this is the central argument of II.27) and anyone who lacks consciousness cannot be held accountable for their actions. In this discussion, Locke clarifies that, in order for a "temporary drunkenness" defense to make sense, a lack of consciousness on the part of the defendant would have to be positively demonstrated, which is a near-impossible thing to do (II.27.22). Criminals should be assumed conscious, until proven otherwise.

<sup>208</sup> "Reason, [Locke] argued...following Hobbes, contains no substantive principles within it, not even such vague things as 'seek the good'; reason is merely a calculative power. Locke, Hobbes and others understood reason more or less as a kind of computer, a logic processor. It has no *content* other than what is supplied from elsewhere; it requires *input*" (Zuckert 2002, 189; see also Zuckert 1994, 199-201). Among other things, this implies that there is no such thing as conscience for Locke (See *ECHU* I.3 and Zuckert 2002, 189). For other good treatments of Locke on moral and political judgment see Grant 1987 Chapter One (especially 40-9), and Chapter Four 192-7, both of which place *ECHU* II.21 within Locke's overall effort to emphasize the necessity of judgment while navigating between both absolutism and relativism. See also Casson 2004. Myers 1998, Chapter Three discusses the role of judgment and probability in Lockean natural science.



always infallibly prefer the best (II.21.58),” but this is not the case. In every case, the result of a wrong judgment is that we do not pursue the good proportionately to its true goodness, that is, the amount of pleasure it will bring.

The cause of this we have already gone through—the “weak and narrow constitution of our minds (II.21.64).” We have a constitutional disposition towards hastiness and complacency: “Men, like spend-thrift Heirs, are apt to judge a little in Hand better than a great deal to come; and so for small Matters in Possession, part with great ones in Reversion (II.21.63).” We are disproportionately susceptible to present pain, and are often tempted by the thought that an absent good may not turn out to be all it is made out to be (a mistake we cannot make about a present pain). We wrongly judge the consequences of our actions because of ignorance or “blind Precipitancy (II.21.67).” Usually, wrong judgment is an intellectual error about moral matters itself caused by a prior moral failing, such as “sloth and negligence, heat and passion, the prevalency of fashion, or acquired indispositions (II.21.67).” In right judgment, contrarily, we “stand still, open the eyes, look about, and take a view of the consequence of what we are going to do, as much as the weight of the matter requires (II.21.67).” The consequence of wrong judgment is always unhappiness; right judgment does what time and experience will do otherwise—make apparent what conduces to unhappiness. Right judgments direct us to virtue and happiness and wrong ones lead us toward vice and misery.

At this point it would be appropriate to take up one objection to Locke's claim about the desire for happiness being a natural law governing human behavior as does gravity. What about monks and martyrs? Do *all* people constantly pursue happiness, regardless of what they believe they are doing? Aren't there at least exceptions? The most direct treatment Locke gives to this question, the form of it in which he seems to be most interested, is the case of consensual slavery or imprisonment (II.21.50). But consensual slavery or imprisonment is not exactly the same thing as the case of monks and martyrs because Locke always expects that an individual who so consents will regret it later. He will recognize his initial judgment as a wrong judgment because of the misery it will bring. "[W]hich way ever it be, either by placing it where really it is not, or by neglecting the means, as not necessary to it, when a Man misses his great end Happiness, he will acknowledge he judg'd not right (II.21.68)." Consensual slavery is the (seeming) exception which proves the rule, that is, the natural law of Locke's teaching on happiness, uneasiness and judgment.

The clearest thing to say about Locke on asceticism is that he simply does not find monks and martyrs to be exceptions, however outrageous some may find this to be.<sup>209</sup> Due to the flexibility of human nature and corresponding

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<sup>209</sup> "I wonder what was the greatest present uneasiness of the martyr St. Lawrence on his gridiron. His liberation rested with himself: it was to be bought with a word. There was the pain of future remorse in the scale against that word of apostasy: there was the pain of actual burning fire making for it. Which was the greater pain? Some may argue from the martyr's choice, that he found the remorse more painful. But it is not a question of the agony of remorse against the agony of burning, but of a prospect of the former agony

power of art, there is a tremendous variety amongst what human can be educated and habituated to find to be pleasant and painful. Again, what can custom *not* accomplish?<sup>210</sup>

When we see men who are so strong as to be able to overcome their desire for self-preservation and/or preference for pleasure over pain, what we are seeing, what the source of that strength truly is, is passion. Virtue is not a *hexis* or disposition, but, more simply, just a passion. What other sort of *thing* could we be talking about? Someone regarded as virtuous is really just someone in the grip of a particularly strong passion. Virtue is passion shaped in an extravagant manner by art, and, likely as not, art which has its roots in religious enthusiasm.<sup>211</sup> None of these ways of accounting for asceticism are explicitly stated by Locke in II.21, but they are entirely compatible with his theory and perhaps even implied by it.

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against an actual endurance of the latter. It is hard to believe that the shadow of threatened remorse distressed the young deacon more than did the reality of present fire. It is a revolting philosophy which pictures a witness of Christ unto torments and death, as merely doing after all the pleasantest thing that he could do under the circumstances, seeking his greater ease and comfort in the jaws of the flames, and only not denying his Lord because on the whole it was less painful to confess Him. It is not creditable to natural manliness, let alone to supernatural sanctity, to be driven by the prickings of uneasiness, as it were at the bayonet's point, to deeds of heroism and high renown (Rickaby, 1906, 94-95)." See also Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 225.

<sup>210</sup> *IT* 57-9, *ECHU* I.2.25, *STCE* 14, Pangle 1988, 216; see also Bacon, "Of Custom and Education," Montesquieu *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and Their Decline* II, and *Persian Letters* LXXXIX.

<sup>211</sup> See Montaigne "Of Virtue" and "Of Cruelty" and Rahe 1994, 39.

Whatever account we ourselves may give of why we act, and however striking the external forms of different actions and characters may be, the structure of all human desire and action is the same, according to Locke.

With his discussion of judgment, of practical reason, Locke brings to a conclusion his critique of “indifferency.” Good judgment is more important than moderation. Obviously, we are apt to be less hasty in judgment when overcome by wild desires. But Locke would not want us to put our hopes in achieving a durable state perfectly free from desire, or, what amounts to the same thing, a perfect balance between desire and capacity. That’s indifferentism—the vain hope that we may be simply free from desire, and guided only by cool objective, disinterested reason and understanding.<sup>212</sup> Not only is this vain, but it denies the perfection of our intellectual natures: “’tis as much a perfection, that desire or the power of Preferring should be determined by Good, as that the power of Acting should be determined by the Will, and the certainer such determination is, the greater is the perfection (II.21.48).” Reason is unsuited to provide us with moderation. Our reason is the reason of perpetually interested, concerned beings, and it achieves its perfection in calculating the best route to happiness. Our reason is instrumental reason.<sup>213</sup> The indifferentists hope for a role of reason in practice

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<sup>212</sup> “Nature has created men so that they are able to desire everything and are unable to attain everything. So, since the desire is always greater than the power of acquiring, the result is discontent with what one possesses and a lack of satisfaction with it (*Discourses on Livy* I.37.1).”

<sup>213</sup> “The Thoughts, are to the Desires, as Scouts, and Spies to range aboard, and to find the things Desired” (*Leviathan* VIII.14-6; see also III.3-5 and XLVI.1, Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature* II.3 and Machiavelli,

for which it is patently unsuited. Relatedly, they seek a freedom which is indistinguishable from arbitrariness since it is a freedom from all desire (II.21.71). Discrediting this conception of a perfect harmony between desire and capacity is, it turns out, just as important to Locke's purpose in II.21 as discrediting the delusional notion of free will maintained by indifferentism.<sup>214</sup>

By now we have seen *that* we are free and in what way. We are free because we have judgment and foresight, and we would be imperfect if we could not employ them in action. How far does our liberty reach? How much can our judgment about good and evil shape the content of our desire for happiness? After all, we are constantly beset by uneasinesses (II.21.45), some of which are so violent as to preclude deliberation (II.21.52). Locke has no answer other than experience-experience can tell us how much liberty we have, and when we have it. All he can say is do your best-if you succeed, it will look like this (II.21.52).

### II.3 Conclusion

Locke begins from the premise that "Liberty" is meaningless except with reference to the will. "Will" is a mode of thinking, that is, a simple mode-the simplest of all the complex ideas. "Liberty" is more complex than "willing"

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*Discourses on Livy* I.6 and 37, II *Proemium*). Rahe is very good on early modern philosophy's understanding of instrumental reason and "*homo faber*" (Rahe 1994, 144).

<sup>214</sup> Who are these indifferentists? Unclear. Typical for Locke, he does not identify the target of his polemics (such as about innate ideas (I.2-4) or whether or not the soul always thinks (II.1)). In other cases, the opponent he does identify is not his true target (Filmer).

because it combines “thinking” and “action.” We are free when we can move our thoughts or our bodies by our preference alone. But our experience of willing reveals that we cannot attribute liberty to willing as others have argued. We are not free with respect to willing because desire, uneasiness, not understanding, determines our will. We are, however, free with respect to desire, and this is because, as rational beings, we desire happiness, not just pleasure. This affords us a freedom *from* transient, unintelligent desire, and a freedom *for* shaping our desires, our uneasinesses, over the long term, by habit working in concert with reason.

In principle, freedom is something open to most humans as humans, but clearly it can be tainted or denied us by any number of factors beyond our control. Freedom is not free, it has conditions; the possession of a perfectly functioning judgment and will are not guarantors of freedom. We cannot be fully free, able to pursue happiness by means of our own faculties, without having had a decent upbringing, some level of material comfort, (“equipment” as Aristotle would say (*Ethics* I.8)), and also things like legs. Based on this definition of freedom, it is difficult to imagine how we could be free without living in a liberal society. First of all, we are much more likely to be able to “have” our wills in a tolerant society that respects private life. Moreover, liberal society is more likely to provide us with the preconditions for Lockean freedom by educating and encouraging the exercise of our independent judgment. To be

molded for liberal citizenship means to receive preparation for the exercise of judgment later in life. Living in a liberal society is thus an external, conventional requirement for freedom, part of the side of freedom which we have fairly little control over whatsoever.

“Liberty” is a difficult concept. The more inseparable human liberty is from human *nature*, the less it looks like liberty. The traditional difficulty with human liberty is that it is philosophically dubious, or at least difficult, yet morally indispensable. Locke’s claim in II.21 is that he can satisfy the demands of both science and morality. He believes he can come up with an understanding of liberty that is both philosophically sound and morally acceptable. Locke claims to have sacrificed the integrity of neither human nature nor freedom in his teaching on freedom. An element of determinism gives coherence to freedom, and as long as *self*-determinism is possible, freedom is real. Locke does not seem to view this as a redefinition of liberty. He scrupulously adheres to certain standards to which he believes any concept of liberty must be held up. First, liberty is unique to intellectual beings—humans, angels and God. Reason, the power of abstraction, broadens our horizon and makes us restless and concerned for the future. Beings lower than man lack the breadth of horizon necessary to be said to free in any meaningful way. Second, liberty is a good thing (II.21.50). It may not be the highest thing (happiness is higher) but it is certainly unnatural and perverted to desire to be a slave. This is a major criticism Locke has of

indifferency (along with the delusional harmony between capacity and desire that it implies)-who would want to be free from concern and not bound by their own judgments about what is necessary to their happiness? If we can't determine ourselves, surely something or someone else will and, from the perspective of freedom being a good thing, how desirable is that (II.21.48)?

Third, "liberty" must be able to account for moral responsibility, the difference between moral vice and virtue, which for Locke comes down to the difference between right and wrong judgment. Fourth, our being free is not in tension with our desire for happiness, far from it, since liberty and happiness are interdependent concepts for Locke. "As therefore the highest perfection of intellectual nature, lies in a careful and constant pursuit of true and solid happiness; so the care of our selves, that we mistake not imaginary for real happiness, is the necessary foundation of our *liberty* (II.21.51)." We would not be free if we did not desire happiness, and if we were not free, calling happiness the end of human life would be unintelligible. We could respond to pleasure and pain without being free, but responding to pleasure and pain is not the same as being conscious of an overarching end to all of one's pursuits. Fifth, liberty must pertain to the whole person, not merely one part, like the will. We exercise judgment, which means its exercise is subject to all the constraints and imperfections we are. Obviously, there will be no molding our desires in accord with judgment if we are under some unbearable pain or just plain stupid.



Freedom means the freedom to pursue happiness with one's own faculties, but it also means (1) having the capacity to do so (which requires a certain nature and education) and (2) not having one's (self-determined) will thwarted by external circumstances. Living in a free country is not sufficient for freedom, but it is necessary.

The uneasiness teaching plays a crucial role in Locke's argument for freedom, in characterizing how we are determined. Uneasiness is an expression of necessity, of the limits of persuasion and spontaneity and also of the limitlessness of desire. It is not something we can change. We can influence what makes us uneasy, but not the basic structural fact that "uneasiness determines the will."

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# Chapter Three: Property and Restlessness

## I.1 Introduction

Tocqueville argues that the restless pursuit of material well-being is characteristic of modern, democratic life, not aristocratic life and not human nature simply. Following Montesquieu, he believes that restlessness is an Anglo-Saxon disease, although one which all modern peoples may expect to contract eventually.<sup>215</sup> The main cause of restlessness is individualism, itself caused by democracy. Equality makes men individualistic, which makes them generally doubtful about the good, and this tends to make them attach themselves to the pursuit of lower material goods, because their status as goods is more certain.

In *2T* Chapter Five, "Of Property," Locke sets out not to describe how men in a certain time and place have come to be disposed towards restless acquisition, but to give an argument as to why all men should be. Locke gives a principled defense of restlessness, based on right and nature. He argues that it is both prudent and moral for men to take material goods as an end, rather than a means. In Tocqueville, this alchemy of changing means into ends, and orienting men towards the "irrationally" limitless pursuit of material well-being is accomplished by history. To be sure, the Americans are partially able give an account of themselves and are not simply blindly fulfilling the mandate of

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<sup>215</sup> On Montesquieu's influence on Tocqueville on this point, see Rahe 2009, 170-1.

History. But historical accident played a considerable role in their coming to embrace this particular moral outlook.

Tocqueville and Locke's justifications of limitless acquisition may be usefully contrasted with Max Weber. The central question that Weber sets out to answer in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is, how did limitless acquisition, a mode of life condemned by all reputable pre-modern moral authorities, come to be accepted and even promoted as the moral good in modern times? How did the pursuit of means become an end in itself? Weber famously posited that the irrationality of restlessness can only be accounted for by locating its origins in the Protestant conception of the "calling." The existence of the modern capitalist is one of "worldly asceticism," self-denial for the sake of acquisition. The fact that it shares this form of life with Calvinist theology, as well as the fact that (according to Weber) Protestants tend to be better businessmen than Catholics, led Weber to look to Calvinism to explain capitalism. This is the true reason for the behavior of the restless individual in modern society, because only if the true motivation is unconscious could this totally irrational way of life be accounted for. The true reasons for the restlessness of the irrationally restless individual are completely unknown to him, long buried under the dust heap of history.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> "a psychic hangover from a previous psychological or cultural intoxication with true Calvinism (Pangle 1988, 18)."

Locke and Tocqueville both disagree that restlessness is so irrational as to defy conscious justification on the part of the restless individual. Both Locke and Tocqueville believe that the restless individual can live with himself. Like Weber, Tocqueville affords the forces of blind history considerable influence over the beliefs, habits and desires of men in modern society. The lack of complete understanding of the true consequences of their actions is central to Tocqueville's understanding of the course of history and of how it has shaped the modern world. As Tocqueville put it in his work on the Revolution of 1848, "The fate of this world is determined by causes and effects, but often contrary to the desires of all those who produce them, like the flying banner spread by the opposite action of wind and tether."<sup>217</sup> Indeed, history is perhaps even blinder and more chaotic for Tocqueville than Weber, in the sense that he never assigns a predominant influence to religion or any other factor in causing democracy. But Tocqueville does believe that the Americans can give some legitimate justification for their beliefs and actions, including restless acquisition.<sup>218</sup> The true reasons why they are doing what they are doing are not totally unknown to

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<sup>217</sup> Quoted in Furet and Melonio 1998, 7. On Tocqueville's "ironic" view of history more generally, see Furet and Melonio 1998, 2-7 and Furet 1981, 1-17.

<sup>218</sup> A more thorough comparison between Weber and Tocqueville on this point would need to go deeper into Tocqueville's belief in historical determinism (see Zetterbaum 1965) as well as investigate the level of moral intentionality implied by Tocqueville's conception of "mores." Mores are more than just numb habit but less than fully deliberate, freely-willed behavior. On this point see Winthrop 1986, 243-4, Maletz 2005, 5 and 14, Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws* XIX, and Kelly and Masters 1992, 203-4.

them; they are looking for something solid, a good which they are certain is a good, which they find in material goods.

Locke is less interested in what history has brought us to think, desire and do than Tocqueville and Weber. He is interested in what is simply true, right, and advantageous, and he contends, in "Of Property," that this is the sort of behavior Weber thought could only be accounted for by having recourse to centuries-dead Calvinistic belief (Strauss 1953, 246). As Pangle, following Strauss, points out, Weber insists on finding a deontological basis for the spirit of capitalism (Pangle 1988, 18-20). Locke, in his philosophy, seeks to combine right and advantage, deontology and utilitarianism.

"Of Property" presents an argument about the natural right to possess and also acquire property. Determining this is an essential preliminary step to establishing why anyone would have the need and right to seek the protection of his possessions in civil society. Through property we fulfill our desire for self-preservation, but this desire cannot be fulfilled simply by possessing property. In order to support life, we need the right to acquire property, and, as it turns out, in effectually limitless quantities. What initially appears as an argument as to why men enter civil society to protect their property becomes an argument as to why men enter civil society "not so much as to preserve as to enlarge their possessions" (Strauss 1953, 245; MacPherson 1962, 199). Locke argues for the righteousness of limitless acquisitiveness because it is grounded in both necessity

and the consent of others. This is the deepest connection between restlessness and liberalism for Locke.

*ECHU* II.21 gives a universal account of human motivation, and argues that all men at all times are restless in the sense of being moved more by the pains we are fleeing than by the pleasures we pursue. Relief and joy are transient states. “Of Property” expands on the teaching in II.21 and completes Locke’s teaching on restlessness by illustrating the way in which restlessness, in the fullest sense, may also be said to be a modern condition for Locke. The teaching of “Of Property” is grounded in nature, but Locke is also looking to the future, whose moral understanding he hopes to shape. Lockean restlessness in the fullest sense combines *ECHU* II.21’s theory of human motivation with the moral direction that “Of Property” provides. This chapter will connect “Of Property” and “Power” and produce a unified theory of Lockean restlessness.

## ***I.2 The argument of “Of Property”: the righteousness of restlessness***

Legitimate government in the *2T* is said to protect the natural rights to life, liberty and property: “Of Property” derives the basis of property rights. Unlike the rights to life and liberty, which are simply asserted at the beginning of the work, Locke does give an argument for the right to property (albeit one derived from the previously-asserted right to life). How does an individual have the

right to property in the first place? Is there any difference between the natural right to property and the right as it exists in civil society?

Locke derives the right to property directly from our natural right to self-preservation. If we do have the right to the end of self-preservation, then we must have the right to the means to it, which is property (2T 26, 1T 86).<sup>219</sup> The right to appropriate is the right to stave off necessity by appropriating what we need to survive. “The condition of human life, which requires labour and materials to work on, necessarily introduces private possessions (2T 35).” Most originally, this refers to what we need to eat.<sup>220</sup> Hunger is the most fundamental form of necessity which threatens our preservation. The rest of “Of Property” builds on this original understanding of private property by expanding this right to alter and digest whatever of external nature is necessary to ensure our preservation.

In the beginning, all property was in common, and there was enough for all. But also there had to have been *private* property, because there was consumption. Man always had to consume to survive and therefore he always had to appropriate to survive. When did this appropriation occur? At the very latest, it must have occurred by the time the nuts and berries were consumed and metabolized. Metabolism is for Locke the most certain case of appropriation.

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<sup>219</sup> “[A] *right* to an end is meaningless, if the *right* to the means necessary to that end is denied (*de Cive* I.8).”

<sup>220</sup> Locke first advances this claim in the *IT*, in the context of a discussion of the Biblical basis for eating meat (*IT* 92).

What we metabolize becomes our property, because it becomes part of our bones and flesh, in a word, our bodies (2T 26-8). We definitely own our bodies and whatever is a part of them.<sup>221</sup>

Metabolism clarifies what appropriation is, but in doing so, it also points beyond itself to a more original form of appropriation. The right to appropriate and acquire private property is the right to alter nature for our preservation. Before we alter nature by digesting it, we work on it to make it suitable to our needs: labor is the original mode of appropriation, even prior to metabolism. Originally, we own our selves, and this means not only that we own whatever becomes a part of ourselves, but that we own our labor (2T 27). When we labor, we alter external nature to suit our needs. Labor always produces something new, something nature did not provide us with, and which is suited for us and our needs. Because we own our labor, when we work on some part of external nature, and mix our labor with it, we must also own that worked-upon thing. Thus, we own the nuts and berries long before we metabolize them, when we pick them, pile them up, or in any way draw a distinction between them and all the other unclaimed, undifferentiated nuts and berries in the common. Just as it is not possible to survive without private property, it is not possible to appropriate in that most fundamental sense of metabolizing without first

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<sup>221</sup> Locke's positing of ownership of our own selves and bodies is a crucial difference between Locke and Hobbes' understanding of natural rights and the state of nature (Zuckert 2002, 4 and 193). Ownership of self and body is simply asserted in "Of Property" but is discussed at great length in *ECHU* II.27. Zuckert is the authority on self-ownership in Locke. See especially Zuckert 1994, Chapter Nine.



acquiring, meaning extracting from the original common. This last step must have been in accord with right, and it was, due to the fact that we own our labor and that with which we have mixed our labor.

By basing the natural right to private property in labor (2T 44-5), Locke can say definitively that property originates from the individual and exists prior to and outside of civil society. Originally and naturally, man does not need the consent of others to exercise his right to private property.<sup>222</sup> To require consent in the state of nature would have violated the right to life. Men were isolated in the primitive economic state of nature, so if they had to ascertain the consent of others before appropriating, they would have starved (2T 28). Locke also says that there was no need to solicit consent because of the abundance of the original state of nature. Because there was an abundance of goods, no one had the motivation to appropriate at the expense of anyone else. Originally, men did not have the *right* to take more than they needed because men did not have the *desire* to take more than they needed. This means that there was no waste: nothing ever spoiled as a result of man's appropriating it in the state of nature (2T 36, 46). The original, economic state of nature's dual characteristics of abundance and the spoilage limitation protect the rightfulness and non-consensual character to the original right to private property.

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<sup>222</sup> "Locke cuts the origin of property loose from all connection to human agreement; he does this by generating a natural right to exclusive property from the altogether self-regarding right to preservation, the ground for the power of labor to appropriate, as itself derivative from the duty to self-preservation under the original no-harm principle (Zuckert 1994, 257)."

After positing these natural limits to acquisition, Locke then spends much of the rest of the chapter removing them. Limits on appropriation may have existed in the primitive economic state of nature, where the only form of property was nuts and berries, but neither they, nor any other limits, exist in civilized economic life. The decisive turning point comes when Locke takes up the right to possess private property in land (2T 32-43). He says that our right to own land is simply an extension of our right to own a pile of berries. In both cases, the external object becomes our property through our mixing our labor with it. Land is obviously not something we can appropriate by consumption, but we can mix our labor, and thus our selves with it, so for that reason it is just as much ours as a pile of nuts or berries.

Laboring is more than just marking our territory. What becomes clear through the case of land is that when we labor, we cultivate, improve, and make useful. The converse is also true: the lack of labor means the lack of improvement. "Labour makes the far greatest part of the value of things we enjoy in this world: and the ground which produces the materials, is scarce to be reckoned in, as any, or at most, but a very small part of it; so little, that even amongst us, land that is left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement of pasturage, tillage, or planting, is called, as indeed it is, waste; and we shall find the benefit of it amounts to little more than nothing (2T 42)." Labor, it turns out, is the *only* form of improvement; unimproved nature provides few external

goods to man and is therefore at best indifferent to our survival. That appropriated land is improved land and non-appropriated land is virtually useless had been implicit from the beginning of the argument, but the point is clearer now, since labor puts a wider difference between cultivated and uncultivated land than it does between the labored-upon pile of berries and those still on the branch. Man must work harder to improve land than to “improve” the nuts and berries, but the payoff is equally greater. Although it was always the case that we had to labor to survive, at first it seemed like we could get by with fairly minimal effort. Now Locke makes clear that this could not have been true.

By stressing the necessity of labor, Locke renders doubtful the abundance of the original common. In any event, it soon becomes irrelevant because of enclosure. Enclosure becomes inevitable when men recognize the need to make their existence bearable by appropriating and cultivating land. Eventually, there will be no more land open to be appropriated. What then? What of the have-nots, how will they satisfy their desire for self preservation?

Well, not only is enclosure inevitable, Locke argues that it is *good*. Only appropriated land is worth anything to man, and so the greater percentage of land which is appropriated and cultivated, the better. Indeed, it is better for all, not just the freeholders, because, in the end, it will mean more berries, more goods, more everything. “[H]e who appropriates land to himself by his labour,

does not lessen, but increase the common stock of mankind...he that incloses land, and has a greater plenty of the conveniences of life from ten acres, than he could have from an hundred left to nature, may truly be said to give ninety acres to mankind (2T 37).” Everyone cannot own the land itself but those without land can benefit from someone else appropriating the land and making it productive, either by enjoying the more abundant harvest yielded by appropriated land, or by working the land for the owner in exchange for wages. It is better for all if the few own all the land and the many work it for them in exchange for wages, than if no one owns the land and everyone just lives off of what they can pick, bear and hoard (MacPherson 1962, 212-3).

Thus, the enclosed manmade plenty turns out to be more plentiful than the original, natural plenty. Whoever acquires and cultivates fallow land is a benefactor of all mankind, by bringing more plenty into the world than existed before. And whoever lives in a society peopled by acquirers is better off than living with others whose entrepreneurialism scarcely exceeds piling up nuts and berries “A King of a large and fruitful Territory [in America] feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day Labourer in England (2T 41).”

Everyone benefits from acquirers, and acquirers benefit from others, too. Locke emphasizes through his examples (especially bread-making-2T 43) the

social dimension of labor at its most productive (Grant 1987, 112-3).<sup>223</sup> Labor brings its greatest improvements and increase when many labor together. The opportunity to work together is as much a motivation to enter into society as the need to seek protection against common enemies.

But if the primary way by which the have-nots survive is the exchange of their labor, then commerce, the exchange of unlike goods of equal value, will become necessary. And for commerce to exist, money, a system of commonly accepted abstract value, must also come into being. Agriculture leads directly to money. Money will allow the landless to acquire their necessities and also to sell their labor. Money allows for the transition from a subsistence economy to a market economy (although in Locke's view, only the market economy truly is a subsistence economy). Money solves the problem created by enclosure by making the existence of the have-nots possible.

Money eliminates the original spoilage limitation and thereby reshapes the definition of "need." Money preserves value and doesn't spoil, so hoarding it is neither irrational nor necessarily harmful to others (2T 46-7). While men always did possess the natural right to hoard precious metals (since doing so does not violate the spoilage limitation), only after the institution of money is there an incentive to hoard. Unlike the acquisition of goods from the original

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<sup>223</sup> On this point, contrast Manent, who argues that working and appropriating are meant by Locke to replace participating in social life as the distinctive and most natural activities of man. "Man is not naturally a political animal; he is an *owning* and *laboring* animal, owning because he is laboring, laboring in order to own (Manent 1995, 42)."

common, which required no consent, money rests on a consensual or contractual basis in the sense that people must consent that this amount of gold is equivalent to that amount of wheat or that number of hours labored. It thus also requires a more developed rational capacity than would be required by asocial hoarding in the state of nature. Even if consent is only indicated tacitly by its use, money requires rationality and the capacity for abstraction. Only rational and social beings can assign mutually accepted abstract values to pieces of metal. Money's emergence is concomitant with the transition from the state of nature to civil society (although not necessarily civil government). Civil society then initiates further employment and refinement of our rational faculties, with the result that need and desire will never be the same.

Because money brings with it the development of rationality, it also induces a broadening of horizon and better awareness of possible future needs. Money satisfies previous needs or desires (the have-nots' desire to survive) but also creates new ones. Since "real plenty will not be produced if the individual does not have an incentive to appropriate more than he can use (Strauss 1953, 244)," money is essential for overcoming natural penury. Labor alone won't do it. Because of money, man may "rightfully and without injury possess more than he himself can make use of (2T 50)," which means he also may *acquire* more than he can make use of. Money makes it reasonable for men to acquire more than what they have a defined, immediate use for; inequality and luxury come into

being through money.<sup>224</sup> Money makes commerce possible, which expands desire, thus stimulating uneasiness and leading to more industry, leading to improvements, and all without necessarily violating right. At this stage in the argument, Locke has lifted the spoilage limitation on acquisition and he will not replace it with any other limitation. He has therefore extended the right to private property, it would seem, to the right to *unlimited* private property.

But, regarding the issue of enclosure and inequality, if all was originally in common, won't more for some mean less for many (Locke himself poses this question-see quote from *Essays on the Law of Nature* in Goldwin 1987, 494)? Is the harmony between right and desire ruptured forever? Locke does not think so, and responds to this challenge in two ways. First of all, there is no inherent injustice in inequality as such, because acquisition is no longer a zero sum game. Acquisition by the few benefits everyone, since nothing can be improved before it is appropriated. Accumulating vast inequalities of wealth is not bad for the same reason that enclosure of land is not bad, namely all will benefit, directly or indirectly. Increase is good and necessary for all, and increase is for Locke the

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<sup>224</sup> See Hume's "Of commerce" and "Of refinement in the arts." The advantages of a certain type of luxury, according to Hume, lie in stimulating desire and therefore industry. Wise policy makers will view industriousness as, effectively, an end in itself, since it is essential to so many other goods such as national strength, knowledge and humanity. Luxury is a means to industry. Locke does not argue that industriousness leads to greater humanity, but he does agree with Hume's conception of the "industrious imperative." It is *good* to encourage desires to expand beyond (present) capacity.

bottom line (1T 33, 41, 59, 2T 32, 34, 37, and 40-8).<sup>225</sup> All must be allowed to appropriate because without appropriation, the human race cannot both expand and sustain itself. Only the efforts of man make increase possible and appropriation is a condition of increase.

Second, inequality is not unjust because all recognize its advantages and easily consent to it. Locke believes that, unlike freedom, people do not naturally desire economic equality. Everyone consents to the possibility that others will have more money than them, because everyone recognizes that an economic life structured by the conventions of trade and money is better than a primitive economic life without them (2T 50). Getting people to consent to inequality is no more difficult than getting them to recognize the “great inconveniences” of the state of nature and corresponding advantages of civil government.

And to reemphasize, this means that they consent to unlimited appropriation by *others*. No longer is necessity the primary justification for acquisition. Necessity is the original motivation to acquire in the state of nature, but only consent justifies, in society, acquisition beyond any immediate concept of need. Without consent, people, the have-nots, too, would still benefit from the increase which attends unlimited acquisition. However, Locke makes clear that their consent is also important. It’s not enough that the have-nots *are* better off,

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<sup>225</sup> “...the central theme of Locke’s whole political teaching [is] increase (Goldwin 1987, 493).” See also Strauss 1953, 235.



it's important that they also recognize that they are, recognize the causes of their betterment, and give their consent to the whole arrangement. And they do, or they will, just as much as they recognize that they are better off with civil government than without it. For Locke, the justice of inequalities of wealth is founded on consent, and consent is granted due to a perception of increase. Right is therefore based on increase, it seems.

And the goodness of industriousness is based on its necessity. In "Of Property," Locke extols the virtues of labor in many ways, but, in contrast to the mores of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century America and Maoist China, he does not imbue labor with dignity. Nor does he anywhere argue that it (or any other moral virtue for that matter) is good in itself. Industriousness is good because it's necessary; an industrious people is a strong people and strength is necessary.

### ***I.3 The achievement of "Of Property"***

In "Of Property," Locke demonstrates that certain key features of civilized economic life are in accord with both right and advantage: private property in goods and land, money, the private possession by some of, in principle, limitless wealth, and economic inequality. Legitimate civil government is defined by its capacity to protect the "honest industry of mankind" and even, Locke says, to "encourage" it. Political legitimacy requires an active interest in the self-

preservation of its members, which means, in a broad sense, economic development.

Political sanction for the right of private citizens, banks and corporations to compile immense resources without any immediately defined purpose (this is sometimes referred to as “capital formation”<sup>226</sup>) is hugely important to modern economic life and modern life more generally. Without such aggregations of capital, equally vast technological, architectural and military projects could not be accomplished, and the overall strength of any political community would be severely limited. Modern economic life, and the undeniable increase it has produced, simply would not exist without the sort of political protections Locke extends to private property and acquisition in “Of Property.”

Locke is not a libertarian; politics always remains prior to economics in his thinking and Locke clearly envisions an active role for government in commercial life (2T 42).<sup>227</sup> Nowhere in “Of Property” does Locke imply that aggregations of private capital are to be held absolutely inviolate. Inviolability is only a characteristic of private property in the state of nature, when property rights are founded purely on labor. In civil society, the man who makes the thing still owns it, but his right to make and acquire limitlessly rests on the fact that others allow him to do so, because they recognize they will all be better off if

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<sup>226</sup> As in “The mission of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission is to protect investors, maintain fair, orderly, and efficient markets, and facilitate capital formation.”

<sup>227</sup> Pangle is especially emphatic about this, in contrast to “some of the more narrow and dogmatic of [Locke’s] successors (Pangle 1988, 169).” (He’s talking about libertarians.)

he possesses this right than if he does not. But the main point is that there is no inherent problem in *principle* with anyone's accumulating immense amounts of wealth, since (1) commercial acquisition is not necessarily at some one else's expense, and (2) all benefit from economic development, not just the developer himself. Inequality is a condition of prosperity.

Investigating the origins of property rights could be a highly disruptive to existing civil society, just like investigating the origins of any social order or government could be:

There is nothing which so generally strikes the imagination and engages the affections of mankind as the right of property, or that sole and despotic dominion which one man claims and exercises over the external things of the world, in total exclusion of the rights of every other individual in the universe. And there are very few that will give themselves the trouble to consider the original foundations of this right...We think it enough that our title is derived from the grant of the former proprietor, by descent from our ancestors, or by the last will and testament of the dying owner; not caring to reflect that...there is no foundation in nature or in natural law why a set of words upon parchment should convey the dominion of land; why the son should have the right to exclude his fellow creatures from a determinate spot of ground, because his father had done so before him; or why the occupier of a particular field or jewel, when lying on his death bed...should be entitled to tell all the rest of the world which of them should enjoy it after him. These inquiries, it must be owned, would be useless and even troublesome in common life. It is well if the mass of mankind will obey the laws when made, without scrutinizing too nicely the reason for making them. (Blackstone *Commentaries* II.1.2, quoted in Aldrich 1988, 121)

Locke is aware of this, but just as in the case of his doctrines of the state of nature and the right to rebellion, he does not believe that "Of Property" will disrupt the

social order, but rather strengthen it. This is due to the fact that the original justification for private property is not maintained in civil society. Due to money and trade, labor does not provide the sole right to ownership, and it certainly does not provide the right to ownership of limitless goods. In civil society, the labor-based, individualistic right to ownership is tempered by concerns for consent and, more basically, the good of the whole community. This underscores the ultimate importance of acquisition and increase to Locke. Did private property not receive its final justification from the necessity of increase for self-preservation, investigating its origins could very well lead to severely disruptive consequences.<sup>228</sup>

The pre-modern understanding of property, that of Aristotle and Tocqueville's aristocrats, conceived of property as a means, the means to achieving the higher, truer goods such as virtue and happiness. In the modern understanding, the case is much more ambiguous, because property is only a means to *life*, not higher life. It is harder to draw the line between what must be done to secure one's property and secure one's life than between what must be done to secure property and pursue the highest form of life. Originally, property is defined as the means to life (this is the basis for asserting its naturalness), but in the end, there is no difference between securing one or the other, which means

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<sup>228</sup> "The final justification of the right to property is its economic utility...the right to property is no longer considered man's fundamental natural right. It is simply the means of preserving the values that result from labor's productivity, the means of production and the exchange of values (Manent 1995, 45)."

that, if the pursuit to secure life and self-preservation is endless, so, too, must be the pursuit to secure property. This is how means become ends for Locke: the pursuit to secure the means is shown to be virtually indistinguishable from the pursuit to secure the ends. It seems absurd to pursue means, not ends, endlessly, but from Locke's perspective, it is less absurd to do this than to pursue an end whose status as a good is far less certain than property's, and in any case can only be secured by securing the means to it, namely life and therefore property.

In "Of Property," Locke holds that, on a practical level, acquisition may be divorced from purpose. Locke never departs from his original conception of property/money as a means to preservation, but he does imply that it is not absurd to pursue this means as if it is an end, that is, without being able to give a precise account of its direct purpose, because who knows what's beyond the horizon (2T 157)?

#### ***I.4 "Of Property" and ECHU II.21: a general theory of Lockean restlessness***

Locke famously never explained the relation between the *ECHU* and the *2T*. During his lifetime, he never even acknowledged authorship of the latter. Locke left the task of connecting the two works to others, generating no little amount of scholarly controversy in the process. The task at hand, however, is

more circumscribed and less daunting than solving the so-called “boundary problem” between the *ECHU* and *2T*.<sup>229</sup> In order to connect Locke’s liberalism to his restlessness, it is only necessary to show the connection between one chapter of the *2T*, “Of Property,” with one from the *ECHU*, II.21 “Power.” In the case of these two chapters, there is no boundary problem. They approach the same issue differently, but in ways that are mutually reinforcing, not incompatible.

The *ECHU* seems, in many respects, to be a more theoretical and also comprehensive work than the *2T*. Nothing in the *2T* compares with the depth with which the *ECHU* probes the topics of virtue, the afterlife, the eternity of the universe, the intelligibility of substances, or the origin of all our ideas, language and knowledge. But the *ECHU* does not answer every question. Indeed, the *ECHU* leaves us with many unanswered questions, not least “how should we pursue happiness?,” which II.21 fails to answer satisfactorily. “Of Property” is more specific about Locke’s moral response to the fact that “uneasiness determines the will.” What does mastery of uneasiness look like? What is to be done? These questions are only answered in a very abstract way in II.21. Locke’s primary intention in that chapter, it should be recalled, is to give an account of the mechanism of human action, to account for *how* human actions occur. Locke does not break any promises to us in II.21, but he does leave some open

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<sup>229</sup> For more general discussions of the boundary problem, see Mansfield 1987, 207, Kennington’s “Nature and Natural Right in Locke” (Kennington 2004), Laslett 1988, 92-105, and Grant 1987, Chapter One.

questions. How should our moral outlook be altered by this new understanding of human action? “Of Property” provides an answer: we should acquire.

The relation between acquiring property and pursuing happiness must be spelled out. As was discussed in the last chapter, Locke’s discussion of happiness in II.21 is very abstract and simplistic, far more so than is found in treatments by other philosophers. He is vague in II.21 about what life is the best, most enlightened or happiest. By positing happiness as the end of all our striving, that is, claiming we are always pursuing it even when we don’t know it, *and* being strikingly vague about what is the best kind of happiness (even in the basic sense of most accessible), II.21 has the effect of de-emphasizing the importance of happiness. If what Locke says about happiness in II.21 is juxtaposed with what he says about the necessity of acquisition in “Of Property,” the implication seems to be that what people actively need to concern themselves with is the possession and acquisition of property in this life.<sup>230</sup>

After all, Locke is not completely vague in II.21 about the content of happiness, in that he does say (referring to earthly happiness), “So the greatest Happiness consists, in *the having* those things, which produce the greatest Pleasure; and in the absence of those, which cause any disturbance, any pain (II.21.55)” (emphasis added). About this passage, Pangle comments, “What most

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<sup>230</sup> Pangle describes this as the “ascent” from *ECHU* II.21 on happiness to the *2T* on property (Pangle 1988, 206). See also Strauss 1953, 227 on the priority of self-preservation and property to happiness for Locke.

comforts us, what we most desire, is not the temporary forgetfulness or narrowing of horizon brought about by consuming present pleasure; more solid and satisfying is the prospective consciousness of our power over, our possession of, *things* that we can deploy at some unspecified time in the future, whenever we might decide to produce pleasure or diminish pain (Pangle 1988, 185)."<sup>231</sup> If the statement from II.21 is true, what could the difference be, practically speaking, between the pursuit of happiness and the pursuit of property, or power (Strauss 1953, 249)?<sup>232</sup> Defining happiness as relief, and also emphasizing the importance of "having" to happiness, intimately links the themes of freedom, uneasiness, power, property and happiness in Locke's thought.<sup>233</sup>

The importance of the moral teaching of "Of Property" can be expressed in the following way. Locke could have presented II.21's argument about the illusoriness of the *Summum bonum*, then emphasized the fact of natural scarcity, questioned providence, posed the question "what is to be done?," and responded

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<sup>231</sup> Compare also Locke's definition of joy (II.20.7) and love in "Pleasure, Pain, the Passions": "nothing but the consideration or having in the mind the idea of some thing that is able in some way of application to produce delight or pleasure in us (*Political Essays*, 238)." For this reason Locke argues there that love is "the principal and first [of] all passions." The fragment "Morality" (*Political Essays*, 267-8) also makes clear the connection between property and happiness for Locke.

<sup>232</sup> Pangle says that this is also how Thomas Jefferson negotiates the relation between the right to property and the pursuit of happiness (Locke never grants a right to the pursuit of happiness, only property): "Jefferson's substitution, in the Declaration of Independence, of the attractive-sounding right to the pursuit of happiness for the more prosaic right to property...was a stroke against the strict letter of Locke's political theory and in perfect accord with its implicit, sinuous and flexible, rhetorical instructions: declare the pursuit of happiness, and in the Constitution protect everyone's right to acquire and hold property (Pangle 1988, 209)." For a rival interpretation of II.21 55, which asserts that it leads to relativism and also seeks to diminish its significance for Lockean morality and happiness see Myers 1998, 162-3. Myers argues that the "having" refers not to things but some form of self-possession, which conduces to "a state of being or rest that supplies the moral and psychological grounding for the active, industrious life."

<sup>233</sup> On the centrality of the pursuit of property to Lockean morality, see also *ECHU* IV.12.11-2.



with a discussion of the necessity of conquest. This would have been, in very broad outline, the path sketched out by Machiavelli.<sup>234</sup> Although Machiavelli famously does not present a formal psychology like Locke does in II.21, his understandings of natural scarcity and the necessity of acquisition are strikingly similar to Locke's, as several commentators have noted.<sup>235</sup> But in the *2T*, Locke argues that commerce provides a more profitable and intelligent response to necessity than conquest. In Chapter 16 of the *2T*, Locke attempts to provide an answer to the difficult question of how to distinguish wars of conquest from wars of security. Locke leaves aside the question of what motivated the conflict, and focuses on its effects: how does the victor treat the conquered? Although a tough-minded account in many ways, (for example, Locke sanctions the indefinite detention of enemy combatants) the chapter rules out any form of conquest for the sake of acquisition.<sup>236</sup> This critique of conquest coupled with "Of Property" and the central role Locke gives to economic development in political life,<sup>237</sup> combine to produce a truly distinctive contribution to the development of modern political philosophy. "Locke [is] the first to define political economy as the central task of politics (Zuckert 1994, 272)." The

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<sup>234</sup> "And truly it is a very natural and ordinary thing to desire to acquire, and always, when men can do it, they will be praised or not blamed (*Prince* III)."

<sup>235</sup> On Locke as a follower of Machiavelli see Mansfield 1987, Chapter Eight, Orwin 1978, Strauss 1959, 49, and Pangle 1988, 30 and 260.

<sup>236</sup> Locke also departs from Machiavelli by saying that our motivation towards (commercial) acquisition stems from its basis in right, as well as necessity (Strauss 1953, 178-9).

<sup>237</sup> Economics occupied a much more subordinate position in politics for Machiavelli than for Locke. See his letter of April 9, 1513 (quoted in Hirschman 1977, 41) and *Discourses on Livy* II.10, "Money is not the sinew of war although this is common opinion."

protection and promotion of commerce is a vital function of legitimate government, but Locke discredits the right to wage wars of conquest, however much to the perceived national advantage.

Locke is clearly following Hobbes in the development of his teaching on property. Hobbes, too, contends that the desire to secure the goods of the world is sure to be endless. What we really want, according to Hobbes, is power, the power to produce or secure whatever goods might appeal to us. We want the means, not the end, because the end is indeterminate but the means are certain. The goods of the world inevitably vary from man to man; there is no one highest, supreme good by which they all may be hierarchically arranged and assigned their true values. But the *conditions* for all goods, that is, for all human life, *are* universal and certain. We may therefore also say that these conditions, or these powers, are natural and we must possess a natural and unlimited right to them. This is Hobbes' famous *jus in omnia*, which we are required to relinquish in order to enter civil society.

Just as with Hobbes and power, "money is and is not the end" for Locke (Pangle 1988, 167; see also Mansfield 1987, 173). With his teaching on property, Locke tinkers with Hobbes' argument in two ways. First, the power we seek acquires more specificity. Locke contends that property is the most valuable form of power, thereby transforming Hobbes' abstract desire for power into the basis for the system of capitalist political economy. This is based in Locke's

contention that the original form of necessity which we must confront in order to preserve ourselves is not other men but hunger, and thus our most pressing need is “not a revolver but a square meal (Zuckert 2002, 3).” We appropriate in order to eat and live, even prior to defending ourselves, and thus property is the most natural power or means to life, according to Locke. Second, Hobbes says that we have a *jus in omnia* in the state of nature but not in civil society. Since we have, in principle, a right to everything, there are no natural property rights in terms of something real, secure, and respected by others. True private property did not exist until civil society. “Outside the commonwealth every man has a right to all things, but on the terms that he may enjoy nothing. In a commonwealth every man enjoys a limited right in security” (*de Cive* X.1; see also VI.15 and XII.7). Natural rights are simply natural liberties for Hobbes, but they are not for Locke. Natural rights for Locke contain some moral content due to the naturalness of property, which stems from the claim that “every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*” (2T 27). This places limits on what is permissible in the state of nature. Others do not have the right to our own bodies and property. Conversely, of course, this also means that ours and others’ natural right to acquire property is limited. “The same law of nature, that does by this means give us property, does also bound that property too (2T 31).” The right to *unlimited* property, the Lockean equivalent of Hobbes’ *jus in omnia*, only emerges in civil society. For Locke, we possess property rights prior to society, but we join society to

transform this right to limited property to a right to unlimited property. For Hobbes, we have a right to everything prior to society, but this is meaningless because so does everyone else, and so we enter civil society to both limit and also to secure our right to property.

Earlier it was implied that Locke dismisses the question of the hierarchy of the goods in his rejection of the *Summum bonum*. Now we see that this is not quite true. The goods that are most choiceworthy-power and property-are those which enable us to obtain other goods. When asked what should we wish for, Locke responds “a million more wishes.”

“Of Property” treats the themes of justice and providence, as they relate to restlessness, with greater depth than *ECHU* II.21. “To what extent is man’s existence supported by nature, and what does that mean for justice?” “Of Property” raises this question in a more challenging way than in *ECHU* II.21. “Of Property” depicts nature as absurd: it instills in us a powerful drive for self-preservation, then tells us that we are on our own to fulfill it.<sup>238</sup> The *2T* begins by claiming we are God’s property (*2T* 6), which leads us to expect that, when Locke comes to the treatment of property proper, the whole subsequent argument about private property rights will be based on our being owned by God. But the argument in “Of Property” begins with a different claim, that “every Man has a

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<sup>238</sup> “Nature is utterly powerless to provide the conditions in which nature’s own main intention-the increase of mankind-might be fulfilled (Goldwin 1987, 494).”

*Property in his own Person.*" And as the argument progresses, Locke relies more and more on the notion that, as is claimed in *ECHU* II.27, *we* own ourselves, and that's why we own our labor, and why our private property is our private property.<sup>239</sup> At the same time, Locke gradually depicts external nature as less and less beneficent. Despite the majesty of the coast of Dubrovnik and the radiance of autumn foliage in New England, the natural world, without vast improvements made by man, does not support our existence.

The impression "Of Property" gives is that man is not at home in the world and the world is not given to him. In order simply to support his existence, man's role towards the natural world must expand far beyond that of warden or steward. Man's attitude must be more than "restraint, gratitude and trust."<sup>240</sup> We are only "provided" with "almost worthless materials (2T 43)."

Locke's most probing and critical reflections on traditional, revealed religion and the intelligibility of the notion of God's benevolence are to be found more in *Reasonableness of Christianity, A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, and other parts of *ECHU*, than in either "Of Property" or *ECHU* II.21. But within the context of Locke's teaching on restlessness, as we have termed it, "Of

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<sup>239</sup> Mansfield 1987, 194, and Zuckert, 1994, 220. For a good discussion on how Locke "subtly shift[s] the ground of his argument from divine proprietorship to self-ownership (Zuckert 1994, 244)," see Zuckert 1994, Chapter Eight and Nine.

<sup>240</sup> This is Zuckert's description of the pre-modern (Biblical) attitude towards property. See Zuckert 1994, 143-6 and 164 on Locke's critique of the Biblical concept of donation and of providedness more generally. See also Pangle 1988, Chapter 14 for further reflections on Locke's departure from the pre-modern (Biblical and classical) understanding of property.

Property” goes farther than II.21. *ECHU* II.21 does not examine the extent to which the natural world supports our efforts to flee pain and maximize pleasure. II.21, to the extent that it touches on this question at all, presents the challenge primarily as an individual ethical one, as a question of self-mastery. Locke stresses that it is hard work molding ourselves, instilling in ourselves the right habits and desires,<sup>241</sup> but the possibility that external nature might also frustrate the most sincere efforts at self-mastery is not discussed in II.21. If anything, the argument about hedonistic Christianity towards the end of II.21 gives the opposite impression. In terms of the overall structure of their respective arguments, the argument in “Of Property” begins with providence but gradually distances itself from it, whereas the argument in II.21 moves in the opposite direction.

By introducing the themes of natural scarcity and providence, Locke also introduces the theme of justice in “Of Property.” Unlimited acquisition is in accord with right because it has the sanction of consent. Were nature more providential, economic development would not be so imperative and unlimited acquisition would *not* be right.<sup>242</sup> *ECHU* II.21 itself has little to say about right other than that we pursue happiness as a matter of natural law. In the context,

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<sup>241</sup> Mastering one’s individual nature is a major theme in *STCE*, where it is emphasized that every successful education must appreciate the child’s natural genius (see, for instance, 66, 139, and 161; see also Bacon “Of Nature in Men”).

<sup>242</sup> “The sum of Locke’s message, then, is this: so barren is nature, so difficult is it for mankind to wrest from nature’s materials a comfortable existence, that there is no ascertainable limit to the necessary growth in the productivity of human labor (Pangle 1988, 166).”

this means nothing more than we cannot help but to pursue happiness, “the utmost pleasure we are capable of (II.21.42),” just like matter cannot help but be attracted to other matter.

II.21 also informs “Of Property” by providing a psychological defense of commercial acquisition. Often, when modern liberal society’s acceptance of commercial restlessness is criticized, it is done so from a psychological perspective. The conception of the moral good that Locke promotes in “Of Property,” it is said, cannot possibly be right, because unlimited acquisition produces an imbalanced, divided soul for the individual acquirer. However brilliantly commerce may have transformed the world, made it more civilized and raised our collective standard of living, our internal standard of living, our happiness, seems to decrease in direct proportion to economic development. In II.21, Locke anticipates such criticisms and meets them on their own psychological ground. II.21 argues that we are constantly moved by pains and have no hope of ever attaining tranquility. We *do* desire happiness, and we are bound to pursue it, but we should seriously temper our hopes of attaining it, or more problematically, our belief at any given time that we have found it. The binding force of pleasure and pain makes us strongly tend towards complacency, which is, Locke implies, at the root of all vice.<sup>243</sup> As Locke argues in *ECHU* II.27,

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<sup>243</sup> “Men, like spend-thrift Heirs, are apt to judge a little in Hand better than a great deal to come; and so for small Matters in Possession, part with great ones in Reversion (II.21.63).” Locke’s concern about the

we are, most essentially *conscious* and responsible beings, and complacency is a form of unconsciousness.<sup>244</sup> Complacency plays the same role in Lockean morality as pride did in traditional Christian morality: it is both the paradigm and cause of all vice. All vice may be understood as a form of complacency, and it is all caused by complacency. Restlessness, or in this case we could even say anxiety, is the paradigm and also cause of all virtue. Both for the objective reasons outlined in Locke's account of the scarcity of external nature, and the subjective reasons outlined in II.21's psychology, anxious foresighted acquisitiveness is the wisest, most beneficial and most moral way of life. It is Locke's view that we are bound to foresight due to our rationality, but unfortunately, not enough so. Our rationality makes us better suited to plan for future contingencies than other animals, but it also makes us suffer more than they do, since they don't know of the unease of anticipation (Zuckert 2002, 13). Because of our fate as uneasy, rational, foresighted beings, only plenty can satisfy us. The world is in motion and thus we must be in motion, or more accurately, we and the world are in motion so we had better strive to master these motions.

Locke identifies a powerful, natural human tendency towards passivity and the avoidance of responsibility for our moral, theoretical, and physical good.

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natural tendency towards complacency comes up most often in discussions of the right to rebellion and the need to "prick up" the populace. See Strauss 1953, 226, Mansfield 1976, 155-6, Tarcov 1981, 211, Pangle 1988, 258-261, Myers 1998, 155 and Faulkner 2001, 10, 16, 28, and 38.

<sup>244</sup> "Person is a forensick Term appropriating Actions and their Merit (II.27.26)." On the centrality of the themes of responsibility (ownership of one's actions) and consciousness to Locke's philosophy, see Myers 1998 Chapter Five, Blitz 2005, Chapter Eight, Zuckert 1994, Chapter Nine, and Josephson 2002, 44-9.



We tend to assume ourselves to be somehow adequately provided for, by custom or some other authority. Myers argues that, for Locke, even the more dangerous or anti-social elements of human behavior, such as vainglory and the desire for power, are caused by laziness or passivity (Myers 1998, 118-128). Vainglorious desires have their origin in a desire to avoid labor, mental or physical, that leads men to look for shortcuts around an honest confrontation with necessity.

Everyone wants security, at root, and thus everyone wants power. Some people develop a desire for dominion over others out of this desire for power. Pride then takes on a life of its own (dominating others becomes pleasant in and of itself), but it originates, according to Locke, out of the natural human desire to get out of work.<sup>245</sup>

A responsible agent actively engages necessity, instead of either giving up or looking for some quick fix through self-deception or prideful domination. Responsibility means being intellectually honest about necessity and the fact of our being determined, but also doing something about it. In *ECHU* II.21, Locke argues that *rational* determination is a special form of determination, so special in fact that it makes more sense to define it as a condition of freedom and not determination. We may be said to own ourselves, our habits and our actions to the extent that we, with our rationality, cause them. Self-ownership and taking

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<sup>245</sup> This goes for intellectual labor as well: “The necessity of believing, without Knowledge, nay, often upon very slight grounds, in this fleeting state of Action and Blindness we are in, should make us more busy and careful to inform our selves, than constrain others (IV.16.4).”

responsibility for one's own actions, habits and desires is different from free will. Locke wants us to focus on molding and instilling the proper habits and desires, which means taking ownership of our *selves*. But since reasoning is itself, of course, an action, it must be determined by a prior uneasiness. We must desire rationality, or put differently, full self-ownership as promoted by Locke requires the coincidence of the desire for rationality and the desire for happiness.

What's the link, then, between responsibility, rationality and restlessness? Locke's thesis that "uneasiness determines the will" implies that we are bound to suffer more desires than we have the capacity to satisfy, that we will always be restless and somehow playing catch-up. Thus we are definitely determined beings. But Locke also argues in II.21 that there is a difference between being determined and being *rationally* determined. A rationally determined being is both determined and free, a being which may be said to be both capable of morality but not exempt from the law of sufficient reason. Although we are restless, and therefore determined, we are yet capable of responsibility, because there is a difference between being rationally determined and simply determined.

In sum, what is the relation between "Of Property" and II.21? What is the relation between restlessness and liberalism for Locke? Together, "Of Property" and "Power" argue that an enlightened attitude toward the world is one which is

anxious about the future and constantly looking out for ways to better secure one's existence against possible threats. "Of Property" improves on "Power" in two ways. One, it argues for the righteousness of restlessness; it takes the psychology of II.21 and recasts it as a matter of right. Two, it makes explicit what the ethical conclusion of II.21 should be, namely commercial acquisition. In turn, II.21 lays the groundwork for "Of Property" by demonstrating the negative orientation of human action and desires. It thereby supplements "Of Property" by arguing that we will never be free from restlessness or necessity because we will always be more motivated by the evils we are fleeing than the goods we are pursuing.

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## Conclusion

We are now in a position to bring our investigation to a close and conclude with a few reflections on Locke, Tocqueville, liberalism and restlessness.

Locke and Tocqueville both present the image of man as restless, motivated primarily by forces he is fleeing without any prospect of finding satisfaction or rest. Happiness for both is something man is equally bound to pursue as he is bound never to achieve. Both portray man as fundamentally self-concerned. Actions are taken with a conscious view of self-interest; none are ever taken in deliberate pursuit of pain or misery. Both offer what we might call a moral psychology of capitalism, a look from the inside at the forces which motivate, and the understanding which guides, an individual bent on the effectively limitless acquisition of material goods.

For Locke, restlessness is partly natural and partly manmade. Restlessness in the fullest sense emerges out of an understanding of human nature and the external world. Man is not constituted such that he can survive without increase, and increase is only made possible by limitless acquisition. In *ECHU* II.21, through an analysis of our constitutions and the structure of human action, Locke comes to the conclusion that, naturally, desire and capacity are not in harmony with one another. We are determined by desire, meaning

uneasiness, and are thus never quite free from it, which means our capacity can never quite keep up. In "Of Property," Locke shows how an accurate understanding of the natural world and man's place in it brings us to a similar conclusion about desire and capacity, but also shows the advantages of encouraging desires beyond capacity. We cannot improve our estates without stimulating industry, and we cannot stimulate industry without stimulating desire beyond our present capacity to fulfill it. The wise, beneficent and legitimate policymaker will look for ways to make his people more industrious.

Industriousness and restlessness are necessary for a longer and more comfortable life. Locke gives the impression that he promotes industriousness for the sake of itself, because he argues for *limitless* acquisitiveness and is doubtful about happiness, but this is not quite accurate. Later liberals do come along and put forth arguments about the "dignity of labor" and how there is some sense in which hard work is good for one's moral character, but this is not Locke. Locke is very impressed by labor's transformative power, but not dazzled by it; labor remains "pain," "toil," and "sweat" (2T 30, 34, 37, and 42-3). Locke thinks we need to labor because it is necessary, and does not promote any moral qualities independent of their advantageousness.

For Tocqueville, inquietude's emergence in modern democratic times has nothing to do with the external world. The moral-psychological disposition towards restlessness is due to the fact that modern society is ordered in accord

with equality instead of inequality. Tocqueville believes that restlessness is a modern condition, unknown to primitives, aristocrats and slaves. Restlessness befell man along with democracy: it was not quite a “natural” development, but it certainly was not manmade. Tocqueville, unlike Strauss and MacPherson, does not hold Locke responsible for creating modern restlessness, but he does object to it and the Lockean conception of the moral good more generally.

Inquietude for Tocqueville is a condition caused by history which sets us against our nature. Certain natural tendencies, such as erotic longing and natural ambition, are weakened and frustrated by inquietude. Tocqueville believes there is something patently absurd about accumulating without ever enjoying or resting. Locke argues that it’s reasonable to be a miser, but Tocqueville is not at all sure about the moral superiority of the miser.

Now we are in a position to see the advantage of focusing on restlessness and its connection to liberalism. Restlessness helps bring into relief some features of modern life and their connection to liberalism, such as for example modern rationalism and the tension between liberalism and a belief in the *Summum bonum*. Restlessness implies an instrumental form of reason. It is in connection with his uneasiness doctrine that Locke outlines his understanding of practical reason as calculation. Tocqueville discusses the Americans’ complicated form of rationality in terms of the effect of inquietude on both theoretical and practical reason. As for the *Summum bonum*, it is in his

discussions of uneasiness and property that it becomes clear why Lockean liberalism is premised on an orientation not towards the greatest good, but the low, material and common goods. Tocqueville shows what a people orientated towards these goods instead of the greatest good looks like.

Both Locke and Tocqueville connect restlessness with liberalism, but in slightly different ways. Restlessness of soul and democracy are historical developments, and democracy causes restlessness of soul, according to Tocqueville. The rise of democracy has changed men in a number of ways beyond just making them equal, such as by making them more individualistic and materialistic. *Liberal* democracy must somehow learn to tolerate and manage this restlessness, such that it retains its connection with freedom and does not encourage the ever-present threat of despotism. Any solution which looks to eradicate inquietude will likely be worse than the problem.

For Locke, it is truer to say that restlessness is the cause or justification of liberalism than vice versa. Legitimate, liberal civil government is distinguished by its commitment to provide protection for the possession and acquisition of private property against the “great inconveniences” of the state of nature.

“Uneasiness determines the will” is an inherent, ineradicable fact of human nature, a law of nature. But as with many natural phenomena for Locke, even if it cannot be eradicated, it may be mastered. Uneasiness is not a modern condition but restlessness, understood as the proper response to it, is a modern

condition, or Locke hopes to make it one. As we recall, the uneasiness teaching may be understood as nothing more than preparation for Locke's teaching on how we are free, the true overarching purpose of II.21. The question of what to do with this freedom is then given content and form by the *2T* and especially Chapter Five, "Of Property." Though Locke is more associated with determinism/materialism, he, not Tocqueville, is the one who gives a larger role to art, at least when it comes to restlessness. We are freer from nature in the case of Locke than we are free from history in the case of Tocqueville.

Nature, for Locke, endows us with our hedonistic constitutions, and makes it difficult for us to mold our habits and desires in accord with reason. Nature makes us oriented towards fleeing evils, not pursuing goods. External nature is also scarce and forces us to work, work hard, in order make our existence in the given world tolerable. And we won't survive, at least not for very long, until we also work intelligently. Full Lockean restlessness requires that we put some distance between ourselves and the primitive economic state of nature. It requires sociality, trade, and abstract systems of exchange, all of which serve both to satisfy fundamental desires and also expand them. It also requires the political institutions which provide protection for restless acquisition.

Orienting men towards self-preservation and material prosperity, as Locke tries to do with his teaching on property in the *2T*, also has the effect of better attaching them to legitimate authority by giving them a clear intelligible



stake in their government and civil society. Locke very much had in mind the sort of self-interested attachment to freedom through private property that Tocqueville describes the Americans as exhibiting. As with Tocqueville's Americans, Lockean man realizes that free government and commercial prosperity go together.

Tocqueville is much warier towards commerce and the threat it poses toward freedom than Locke is. Only with reluctance is Tocqueville willing to accept that political freedom be reduced mostly to a means towards the end of greater material well-being. There is more and cleaner overlap between the goods of commercial prosperity and political freedom for Locke than for Tocqueville.

Locke's endorsement of restlessness and all its aspects-materialism, the excess of desire over capacity-is less qualified than Tocqueville. This may be accounted for by two differences, the first of which is the fact that Locke in "Of Property" gives restlessness the sanction of right. For Locke, justice is protecting life and this means protecting property. We cannot find any corresponding effort in *DA*. Even though Tocqueville does think democracy more just than aristocracy, *and* claims that inquietude is a distinguishing feature of democracy over against aristocracy, he is unwilling to give it the sanction of justice. It may not be *unjust*, but it is not as central to his concept of justice as for Locke.

The second is the fact that Locke and Tocqueville diverge on the coincidence of right and advantage. For Locke, right and advantage-understood primarily as preservation-overlap. For Tocqueville, one cannot define “advantage” without taking greatness into consideration, and greatness does not necessarily overlap with right. Tocqueville’s liberalism is vexed by the tension between justice and greatness. Right and preservation are closer for Locke than right and greatness are for Tocqueville. Locke doesn’t see the tragedy Tocqueville does; Locke’s philosophy may be dark and cynical in parts, but it is not tragic.

In other words, though Tocqueville is wary of stressing the justice of restlessness, its lack of accord with justice is not necessarily Tocqueville’s biggest objection to restlessness. He is probably more concerned with the risk it poses towards greatness. Tocqueville’s concern for justice is qualified by his concern for greatness, and more so than Locke’s is by his respective concern for preservation. Arguably, justice comes off looking less “strange” for Tocqueville than it does for Locke, despite, or perhaps because his commitment to it is more qualified than Locke’s is.

This is the simplest way to express the difference between restlessness in the political philosophies of Locke and Tocqueville. Locke believes restlessness, properly understood, is a way of life which combines the attractions of both right

and advantage, and Tocqueville believes that no way of life combines right and advantage, and even if there were one, it certainly would not be a restless way of life.

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